STAGE DRAMA IN INDEPENDENT MALAWI

1980 TO 2002

Ph.D. Thesis

MUFUNANJI WILLARD MOFFATI MAGALASI

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PH.D. THESIS

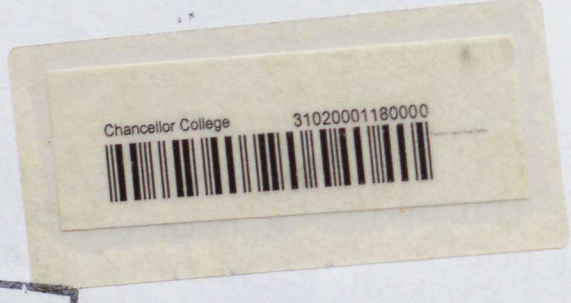
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By

Mufunanji Willard Moffati Magalasi

SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D) TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI, CHANCELLOR COLLEGE, ZOMBA, MALAWI.

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DECLARATIONS

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We certify that this thesis has been submitted to the University of Malawi with our approval.

Main Supervisor: .....

Olufemi J. Abodunrin Ph.D., Associate Professor

Date: 23 August 2006

Internal Examiner: .....

Brighton J. Uledi-Kamanga Ph.D., Professor

Date: 23/8/2006

Dean, Postgraduate Studies & Research.....

Kings M. Phiri Ph.D., Professor

Date: 28/8/06

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my parents, Mallavi Moffati Magalasi, and Azambiyanso Ainesi Mbuzi, brothers Welford and Fyshon, and sisters Namulaudzi Effines and Nali Elube.

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This study leaves out Theatre for Development, School Drama Festivals, and Radio Drama. The selection of University and Popular Commercial Stage drama has been forced on it (the study) by lack of research funds. The total required for the whole research was K 2.2 million (12,000.00 British Pounds), of which only K290,000.00 (1,440.00 British Pounds) was available. The University of Malawi granted me K210,000 in three postgraduate annual book allowances, and the Eastern and Southern African Universities' Research Projects (ESAURP), through Chancellor College's Centre for Social Research, issued me a research grant of K80,000. Though

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Lastly, it should be mentioned, however, that any mistakes and oversights in this dissertation should not be blamed on the people who helped me but be placed squarely on my shoulders.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation titled *Stage Drama in Independent Malawi: 1980 to 2002* is a historical, performance and literary study of a significant period in Malawi's theatre history. It focuses primarily on the academic / highbrow theatre produced at the University of Malawi, and its dichotomous counterpart, the professional popular commercial stage drama, produced in the period under the spotlight. The central argument of the thesis is that political and social developmental policies implemented under the banner of Independence affected stage drama by influencing ideology of aesthetics and the organization of Malawian stage drama. On the one hand, University Theatre has been interpreted using a combination of principles and theories of academic literary theatre and performance as articulated by David Kerr, Femi Abodunrin, Olu Obafemi and Ahmed Yerima, among other theorists and thinkers in the field. Karin Barber's and Ian Steadman's con-textual and descriptive theoretical approaches have been used to reveal previously hidden fundamentals of the Malawian popular commercial theatre practice, on the other.

What the investigation reveals is that the evolving state of affairs in Malawi as an independent state affected the organization, production, and consumption of stage drama. The personality of the political leadership and the government policies they followed in the different decades saw university drama responding accordingly. The focus of the artists in popular commercial stage drama, on the other hand, was on how to earn an income from drama as alternative employment, considering the low level of education most of them had. Unwittingly, they re-refined aesthetics of approach to form a new style which constitutes, arguably, a guiding principle, "peculiar" to Malawian drama.

The study is in two sections. Section one focuses, in four chapters, on the various theoretical, political and polemical premises through which university/high brow drama outmanoeuvred censorship, or how it directly commented on some problematic policy issues that the

governement followed. Section two, "Popular commercial drama in Malawi", investigates the innovative ways in which plays were created, delighting audiences and re-writing aesthetics of dramatic presentation. Conversely, the thesis attempts to answer questions about who some of the drama practitioners were, the important performances they staged, the way they organized their activities, the principles they followed and the critical responses they received, within the context of Malawi as an independent state.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: INTERPRETING MALAWIAN THEATRE

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Writing for the newspapers in the 1980s after being part of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre, Jika Nkolokosa, Isaac Chirwa, Roziliro Twea, and Costly Ntogolo were very critical of popular commercial theatre. Roziliro Twea, and Isaac Chirwa, for example, did not think the works that groups such as Kwathu Drama Group presented were good enough to be called theatre. They compared the popular plays with the Travelling Theatre's and dismissed them as substandard.

In the 1990s, critics such as Steve Chimombo and Joe Chimwenje, to mention but a few, thought the popular performances were deficient in quality, because the playmakers failed to distinguish principles of theatre presentation in different mediums. Chimombo wrote that groups such as Kwathu staged shows with stage furniture set in a straight line, similar to the way seating is ordered in a radio drama studio. He also noted that the dialogue was styled as if meant for an audio medium. He speculated that this state of affairs could have been in that way because the artistic director of Kwathu, Charles Severe, trained as a radio producer before coming to stage drama[1]. Another critic, Joe Chimwenje, felt that the problem of low quality productions resulted from lack of funds and expertise[2]. Charles Severe, a practicing dramatist, contributed to the debate. In an interview with Steve Chimombo in 1992,

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[1] For detail see Chimombo, "Mind your Stage Business", *WASI* 1995:9

[2] J. Chimwenje, "The Chancellor College Travelling Theatre and the Development of Theatre in Malawi", *Journal of Social Sciences*, 17 (2003) p.19

he observed that popular theatre in Malawi was not advanced professionally because most of the dramatists did not have university or college training[3] (Severe, 1992:50).

Despite the negative responses, other commentators such as Daniel Nyirenda of the *Nation* newspaper thought the theatre was advancing. Nyirenda described ways in which Gertrude Kamkwatira wrote and directed over thirteen plays after taking over the leadership of Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre, since the death of Dunduzu Chisiza Jr. in 1999[4]. On Chichewa commercial plays, Philip Banda celebrated the many works that John Nyanga and Eric Mabedi produced as comedians *Izeki ndi Jakobo*, after gaining a lot of playmaking and acting experience in Severe's Kwathu Drama Group. However, what these contesting opinions managed to do was to create confusion as to what the true picture of the practice between 1980 and 2002 really was. For this author, twenty-two years of disorderly commentary is not healthy for the Malawian theatre practice. Many changes had taken place since the last substantial studies by Patience Gibbs and Christopher Kamlongera[5]. In fact, important political changes took place in the period between the last major studies and 2002.

1.2 SELECTED POLITICAL EVENTS: LATE 1970s TO 2000

In 1978, after a trial presided over by traditional chiefs, Albert Muwalo Nqumayo was hanged, by former President, Dr. Banda, for treason. Muwalo's co-accused, Focus Gwede, was given a life sentence. In the same year, Malawi's national football team won the East and Central Africa Senior Challenge Cup tournament at Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre. Without knowing who started it, many people in the stadium

[3] See Severe interview with Steve Chimombo, *WASI*, 1992:50
[4] Daniel Nyirenda, *Nation Daily*, 13/9/2001
[5] Patience Gibbs' MA thesis, University of Malawi, 1980 and Christopher Kamlongera's Ph.D. thesis, Leeds University, 1984.

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joined in to sing a popular political praise song, *Zonse Zimene Za Kamuzu Banda – Everything Belongs to Kamuzu Banda*[6]. In this case, the question became: was the whole nation behind Kamuzu Banda, or was the act of the song at the stadium ironically alluding to the repression, in a mass public performance?

Still on the topic of politics, Malawian veteran politician Orton Chirwa, with his wife Vera and son Fumbani were, in 1981, abducted from Zambia to be tried for treason in a Malawian traditional court. The adult Chirwas were given life sentences, while the son was released. In the same year, despite the close monitoring of events and commentaries by the Censorship Board, the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre staged Steve Chimombo's Chichewa play, *Wachiona Ndani? (Who has seen the winning card?).* It was subsequently published by Dzuka Publishers, which was partly run by a very important member of the Malawi Congress Party like John Tembo. *Wachiona Ndani?* is about a grocer businessman who controls the lives, both economically and socially, of people who are around his store, Mataya Enterprises. Was the characterization of the play referring to Kamuzu Banda who controlled the lives of Malawians during his reign? Additionally, could the performance and publication of the play text be suggesting that Chimombo was successful in using metaphorical theatre for political commentary? Francis Moto responded to the play as part of literature coming from repressed societies. He observed that:

> The play (*Wachiona Ndani*?) centres on a group of characters in a semi-urban setting and explores themes of love, class and gender conflict, hypocrisy, exploitation, social and economic oppression, alienation and deceit… The idea of using literature as a vehicle for the expression and liberation of otherwise hard to air pent-up, latent frustration and ideas that are difficult to articulate … surfaces as the play unfolds on stage[7]

---

[6] I was present at the Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre to watch the finals between Malawi and Zambia on 5th November, 1978.

[7] For detail see Francis Moto, *Trends in Malawian Literature,* 1999, p. 95.

Noteworthy about Moto's comment is that he published such an interpretation as above in 1999; five years after Banda and the Malawi Congress Party were defeated in a general election that ushered in, amongst other things, freedom of expression in Malawi. What is more, such appreciation of the play sums up the general feeling of Malawian citizens at the time Steve Chimombo wrote and staged *Wachiona Ndani*?, considering the political arrests that took place around the same time.

Still on political events, three ministers and a Member of Parliament were killed in a motor car accident, believed to have been staged under orders from Banda in 1983. The official story refused any underhand plot on the government's side. It stated that the accident occurred as the four attempted to escape into Mozambique. However, Banda publicly boasted about the deaths of the politicians at a public meeting in 1985, saying such punishment followed those who rebelled against him. At the trial facilitated by the Muluzi government in 1995, the main suspects, Banda, Kadzamira and Tembo refused any knowledge of the plot to kill the politicians, let alone giving orders for the assassination of the ministers. According to Jan Kees Van Donge, the trial proceedings established that the orders to kill the ministers seemed to have come from John Ngwiri, Secretary to the President at the time. Van Donge claims that Ngwiri was trying to silence criticism of corruption and funds mismanagement in the Civil Service, which the dead politicians instigated[8] . Banda, Tembo and Kadzamira were found not guilty.

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[8] See **Van Donge, Jan Kees** (1998) "The Mwanza Trial as a Search for a Usable Malawian Past", in ed. Kings Phiri and Kenneth Ross, *Democratisation in Malawi: A Stocktaking*, Zomba: Claim Kachere Books, p. 44.49

In another development in 1983, rebel leader Atati Mpakati, who took refuge as an exile in Mozambique, was assassinated in Harare. Banda's agents were suspected as responsible, even though no one was arrested. In 1987, poet and Head of the Department of English at the University of Malawi, Jack Mapanje, was thrown into prison without any charge. He was released after intense pressure on the Banda government from the international community. In 1989, political fire-brand journalist, Mkwapatira Mhango, was blown up together with his family at their home in Lusaka. The bombing happened after his own brother was detained in Malawi on account of revelations of political repression Mkwapatira published in the media around the world. It is interesting to note the type of plays that were produced both at the University and in commercial theatre during those times (see the discussions of Du Chisiza's *Check it Out,* and University Drama in the 1980s).

The 1990s had its stories. Chakufwa Chihana openly challenged Banda after attending a trade union conference in Zambia. He was arrested at Lilongwe Airport soon after disembarking a plane from Johannesburg. In 1992, the Catholic Bishops of Malawi wrote a letter that was read in all Catholic churches in Malawi criticizing Banda and his oppressive policies. By this time, underground movements, which were later registered as Alliance For Democracy (AFORD) and United Democratic Front (UDF) pressure groups, mobilized the country to reject one-party rule for multi-party democracy in a referendum held in March 1993. Persuaded to permit the referendum, Banda was surprised to find that the majority of Malawians rejected his one party rule. In 1994, democratic general elections were held and won by the United Democratic Front who formed the first multi-party government in which AFORD and Malawi Congress Party became opposition parties.

After UDF were elected in 1994, many laws that restricted the growth of theatre and the arts such as the Censorship Act were revised. For example, it was no longer treason to talk about the ruling party and other political issues. The question this thesis will try to answer is: did repression disappear with the removal of Banda from office? If this action did, what impact did the new freedoms have on drama?

Since 1984, there have been major changes in the region as well as in the country. Zambia changed its leadership three times, replacing United Independent Party (UNIP) with multi-party rule under Frederick Chiluba, to replace him yet again with Levy Mwanawasa. In 1994, South Africa ended apartheid to bring in a government of national unity under Nelson Mandela and was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki in 1999. Namibia became independent in 1990 under Sam Nujoma, and devastating floods hit Mozambique in 1999. The Organisation of African Unity became the African Union at the turn of the millennium.

In Europe, the Berlin Wall was broken to re-unite East and West Germany, and the cold war between America and the Soviet Union ended, collapsing the latter into small states. America and Western Europe, in the same period, started to talk of globalization. All these events could not have left Malawian theatre and drama practice unscathed in the period since the last studies.

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1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

As participants of University theatre from 1967 (John Linstrum), and later at Chancellor College Travelling Theatre from 1972, Innocent Banda, James Gibbs,

Patrick O'Malley, Ken Lipenga, Enoch Timpunza Mvula, and David Kerr, wrote about theatre activities in Malawi. They reviewed plays and reported on drama produced at the University of Malawi, in secondary schools, and by independent amateur theatre groups. James Gibbs collected and published a number of their articles under the title *Theatre in Malawi: 1970-76*. Replacing John Linstrum in 1972, Gibbs taught in the Department of English at Chancellor College and was the organiser of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre (CCTT) until 1978, after which he left Malawi for Nigeria. His involvement, including his confrontations with the Malawi Censorship Board in that period, is well documented in his later publication, *Singing in the Dark Rain: Essays on Censorship in Malawi*[9].

In 1977, Christopher Kamlongera presented *Development of Contemporary Theatre in Malawi* at Leeds for a Master of Arts degree. In 1984, he wrote *Problems in the Growth of Popular Art Form: the Relationship between Drama and Society in Malawi and Zambia,* for his Ph.D. at Leeds. The thesis focused on indigenous performance, radio drama, literary drama, and Theatre for Development in Malawi. In 1987, UNICEF published part of Kamlongera's Ph.D. thesis under the title *Theatre for Development in Africa with Case Studies from Malawi and Zambia.*

Patience Gibbs conducted another important study entitled *Drama and Theatre in Malawi* for her Master of Arts degree at the University of Malawi in 1980. Highlighting types of Malawian theatre and their origins, Gibbs intended to show, through her study, the connection between indigenous performance and modern stage drama. She explored *chiputu*, the ritual of girls' initiation amongst the Yao of

[9] see Gibbs 1998.

Southern Malawi, and created awareness about aspects of narrative, characterization, costume, mimesis, and gestures in the 'initiation dance'. An active member of the Travelling Theatre, Patience Gibbs stage-managed some of the productions that were produced between 1972 and 1978.

Since these studies were done, there have been other important works that commented on theatre in Malawi. In 1995, David Kerr published *African Popular Theatre: from Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day*, in which he remarked substantially on the Travelling Theatre, in the context of other travelling theatres from different parts of Africa. Kerr followed *African Popular Theatre*[10] with *Media, Dance and Entertainment in Southeast Africa*[11] in which he discussed the history of media in Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

Other critics wrote about specific activities of Malawian theatre. Steve and Moira Chimombo published *The Culture of Democracy: Language, Literature, the Arts and Politics in Malawi, 1992-94*[12], highlighting the way politics of the transition from 1990 to 1994 affected cultural production in Malawi. They discussed political theatre alongside literature, other art forms, and newspapers as witnessed in the period.

A closer look at the critical literature, exemplified by the cited works, shows that the theatre practice from the 1960s to 1970s received some attention. However, the activities of the period between 1980 and 2002 have not been scrutinized in their entirety. The present study intends to fill the gap by focusing on stage drama in the stated period.

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[10] David Kerr, 1995
[11] David Kerr, 1998
[12] Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996.

1.3.1 1980 - 2002

The disjointed nature of criticism between 1980 and 2002 gives a vague picture about the real nature of Malawian theatre during the two decades. While there are newspaper and periodical reviews of plays by groups which performed in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and activities at the University, secondary schools and presentations on Radio MBC, no proper follow up has been made to collate the texts and interpret issues that were raised. A few articles have been published in academic journals by the local university's *Journal of Humanities*, or elsewhere. James Gibbs[13], David Kerr[14], Linje Manyozo[15], Magalasi[16] and Joe Chimwenje[17] tried to fill the gap. Nevertheless, there is still an unclear picture of the theatre practice.

1.3.2 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Malawian theatre in the period under focus can be divided into five categories. Under popular commercial theatre, members of the general public paid admission fees to watch shows in venues such as French Cultural Centre in Blantyre, Chipasula Secondary School, The Town Hall in Lilongwe, and Katoto Secondary school hall in Mzuzu. Though popular commercial theatre is mostly staged over weekends, the major companies such as Wakhumbata, Wanna Do, Kwathu and Alufeyo Performing Arts worked on a full-time basis.

---

[13] See James Gibbs in *The Literary Half-Yearly*, 1982.
[14] David Kerr, Theatre in Malawi, in *The Drama Review*, Summer 1987,; "Participatory popular theatre as the highest stage of cultural underdevelopment", *Research in African Literatures* 22.3, 1991, and on theatre for development and audiences in ed. Frances Harding 2002.
[15] Linje Manyozo (2002), "Participatory community development without participation", *Convergence* 35.4
[16] Mufunanji Magalasi (2001), Malawian theatre at the crossroads:, *Journal of Humanities* 15.
[17] Chimwenje op.cit.

Annual secondary school drama festivals have been organized by the Association for Teaching English in Malawi (ATEM) and The Alliance Francais. As the names of the festivals suggest, ATEM Festivals showcased plays that used English as a medium while French drama used French language as a conduit.

Government departments and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have mostly used participatory Theatre for Development (TfD) to engage local communities in discussions about problems that affected them. Issues tackled included HIV/AIDS, Human Rights, gender equality, and importance of education for girls. In radio drama, plays, using both English and local languages, were broadcast with the intention of raising awareness for social problems, or pure entertainment. Programmes such as the Story Workshop's *Zimachitika (These Things Happen)*, and *Tingathe (We Can Stop It)*, dealt with community problems, whereas the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation's *Sewero la Sabata Ino (This Week's Drama), Pa Majiga (At the Crossroads)*, and *Theatre of the Air* mixed awareness raising and entertainment.

Staff and students from the five constituent colleges of the University of Malawi, Chancellor College Traveling Theatre, and the Department of Fine and Performing Arts produced University Theatre. A trendsetter, University Theatre activities inspired growth of theatre practice in Malawi, particularly professional popular commercial theatre[18].

[18] See Chimwenje op.cit.

1.3.3 POPULAR THEATRE

Theatre for Development (TfD), Commercial Theatre, and some radio drama series such as *Sewero la Sabata Ino (This Week's Play)* and *Pa Majiga (At the Crossroads)* are referred to as 'popular'. TfD is "popular" because of its methodological approach. Since it intends to raise awareness, it includes, as Kerr (1991) and Mlama (1991) point out in their studies, popular dances, songs, games and narrative styles found in areas targeted for development by the different organizations. The participation, engagement of local communities, and inclusion of their communication media, gives the practice its "popular nature".

Joe Chimwenje defines "popular theatre" differently from the TFD interpretation:

> It should be noted that by popular theatre, it is being meant to include the urban-based sociological theatre practice that mainly caters for the ordinary majority in the urban and peri-urban centres of the country, purporting to reflect, uphold, and interpret the everyday events taking place in the society. Most of those involved in this theatre practice include school-leavers, school drop-outs, or paid employees from the private or informal sector. The popular drama groups operate on an independent basis, and their medium of communication is Chichewa, the country's national language[19] .

Though Chimwenje leaves out some popular groups that use English as a medium, he suggests that the groups are "popular" because they come from lower classes of society, and that the groups include issues from their experience as subject-matter for their dramas.

Other writers such as Karin Barber have tried to highlight the ideological basis of the word 'popular' in their studies about popular culture. In her introduction to *Readings in African Popular Culture*, Barber observes that:

[19] Chimwenje, Op.Cit., p.10

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> ...the term 'popular'... is generally agreed to have been an empirical sociological basis, that is, to refer in some way to an existing social category: the 'people'. Who are the people? In the history of European usage, the boundaries of the concept have shifted, and multiple usages have co-existed. The people can mean the whole people, the nation; more often though it has been used to mean only part of the nation – those who are not the State, the dominant classes, the aristocracy, or the bourgeoisie. 'The people' then, in this usage, corresponds to a class, or group of classes, though the boundaries are not usually clearly specified, and the people's culture can be seen as engaged in contests over those boundaries... The people's culture in Europe then, is low or common culture as opposed to the high culture of the ruling class.[20]

Just like Chimwenje, Barber places the concept 'popular' within the levels of social hierarchies. While specifying the class to which 'popular culture' belongs, noteworthy is also the emphasis on the way the term was applied in European studies. As a result of that action, Barber introduces more ideological difficulties in the understanding and application of the concept to African Studies. The question, therefore, to be posed in this case is: can we apply the principles of 'popular' culture to African Studies in the same way as it is done in Europe? If African popular culture includes graffiti, cartoons, songs by bands, paintings of the African marketplace, and local television programmes[21], can the origins justify its use in classifying African popular culture? This is a big debate fit for another study. We will for the time being content ourselves with the general principle which contends that popular culture is not 'high culture' and that it belongs to, is produced and consumed by the lower classes of society. In the Malawian case, theatre produced by both the lower classes and that which can be arguably placed as part of 'high art' (University Theatre) has not received much attention in the period between 1980 and 2002. This thesis attempts to respond to that need.

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[20] For detail see Karin Barber, (1997) *Readings in African Popular Culture*, Indiana, p. 3
[21] see Barber, 1997.

Some of the questions that this thesis tackles are: How did Malawian stage drama become consolidated? Who was involved in the productions? What did they perform? How were the performances organised? Who wrote about them, and what did they include? These questions will be contextualized within the debate about Independence.

Countries such as Malawi continue to struggle with the aftermath of colonial rule, dictatorial legacies left after the exit of the first generation of African leadership, and with the current trendy concepts such as "democratization" and "multi-party politics". The primary focus of this thesis is to investigate whether "independence", in the decades under the spotlight, affected theatre in anyway, and if it did, how?

1.4 MAIN OBJECTIVE

The main aim of this dissertation is to explore how the context of Independence affected stage drama in Malawi from 1980 to 2002.

1.5 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To examine the way Malawian independence affected stage drama
- To describe approaches used and critically examine play texts produced by University Theatre
- To describe approaches used and assess play texts from professional popular commercial stage drama, in both Chichewa and English.
- To identify issues that Malawian stage drama raises and suggest possible ways of advancing it.

1. 6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A close look at the appreciation of Malawian drama reveals that critics from the 1970s to 1980s tried to interpret Malawian drama, based on European standards. They not only investigated the theatre using European aesthetics, but also matched styles that Malawian writers used, to their European models. Secondly, because University theatre was informed by European standards, and that professional popular commercial theatre was produced by people from the lower classes of society, most plays from the latter group were dismissed as deficient in quality, as a result of their failure to live up to the European literary and performance standards. However, Malawian popular commercial theatre had proved the most active, and the most appreciated by its audiences in the period under scrutiny. In this thesis, I intend to employ a different approach in my analysis. I will investigate the contexts of university theatre and popular commercial theatre for principles that their playmakers paid attention to, as examples of cultural products of "Independence". While stage drama was confined to European standards of appreciation during the colonial period, independence gradually ushered in performance and literary analytical tools relative to the independent state. I draw the theoretical approach on popular commercial theatre from what critics such as Ian Steadman and Karin Barber used in evaluating Black South African anti-apartheid theatre, and Nigerian Yoruba Popular Theatre, respectively. Studies by David Kerr, Femi Abodunrin, Olu Obafemi and Ahmed Yerima have provided more tools for the understanding of University theatre.

Ian Steadman made a departure from how some white critics viewed South African Black Theatre. According to him, they used 'formalist approaches' which 'prescribed' ways in which a South African black play was supposed to be produced. In the end,

the commentators failed to unravel main principles of the plays. In place of the 'prescriptive' theories, Steadman suggested a broader 'descriptive' analysis, which started with the exploration of the socio-political, cultural, and economic environment, to expose values that the black theatre practitioners paid attention to, followed by the analysis of the play texts and performances[22].

In West Africa, Karin Barber studied Nigerian Yoruba Theatre using a method similar to Steadman's. She explored elements of Nigerian socio-politics and economics, relating them to how they affected Yoruba life and the process of playmaking. Using 'participation and observation', she accompanied the Oyin Adejobi Theater Company on tours, and took roles in their plays[23]. She observed the production methods and used her findings as a base for the examination of the dramas. Like Steadman, Barber avoided analyses which started with the plays. Instead, before examining the plays, she explored factors that determined elements of playmaking. In using this approach, she steered clear of prescriptive positions that originated from outside the socio-political, historical, and economic contexts of the theatre practice.

As regards University Theatre, David Kerr[24], Femi Abodunrin[25], Olu Obafemi and Ahmed Yerima[26] have given helpful suggestions for ways in which to critically understand it. In an attempt to categorize the theatre of Hubert Ogunde and Wole Soyinka, David Kerr observes:

> One way of highlighting some of Ogunde's ideological attitudes is to compare his career with that of a very different Nigerian theatre artist,

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[22] See Ian Steadman, Ph.D. thesis, 1985.
[23] Karin Barber, (2000) *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theatre,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
[24] David Kerr, 1995, op.cit.
[25] Femi Abodunrin, (1996) *Blackness – Culture, ideology: A comparative study*, Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies
[26] Olu Obafemi and Ahmed Yerima (2004), *Stagecraft and Ideology*, Lagos: Bookplus Nigeria Ltd.

> the academic literary playwright, Wole Soyinka... The comparison, of course, is not really fair; Ogunde was working within the rather rigid conventions of an established genre, whereas Soyinka was able to experiment with new forms. All the same, the comparison between the two artists raises important issues concerning the relationship between varieties of popular and literary theatre...[27]

Kerr's noticing of the difference between the two Nigerian theatre artists is crucial for this thesis. His conclusion is that Soyinka, as a member of the University theatre, used literary forms, and Ogunde used conventions that he saw as workable, not only for his audience, but commercially. Kerr's further observation on Soyinka's ability to experiment, afforded by his membership to the academy is crucial. It draws the reader to understand why two great theatre artists of a country, such as Ogunde and Soyinka, produced different plays.

Femi Abodunrin, in his study of Obotunde Ijimere's and Wale Ogunyemi's plays, adds more observations on the relationship between popular theatre and University theatre that:

> Obotunde Ijimere's *Imprisonment of Obatala* and Wale Ogunyemi's *Obaluaye* represent what I would like to describe as the quintessential bridge between a literary dramatic academic experience and the so-called popular theatre...[28]

While recognizing the base of Ijimere and Ogunyemi as practitioners of the literary academic mode, Abodunrin notices how their plays blend elements of University and popular theatre, at which point Obafemi and Yerima pick up the argument from Abodunrin and give further details of Ogunyemi's influences and sources of his artistic inspiration:

> As mentioned earlier, Ogunyemi's plays have evolved out of three main inspirational sources. Firstly, the availability of historical

[27] David Kerr 1995, p. 91-92
[28] Femi Abodunrin, op.cit. p. 65

> materials for which his great grandmother had remained a major traditional influence... A second source of influence can be found in his academic experience and his encounter with Shakespeare... A third influence on Ogunyemi has remained theatre itself. His ability to work with both English and Yoruba theatres has accounted for his prolificacy as a playwright. His experience at Oshogbo with the Yoruba professional theatre groups of Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo, gave him more materials to work with...[29]

History, western academic styles, and involvement in the popular theatre practice gave Ogunyemi the flexibility, and yet he remained a member of University theatre. It can therefore be safely put that a reading of University theatre could benefit, not only from the socio-political, cultural, and economic contexts in which the plays are produced, but also by considering the literary academic forms on which the theatre artists are nurtured. So, while popular commercial theatre benefits from a broader 'descriptive' approach, University theatre will be further probed for the literary academic forms it uses.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

The theoretical, and part of the critical data for this study has been collected using 'library research'. Presently, there are many written commentaries on drama practices in states that were formerly under colonial rule. Apart from the library research, semi-structured and in-depth interviews were used to collect information from selected practitioners, critics and commentators. Observation of, and participation in the performances was also used. Figures, where necessary, were also collected.

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[29] Olu Obafemi and Ahmed Yerima, op.cit, p. 8-9

1.8 RATIONALE

Steve Chimombo tirelessly followed Malawian drama activities in *WASI Magazine* from 1990. Throughout the decade, the magazine was the most consistent source of drama news. The problem, however, was the absence of a more detailed study that would have collected, and interpreted what went on in the practice beyond mere reporting. Furthermore, since Patience and James Gibbs, Chris Kamlongera, and David Kerr conducted their studies, there has not been any comprehensive material available on the current theatre practice, apart from Chimombo's admirable but necessarily piece-meal effort. Of course Steve and Moira Chimombo[30], David Kerr[31] and James Gibbs[32] have in their different ways written about it. The problem has been the disjointed nature of the criticism, and its highly particularized focus, either in the colonial period, in the 1970s or during transition to multi-party democracy. Contemporary Malawian drama between 1980 and 2002 needs an elaborate study.

As regards the value of this research, the country will benefit greatly. Government could use the insights unearthed by the investigation as a base for creating a Cultural Policy. Up to very recently, Malawi has had no Cultural Policy. A discussion document was only debated and adopted in August 2003. What was noteworthy about the document was the adhoc nature in which it was put together. The officials from Ministry of Culture did not widely consult with people who were directly involved in the practice. It is my belief that this thesis will prove helpful in the consolidation of the Policy, apart from being a base for theatre educators and trainers to plan any necessary programmes for local theatre artists.

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[30] See Chimombo & Chimombo, op.cit
[31] see Kerr 1998
[32] See Gibbs 1999.

1.9 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Chapter One introduces the central ideas of this thesis. Firstly, it creates a context for the "problem" that the thesis intends to investigate, and undertakes a review of the existing scholarly literature in Malawian theatre, starting from the 1970s to 2002. Works by James Gibbs, Patience Gibbs, Chris Kamlongera, David Kerr, and Steve Chimombo have provided the bigger thrust. Secondly, the chapter outlines briefly the method used in collecting data, and the theoretical framework employed by the thesis. I have suggested, in closing, that the importance of this thesis lies in its bold attempt to fill the critical and temporal gap that exists between the last studies and the way the critical establishment and perhaps policy makers could draw from the research findings to improve on their reception of the theatre practice or the Cultural Policy, in that order.

Section One is made up of Chapters Two to Five. It became apparent, while exploring plays written by Malawians from the 1970s, that James Gibbs, Patience Gibbs, and Chris Kamlongera excluded many of the plays possibly because they were politically explicit. Cautious about the repercussions of Banda's wrath, the critics could have left them out for the safety of the dramatists and themselves. As a result, I included the 1970s to create Chapter Two, entitled "University Theatre: 1970 – 1979". The chapter investigates on *Phuma Uhambe, Because of Charity* (Bayani Lance Ngulube), *Mad Prophet* (Innocent Banda), and *The Vacant Seat* (Dede Kamkondo) to re-explore the context of University theatre in the 1970s and then gives an analysis of the plays. The choice of Ngulube's plays written in the 1970s was based on the fact that he was detained without trial from 1975 to 1977. The intention was to explore how much political content, explicit or otherwise, his two plays had. Though Ngulube's *Phuma!*

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Uhambe and *Because of Charity* were permitted to perform on stage and radio respectively, a closer assessment of the plays registers political commentary that by-passed the notorious Censorship Board. Innocent Banda's *Mad Prophet,* probably the most thorough political commentary, makes bold remarks on the debate about independence in Malawi, correlating with remarks made by Frantz Fanon in the late 1950s. There is no record of it having been performed anywhere. Kamkondo's *The Vacant Seat*, was a winner of the Travelling Theatre's writing competition in 1975. *The Vacant Seat* was refused a performance permit by the Censorship Board on the grounds that the murder scene was not appropriate for public showing in Malawi[33]. Further analysis shows that the play raised the issue of succession, which was a taboo subject in Banda's Malawi of the 1970s and 1980s, and the Censorship Board watched for it in cultural expressions. James Gibbs has written at length about Censorship on Malawian theatre in his *Singing in the Dark Rain.* However, the chapter creates an opportunity to openly discuss plays from the decade, in the way that could not have been possible then.

Chapter Three, "University Theatre: 1980 to 1989", investigates the intellectual climate that influenced University Theatre in the 1980s, and then gives an analysis of four plays. *Chinese Monastery, Tears of Blood* (Zangaphee Chizeze), *Growing Wings* (Harawa, Kanyongolo & Kerr) and *They Call It Africa* (Chimwenje and Kerr) reveal an incorporation of the forceful tone of political liberation that prevailed in Southern African revolutionary theatre of the time into Malawian University plays. David Kerr, who had participated in radical liberation theatre while at Chikwakwa in Zambia, was part of the team which led the 1980s University Theatre to utilise

[33] Gibbs, 1998

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historical, traditional, and contemporary subject matter, questioning the way society was being run. The plays, randomly selected from the 1980s lot, showed a big shift in approach from the western literary pre-occupations of the 1970s to the players' experimentation with different forms of anti-Aristotlean theatre in the 1980s.

Chapter Four, "University Theatre: 1990 to 1999", starts with an exploration of the socio-political changes in Malawi in the 1990s, and then scrutinizes three plays. *Refugees* (Kerr and Cast), adapted from Brecht's *Mother Courage*, dealt with the trauma of a woman and her two sons, following two wars fought in Mozambique. *Alamu Mwandibvula – You Have Undressed Me Brother-in-Law* (Kamlongera and Cast), a Chichewa play that discusses confiscation of property from widows, and HIV/AIDS, made the most of a Theatre for Development approach, which was becoming commonplace in the decade. *Sister! Sister!* by Steve Chimombo, opens up the debate of Women's liberation in the context of Malawian traditional rural cultures. University theatre in the 1990s shows a move away from the theatre's pre-occupation with political liberation, as emphasized in the 1970s and 1980s, to broader social issues, and the selected plays were representative of this plethora of issues.

Chapter Five, "University Theatre: 2000 – 2002" explores how Lance Ngulube, a university dramatist from the 1970s, was quick to respond to politicians' manipulation of the media, and the curbing of press freedom in Malawi under the new dispensation, in the play *Tippex*. The investigation on *Tippex* registers the way multi-party politics and its attendant freedoms took form in Malawi. The play is an illustration of the state of affairs six years after the change from one party rule in 1994 which witnessed a re-

emergence of discontent amongst ordinary people and intellectuals against corrupt politicians.

The main point that the assessment of University theatre from 1980 to 2002 makes is that the evolution of Malawian politics, decade after decade, affected not only the response of University drama to the decade specific political issues, but also influenced the styles of presentation.

Section Two, "Commercial Theatre in Malawi: 1980 - 2002", opens with Chapter Six which carries the same title. The chapter introduces the section by giving a background to the birth and growth of professional popular commercial drama in Malawi. Linking the contemporary practice to activities of University Theatre and ATEM, the chapter argues that the potential for commercial plays in English was detected in the 1970s. In the 1980s, activities by the Travelling Theatre created circumstances for the birth of Chichewa commercial plays. The chapter goes further to note factors such as "The Cultural Afternoon", and the political situation of the time, as responsible for the advancement of "entertainment" professional popular commercial theatre.

Chapter Seven, "Commercial Stage Drama in Malawi: Chichewa Plays" analyses Izeki ndi Jakobo's *Pa Depoti – At the Bus Depot, I am the Road You Walk*, and *Kukhala (Is this Neighbourliness)*. The plays were chosen due to availability. Many Chichewa plays from major drama groups such as Upile, Umodzi, and Alufeyo Performing Arts are improvised and are not written down. What is more, Kwathu Drama Group refused me permission to study their plays for fear that I "might

crookedly copy and sell their videos to white people in England without their knowledge". As such, I studied Izeki ndi Jakobo's three plays which were recorded on video and sold on the open market in Malawi.

The investigation of the three plays takes the reader through aspects of narrative and plot structure, characterization, language, humour, and costume. The chapter offers new insights into the interpretation of Chichewa plays, in addition to those offered by Steve Chimombo, Joe Chimwenje, and Innocent Komwa. The chapter argues for a relativist approach to analysis of Chichewa plays, whose creation is audience-driven.

"Commercial Stage Drama in Malawi: English Plays", the Eighth Chapter, gives a brief background for three playwrights and then analyses each of their plays. Du Chisiza Jr. was the major popular dramatist writing in English from 1980 until his death in 1999. Gertrude Kamkwatira took over from where Chisiza left to prolifically produce plays against fears that the death of Chisiza Jr. marked the death of popular Malawian English drama. Following Kamkwatira was Sanudi who produced plays in English on a fairly regular basis. The three dramatists were viewed by both the public and other practitioners as the top theatre artists in the popular English category. A scrutiny of *Check it Out, Democracy Boulevard* (Du Chisiza Jr.), *It's My Fault* (Gertrude Kamkwatira), and *Black Democracy* (Twaya Sanudi), reveals the individual playmakers' styles of narrative creation, plot structure, humour, language, and approach to social and political issues. What binds the three dramatists together is the fact that all of them at one time performed in Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre which was creatively led by Chisiza Jr. and somehow their craft was partially influenced by this fact. In addition, they all made extra effort to incorporate elements that delighted

their audiences, just as their counterparts in Chichewa Commercial stage drama. While university drama uses the intellectual capacity of its dramatists to confront political issues in both content and presentation style, popular commercial theatre, driven by people with low education, aimed to survive in an economic and political context which relegated them to the fringe of society by utilizing traditional forms, mixed with western principles, to win a following for their commercial enterprises.

Concluding the thesis is Chapter Nine, "Stage drama in independent Malawi: 1980 - 2002". It attempts to summarize the dissertation by responding to questions that the thesis was supposed to answer. Firstly, the chapter presents the main thesis of this thesis based on the exploration of dichotomous relationship between highbrow / university theatre and popular commercial theatre in Malawi. The central argument this dissertation makes is that the type of political and social developmental policies implemented in Malawi in the period under focus influenced ways in which drama was produced in two ways namely ideology of aesthetics, and organization. Regarding the ideological significance of Malawian drama, the exploration reveals that popular commercial drama, especially Chichewa drama, innovated to create a form which the present writer has termed Malawian comedy. The chapter further lists problems that have bedeviled Malawian stage drama. Government has been the major problem because of the laws that prevented growth of the practice by disapproving permits that would make university dramatists interact with their counterparts in the lower classes of society, or by limiting funds that were given to relevant ministries. As a way forward, recommendations have been made as suggestions for possible new directions for Malawian stage drama.

Having attempted to create a context, following is the first section entitled "University Theatre 1970 to 2002"starting with Chapter Two, "University Theatre: 1970 to 1979".

SECTION ONE

UNIVERSITY THEATRE: 1970 - 2002

CHAPTER TWO

UNIVERSITY THEATRE 1970 - 1979

2.1 INTRODUCTION:

In her MA thesis entitled *Drama and Theatre in Malawi: A Study of Their Development and Directions*, Patience Gibbs wrote about girls' initiation ceremony amongst the Yao people, in order to expose dramatic elements found in indigenous performances[34]. She further chronicled evidence of theatre in Malawi from 1900 to the time the University became active in 1967, and analysed ten published plays produced at the University between 1972 and 1978. Nine of the ten plays were published in a collection called *Nine Malawian plays.* Edited by James Gibbs, the book contained: *The Banana Tree, The Beauty of Dawn* (James L. Ng'ombe), *Who Will Marry Our Daughter* (Joe Mosiwa), *The Lizard's Tail* (Enoch Timpunza Mvula), *Graveyards, Love Potion* (Chris Kamlongera), *This Man Is Evil* (Spencer Chunga and Hodges Kalikwembe), *Lord Have Mercy*, and *Cracks* (Innocent Banda). Steve Chimombo's *The Rainmaker* was the tenth in the list of plays Patience Gibbs studied. Popular Publications published both James Gibbs' collection and Chimombo's book.

In the analysis, P. Gibbs' comments on T*he Rainmaker* were particularly interesting. She not only indicated that the form of the poetry Chimombo created for the play was influenced by T.S. Elliot, she also considered how the writer used myth. Making the point that the play's protagonist, Kamundi, clung to power despite his inability to fulfil major responsibilities such as rainmaking, P. Gibbs suggested that Chimombo's inspiration came from the socio-political context he lived in, saying:

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[34] Patience Gibbs 1980, p.1

> A personal dimension is successfully conveyed in "The Rainmaker's" deeply felt concern with the oppressive figure of Kamundi and the desire for change.[35]

Like Chimombo and the other members of the Writers' Workshop, Gibbs disguised her interpretation of political criticism in the play, and yet remained very indicative. She recognised an oppressive figure in the play, Kamundi, and the desire for change in the society. If she had replaced the suffix *ndi* with *zu* in the name *Kamundi,* she could have had the name Kamuzu. One might suggest that, with hindsight, she avoided such reductionist political references in fear of reprisals from the government on the playwright, who at the time taught at the University of Malawi. The other reason could have been to maintain the play's poetic depth to conjure up more layers of meaning.

Writing under the same dispensation but in Leeds, Chris Kamlongera extended Patience Gibbs' subtle interpretation in his Ph.D. dissertation. He analysed four stage plays, selected from the second half of the 1970s, including *The Rainmaker.* Making more observations on Chimombo's usage of myth, Kamlongera wrote substantially on how the play was a comment on Kamundi as an oppressive figure who clung to power. He wrote that:

> The obvious and central theme in the play is the question of power and 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 fulfill his duty to the community. Should he fail, he must give way to another person... The reason for refusing to give way is not that he can still perform his duties, but because he believes he is infallible[36]...

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[35] P. Gibbs 1980, p.3
[36] Chris. Kamlongera, 1984 p. 280 -281

Kamlongera added more contextual suggestions to the meaning of the play in his reference to the trust given to leaders, coupled with the greed and tyranny they develop. He emphasized the point by alluding to the leadership's refusal of succession, even after failing the society in its expected role. The succession to Kamuzu Banda's presidency was a taboo topic under his reign in Malawi. Anthony Nazombe's further remarks on Chimombo's usage of myth in his thesis additionally illuminated how the playwright succeeded in commenting on the socio-politics of Malawi[37].

James Gibbs appreciated the dimension that emerged in the *Rainmaker*'s performance by equating it to other plays such as *Antigone* and *Julius Caesar* in his book *Singing in the Dark Rain: Essays on Censorship in Malawi*:

> For a moderately subversive observer, one of the highlights of a performance of *Antigone* in Malawi was the audience's reaction to the ... exchange between Creon, an ageing ruler used to getting his own way, and Haemon, a youthful challenger... At Zomba, Haemon's remarks drew gasps of delighted surprise and recognition that stirred the dark Malawian night. *Julius Caesar* also made its point... Some of the scenes were presented in modern dress ... (with) some members of the audience standing around the "corpse of Caesar"... The experience engulfed the audience, the actors, and the crowd[38]...

Gibbs' observation pointed out how such plays became allegorical commentaries on Kamuzu Banda's abuse of power. In addition to that, he implicitly revealed similarities between the main characters in the two plays, and *The Rainmaker*, all of which had a ruler who refused to take advice from other people. *The Rainmaker* can be seen as one of the plays which outwitted the Censorship Board in their attempt to eliminate political criticism.

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[37] Anthony Nazombe, Ph.D. thesis, Sheffield University
[38] J. Gibbs, 1999, p. 7 - 8

Other members of the Writers' Workshop and Travelling Theatre wrote plays of the same nature as *The Rainmaker, s*ome of which were successfully staged, others rejected. Notwithstanding the scope of this dissertation, which is 1980 to 2002, it is my intention to study four of these plays from the 1970s, written or performed under Banda's repressive regime.

When Malawi was under Banda, critics could not freely mention similarities between the play texts and the Malawian socio-political, economic and cultural context of the time, for fear of reprisals on both the critic and the writer. That is one of the reasons, for example, why James Gibbs, in his 1982 article on censorship and cultural activities in Malawi, published in the *Literary Half Yearly*, avoided mention of names of current writers. Instead, he focused on the activities of the Travelling Theatre and the English Department in the 1970s. Gibbs also stated that he published the article because he had no plans of coming back to Malawi when Banda was alive. With the intended inclusion of plays from the 1970s, I will be able, therefore, to raise issues that could have been impossible to comment on at the time the plays were either written or performed. Out of the thirty-five plays I had access to, sourced from James Gibbs and David Kerr's personal archives, I chose *Phuma! Uhambe!* and *Because of Charity* (Lance Ngulube), *Mad Like A Prophet* (Innocent Banda), and *The Vacant Seat* (Dede Kamkondo). According to performance permits issued to James Gibbs, who was the Travelling Theatre's coordinator at the time, *Phuma Uhambe* and *Because of Charity* were produced for stage and radio respectively, with the approval of the Censorship Board. I chose the plays because the playwright was detained without trial from 1975 to 1977. My interest was to check for political subversion in plays written by someone who was later detained by the political system. *Mad like a*

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Prophet was never performed, and *Vacant Seat* was rejected for public performance. I chose these two plays because the seemed to make direct comments on the political situation. My aim is to investigate some of the hidden indicators that could have earned the Board's rejection for a permit, and why there wasn't even an attempt to seek permission for others such as *Mad like a Prophet*. The analysis will focus on characterization, themes, and language of the plays. However, before the analyses, a brief contextual background of the 1970s University Theatre practice is important.

2.2 UNIVERSITY THEATRE: 1970 – 1979

The University of Malawi opened in 1965, a year after Malawi's independence from British colonial rule in 1964. The already existing Mpemba Institute of Law and Public Administration, and Soche Hill College were added to the newly opened colleges at Chancellor, Polytechnic, and Bunda to create a university college that was linked to the University of London, which also comprised of constituent colleges.

Early university drama in the period between 1967 and 1978 was produced at Mpemba, Soche Hill College, and Chancellor College, and can be divided into three phases. Between 1967 and 1969, Trevor Whittock, who lectured in the English Department at Chancellor, produced *Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Crucible*. He was succeeded by John Linstrum. From 1969 to 1971, Listrum produced *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and Obotunde Ijimere's (pen-name for Ulli Beier) *Everyman*. Listrum was joined by Malawian drama academic, Mupa Shumba, who had performed in the Makerere Travelling Theatre when he attended Makerere University. According to Kamlongera's thesis, Mupa Shumba and John Listrum formed the Travelling Theatre (TT from here on).

Other efforts in this period came from Mpemba, and Soche Hill College. Miss J.I.L. Jarvis, a lecturer in English at Mpemba, directed *The lion and the Jewel, The Trials of Brother Jero*, and *The Trick* in 1972, before organizing, in 1973, 'The Wole Soyinka Show', which featured *The Trials of Brother Jero, The lion and the Jewel, Childe Internationale*, dramatizations of *The Telephone Conversation* and scenes from the novel *The Interpreters*[39]. Starting off with Christmas concerts, Soche Hill College's Dramatic Society and the Students' Christian Organisation (SCO) staged play-lets and one act plays such as *Tobias Phombe*, and *The Heart Transplant,* followed by Enoch Timpunza Mvula's *Medicine for Promotion*[40]. When James Gibbs arrived at Chancellor College from Ghana in 1972, he consolidated this tradition of drama in the university (Gibbs P. 1980: 46), popularising it more intensely than had happened previously. Through the TT and University Theatre Festival in 1974, a repertoire of eight plays was performed at Chancellor College[41], and national tours to secondary schools, community halls, and colleges were undertaken. In 1974, TT staged performances in a national tour starting from Karonga, in northern Malawi, performing to secondary schools along the lakeshore. Other day performances were done at the college and nearby secondary schools such as Zomba, Blantyre, Balaka, and St.Patrick's[42].

Looking critically at university drama between 1967 and 1978, the forms used were a mixture of European, African, and Malawian theatrical experiences. Trevor Whittock's main interest was in film. He produced on film an adaptation of *The*

[39] see Brietzke SA, 1973 in ed. James Gibbs 1976.
[40] Banda Innocent 1973, in ed. James Gibbs 1976
[41] See Patience Gibbs 1980
[42] ibid.

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Pardoner's Tale in 1968. David Kerr, who joined the University in 1969 produced *Mbalame,* based on the *Sikusinja ndi Gwenembe* song, and Mupa Shumba added the Makerere Travelling Theatre experience to dramatic activities at Chancellor College[43]. James Gibbs came with a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate work from Europe[44], besides his experience with the Ghanaian Legon Travelling Theatre and Ben Abdullah[45]. Both European and African forms were exploited in University drama. For example, approached by students who found no relevant texts, Gibbs wrote plays and also urged them to tap material from Malawian folktales, legends and myths[46].

In this period, the Travelling Theatre also benefited from activities in the Writers' Workshop, which initially brought together staff members and students of the English Department at Chancellor College[47]. It was at the Writers' Workshop where members identified use of metaphors as a way of commenting on Malawian society, when the Censorship Board inhibited such critical activities. It is the admixture of experience from the British academics, young Malawian dramatists at the University, and the socio-political context of the 1970s that formed a base for Lance Ngulube's *Phuma! Uhambe! (Get Out and Go)* which we now turn to.

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[43] see Kerr, 1995
[44] James Gibbs referred to this in conversation on 9th December, 2003.
[45] Kerr 1995, p.139
[46] Gibbs in conversation.
[47] Kerr interview with the writer, August, 2003

2.3 PHUMA! UHAMBE! by Lance Ngulube[48].

Phuma! is set in a Ngoni/Tumbuka village in Northern Malawi. Masozi's new-born baby, Chakufwa, has fallen ill. Mufwenge, an elderly man from the village, is suspected of having bewitched him. Referred to traditional medicine, a traditional prophet points out that Mufwenge is also responsible for cattle theft in the village. Using magic, he attracts lions that break into other people's kraals. Rumour also has it that he intends to inherit Masozi, who has been recently widowed. In trying the case, Chief Inkosi concludes by pronouncing banishment for Mufwenge, and the whole village shouts out the judgment to Mufwenge in unison. In response to this, Mufwenge casts more evil spells on the villagers to silence them, and does not leave.

Looking at the characterization of the play right from the prologue, the relationship between the chief, the Induna, and the villagers reveals layers of contradictions. At the *mphara* – chief's open ground - the Induna warns the people of the Inkosi's approach to the ground in this way:

> ... Silence everyone! Here comes the Inkosi! Prostrate!

And the villagers greet the chief in unison:

> ... Bayete Inkosi! Your decision is always final!

The chief opens his address to the villagers saying that:

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[48] Lance Ngulube attended Mzimba Secondary School, and came to Chancellor College in 1972. He attended meetings of the Writers' Workshop and took interest in the Travelling Theatre. He was part of a community which included such people as Jack Mapanje, Steve Chimombo, James Gibbs, Ken Lipenga, Patience Gibbs, Lupenga Mphande, Adrian Roscoe, Patrick O'Malley, Innocent Banda and Enoch Timpunza Mvula. In their different essays, writers such as Gibbs, Mphande, Mapanje, and O'Malley have remarked on how the authoritarian rule in the country inspired creative writing in different ways, including use of traditional material, as Ngulube did in *Phuma! Uhambe!*

> Witchcraft in my dominion is punishable by banishment! ...My chieftainship remains mine forever. My sons remain to be obeyed and respected. (Villagers murmur) Did I hear any murmurs at the back?

The villagers' response goes this way:

> Bayete Inkosi! Not even the ancestral spirits would be foolish enough to object.

Satisfied, Inkosi pronounces the verdict:

> Good, we must maintain the spirit of oneness. By the power which lie in me as your chief, I have considered the case... I am convinced that I can only do one thing about it – (A buzz of murmurs interrupts the speech)

The chief Induna disciplines the villagers:

> Silence! You make a wild noise as if you are all witches. Keep still and listen.

Inkosi continues in this way:

> It does not please me to send a kinsman to his damnation. But in such circumstances, compassion must give room to justice. He that practices witchcraft separates himself from our community. I therefore pronounce that my verdict is (Momentary pause. Sound of drums, then faintly) PHUMA UHAMBE! (Violent drumming. An uproar of abuses from villagers shouting 'Phuma uhambe' as they chase away Mufwenge)[49].

The praise that Inkosi receives is exaggerated, and has undertones of sycophancy. It is the villagers' tradition to prostrate when the chief approaches, so one wonders why they should be reminded about it. In addition to this, the villagers encourage the chief to speak out of fear. In their salutations to the chief, they express the idea that he is more powerful than ancestors. This is surprising since, normally, chiefs consult ancestors for wisdom to guide the living. In the present case, there is an inversion of power because even the ancestors are afraid of him. Furthermore, the villagers'

[49] Ngulube's *Phuma*, p.1

greeting emphasizes the chief's divine ability to make 'irreversible decisions'. For example, after condemning witchcraft, the villagers comment:

> Bayete inkosi. Your decision is always final[50].

At which point Inkosi reminds his subjects that:

> My chieftainship remains mine forever. My sons remain to be obeyed and respected[51].

When the villagers mumble in response, Inkosi threatens:

> Did I hear any murmurs at the back?[52]

The Chief Induna, in loyalty to the chief, shouts 'silence!' to the villagers. The mention of 'chieftainship is mine forever' also indicates the way the chief intimidates his subjects. The murmurs from the villagers suggest that there is resistance to the chief.

In cynicism towards the chief, Ngulube sets up a trial scene in which a villager is charged with witchcraft. In his judgment, the chief's weakness, autocracy, and the villagers' tense relationship with him indicate discontent against the chief. In essence, while the chief pronounced *'Phuma! Uhambe!'* to the wizard, the echoing of the words by the villagers was directed superficially at the wizard and most importantly at the chief himself. Constrained by censorship from expressing themselves openly, the authors resorted to communicating through parallels and imagery, as Ngulube has shown in *Phuma!* This can also be seen in poetry. For example, Jack Mapanje quotes Anthony Namalomba's poem, *The Rejection,* in which there is an attempt to break away from a lover:

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[50] *Phuma*, p.1
[51] ibid
[52] ibid.

No more a doting effigy
Tendrils of feeling for you
Have withered away....

In submissive laxity
I delve the resources of my
Heart and evict you (out).
Out you go!
Out you go!
... Cheat!
Out you march [53]

Namalomba's poem, meant to signal the end of a love affair, registers anger from the persona of the poem, who tries to remove the picture of 'a doting effigy' that lingers on his mind, and tells the lover without hesitation: 'Out you! Out you go! ... Cheat!' Words such as 'doting' and 'withered', used about this evicted lover, could have been in reference to the aging Kamuzu Banda. Lance Ngulube brings out outrage in a similar manner, going further to make a whole village to shout: PHUMA! UHAMBE! – Out you go!

At another level, *Phuma!* raises the issue of traditional life and European influence. In the presence of Delelani's daughter, Tafwachi, Masozi reports a child's sickness to Delelani, the chief's wife. The three women then have the following exchange:

> **Tafwachi:** Don't worry *mulamu* (sister-in-law). He will recover and we shall ask the elders to take him to the mission medicine house.
>
> **Masozi:** Medicine house? That place of white people who prick people with needles. What do they know about *chikoko*? (epilepsy) *Uthakati*? (witchcraft)
>
> **Delelani**: True. They should take him to our traditional medicine man.
>
> **Tafwachi**: Is it really you saying that. I thought you said you do not believe in witch finding?[54]

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[53] Anthony Namalomba, "Out you go", in ed. Jack Mapanje, *Odi*, 1977, p. 27
[54] *Phuma* p.2

The villagers' ideas on traditional medicine exist side by side with the Mission medicine. Masozi doubts the effectiveness of the hospital in a witchcraft case like the present child's sickness. The women agree to go to a medicine man, as is very common amongst Malawians. At times, traditional medicine is actually brought to the patient at the hospital.

Looking further at traditions in the play, we turn to the use of drums. *Phuma* is punctuated by drumming to indicate transitions between scenes. The play opens with drumming before the people and the villagers arrive at the chief's open ground. Later, when the sentence has been pronounced, drums are played again, connecting the prologue to scene one. At the end of scene one, a drum-beat announces the men's departure for the lions hunt. Indeed every scene opens and closes with a drum-beat.

The use of drums had long been a part of Malawian life and Malawian drama in English. In Tom Omara's *The Exodus,* for example, as witnessed by the present writer in Owen Mbilizi's production at Chichiri Secondary School in 1979, the two brothers cross swords, and chant their departure speeches in verse, punctuated by drums.

At another level, the use of drumming as a transitional device between scenes was consistent with the format of popular Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) radio dramas. *Theatre of the Air* or *Sewero la Sabata Ino (kapalepale)* used drum music to connect scenes. Writers such as Ngulube could have been influenced by the described contexts.

It is also important to note the writer's use of transliteration. A number of direct translations either from Tumbuka/Ngoni or Chichewa are detectable in many parts of the play. In scene one for example, Khaulani arrives, running to report the lions' invasion and shouts: 'Help you people!'... The expression makes more sense when translated into the Chichewa language ... *ndithandizeni abale*. Again in scene two, when Masozi comes to report that her child has epileptic fits, her dialogue with Delelani, the chief's wife, shows direct translation from Tumbuka/Ngoni in this way:

> **Delelani:** Come on Masozi, be an adult and tell us what has happened. Crying won't help us.
>
> **Masozi**: *Achiponde ine (*my ancestors of the Chiponde clan*)*. Why do I live if I am a complete sufferer on earth? ... My son eh eh eh.[55]

The addition of 'us' in the phrase 'crying won't help us' directly translates as *kulira sikutithandiza*. Normally, the phrase does not have an 'us' at the end. In addition to that, the phrase 'a complete sufferer on earth' was Ngulube's translation of 'mkavu' from the way utter suffering and poverty is described in Ngoni/Tumbuka.

Possibly the explanation for such usage was the writer's attempt to be consistent with the traditional setting of his play, which he successfully managed to do. Such writing was amongst the qualities African writers attained when using English language. Discussed at length by David Kerr in *African Popular Theatre*, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Makerere and Chikwakwa Travelling Theatre provide instances to prove this. The Yoruba Travelling Theatre, for example used the *alarinjo,* a paradigm which is an indigenous form of narrative and performance in Nigeria. Furthermore, Kerr quotes James Gibbs who related the audience's excitement at the inclusion of pidgin English

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[55] *Phuma*, p.3

in the plays performed by the Yoruba Travelling Theatre[56]. Ngulube's transliteration can then be appreciated within that context.

Generally looking at the play, the united chasing of the wizard out of their village could have been a possible reading of how Malawians subconsciously responded to Banda's dictatorship. In public, people agreed with whatever his decision was but grumbled in private. These could be the serious intentions that the writer wanted to convey. Adrian Roscoe observed about the author's intention in writing the play that:

> (He is) questioning ... the values of the Ngoni/Tumbuka tradition of banishment and he is not merely exposing the tradition for the sake of entertainment[57].

I suggest that Ngulube used the Ngoni/Tumbuka tradition as a metaphor for Malawi in which banishment was a common story, and loyalty was faked in public. Banda had a network of spies, and gave power to *ayufi* – party village guards called 'youth leaguers', and members of the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP). Any opposition against him meant that the opponent would be severely dealt with when detected. Even though many people grumbled, they were either forced to attend Malawi Congress Party rallies during Banda's rule or did so for fear of reprisals. At the rallies, they highly praised his 'wise leadership'[58] .

According to James Gibbs, *Phuma*, was approved and given a performance permit by the Censorship Board. Staged at the Chirunga Open Air Theatre as part of a Chancellor College Theatre Festival in 1974, Adrian Roscoe, who did not hear much

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[56] see Kerr, 1995, pp. 139 - 145
[57] see Adrian Roscoe in ed. James Gibbs, 1976
[58] Padraig O'Malley, (1999), *Living Dangerously*, Somba Publications, Scotland.

of the play because of audience noise, described the audience's response as 'excited'[59].

From the description above, and assuming he intended to make a political comment, it is clear that Ngulube used a number of devices to escape the censor's watchful eye. He used traditional material, complex characterization and irony to successfully camouflage criticism of Banda's leadership and policies. Ngulube did not, nonetheless, use traditional material alone. He also wrote other plays using contemporary subject matter, like *Because of Charity* whose discussion follows.

2.4 BECAUSE OF CHARITY by Lance Ngulube

Written in 1975, *Charity* opens with a dream in which a man called Fred Nthenda is dancing with a girlfriend, Charity, at a nightclub. They are drunk and hold one another tightly. Other men are dancing alone. In the middle of the dance two women, Madando, Fred's wife, and Vitima, Fred's aunt, enter the bar. Recognizing the intruders, Fred and Charity slip away.

Fred's newly born baby Suzgo is sick in hospital. Fred does not visit the hospital, leaving Madando to look after the child alone. Madando believes that the baby is sick because the father is sleeping with other women and she angrily states:

> Do you realize that the poor soul is a victim of your vagrancy; your ceaseless pursuit of pleasure in bars and public houses[60].

The wife's comments do not stop Fred from engaging in the other affairs. He tells Charity he will divorce his wife for them to marry. A few days later, Fred invites

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[59] Roscoe op.cit.
[60] Ngulube's *Charity*, p. 9

Charity to his house while Madando is at the hospital. Madando returns home to find Charity. An argument ensues and Fred assaults Madando for questioning his behaviour. Fred's aunt, Vitima, intervenes.

A problem arises and further complicates Fred's extra-marital affair when Charity becomes pregnant. She forces Fred to divorce Madando to marry her. However, in the middle of the argument, a messenger from Fred's work-place informs him that the child has died. The messenger identifies Charity as his sister-in-law who has run away from her husband. This revelation forces Fred to reconcile with his wife. Exposed and humiliated, Charity leaves, following the messenger.

The play is a critique of the behaviour of educated young men in the cities. In the 1970s, residential areas such as Nkolokosa and Soche East in Blantyre, and parts of Lilongwe housed educated young men like Fred Nthenda. Their education qualified them for higher jobs whose benefits included a car and a high salary. Excited by the good jobs many of them were offered after secondary school and university, they extravagantly entertained themselves and neglected their wives. The upward mobility affected their outlook towards life. They exhibited snobbish behaviour and the play has a number of examples of this. The English language, with a dash of pseudo-American slang became the order of their day, and also differentiated their social class, as shown in this exchange at the bar:

> **Barman**: Hey, Gentlemen dancing alone…
>
> **1st Patron**: Come on. You put on the music and let's groove like it ain't nobody's business…
>
> **Fred**: Bring me a beer.

> **Barman**: Yes sir. Pleasure... here sir... Yesterday you no come and she come.
>
> **Fred**: Who came?
>
> **Barman**: Your lady sir. She asking for you. Me tells her you coming and she waiting to closing time[61]...

As university graduates, Ngulube makes Fred and his colleagues speak good English, mixed with pseudo-American slang, differentiated from the barman's English, which has grammatical errors. The mastering of English through high education puts Fred and his colleagues in a class higher than the barman.

At another level, the play raises the issue of traditional beliefs. Madando, despite having a university education, still believes in traditional explanations for childhood sicknesses, as the following speech with Fred illustrates:

> Suzgo! Suzgo! As if you know where the poor child is rolling in agony? Do you realize that the poor soul is a victim of your vagrancy; your ceaseless pursuit of pleasure in bars and public houses.
>
> ... Simply because of your B. Sc. in soap making, you consider yourself mature and learned to trample on your indigenous ways of life, hey? Do you think that when elderly people say that married men should stick to their wives they are merely joking? Can't you see what is happening to Suzgo now?[62]

According to Madando, Suzgo was sick because the father did not abstain from sexual activity while the baby was still very young. She thinks the father does not believe in the traditions because of his western education.

The play also raises the issue of education policy in Malawi. We learn that Madando fell pregnant while at University and was expelled. In the 1970s, dismissing pregnant girls from educational institutions reduced chances of improving on women's

[61] *Charity*, p. 3
[62] *Charity*, p. 9

education. The perspective has since been reversed and now pregnant young women are allowed to attend secondary school and university. They are also allowed to continue their education after giving birth.

While the play is primarily concerned with the relationship between educated young men and women, and the young men's disregard for traditional belief systems, I would like to suggest that in a single line, it makes a strong political comment. The title of the play is *Because of Charity*. Charity is a loose woman who goes to nightclubs to entice men to sleep with her. Her relationship with Fred is not permanent, and yet the relationship distracts Fred from his responsibility. Noteworthy is Ngulube's highlighting of Fred's womanizing behaviour by using only one woman, who makes him abdicate his duty over his family. The death of the child becomes the climax of the narrative from which a theme can be drawn. From this, I would like to read the theme in the context of Kamuzu Banda's relationship with the Official Government Hostess.

Banda's relationship with the Hostess was never publicly defended as a marriage during his lifetime, and the issue circulated amongst Malawians as rumour. The story was partially confirmed when Banda died. An argument over inheritance of Banda's riches ensued between the Hostess and the Kazombo family, relatives of Banda. A report from the lawyers standing for the family quoted the Hostess, counteracting the claims that she was being given a lion's share of the wealth, when the will clearly stated that she would receive 25%. While it is true that any person very close to a rich person can be written into a will, the circumstances for writing her in are vaguely attributed to being Banda's wife: a relationship that was never legitimized. Writers

picked this story and created analogues, as I suggest Ngulube has done with the title of *Charity*.

The usage of the title could have also been a further subversion of what the Banda regime believed in. I suggest that the title of the play could have been *Because of a woman*, reminiscent of Mbella Sonne Dipoko's *Because of Women*, which was a banned book in Malawi[63]. Ngulube could have been aware of this from the battles the Travelling Theatre had with the Censorship Board and inevitable follow ups on lists of banned material by such people as James Gibbs. So despite the apparent apolitical conflict of Ngulube's play, the title, and the theme could have been made to suggest an analogy to the infamous relationship between Banda and the Hostess.

Ngulube did not, however, escape Banda's watchful eye for long because, one evening, he was dragged out of one of the hostels at Chancellor College and was detained without trial at Mikuyu prison in 1975. He was released in 1977 after the Secretary General of Malawi Congress Party, Muwalo Nqumayo was detained for plotting to assassinate Kamuzu Banda[64]. After the irony and analogies of Ngulube, we now turn to Innocent Banda's *Mad like a Prophet*, which used a fusion of different forms to appraise the state of independence in Malawi.

[63] See J. Gibbs 1999, p. 3
[64] See J. Gibbs 1999

2.5 MAD LIKE A PROPHET by Innocent Banda[65]

In *Mad Prophet*, the voice of an exiled madman renders poetic criticism of the madman's brother who has banished him from the land of their parents. Accompanying the mad prophet is the Voice which chants and complains about oppression. Besides talking about oppression in the land where the mad prophet comes from, the Voice appeals to God for help. Later, a realistic scenario brings out an argument. A father warns his son not to resist the colonialists because they made him chief. The son, however, does not heed this, but goes ahead to mobilize people to resist the colonialists. As a result, the country attains independent rule.

In celebrating freedom, a big party for 'new Bwanas' (bosses) is organized at a big hotel in the city. Only those who had high education and big posts attend the party. The son's father, who had accompanied him to the party, notices the similarity between the 'new Bwanas' and the Colonialists. They eat good food and drink imported liquor. When the party ends, the Mad Prophet, accompanied by the Voice of the oppressed, admonishes the new Bwanas that 'they dine while seated on "corpses" of the struggle for liberation'.

Mad Prophet combines surrealism, realistic scenes, poetry, background sounds, and commentary. It has several 'voices' that render poetic pieces inside realistic scenes,

[65] Innocent Banda's *Cracks* and *Lord Have Mercy* were some of the plays analysed by Patience Gibbs in her 1980 study. In providing the context for the pieces, she included information about Innocent Banda's background which drew attention to part of his creative impulse. She stated that he was born in Mutapa outside Bulawayo, Rhodesia in 1948 and came to Malawi when he was thirteen. His father came from Kasungu, and went to Rhodesia after qualifying as a student-teacher with the Methodist Church. When Innocent was young, he liked copying pictures: a reason Gibbs attributed to the pictorial nature of *Cracks* (Gibbs P. 1980:92). Gibbs also mentioned Innocent's travels as inducing in him a sensitivity towards other people. This sensitivity, in addition to a poetic urge to go beyond reality, will help in the reading of his play, *Mad like a Prophet.*

and the poetry connects two different scenes. The play opens in the following breathtaking way with:

> ...wild wind; introducing rural sounds and snoring; slowly all of them rising to a fearful climax ... then a crash of thunder stops everything to a dead silence ... Then the voice of the Mad Prophet: rough but strong; crude, rebukes, predicts and assesses the situation[66].

The playwright uses the wind as a background in an evocative painting. Rural sounds and snoring become images that are 'painted', fore grounded on the windy background. They grow louder in volume, only to be abruptly stopped by the sound of thunder: a prelude to the entry of a mad prophet. The texture of the opening mood prepares the audience/reader for a presentation that mixes reality and fantasy.

Innocent Banda's obsession with madness, first expressed in his other play, *Cracks*[67] seems to indicate the writer's attempt to use a form that enables him to fully articulate the status quo in a stylized form, which afforded the performance an opportunity to directly address the audience, through poetry and prose. The poetry in *Mad Prophet* uses and creatively extends Biblical stories for critical thought. Mad Prophet himself says:

> God created the world of winds and rain, the world of
> cows and goats; and in the centre of all, threw a man
> full of innocence.
> He wandered
> the world free
> like a bird
> like the wind
> but when he discovered
> his mouth:
>
> (THUNDER)
>
> Man became selfish
> and forever lived

[66] Zangaphee Chizeze's *Mad like a Prophet*, p. 1
[67] P. Gibbs, p. 96 - 98

in bondage
to his stomach.
Oppressors suffer a perpetual
selfishness
(A demonic laugh…)[68]

The poem talks about God's creation of the world, and man's destruction of it when he was put in charge. Starting with man's discovery of 'his mouth', he became selfish as he always considered himself first, and oppressed others. In the stanza that follows, this selfish man and oppressor is described as: 'my preacher brother' … who sent the narrator into the wilderness for blabbering lunacy. The mad prophet tries to convince the reader/ audience to be on his side because he openly shouts: 'I am a prophet'. The reason why the mad prophet should be listened to is stated by another character, the Voice, who pleads:

Rise, O lord
to the aid
of your people.
Our backs are doubly bent…
… in slavery…
Listen O Lord,
to the echo
of the oppressor's whip
gnawing the backs
of your people
in the south
as they polish gold[69]…

In this quote, the Voice pleads with the Lord for himself and others because of the enormity of the problem. There is no leadership which productively directs the people to liberation. Feeling abandoned, the oppressed appeal to God. Furthermore, the Voice, heard besides the mad prophet's, is not a lone one. Using the pronoun 'our' to give a plurality of suffering voices, the victims cry with the oppressor's whip in South Africa: 'as they polish gold'.

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[68] *Mad Prophet*, p. 1
[69] ibid.

There is a connection between South Africa and the land from which the mad prophet is banished. Malawians went to work in South African and Rhodesian mines because of lack of such resources in their country. The dependency on Agriculture by Malawians made the mines a better source of income. It is also evident that the mad prophet's 'preacher-brother' is connected to these oppressors. Kamuzu Banda was the only leader in Southern Africa who kept diplomatic ties with the regimes described as racist and oppressive such as South Africa and Portuguese East Africa (PEA). In 1970, John Vorster, the Prime Minister of South Africa, came to Malawi, and Banda reciprocated the visit in 1971. In the same period, Banda visited the PEA. Nationalists in South Africa and Mozambique saw this act as a betrayal to the struggle for freedom in Southern Africa. Innocent Banda seemed to agree with the criticism that the nationalists made on Kamuzu Banda's policies.

The scene that follows this verse-opening introduces another debate. A father, who is a stooge of the colonialists argues with his educated son over rebellion against the colonialist administration in Nyasaland. The father says:

> I am the best chief in the whole country, and don't you spoil my future. I saw these white men come. They opened my eyes and I cannot betray them[70]...

The father revered the colonialists for the respect that they offered him, and he was not ready to spoil the relationship. His future was clearly bright in the colonialists' continued rule of the land. Notwithstanding his argument, the son mobilizes the people against the colonial government. The playwright takes the audience/reader into colonial times and presents arguments that compare and contrast independence and

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[70] *Mad Prophet*, p. 2

colonialism. The political gap between the father and the son is wide. The colonialists have given the father a job as a chief, and the son wants to fight them, despite the fact that he '...works in the DC's office, the only black man among whites'. The father warns the son not to defy the colonialists because ... 'if you want your sons to rise high in this cursed society, do not meddle in politics'. The son does not take heed of the father's warning and he goes ahead to preach resistance, as a result of which the country gains independence. With celebration everywhere, the Mad Prophet and the other oppressed voices admonish the celebrants about the cost of the freedom in this way:

> **Mad Prophet**:... We sing of the Dawn coming soon
> the dawn is the gift of God
> Sing the song of Dawn
> yet those that abuse this gift
> shall die by the sword....
>
> **CHANT**: ... The night fades and the eastern horizon
> brightens to free us from the darkness...
> Before we knew it we were slaves...
>
> **Mad Prophet**: Dawn falls like manna
> yet many must fall
> before the dawn
> and upon the corpses
> the living
> sit to dine[71]...

'Dawn' is a sign of the break of day, and also symbolizes the transition into independence. The slogan for the Malawi Congress Party opened with the word 'kwacha', which in Chichewa means break of day - dawn. Furthermore, the idea of darkness and light is used to illustrate the transition from colonialism to independent rule. The Mad Prophet and the Voice therefore warn those who have intentions of abusing "the dawn", because it was won with blood. The punishment, therefore, for

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[71] *Mad Prophet*, p. 4

those who abuse the benefits of self rule is death by the sword. By mentioning words such as 'dawn is a gift from God' and 'yet dawn fall like manna', the writer makes Biblical references to equate abuse of independence to sinning against God.

The mad prophet and other voices are nonetheless pessimistic after observing how independence is initially celebrated. Achieving 'Dawn' from darkness had its own casualties. The reference to 'corpses' amongst the casualties is evocative. It is clear that in every war there are casualties. However, while these casualties existed, there were others who were killed within the camp of freedom fighters, by their colleagues. These consciously made 'corpses' could have been at the celebration had it not been for their murders. Political economist Dunduzu Chisiza, who died mysteriously before independence, was one such casualty. The playwright emphasizes the word 'corpses' to evoke such memory, as independence is commemorated.

In the scene that follows, the son is now a District Commissioner. Inheriting the colonialist's house, he has a house servant, just like his predecessor. He is invited to the Republic celebration dinners in big hotels, to which only "the bwanas" are invited. On one occasion at the hotel, the son meets his friend, Samson, who has grown a pot belly, a double-chin and drives a good car. Sam is already drunk by the time he comes to the celebrations, prompting the son to be very critical about the behaviour of the other "bwanas". He reminds Sam that the freedom was fought for by the people, many of whom are not present. The extravagance of the party equally perplexes the father, who has accompanied the son. After the good party, where the new "bwanas" drink the 'brandy and coke of independence', the voices of prophecy come back to close the play with a warning that:

Dawn fall like manna
… yet never let it be forgotten
that many fell before the dawn.
It is upon their corpses,
beware therefore and be righteous
we sit and dine…

… there is a greater day
in a drop of sweat and blood
than in a sea of wine
(Rise music with finality. Cross fade into a … song… (Bwereke)[72]

The play raises several issues. Right from the opening of the play, it is evident that the play captures the state of affairs in Malawi at the time Banda wrote the play. The wild wind represents an unstoppable force that blew over a majority of the citizens, threatening them into conformity. The rural sounds and the snoring stand for the slumbering citizenry, who are woken up when the thunder cracks, and with all the sounds abruptly silenced, the voice of the mad prophet is heard.

On characterization, the mad prophet is a representative of people who opposed Dr. Banda, and were not welcome in independent Malawi. Many of them were thrown into jail, exiled, or killed. The Cabinet Crisis of 1964 had sent Masauko Chipembere, Kanyama Chiume, David Rubadiri, and Willie Chokani into exile (Richard Carver: 1990). Machipisa Munthali, trained as a freedom fighter in Russia, was captured and thrown into jail and forgotten. In 1971, Dr. Banda manipulated his remaining cowed cabinet to change the constitution and declared himself president for life. At the university, writers such as Innocent Banda, Felix Mnthali and Jack Mapanje, a breed of the mad prophet, were 'looking for a voice' to raise issues about the state of affairs in Malawi. In fact the use of the term 'mad' is a cynical celebration of critics whom

[72] *Mad Prophet*, p. 8

Kamuzu Banda saw as 'insane', and yet the term also expressed how most of the people in the country felt about him.

The prose scenes added issues of colonialism and independence. Malawi, as a British Protectorate, experienced indirect rule. Loyal chiefs collected tax, and were in turn given a small salary. This inhibited efforts by nationalists to mobilize the people through chiefs who felt satisfied with their positions. Leroy Vail[73] states how John Chilembwe, a Malawian Baptist priest, met resistance from Yao chiefs when he tried to enlist people for the 1915 anti-colonial uprising in the Southern Region. Chilembwe resorted to the Lomwe people, who lived as tenants in the Yao chiefs' lands after being displaced from PEA by Portuguese cruelty. Innocent Banda clearly raises this disagreement between nationalists and chiefs to highlight the reality that was there during the time of anti-colonial struggles.

The most important debate that the play raises, however, is on rulers of the independent state. Both educated people and villagers fought the anti-colonial wars. On attaining independence, it was the educated people alone who benefited. The father notices similarities in the behaviour of his son, who is a new Bwana, to that of the colonialists. The following exchange between them illustrates this point:

> **Father**: … My son it's my time to speak to you.
>
> **Son:** (To a servant) Go and make tea for us. Don't make it strong…
>
> **Father**: Just like Bwana Thompson. I am sure you don't like your tea with too much sugar…
>
> **Son**: (Laughs. He assumes a European accent) One sugar please?[74]

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[73] Leroy Vail and Landeg White (1990) *Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*
[74] *Mad Prophet*, p. 9

While this type of snobbish talk came from colonialists, it was later assumed by educated natives who attained high positions in the new dispensation. Frantz Fanon discussed the psychology of black people as they fought for independence. He prophesied that after independence, the leadership, because of being denied 'good life' by the colonialists, would desire to live like their predecessors[75] (Fanon 1990). Fanon argued that the leadership's western education did not prepare them enough to be liberators because they themselves were not liberated. Instead of having visions for the benefit of all, they aimed for personal comfort, rising to the heights white people had always blocked them from.

Another instance of psychological weakness is detectable in the party scene when Sam, the son's colleague, comments on food that:

> ...Hey look over there mounds of food. My God, this is freedom. White man's food. Food for Bwanas... I have never known freedom to be so appetizing...
>
> **Samson:** (to the Son) ... Hey, what's the matter with you... you can't allow yourself a freedom drink. Freedom maketh my mouth water. What else can I say? For me freedom means a pot belly and a car[76]...

Provocative, the playwright satirizes the character to emphasize the point of self actualization in the psyche of the new Bwanas, who had always wanted, because of their education, to be materially comfortable, but colonial policies would not let them. Having attained independence, it was their time to enjoy the benefits of their education and struggle against the colonialists, at the expense of uneducated people who also played a very important role in the anti-colonial wars.

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[75] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin, 1990.
[76] *Mad Prophet*, p. 12

Further provocations from the playwright can be seen in the usage of the word "bwana". According to Dickson Chilongani, a Tanzanian PhD student at Bristol University, 'bwana' literally means 'Lord'. It came into Chichewa from the Swahili word *bwana-kubwa* – big Lord, and was used to address White men in the colonial days[77]. Likewise the Chichewa word 'dona', which has its roots in Portuguese, refers to a woman and was used to accord power to white women, just as Bwana did to white men. Kamuzu Banda used the word "bwana" when addressing Malawians. He flattered loyalists, especially villagers about their elevated position in independent Malawi, by suggesting that they are "*bwanas* and *donas*". Banda often coupled this use with compliments on how well Malawians dressed once independence had been achieved to satisfy his own Victorian English taste of dress, and to self-gratify as leader who brought progress to a backward and underdeveloped nation. Innocent Banda and his colleagues at the Writers Workshop and Traveling Theatre used words like these ironically to level criticism on Kamuzu Banda.

The play's conclusion with the song 'Bwereke' is also very telling about the playwright's critical intention. 'Bwereke' was a song Kamuzu Banda sang with women from his home district Kasungu at party rallies. The song says:

> Bwereke, bwereke
> Bwereke, bwereke
> Bwerekeee bwerekeee
> Nkhuku bwere bwere eeee
> Nkhuku bwere bwere eeee
> (repeat)

The contextual meaning of the word "bwereke" falls within the sound that the chicken makes in celebration for its eggs, and the chicken owner's celebratory mood for the

[77] In conversation with Dickson Chilongani, a Tanzanian Ph.D. Theology student at Bristol University on 19th November, 2003

wealth that the chicken creates, when it hatches live chicks. In this agricultural society, chickens are a source of income and food, hence the imitation of its sounds in song to celebrate the prospective wealth[78]. Innocent Banda includes it in the play as one of Dr. Banda's favourite songs sang by dancing members of the Malawi Congress Party's Women's League to contemporarise the issues he raises.

In conclusion, it is clear that the playwright is critical of the way Malawian independence accorded privilege to people, on the basis of their education. The loyal educated party members, some of whom had positions in Banda's government, enjoyed the fruits of independence while the majority of Malawians languished in poverty. Kamuzu Banda exhibited the psychology of the leader of the independent state, prophetically described by Frantz Fanon in the 1950s as a leader of the national bourgeoisie[79].

Unlike *Phuma Uhambe,* and *Because of Charity, Mad prophet* was never performed. Its direct references to the leadership's dominance in enjoyment of benefits of independence could have not only prevented it from obtaining a permit for performance, but could have also discouraged the writer from attempting to apply for approval. Nonetheless, direct reference was not the only criteria on which plays were rejected, as shown in Dede Kamkondo's *The Vacant Seat.*

[78] In conversation with Mr. Kapondamgaga, June 2003
[79] Fanon 1990, p. 135

2.6 THE VACANT SEAT by Dede Kamkondo[80]

Kamkondo wrote the *Vacant Seat* for a Travelling Theatre writing competition when he was in First Year at Chancellor College. Voted the best play, the competition was adjudicated by James Gibbs and Patrick O'Malley. Follow up plays included *Waiting for the Sun* (R.N. Mulowoka), *Darkness Yonder* (H. Msiska), *Citizens of Fate* (I. Chirwa), *She Didn't Love Him* (Owens Chirambo), *Beautiful Girl and Rich Man* (F.R.G. Phiri), and *Because of Lora* (V.B. Chirwa [Miss])[81].

The Vacant Seat is about succession to chieftainship. The late Chief Shaki's second wife, Sokoni, wants her first born son Sawa to be chief, contrary to the traditional norm which stated that only a first-born son by the first wife succeeds his father. Sokoni instructs Sawa to ambush Mubanga, the rightful successor to the chieftaincy, who is expected to come back from South Africa, where he works in the mines. Shembe, Sokoni's brother, in an effort to please the sister, also arranges with three thugs to kill Mubanga on his return.

Mubanga, anxious to arrive home looking smart, stops by a river to bath and wear new clothes, leaving his old trousers and suitcase unattended. Sawa steals these and wears the trousers. With the appearance of a man in trousers, carrying a suitcase, the

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[80] Dede Wisdom Kamkondo attended Chaminade Secodary School, which was a hub of ATEM dramatic activity in the early 1970s, before coming to Chancellor College in 1974. He participated in both the Writers' Workshop and the Travelling Theatre, interacting with such people as Felix Mnthali, whom he described later as a Malawian T.S.Eliot; Adrian Roscoe as a 'doyen of literature', and Jack Mapanje as 'the-always-has-a-tongue-in-cheek Jack' (Muse 28).

In 1979, when he was in 4th year, Kamkondo edited *The Muse*, a magazine for critical writing and performance at Chancellor College, advised by Jika Nkolokosa. Filling his editorial pages with humourous comments, he encouraged both students and staff to contribute to *The Muse* (See Muse 22 – 32, 1979). Kamkondo later joined the teaching staff at the University of Malawi as a Lecturer at Bunda College, and published numerous short stories and novels such as *Children of the Lake*.

[81] *Muse* No. 6, 1976

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thugs, who lay in wait, mistake him for Mubanga. They kill him, cut his head off, and put it in the suitcase to present to Shembe. Without checking the contents, Shembe takes the suitcase to Sokoni as a gift. When Sokoni opens the suitcase, she is understandably horrified.

As regards characterization, Sokoni drives the story. When she enters in the opening scene, after being told the council's decision to uphold Mubanga's right to the chieftaincy, she is very upset, and says:

> Ridiculous! Absurd! That's not their decision … it can't be … (pulls at her hair)

Shembe interjects:

> I was there, sister. Am I not a member of the council? They completely outvoted us … oh, the embarrassment … (hides his eyes)[82].

In her anger, Sokoni accuses Shembe of being drunk at the meeting and asserts that Mubanga was chosen because of this. The aesthetic of power is also shown in scene three when Sokoni has the following exchange with Sawa:

> **Sokoni**: (angrily) Sawa! … You were not listening… Did you stay out late last night?
>
> **Sawa**: No mama…
>
> **Sokoni:** You are like that boneless brother of mine when he was young…
>
> **Sawa:** But, mama[83]…

Throughout the scene, Sokoni tells Sawa what to do and what not to do. His responses 'yes mama. No mama…' show how powerless he is in front of his mother. In

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[82] Dede Kamkondo's *The Vacant Seat*, p. 1
[83] Ibid., p.3

addition, Sawa's insistence on 'no mama... yes mama', which he does six times in a space of three minutes[84], show how polite he was to his mother[85].

In addition to these characteristics, Sokoni also confronts problems in a devious way. Instead of facing the council to demand that they change their choice of chief, she plans to kill Mubanga. Unfortunately, as indicated above, things do not go according to plan because Mubanga survives the plot and Sawa is killed in his place. This does not happen by chance since Mubanga keeps referring to the ancestors. For example, when he cannot find his suitcase after bathing he thinks the ancestors have taken it. As a result, he throws a white towel into the river as an offering to them[86]. Clearly, the ancestors listen to him. It is not bad luck to have his suitcase and trousers stolen. It becomes a sacrifice that saves him from the killers. While this appears simplistic, it turns around the fate nonetheless. When Sawa appears in the dusk, wearing a pair of trousers and carrying a suitcase, he is killed. Ancestors, on whom authority rested to install chiefs, wanted Mubanga, and foiled any evil plans made to stop this.

Shembe is another major character. He is a member of the royal family by virtue of being a brother to Sokoni. Although a drunkard, he is intelligent and makes his own plans, as shown in this exchange with the thugs:

> **Shembe**: ... You can go now. Remember the instructions. The stranger will be carrying a suitcase and he will be dressed in town clothes. Your job is simple... cut his head off ... and bring it to me. No head, no return...
>
> **1st thug**: Are you sure the young man will be alone?

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[84] Ibid., p. 3 - 4

[85] One, however, toys with the idea that the constant use of 'mama' in the scene could have been a reference to the Government Hostess, whom Kamuzu Banda had started to call Mama.

[86] *Vacant Seat*, p. 5

Shembe: (Annoyed) Was I born yesterday, you piglet?[87]

The authority he carries is clear, and the thugs are cowed. It might be said that his perpetual drunkenness was a sign of wealth, not a weakness. His cold-bloodedness also comes out clearly in, firstly, the planning of the murder, and secondly, in the threat of harsh consequences to the thugs on failure to accomplish the assignment.

Central to the plot of *Vacant Seat* is a known Malawian proverb, '*choipa chitsata mwini*' – an evil plan always turns back on the plotter. There is an evil plan at the center of this story instigated by a very powerful woman. Unfortunately, the ancestors prove more potent than the underhand plotters.

The play uses comic relief to ease the tragic feeling. For example, Sokoni, while angry with Shembe, mocks him, as indicated in the following exchange:

> **Sokoni**: Were you drunk again? Beer makes you lazy…
>
> **Shembe**: Lazy? Lazy you say? Do you know how many children I have fathered legitimately or illegitimately?[88]....

The fathering of children had nothing to do with the charge of laziness that was being laid upon Shembe. However, the writer found it opportune to introduce the issue in a humourous manner.

The stage directions in scene two show another instance of humour when Shembe meets the thugs:

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[87] *Vacant Seat*, p. 2
[88] *Vacant Seat*, p. 1

> Shembe is sitting on a stool, drinking. He does not pass the calabash to the three young men sitting cross-legged at his feet. They are not staring at him but at the calabash. They lick their lips. Seeing this, Shembe picks up the calabash and makes a movement as if to hand it to one of them but takes the sip alone. The young man's outstretched arms falter wearily.[89]

Shembe, as a member of the royal family, exhibits power and an ability to afford material things. He is aware, while he drinks the beer, that the thugs wish for it as well. He, nonetheless, does not share the calabash with them, but teases them instead. Such action would provoke laughter amongst audience members.

There are striking similarities between the theme of *Vacant Seat* and the power hierarchy of Malawi. Firstly, the mention of a 'vacant seat' was very evocative in political terms. Kamuzu Banda never opened up the issue of his succession for debate with anybody including members of his own party. Whoever raised it was seen as an opponent and was silenced. There was a rumour in Blantyre around 1975 and 1976 that when Albert Muwalo Nqumayo, Secretary General of Malawi Congress Party praised Kamuzu Banda at party rallies saying '*maluwa a Kamuzu, wali wali wali phi* – shine Kamuzu's flowers bright, bright, and extinguish', he referred to succession of the president. Common folk in Bangwe location, and school children at Bangwe Catholic Primary, interpreted it as a sign to remove Kamuzu from the seat (*personal experience*). In addition to that, a number of political murders were rumoured to be a consequence of succession for the president.

However, centralized in *Vacant Seat* are the two main characters, Sokoni and her brother Shembe. A combination of the two and what they intended to do to Mubanga

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[89] *Vacant Seat*, p. 2

was an ongoing theme in Malawian politics under Kamuzu Banda. While Banda was blamed for many atrocities that befell his opponents, there were two people beside him who influenced his decisions: John Tembo and the Offical Government Hostess, Cecilia Kadzamira, who was Tembo's niece. Their ambitions created a lot of tension with members of Malawi Congress Party's national committee. Any person other than Tembo, rightfully in line for 'the seat', would be mysteriously eliminated. Muwalo Nqumayo was removed from power for allegedly plotting to assassinate Dr. Banda. Tried by traditional chiefs, he was sentenced to death. While it is difficult to contest Muwalo's innocence because of the way the case was dealt with[90], the fact remained that he was the Secretary General of the party, and that gave him power of succession in an event of Banda's removal from the post. Killing such potential successors created possibilities for those who were favourites for the position such as Tembo. Nonetheless, Tembo and his niece's plans proved useless because of what the constitution of the Malawi Congress Party stated. He was never made Secretary General of the party. Consequently, the legitimate way to be elected to the party's leadership became difficult. The constitution stated that the Secretary General of the party would take up leadership should anything happen to the chairperson. Necessitated by Kamuzu Banda's ill health and old age, the 1993 amendment, allowed a council to rule in the absence of the chairperson, and Tembo was part of the three man council, alongside Gwanda Chakuamba and Robson Chirwa[91]. Kamkondo's village analogy to this socio-political issue accurately comments on the succession issue and how prospective candidates were discredited or killed by those who wanted the presidency. Having said this, the playwright's moral efforts shaped

[90] Richard Carver (1992), *Where Silence Reigns*, Amnesty International
[91] *Malawi Update*: 2: 1993

the conclusion of *Vacant Seat* by making the legitimate successor, Mubanga, survive the plot and ascend the throne.

The Censorship Board rejected *The Vacant Seat* for a public performance. The Chairman of the Board rationalized the rejection thus:

> I am afraid scenes in the play concerning cold-blooded murder, conspiracy and loose morals are repugnant to our Malawi concept of decency. Rejected 25.11.76[92].

Gibbs, surprised by such responses, pointed out that plays such as *Julius Caesar*, whose central issue was conspiracy to murder, were allowed to be performed in the country. He bemoaned the bias for European classics and suggested that prejudice was rooted in the sense that the Chairman of the Board, Dr. Tobias Banda, saw classical plays as posing no immediate threat to Malawi. He felt they were distant from the Malawi situation.

2.7 CONCLUSION: UNIVERSITY THEATRE AND CENSORSHIP IN THE 1970S

The plays studied in this chapter use different techniques to put across their messages, which I have argued as being political. The writers used traditional subject matter, complex characterization, irony, stylized writing, mixture of poetry and realistic scenes, and metonym as metaphor to shape their dramas. With varied success in efforts to obtain a permit for their performance, all the plays had an audience at least in the Writers' Workshop.

In *Phuma! Uhambe!*, traditional subject matter is used as a metaphor to comment on Banda's policies. Using embedded feelings of hate in the relationships between the

[92] The Chairman of the Malawi Censorship Board quoted in J. Gibbss 1998, p. 6

villagers and the chief, the play manages to reveal the chief's autocracy, and intimidation of the people. The villagers themselves subtly register resistance in the murmurs, and privately criticize some of the traditions their chief uses to rule the village. In the final analysis, the villagers' support for banishment is superficially directed at the wizard, as they wish it on the chief himself.

In *Because of Charity*, educated young men are criticized for the way their extravagance, and the attention they give to womanizing, destroy their family lives. Through this everyday social narrative, the play makes a political statement about the relationship between Banda and the Government Hostess. The relationship was given significance because the Hostess influenced Banda in making autocratic decisions.

Mad like a Prophet shows how the new dispensation that succeeded colonial administration offered comfortable lives to educated Malawians, leaving out the less educated. In a stylized form, through Biblical and original metaphors, the play threatened death by the sword to those who abused the benefits of independence.

By focusing on succession to chieftaincy in a traditional story, *Vacant Seat* raises a contentious political issue. Mysterious deaths, planned by people related to those in power, had become the order of the day. A queen and her brother's plans to kill the rightful successor are foiled to consequently have the queen's own son killed.

The writers exhibited a high level of expertise in a repressed society. *Phuma! Uhambe!* used transliteration to give a cultural flavour of the traditional Tumbuka/ Ngoni, while *Because of Charity* delivered its intended argument through a

contemporary urban setting. *Mad like a Prophet* showed sophistication in its stylized form, fusing poetry and prose, enjoying the freedom to speak directly to the audience and interspacing such statements with realistic scenes. *The Vacant Seat* presented a strong politically critical narrative in simple language.

The four plays exemplify the creative work Malawian dramatists produced in the context of strict censorship rules, with encouragement from their English teachers and producers in the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre in the 1970s. Innocent Banda's self exile from Malawi during the 1980s and Ngulube's detention at Mikuyu Prison are testimony to the climate of fear which existed in Malawi. The Travelling Theatre had remained university based, and never fully committed itself to doing community plays. The Travelling Theatre's sour relationship with the government, through their interactions with the Censorship Board, and the deportations of some expatriate academics could have made obtaining a permit to go into villages virtually impossible. By 1977, Chikwakwa Travelling Theatre, a project of the same nature at the University of Zambia in Lusaka, where David Kerr was based, had made breakthroughs in village-based theatre, as we will discover in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

UNIVERSITY THEATRE 1980 - 1989

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1970, in a village in Thyolo district, government agents (The Special Branch) stopped Chancellor College academic David Kerr[93] from shooting a film called *Mbalame – Bird.* Kerr did not have government permission for the project. Commanded to apply for the permit, it took two years for the Censorship Board to process the application, and the request was eventually turned down. Kerr went ahead to finish filming without permission, and took the negatives for processing in England. Later, Peter Nkosi, who co-acted with Chris Kamlongera in the film as Gwenembe, was detained without charge by the police. *Mbalame* was based on a popular murder folktale song titled *Sikusinja ndi Gwenembe* produced by Malawi Broadcasting Corporation's house band.

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[93] David Kerr, a young British academic, joined Chancellor College in 1969. During his initial stay in Malawi, he taught literature in the English Department, and also showed interest in film making and creative writing. Kerr played a major role in the consolidation of creative activities in the Writer's Workshop alongside the likes of Landeg White.

After the clashes with the Special Branch (SB) over the film project, the situation deteriorated when Kerr became involved with Mary Ndovi. The SB was an elite police department that protected VIPs and members of the ruling party. According to Kerr, the SB tracked him because Ndovi's two brothers, Peter and Annersly, officers in the Malawi Army, had been suspected of plotting a coup d'état against Banda. Annersly was a Major General and the highest Malawian ranking officer in the Army. The two brothers were detained and Kerr accommodated some members of their families in his University house at Mount Pleasant, a suburb in Blantyre. Reporting the harassment to the British High Commissioner in Malawi, Kerr was told that the British Government would not jeopardise its relationship with Banda by protecting him. In 1974, Kerr moved to the University of Zambia and participated in activities at Chikwakwa Theatre. At Chikwakwa, he worked alongside Landeg White, a former colleague in Malawi; Mapopa Ntonga, a Zambian dramatist and dancer; and Stephen Chifunyise, a Zimbabwean exiled cultural activist (Kerr 1995). According to Kerr, Chikwakwa Theatre carefully rationalised its motivation and objectives, and was committed to socialist theatre. The members collaborated with villagers to create performances using local problems as themes (Kerr Interview: 08/03). Why did Kerr come back to Malawi after his previous experience with the Security Police in the 1970s?

Malawi's political life under Banda in the 1970s was made harder by Albert Muwalo, who, amongst other high profile duties, oversaw the operations of the Special Branch. John Lwanda states that the height of repression in Malawi coincided with the time when Muwalo was in power[94]. It was during this period that Kerr was harassed by the Police. In 1976, Muwalo was detained on allegations of planning to overthrow Banda, and the government hanged him in 1977. With the belief that Muwalo's removal had eased tensions in Malawi, Kerr returned to Chancellor College in 1981.

When Kerr returned, he brought along an approach that had been affected by his Zambian experience. In conversation, he related some of the memorable moments at Chikwakwa and how the coordinating committee and members of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre fused them into their productions. He said:

> Ross Kidd did Theatre for Development at Laedza Batanani in Botswana from around 1974 to '75. First attempt of theatre campaign in Zambia was done in 1977 when we tried to link our Luapula Province Travelling Theatre to social issues specially connected with a Canadian project on credit unions, and legal issues to do with women's rights of succession. Terribly naïve, looking at the mistakes we made... That was connected to the Chalimbana workshop... We had invited people like Amandina Lihamba from Tanzania, ANC exiles within Zambia, people from Lesotho, Swaziland, and Botswana.... We created plays for the community. (South African poet and Black Consciousness activist) Sipho Sepamla was there. He kept quiet and said nothing throughout... We later did a play with ZAPU PF called 'War Of Liberation'. We used their songs, went into their camps to be trained on how to do it properly. We had this cross-fertilisation of ideas. When we did the first performance, Josiah Chinamano was there as Guest of Honour. He was second in command to Joshua Nkomo, who was out of the country at the time. At the performance, the audience almost ran away because the battle scenes looked so real (like in a liberation war).
>
> When I came back to Malawi, we decided to do two things...Firstly to consolidate Chichewa drama. Travelling Theatre did its plays mostly in English. Secondly, we decided to do Theatre for Development. Then we had an invitation to go to Mbalachanda. The invitation came

[94] John Lwanda (1993), *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi*, Dudu Somba, Scotland. p.164

> through OPC (Office of President and Cabinet) ... very weird. It was funded by the Germans[95].

Three things can be established from what David Kerr says. Firstly, Theatre for Development was becoming a force in Southern Africa. Ross Kidd started to experiment with it in Botswana, following its success in Chilean and Brazilian adult literacy programmes by Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal from the late 1960s[96]. Secondly, Lusaka and many other places in the region provided space for exiles of the liberation struggle from Angola, Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa. Their socialist philosophy and commitment filtered into the Southern African theatre. The third objective Kerr mentions is the decision to consolidate Chichewa drama, following earlier efforts in Malawi, as Patience Gibbs indicated. How did this paradigm shift affect University Theatre in the 1980s?

3.2 OVERVIEW

The story of university theatre in the 1980s was partly tackled by Chris Kamlongera (1984) and David Kerr (1995). In his PhD. dissertation, Kamlongera wrote about literary plays performed at the University and in secondary school English Drama Festivals. Analysing two plays from the 1970s, *The Rainmaker* (Chimombo) and *Not Sparing the Flock* (Ng'ombe), Kamlongera also tackled *Daughters of Their Mothers* (Owen Mbilizi) and *Wachiona Ndani?* (Steve Chimombo). He observed that Mbilizi's *Daughters* tackled problems Malawian women face at the hands of their oppressive husbands, and that stylistically, the play used a lot of performance imagery to suggest sexual acts, by-passing the Censorship Board's critical eye in the process[97]. As

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[95] Interview with David Kerr, August, 2003, Zomba.
[96] See Kamlongera (1984) , Ph.D. thesis 1985, Zakes Mda (1987) *When People Play People*, 1987, Penina Mlama 1985, *Culture and Development*.
[97] Kamlongera 1984, p. 298 -303

regards *Wachiona Ndani?*, Kamlongera interpreted it by contextualizing it within the paradigm shift Kerr brought from Zambia, especially in reference to use of local languages in drama. According to Kerr, quoted in Kamlongera 1984, *Wachiona Ndani?*, alongside other plays such as Kanyongolo's *Nsomba Nso*mba, Nambote's *Maliro*, and the Traveling Theatre's *Eviction* played a major role in consolidating drama in indigenous languages[98]. Kamlongera also quotes Mupa Shumba who, in his review, celebrated that drama in local languages had come to stay, and commended that following the example, "any major playwright will have to write for the mass audience"[99]. Furthermore, Kamlongera analysed the Mbalachanda Theatre for Development workshop of 1981, mentioning plays they created with the local communities such as *Kufunika Kwa Ukhondo (Importance of Sanitation)*, *Kumanya Mbanangwa (Knowledge is Freedom)*, and *Nzeru Zayekha (Mr. Know it all)*.

David Kerr, with a continental focus in *Popular African Theatre*, gave University theatre some attention. Under the chapter, 'The Travelling Theatre Movement', he remarked on how the Travelling Theatre was formed. He, nonetheless, did not analyse or mention any play that came out of it in the chapter 'Literary Theatre'. In another publication, *Dance, Media and Entertainment in South East Africa* Kerr focused on the colonial history of film and radio in Rhodesia and Nyasaland and mentioned radio dramas such as *Sewero La Sabata Ino (Kapalepale)*, and *Pa Majiga*.

3.3 TRAVELLING THEATRE'S PRODUCTION CONTEXT

When the Travelling Theatre returned from its Mbalachanda tour, the publicity it received induced the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) to serialize TT's popular Chichewa hit play, *Nchira wa Buluzi (Lizard's Tail)*, which had been

[98] Kamlongera 1984, p. 288
[99] ibid.

translated from Enoch Timpunza Mvula's *Lizard's Tail*. The play used contemporary subject matter from Malawian village life. Its fame on the radio, owing to the humour and use of local language, led to the adoption of the style by radio personality, Smart Likhaya Mbewe, who included a popular scene, 'theka la theka' (half of half), in his own weekly series of *Sewero la Sabata Ino*. This act led to copyright rows between the Travelling Theatre and MBC. It was resolved amicably shortly after[100].

The fame of the style used also led to more creations of Chichewa plays in 1982 - 83. Third year education student, Mike Nambote, who had directed *Nchira Wa Buluzi*, produced *Maliro –Funeral* - with the TT cast. The play used a village setting, and a typical rural theme of widow dispossession - property grabbing from widows - by members of the husband's family. In another instance, Edge Kanyongolo, second year law student, set *Nsomba Nsomba – Fish Fish* - in an urban market and at the lake. Kaulanda Nkosi, a student critic at the university, contrasted the use of authentic village life and language in *Maliro* and the urban streetwise setting and language in *Nsomba Nsomba*[101].

The activities at Travelling Theatre inspired the training in the Drama Department and drama activities in other colleges. The fourth year drama class produced *Thy Brother's Keeper*, *The Bear* and *Mother Cow*, and The Polytechnic students staged *The Strong Breed*. The University Drama Festival took place at Chancellor College in 1980 and at Bunda and Kamuzu College of Nursing in 1981. There is evidence of competition and tension between the colleges. Writers of *The Muse*, who were mostly students from Chancellor College, focused much on The Travbelling Theatre's

[100] Kerr in Chancellor College *Broadsheet*, 1983, p.5
[101] Kaulanda Nkosi, *Broadsheet*, 1982 p.1

activities, leaving out plays by the other colleges. Aleck Kwapulani captures the rivalry between the colleges in this way:

> Our coaster and Mazda vehicles approached the (Bunda) campus in the evening. Before we actors alighted from the vehicles we heard shouts and abuses... Chris Kamlongera and Robert Green told us to be courageous and just concentrate on our performances. The actors from Polytechnic arrived. No sooner had they arrived than we noticed that they were in what might be called a dual alliance... By virtue of being hosts, Bunda opened. The hall was a mixture of comments and laughter indicating the success of the play on stage. Then came Kamuzu College of Nursing... (W)e were entertained... Finally came our play... Whistling and shouting. Abuses and curses[102]...

Even though rivalry can sometimes ensure good productions, it was becoming destructive to the appreciation of good drama in the university. The feeling of 'us' and 'them' between the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre and other colleges could have led to physical fights, as evidenced in the reception of the plays in performance. The Travelling Theatre was, however, confident because its own Chancellor College audience, which was similarly disruptive of performances, had already commented on the plays, *Domalisa* (Peter Chiwona) and *Zoo Story* (Edward Albee), which TT took to Bunda in Lilongwe. Kwapulani further reported that, in the previous year, Chancellor College students had behaved in a similar manner towards other colleges at Chirunga Open Air Theatre, and were reprimanded by a reporter in the *Daily Times*. Comments from the audience, which Kwapulani thought were unhelpful to on-going performances, included 'kubowa' (boring) 'yee, choka pa siteji' (get out of the stage), 'wa drier' (he has forgotten the lines), 'udangoloweza malayini' (you just memorized lines). Other critics such as Zangaphee Chizeze, who also wrote and directed plays at Travelling Theatre, further commented that the noise distracted performers.

[102] Aleck Kwapulani, *The Muse* 59, pp. 6-7

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIBRARY

A committee comprising Edge Kanyongolo, Mike Nambote, Viphya Harawa, and David Kerr ran The Traveling Theatre. One of the reasons for having a committee that included students was to democratize the leadership. The belief was that other student members would freely air their views on issues affecting the smooth running of the company[103]. The other reason was teaching pressure. When the Great Hall Complex of theatres, offices and studios were completed in 1982, drama moved from the English Department to join the Fine Art Section, forming the Fine and Performing Arts Department. Consequently, the lecturers who were involved in Travelling Theatre activities could no longer rely on colleagues in the English Department to stand for them in their other classes while they were away on tours. Furthermore, the academic courses, and activities of the Travelling Theatre left little time for the staff members. As such they started to focus more on the courses. In addition, due to shortage of staff after Kamlongera left for Leeds, Kerr had to teach drama on his own, hence he delegated a bigger proportion of organizational responsibility at TT to the students.

At this point, articles and cartoons in *The Muse* leveled accusations of commercialisation against the Travelling Theatre[104]. Kerr responded that earlier performances admitted people to watch free of charge because the German Schimmel Fennick – Campbell Grant, and the English Department provided funding. In an effort to meet the costs of duplication, advertising, hall charges, tour-food, refreshments, and transport, the TT charged K1.50 (75 British pennies at the time) for performances

[103] Kerr, Interview, August 2003
[104] See front page of the *Muse* 67

in the urban areas, while at rural centres adults paid 50 tambala (25p), and 20 (10p) tambala for children.

Another problem that arose concerned 'professionals'. After spending over four years at the Travelling Theatre, members such as Edge Kanyongolo, Viphya Harawa, Roziliro Twea, and Joyce Kumpukwe gained a lot of acting, and directing experience. Organizations such as MBC and the Malawi Correspondence College Centre requested their assistance for radio drama programmes. When the mentioned members, recommended by David Kerr, attended to such performance requests, they were paid money. Noticing the development, other less experienced members accused them of neglecting activities at TT, consequently allowing standards of the performances to drop. This, however, in combination with the allowances performing members of the TT received, inspired many students to work hard at rehearsals and performances.

The other development that provoked criticism was use of foreign plays. Writing in the *Muse* Kerr complained about lack of scripts after exhaustion of plays written by Steve Chimombo, Chris Kamlongera, Innocent Banda, Enoch Timpunza Mvula, and James Ng'ombe from the 1970s. As a result, plays such as *Blood Knot, The Island, Siwe Bansi is Dead, Zoo Story, Blood, Mother Cow, Mwana Wochititsa Manyazi (Shameful Child), Chiwaleso*, and *The Burden* were staged[105]. Besides being foreign, the plays needed small casts and excluded many members. The scathing criticism that resulted in response to this is evident in Godfrey Mtonga's writing.

[105] Kerr in the *Muse* 60

One of Chancellor College's student theatre critics, Godfrey Mtonga, registered his shock at the obscene language of *Mwana Wochititsa Manyazi*. For the play being originally Zambian, Mtonga decried the 'adaptations of plays from other societies'. In the play, a girl falls pregnant. The boyfriend concocts a plan, and convinces two thugs to confuse the issue by deceitfully admitting to the father to have slept with the girl on different occasions, and that each claimed responsibility for the pregnancy. Mtonga described what infuriated him and other spectators in this way:

> Theatre in Zambia or Britain is not necessarily theatre in Malawi...The conversation between the two crooks – Mctonto and Chipulu ... was far from realistic... To call a spade a spade, no person, unless mentally deranged, can say to the parents of his girlfriend ... that "I slept with your daughter"... In addition to this, how can someone mention the 'sensitive' area of ... a female partner to her parents?
>
> ... Most plays written by black South Africans depict the suffering masses of blacks at the hands of the superiority complex of whites who oppress them through various laws... It is important therefore that when plays are adapted, as *Mwana Wochititsa Manyazi*, they should be consistent with the ecology of a country.[106])

According to Mtonga, the mention of a woman's 'sensitive' area was offensive while the South African plays were seen as inconsistent with the 'ecology' of Malawian society. Noteworthy in this comment is the fact that Malawi was still under Banda's rule, which discouraged public mention of 'indecent words' and politics. Whilst members of the Travelling Theatre complained about Censorship restrictions on their plays, it is noticeable that the official policy had an impact on Malawian society. Mtonga's comment could have been influenced by the embarrassment that the 'sensitive' words provoked, or could have been made for political correctness, considering what other student critics such as Zeleza Manda wrote.

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[106] Godfrey Mtonga in the *Muse* 71 p.1

Writing in the same issue of the *Muse,* Manda celebrated the play saying that 'If the amount of laughter and interlude jokes from the audience are a yardstick for rating plays, then *Mwana Wochititsa Manyazi* was the play of the night'.[107] However, sentiments about plays with foreign origins were not completely erased. In the same article, Manda criticized *Chiwaleso* (Owen Mbilizi/ Watipaso Mkandawire), an adaptation of *Medea,* as 'ananchronistic, wordy, and suitable for the Greek ancient times it was created for, and not contemporary Malawi'. Manda completely missed the poetic similarity of a mother murdering her own children to the political murders that Banda and the MCP were committing.

The mixed views of the student critics showed how opinions concerning the performance and literary activities were allowed to flow. It had always been the vision and daring spirit of academics such as David Kerr to encourage drama and its attendant intellectual activities at the Travelling Theatre. Kerr conceded to the students' opinions by encouraging members to create plays through group authorship and improvisations, with the hope of addressing the issue of foreign scripts and reliance on individually written plays.

Another development concerned styles of creation and presentation of plays. According to Kerr, the 1970s TFD movement coined a slogan of 'taking theatre to the people'. In the 1980s, it was modified to 'making theatre with the people'. The approach was centred on creating theatre with communities, while the former movement meant performing for the people, as spectators. This change meant a number of things for productions at the Travelling Theatre. It brought, Kerr related,

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[107] Zeleza Manda, the *Muse* 71 p. 7

the confusion on issues of script versus improvisation, English language versus local languages, and further challenged student directors to experiment with acting styles such as mime. This, he indicated, meant a change in ideological roots of university drama in the way it had been practiced in Malawi.

The change, which inculcated self reliance in student productions, had started with the staging of *Chiwaleso, Mwana Wochititsa Manyazi*, *Children of Yehova*, and *The Sacrifice* (V.Harawa). Initially a radio play, *The Sacrifice* was about College life in which a student is expelled from his Law course for impregnating a girl. *Growing Wings* by Harawa, Kanyongolo and Kerr which was about prison life followed.

Growing Wings made provocative statements by alluding to popular feelings. S.B. Phiri, reviewing it for *Muse* 66, quoted the first lines of the characters in the following exchange:

> **Kondwani**: Can you see that light over there, Poison? That bright shining light?
>
> **Poison**: Yes that's prison flood lights?
> **Kondwani**: No, it's not. It's my Stella?[108]

The students made passing statements about 'prison' in reference to the political context in Malawi at the time. It was meant to invoke feelings about Mikuyu detention centre where members of the academic community and other intellectuals languished. In a 1983 Broadsheet, Kerr made a subtle statement, almost like a eulogy for an obituary for loved ones that 'the Travelling Theatre deeply felt the loss of some of its members'.

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[108] S.B. Phiri, the *Muse* 66, p. 16

By 1985, the Travelling Theatre and Department of Fine and Performing Arts created Chancellor College Arts Festival. Outside groups such as Kwathu, Umodzi, Lonjezo[109]; music acts such as Allan Namoko, Black Paseli, Michael Yekha, Maria Chidzanja, Reverend Chimwemwe Mhango; performed alongside Chancellor College productions. Through the interaction, methodologies of play creation and performance were exchanged. One critic in the *Muse* observed that up to that point, most of the outside groups came from the urban areas of Blantyre, Zomba, and Mzuzu, except Lonjezo which came from Mbatamira village in Zomba.

Chancellor College productions themselves involved artists from other mediums such as music academic Mitch Strumpf, and fine artists Kay Chiromo, Berlings Kaunda, and Willie Nampeya. For example, Mitch Strumpf collaborated with French Cultural Centre drama to produce a musical under the title *Last Bus to Chilobwe*. *Baraza,* an inter-art disciplinary journal of the Arts in Malawi, was launched and its editors included David Kerr, Chris Kamlongera, Willie Nampeya, Berlings Kaunda and Mitch Strumpf. Though it lasted for only three issues[110] the various art disciplines published some important works in it. Kamlongera wrote about the impact of British Drama in Africa; Chimombo analysed popular newspaper cartoons, Joza and Pewani, and related them to fireside stories. Others, such as Kay Chiromo, and Berlings Kaunda wrote about fine art, while Joyce Kumpukwe published her research on popular radio drama, *Sewero La Sabata Ino* by Smart Likhaya Mbewe.

The 1980s celebrated staging of plays including *The Curse* (Kole Omotoso), *The Lion and the Jewel* (Soyinka), *To Africa With Love* (Tikhala Chibwana), *Was It A*

[109] Interview with Eric Mabedi, April 2003
[110] Vol. 1 1983, Vol. 2 1984 and Vol. 3 1986

Compromise, *Tears of Blood*, *Angel* (Zangaphee Chizeze), *Ulemu Unlimited* (Chilimira, Katundu, Kerr), *Kumatokoteza* (Francis Moto), *Kanyenya*, *Mmemo*, *Mpikisano*, *Willing Spirits* (TT Collective), *Resolution To Kill* (Pat Maddy), *We Shall Sing For the Fatherland* (Zakes Mda), *Survival* (Workshop '71), *Giants* (Soyinka), *Woza Albert* (Mtwa), *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (Ola Rotimi), *Death and the King's Horsemen* (Soyinka), and *Likawomba Otheratu* (Kamlongera).

Some of the plays listed above created controversies amongst critics. Staged in one evening, college critics conflicted over the performances of *To Africa With Love* and *Was It A Compromise*. In the *Daily Times* of 1st February 1985, Zangaphee Chizeze wrote that *Was It A Compromise* was well performed as compared to *To Africa With Love*[111].

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[111] In response, Dickson Thunde, the play's director, revealed that Chizeze only watched the first performance and left. In Thunde's response, however, the fear with which campus critics viewed Chizeze was exposed. Thunde referred to Chizeze as having 'supernatural anger' and as an 'omniscient literary deity'. Some of the students who interacted with Chizeze at the time, such as Manuel Mang'anya, Moyenda Chokazinga, and Andrew Kadammanja described Chizeze as fearful because of his anger and fearlessness (Personal Communication: Zomba, 08/2003). There were, nonetheless, other critics such as Namasingo Phiri (pen name for Benedicto Malunga) who withstood Chizeze's personality. In another response to Chizeze's criticism of the plays, Phiri thought Chizeze's intention for writing such criticism in the national paper was to destroy the potential of new performers such as Sylvia Nankwenya and Marc Maleta (Namasingo Muse 76:5), which Chizeze described as:

> Tend(ing) to be static and their few movements up and down the stage appear(ing) purposeless, more injurious than beneficial to the play's success (Chizeze in *Daily Times*, 1-2-1985 quoted in Phiri 76:5).

Chizeze was bold towards people and issues because of his long experience as a member of the Travelling Theatre and Writers' Workshop, besides being a Law student (Chimwenje: interview: 08/2003). He came to Chancellor College in 1979, and had written and directed several plays, besides being an active member, and at one time Chairman of the Writers' Workshop. His confidence, however, took him to areas where he trod on 'holy' grounds when he dismissed works of one of the Malawian literary godfathers, Steve Chimombo. Basing his attack on the interview Chimombo had with Lee Nichols, published in *Conversations With African Writers* (Voice of America 1981), Chizeze described Chimombo's works as having no message to the oppressed masses of Malawi. An articulate response from one of Chimombo's followers challenged Chizeze in this way:

> I have the following complaints against Mr. Chizeze. Did he arrive at the conclusion ... after thoroughly reading his works or did he emotionally conclude after what he read from the interview. Mr. Chizeze quotes Karl Marx to defend or probably substantiate his argument (that) he (Chimombo) has no message to the oppressed and exploited masses... I humbly beg him to follow Chimombo's art in *The Rainmaker*,

The Drama Classes in the Fine and Performing Arts Department also made their own contributions. The First year students, in collaboration with Chris Kamlongera produced a memorable improvised play under the title *Katangale - corruption*. It focused on issues of corruption. The second years performed a poetry performance, titled *The Voice's Command*. It included *Write, Address To The Elders* (Felix Mnthali) *The Chase, Wapantima* (Enoch Timpunza Mvula), *New Platform Dances, Epitaph for a Mad Friend* (Jack Mapanje), *Gone for Good, Bwan'oni* (Geoff Mwanja), *City Girl's Progress* (Steve Chimombo), and *A Supporting Wall* (Frank Chipasula).

Some of the poems included in the performance evoked emotions, while others revealed the character of the poets. Mnthali's *Write* reveals a forceful voice that tells the persona to write everywhere 'that they may also rejoice/ who suffer the void/ of a prison without walls'. The reference to "prison without walls" could have produced excitement in the students because of its metaphoric allusion to the situation in Malawi in the 1980s. Mapanje's *Epitaph* dramatized with characters such as Mercy

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his poems found in various *Outlook* journals especially the poem titled 'Napolo'... (Cleo Malambo: *Muse* 76: 11)

Malambo concluded her article by offering a list of references on Myth Criticism and Marxist Theory to Chizeze. Chizeze's misreading of Chimombo's works and their relevance to the situation of oppressed people in Malawi is hereby exposed. Not that Chizeze misunderstood, or was ignorant about usage of myth as a metaphor for politically oppressed situations, as portrayed in *The Rainmaker* and *Napolo Poems*. Chizeze had created plays similar in their use of subject matter to *The Rainmaker*, such as *Tears of Blood*.

Chizeze was, however, not the only one who raised controversies. Roziliro Twea, a former producer at the Travelling Theatre, provoked David Kerr with her article on the University Festival of 1984. Present for one night, Twea dismissed the whole two day event as 'below the standard of the Travelling Theatre'. Kerr immediately wrote *Daily Times* and pointed to the fact that Twea only saw plays on the first night, and her conclusions about the quality of the whole festival were erroneous. Some of the critics of the period included Sam Raiti Ntamba, Joyce Kumpukwe, Chimwemwe Jere, Patrick O'Malley, Kamaliza Chimsang'iza and Garton Sandifolo.

and An'dwanje the madman '*who was also gone*' became prophetic on how the poet and his wife would later communicate while he was detained at Mikuyu from 1987 to 1991. Chimombo's irony in *City Girl* explored the progress of the character Abiti Selempani who was late for her cleaning job, having spent a lot of time gazing at clothes she desired to have but could not afford. Chimombo had used the name Abiti Selempani on a liberated prostitute character in his play *Wachiona Ndani?*. The reference to the name therefore revealed Chimombo's deep sense of attachment to the woman's quest for economic survival. Chipasula's *Supporting Wall* invokes a nostalgia for an affair that ended due to a sudden separation. Chipasula constantly refers to Malawi as his lover in some poems in his collection of poetry, *O Earth Wait For Me*[112].

The Third Year students created *Ulemu Unlimited*, whose one scene was banned after one performance at the French Cultural Centre in Blantyre. It was about a Zambian, born of Malawian parents, who returned to Malawi to start a company in Blantyre. Using the company as a front, he smuggled marijuana to South Africa. According to Kerr, what offended the government was the inclusion of a scene about a corrupt pastor. After the removal of the scene, the play was allowed to perform[113].

By the end of 1985/86, the Department secured funding from the German Embassy and Liwonde ADD to do a Primary Health Care workshop. Thirty six people had died of Cholera in a village near Mwimba Trading Centre in Liwonde, twenty miles north

[112] see "A love poem for my country" in Chipasula 1984: 5-6).

[113] Kerr, interview August 2003

of Zomba. The FPA Department was asked to facilitate workshops about better sanitation in the area[114].

A fair amount of performance came from the other colleges as well. Encouraged by the University festival, Polytechnic, for example, had a repertoire of such plays as *The Deviant* (Chris Maleke), *Brave New Cosmos* (Lughano Mwalwanda), *The Eye of Chimuzi* (Du Chisiza) and *Who Will Rescue Our Daughter* (Boyle Chirwa).

Some of the plays such as *The Deviant* had provocative stories. It was about a man called Latif, who kept a mistress, Shika, for two years in a house but could not decide on whether to marry her or not. One day, Shika gathered courage to challenge Latif to marry her. This play, I suggest, was based on a story that circulated in Blantyre at the time that the Offical Government Hostess had called Presbyterian Reverend Sangaya to bless a marriage between her and Kamuzu Banda. Banda's surprise and ignorance about the matter led his henchmen to beat up the Reverend.

As regards national organization of theatre, no credible body had been formed. In a letter to David Kerr, Mike Nambote described efforts that had been made in Blantyre. An Association of Artists had been formed in 1984, and Nambote joined it, only to discover that it was meant to support Dzuka Publishers, which was a publishing enterprise for the Malawi Congress Party. Nambote thought it was a front to spy on the activities of the performing arts in the country[115]. The association never lasted.

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[114] See David Kerr in ed. Frances Harding 2002.
[115] See Mike Nambote's letter to David Kerr dated 2nd March, 1983

Between 1988 and 1990, the Travelling theatre did not stage any shows outside campus due to financial and transport problems. However, Pat O'Malley's *Living Dangerously* reveals that organizers such as Kerr concentrated on the detentions that had taken place in Malawi, including that of Jack Mapanje in 1987. The Travelling Theatre then focused on performances that were staged around the College such as *Likawomba Wotheratu* (Chris Kamlongera), *Papuloti* (TT Cast), *Kumatokoteza* (Moto), and *Youth* (Sandifolo), besides training sessions for documentary video, in anticipation of the setting up of a television station in Malawi by 1990.

It is clear then from the foregoing that the 1980s' university theatre saw a change in approach. The shifts that occurred concerned improvisation in play creation, influence of anti-apartheid and liberation theatre of Southern Africa. *Chinese Monastery, Tears of Blood* (Zangaphee Chizeze), *Growing Wings* (Kanyongolo, Kerr and Harawa), and *They Call It Africa* (Chimwenje and Kerr) will be examined to explore some of the influences mentioned above.

3.4 CHINESE MONASTERY by Zangaphee Chizeze

As indicated above, the late Zangaphee Chizeze was one of the most radical students at Chancellor College in the early 1980s. Vehemently opposed to injustice, Chizeze wrote, directed and reviewed plays at Chancellor College and earned respect amongst a significant percentage of the university community. The plays he wrote included *Chinese Monastery*, *Tears of Blood,* and *Angel*. For the purpose of this dissertation, we will look at the first two.

Chinese Monastery is a ten-minute monologue set to address rebellious monks at an unnamed Chinese Monastery. The speaker, who is not identified, is very angry at his audience. When he appears, there are signs of discontent amongst the monks and the Speaker responds without hesitation:

> I do not expect this impudent hissing and unholy booing from men of the cloth such as you – You the privileged men in Communist China allowed this sanctum of the Holy Trinity amidst so much iniquity and so much ungodliness. You are chosen amongst millions[116]...

The reference to the 'Holy trinity' suggests that it is a Christian sect which is surviving amidst traditional beliefs and Communist atheism in China. The speaker patronizes his audience and yet threatens it at the same time. He has come because their Headquarters in Europe had learnt that ideas of socialism are becoming popular amongst the monks. He says:

> It is with much fury that the Central Committee of the friends of the Chinese Monastery in London dispatched me to admonish you with regard to the satanic acts that the monks of this great Monastery have been involved in... I can see audacity in your eyes, and you call that struggle? What struggle?[117]

The speaker's prejudice is very clear from the quote when he equates the monks' discontent with 'satanic acts'. While this is a Christian institution, this revelation makes clear subterranean wars of ideology between freedom to speak out and Christian principles espoused by the benefactors in London.

In the next paragraph, the Speaker mentions some of the disruptive words the monks voiced:

> Some of the offensive utterances went thus...: MONKS UNITE. WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS[118]...

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[116] See Zangaphee Chizeze's *Chinese Monastery*, p. 1
[117] *Chinese Monastery*, p. 1
[118] ibid.

As far as the speaker is concerned, there are no chains in the monastery. He, however, puts the question to the monks in this way:

> What monks are bound in this monastery? Are you in chains? Are you? (Pause. Hisses of 'yes')[119]

The response is so unexpected that he reacts to it right-away:

> Which of you infidels is hissing "yes" at the back there? (Bangs table).[120]

With that type of reaction from the monks, he threatens them in this way:

> I tell you that the serpents in your midst shall be bound and cast into the dungeons of this Monastery for many days and many nights until they repent or otherwise perish... The Friends of The Chinese Monastery will not tolerate any conduct by the monks that has its object the challenging of established authority. (Sips water) Such conduct is, at heart, atheist.[121]

Despite the threats that he makes, the signs of mutiny from the monks persist until the end, at which point he says:

> All over your faces and in muffled voices of some buffoons at the back there I can see and hear that you think in your hearts that, as your graffiti has proclaimed, LA LUTA CONTINUA... (You) will be punished with all necessary severity.[122]

The speaker closes in this way:

> Thank you very much, Father Superior, Vicar, Bishop, and monks, thank you. Thank you.[123]

From the fore-going, it is clear that the speaker and the people he represents are authoritarian and are angered by the revolution brewing in this Christian institution.

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[119] Ibid.
[120] *Chinese Monastery*, p. 2
[121] ibid.
[122] ibid.
[123] ibid.

The surface message is that the spread of Socialism among monks is directly counter productive to the advancement of Christianity[124].

The other noticeable thing is the expression, *La Luta Continua*, sourced from the Southern African Liberation Movements. This originated and was popularized by the FRELIMO and Angolan struggles against the Portuguese. It was one of the defiant statements in the war against remaining tracts of colonialism in Southern Africa. It appeared in the anti-colonial literature produced in the region, such as black theatre in South Africa. In addition, the phrase was very popular amongst radical academics and students at Chancellor College in the 1980s. *The Muse* and Critical Broadsheets bear articles by, amongst others, David Kerr, Ben Malunga, Zangaphee Chizeze, Dickson Zunde, Sam Raiti Ntamba, Simon Phiri and Kadwa Phungwako, which used the phrase as a closing slogan. While it stood for the Southern African struggle, my suggestion is that it was meant to also register their own 'continuing' struggles with the government of Malawi.

The other phrase, 'Monks Unite. We Have Nothing To Lose But Our Chains' is also reminiscent of the Labour movement the world over against worker exploitation. Originating from the *Communist Manifesto*, it is quoted from Marx and Engels' lines that the poor have nothing to lose in waging war against capitalism, except their poverty. Its usage in Chizeze's context was connected to the struggles referred to

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[124] It is not clear whether Chizeze was aware that an episode of the sort took place at Chancellor College before he was admitted. John Tembo as Chair of the University Council, threatened members of the academic community on suspicion of underground opposition to Banda's policies. In 1977, James Gibbs and Patrick O'Malley witnessed a disciplinary meeting Tembo had with them, including Robyn Graham, a British renegade literary editor. Graham published an issue of *Odi* (Literary Magazine) without clearance from the Censorship Board. Unrepentant about his act, and with the inclusion of names of rebels such as David Rubadiri, he was given forty-eight hours to leave the country. This is not to suggest that Chizeze was writing about the Robyn Graham / Tembo episode.

under *Lalutta Continua* meaning "the struggle (war) continues". Wits University academic Bheki Peterson contends that in Socialist perspectives, the struggle against oppression in Southern Africa was waged on both the Labour and political front[125].

What the short speech indicated was defiance to Banda who, with his government machinery, made it a crime to talk communist and socialist language in Malawi. For example, part of Muwalo Nqumayo's alleged crimes was the attempt to bring Communism to Malawi[126]. Additionally, Attati Mpakati, who led Socialist League of Malawi, LESOMA, the armed wing of the Malawi Freedom Movement (MAFREMO), was assassinated in March, 1983[127]. What is more, according to labour lawyer Ngeyi Kanyongolo's Country Report published in 1997, the workers language was not allowed in Malawi, let alone the formation of a trade union[128]. Initial trade union leaders such as John Duncan Phoya and Nyemba Mbekeyani were silenced by being given high government posts. Those who insisted to continue, even when they were exiled such as Thomas Chakufwa Chihana, were detained without charge in the 1970s. Chizeze's *Chinese Monastery* was an attempt to challenge the authority for suppressing freedom of expression and association by suggesting that socialism offered liberty out of the iron fist rule that Banda and his sycophants subjected Malawi to.

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[125] Bheki Peterson (1995), "A rain a fall but a dirt a tough: scholarship on South African theatre", *Journal of Southern African Studies*.

[126] Richard Carver, op.cit

[127] United Nations Social and Economic 42nd Session Special Rapporteur's Report on Human Rights [Amos Wako] 1984: 7).

[128] See Ngeyi Kanyongolo in E. Kalula and M. Madhuku 1997

3.5 TEARS OF BLOOD by Zangaphee Chizeze

In a Chancellor College Broadsheet of 5th February, 1985, with the title 'Travelling Theatre Goes Traditional Again', Chimsang'aza Kamaliza praised *Tears of Blood* that:

> Everyone was all "eyes and ears" in the Little Theatre of the magnificent Great Hall Complex, attentively watching, and listening to a play entitled 'Tears of Blood' written by Zangaphee Chizeze, a law student. The budding young actors who, in return displayed their talents to the point of almost reflecting the exact dreams that Zang' had in his creative faculty "mains". Tears of Blood", a tragedy which carries in it the likeness of Dr. Steve Chimombo's "Rainmaker" and Dr. Chris Kamlongera's "Wrath of God" in short, was like a prophet's word. It sent everyone to those old days of the great Maravi Kingdom, when the ancestral spirits and the gods (Leza, Namalenga) executed justice and administration to the souls of our land via the commanding powers of diviners. The success was mainly a result of carefully designed humble circular stage set which sent all the necessary message to the audience. This was mainly through a powerful expert use of drums and clarinet (played by Dr. M. Strumpf). Credit to the giant diviner, Wokomaatani Malunga who kept the audience reminded that traditional healers and diviners had powers and authority in the old days. The play which was produced by young (Marc) Maleta really adds power to the Travelling Theatre.[129]

The young critic's praise, equating the play to Chimombo's and Kamlongera's works, the romantic pre-colonial appeal, use of music, and good acting showed the play in very positive light. Namasingo Phiri, writing for *the Muse*, equally commended the play, in agreement with Kamaliza. Whilst the admiration comforted the playwright, other student critics such as George Mtonga, Zeleza Manda, and Garton Sandifolo lined up and gave their dissenting views to it. Chizeze's response to them went this way:

> The critics have been unanimous in their mutual disagreement, they have also been uniform (like telegraph poles) in propounding grave criticism... MR. MTONGA: Emerges triumphant over his misguided

[129] Chimsang'aza Kamaliza, *Broadsheet* 1985

> comrade-critics, which isn't a compliment to his absent-minded views on TEARS OF BLOOD... He argues that a radio play, if done in the round at the quadrangle or in the café, is incapacitated... Mr. Mtonga is an honourable critic... MR. ZELEZA MANDA: is uncompromising in his creative as well as is indisputably one of the giant assets of the Chirunga literary tradition, however, relentlessness for its sake or for pursuit of falsehood and fraud upon the unalert reader is, at best, abdication... MR. SANDIFOLO, in his article on TEARS OF BLOOD... exhibited great professional irresponsibility... It has been contended that dear Juliet neither looks nor speaks like a queen ... So is it a sin to borrow a traditional Zulu work-song-rhythm and adapt it to a Malawian?[130]

In conversation, Kanyongolo, who was very close to Chizeze, described him as one of the most intelligent dramatists at the Travelling Theatre. He also commented on his ability to mix personal temperament and words. At most, he acknowledged his ability as a poet, short story writer, essayist, theatre director and Chairman of the Writers' Workshop.

Tears of Blood (TOB) uses a fictional historical setting to tell a very complex story about dilemmas of leadership. The King of Maravi has been defeated and killed in a duel with the King of Akafula kingdom. The two kingdoms quarreled over the ownership of Mizimu forest, valuable for its rare trees and herbs, and believed to be a habitat for spirits. According to the play, tradition has it that in disagreements, which have no diplomatic solutions, kings of the feuding kingdoms confront one another in a 'one to one' fight. Whoever loses the fight also forfeits his freedom. In Maravi the punishment goes further: the first son of the losing king becomes a slave in the winning kingdom. If he refuses to go, he is forced to kill himself.

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[130] Chizeze in the *Muse* 76, pp. 9 - 10

In a very tense opening scene, Chishyango, the late king's son, bids farewell to his fiancée, Namisozi, who is pregnant by him. Chishyango is ready to go as a slave to the land of Akafula. Namisozi wants to accompany him but Chishyango refuses. In the next scene, Natsoka, Chishyango's mother, pleads with Mwabvi, the caretaker king. Natsoka wants compassion from Mwabvi to save her son. Mwabvi does not give way. According to tradition pronounced by the prophet of the kingdom, Chinsinsi, Chishyango should not be spared, lest the whole kingdom be punished by the wrath of the ancestors. Chishyango takes poison and dies.

With the passage of time, the kingdom is plagued by disease. Despite the sacrifices offered to the gods, the plague persists. In the end, it is discovered that Mwabvi had hidden Namasozi who carried tainted blood by virtue of being impregnated by Chishyango. Finally revealed as culprits for the calamity, Mwabvi and his wife, Chidani, are forced to take poison to appease the offended gods.

The strength of the play's conflict lies in Mwabvi. In deference to tradition, he adheres strictly to procedures about how issues of tradition have to be dealt with. For example, in scene three, as drums sounded at the funeral scene, Namisozi meets her father and they exchange the following dialogue:

Mwabvi: What is it my daughter? These tears do not please me...

Namasozi: Father!

Mwabvi: Yes my daughter, speak and let your tongue be relieved...

Namasozi: ... It is about the prince of Maravi kingdom, about Chishyango the man of my heart –

Mwabvi: Do not talk of the prince of Maravi in this house, do you hear me? I don't want to talk about tainted blood...

> **Namasozi**: But father, how can they be made to suffer so unjustly ... If the judgment must be given as I have heard, then it will be merciless on the family of the dead king...
>
> **Mwabvi:** Be quiet...
>
> **Namasozi**: But father, will you let me remain wife of a dead man... Will you harden your heart like a snake? ... Father, father, hear my cries, father...
>
> **Mwabvi**: What shall be done must be done, for it has been so since the first dawn[131]...

Important to be noted in this scene is the daughter's plea to her father. Realising her fate in the matter, as carrier of tainted blood, Namasozi tries to save the prince in order to save herself and the child. She tests the father's love and wishes it extended to the prospective son-in-law. Nevertheless, she fails to pluck any mercy from him. Mwabvi has resolved that "the prince will die, as tradition requires, since the first dawn". No pleading will make him change his mind on the matter.

While the subject matter of this play is meant to appear as if it is retrieved from the pre-colonial times, employment of phrases such as 'since the first dawn' is suggestive of times of independence. 'Kwacha' was used by Banda at the party's political rallies. The word "dawn" according to Lupenga Mphande, was coined at the Writers' Workshop in the 1970s to refer to Kwacha, an opening slogan for Malawi Congress Party rallies. It was successfully used in the prose and poetry, eluding the unsuspecting Censorship Board[132].

In a scene that follows, Natsoka the queen approaches Mwabvi to remind him of the relationship their children have, as shown in the following exchange:

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[131] Chizeze's *Tears of Blood*, p. 6

[132] see Lupenga Mphande (1996) "Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Writers' Group: the (un)Making of a Tradition", in *Research in African Literatures*, 27.1, Spring 1996, pp.80 – 101.

Natsoka: Will you not show compassion?

Mwabvi: Compassion? ... Compassion does not rule the land neither does it govern the destinies of man... Go Natsoka, go[133] ...

Just as he had clearly stated to his daughter, Mwabvi repeats the same message to Natsoka. What the playwright intends to achieve by this repetition is to bring attention to the word 'compassion'. Natsoka pleads for it, using the relationship of their two children, albeit pointing to Namasozi's fate in the matter. However, Mwabvi does not budge.

While critics might see forced political interpretation of the word 'compassion', Chizeze seems to have used it deliberately to expose the harshness with which Malawian society was ruled. It is evident from a number of instances that Banda used uncompromising harsh policies, devoid of compassion, creating an autocratic environment. He did not feel compassion for Orton and Vera Chirwa who were framed and jailed; for the ministers who mysteriously died under his rule; for Atati Mpakati assassinated in Harare. Playwright Chizeze knew all this and his insistence on the word 'compassion' through the characters could have been made in reference to the situation in the country at the time.

At the gathering where Chishyango is condemned, he asks for a day to make the choice of either going to the Akafula Kingdom or taking poison. He is granted the time, not out of compassion, but to give time for Chinsinsi, the prophet, to confront Mwabvi about his tainted daughter. When asked about her, Mwabvi tells Chinsinsi that he will not banish or kill his own daughter. Chinsinsi, playing a diplomatic

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[133] *Tears of Blood*, p. 8

representative of the ancestral spirits, does not pursue the matter any further. Later, when the pestilence plagues the kingdom and Mwabvi realizes the mistake, he confronts his wife Chidani, saying:

> ... It was my weakness for when I first let my mind be ruled by the words of a woman, now see what you have done[134]...

Mwabvi regrets listening to his wife. From this regret comes the sub-theme 'listening to a woman on matters of national and judicial concern'. Notwithstanding its chauvinistic tone, the subtheme precisely applies to the playwright's social context in which a ruler is constantly influenced by his wife to eliminate opposition by applying double standards in matters of justice.

After the angst that affects Mwabvi, Chinsinsi pronounces the punishment for him and Chidani. He says:

> The gourd of poison shall descend from the yawning caves of terror into your house and you and your blood and Chidani and her blood will likewise drink from it... so that the children may laugh again freely and Maravi river glitter again with life... This is how you pay... you will bite the fruit of your evil...
> (Drums drums drums)[135]

There is a lot of anger in the sentencing of Mwabvi and Chidani. Through the character Chinsinsi, the playwright pronounces their end with sadistic coldness. The feeling of anger in the sentencing is carried in the emphasis on the slow and intimidating movement of 'the gourd of death'. The terrifying gourd descends from 'the yawning caves of terror' to pour poison into the bodies of the culprits, to devour them from inside, causing a slow and painful death. Using the passive voice, and repetition of certain phrases to drag the statement, he expresses his vengeance in an attempt to create a torturous end, for the pain and suffering they inflicted on the

[134] *Tears*, p. 19
[135] *Tears*, p. 21

society. The playwright suggests that getting rid of the two will bring freedom to the kingdom: an end wished on the oppressive leader, influenced by a woman, in his infamous rule over the society. After they are finally gone, the playwright visualizes beyond the present in which children cry for their fathers, wives weep for their husbands, as the rivers carry away bloated bodies of victims of the harsh rule. He cleanses the river and makes children to play and laugh again.

The historical setting is, however, created by the playwright and is not factual. Using familiar names such as Maravi Kingdom, reminiscent of the pre-colonial times, the play outwitted the Censorship Board and was approved for production both for the stage and the state-run radio.

3.6 GROWING WINGS by Edge Kanyongolo, Viphya Harawa[136] and David Kerr

[136] Edge Kanyongolo and Viphya Harawa joined Chancellor College in 1979. They had been introduced to the stage at St. Patrick's Secondary School (Mzedi), a Catholic institution on the outskirts of Blantyre. Mzedi's location, and the interest that the Catholic brothers had in drama, encouraged many students to join their drama club. At this boys' boarding secondary school, the headmaster viewed entertainment as an important part of school life and Mzedi was one of the schools that invited the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre to perform in the school hall. Furthermore, when the Travelling Theatre performed in Blantyre, either at Kudya Entertainment Centre or the French Cultural Centre, the headmaster took members of the drama club to watch the shows (Edge Kanyongolo: Interview 08/03).

By the time Kanyongolo and Harawa came to Chancellor College, they had watched a number of Travelling Theatre's productions. Starting off as a science student, Kanyongolo remembers how terrified he was with the idea of being watched by "very educated people" at what he regarded as "the home of theatre in Malawi'. The first response was encouraging, and it inspired him to continue. When David Kerr came from Zambia and changed the approach, Kanyongolo and Harawa entered their golden years as actors. It was also in the same period that Kanyongolo and Zangaphee Chizeze were picked up by the police and detained at Mikuyu prison.

Kanyongolo saw the Travelling Theatre as a space where students and staff freely expressed their views. It was a forum, he thought, which attracted people who felt uncomfortable with conformity to society. In Malawi at the time, the political leadership considered conformity a virtue and regarded criticism as subversion. A combination of the Writers' Workshop, and the Travelling Theatre made Chancellor College the ideal place for critical students.

According to Kanyongolo, the leadership at the Travelling Theatre was 'unbelievably' democratic. It was run by a group of students who reported their decisions to the patron. The patron's position was important because it was his responsibility to organize transport with the Administration, in addition to attending to matters of discipline required of student actors.

The performances focused on issues of oppression and identity, in addition to satirical humour, and the best way to present them to the public without falling foul of the authorities. South African plays such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead, The Blood Knot, The Island,* and *Woza Albert!* made a big impression on the young actors because of their articulation of oppression. Though the plays were set in South Africa, Kanyongolo thought they carried themes that applied to Malawi, serving as a disguise for direct criticism of Banda and his policies. He also noted that Malawians deciphered the messages in the plays and applied them to their own situations. For example, when the Travelling Theatre staged *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, the people noticed the exploitation of workers that it dealt with as similar to that in Malawi. In *The Island*, they also read the political detention that the two characters go through in the play as a known fact in their society. The South African plays contained revolutionary ideas that the young students and their lecturers wished to talk about in Malawi.

The South African plays provided the background to the next batch of Malawian plays. *Growing Wings*, together with Rowland Mbvundula's *Genuine Tears* were invited to the L'Aquila festival in Italy: the one and only time the Travelling Theatre performed outside the country. The two plays were published there in 1988 in a collection called *Teatro Africano*, edited by Bulzoni. *Genuine Tears* is about street

children and the disregard the city has for their welfare. The street children keep comparing themselves with people who have homes and money to live. In this study, however, we focus on *Growing Wings*.

Growing Wings (Wings from here on*)* is about the imprisonment of two brothers. Poison is locked up for illegally selling an elephant tusk to an ivory dealer while Kondwani is detained for receiving an insurance premium and spending it on personal expenses. The two come from Chiradzulu, a district in Southern Malawi. Kondwani has university education while Poison only attended primary school.

When the play opens, Kondwani is hallucinating and shouting while Poison tries to pacify him, as shown in the following exchange:

> Lamps quench candles. Torches quench lamps. The lord sayeth "Let there be light".
>
> **Poison**: Kondwani take it easy.
>
> **Kondwani**: Hunger pains. Love wounds. Money kills…
>
> **Poison**: Kondwani, they are all laughing at you[137]…

There is pessimism and helplessness in Kondwani's hallucinations about the world. He thinks that more powerful lights make those which are less so to appear dim. He, however, identifies that all the lights that are artificially made are surpassed by those that God created. In this case, Kondwani puts his trust in God.

The hallucination turns out to be a summary of the reality that Kondwani goes through to land in prison. The play is structured as a narrative of the present,

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[137] See *Growing Wings*, p. 157

explained further through flashbacks. It starts in their home village in Chiradzulu. Kondwani studies hard to go to secondary school, while Poison pays much attention to socializing, especially with the village beauty, Enelesi. Kondwani believes he will have a go at beautiful girls later in life when he is educated and is able to earn his own money. The boys' studies and socializing are combined with the farming they do in their parents' fields.

Kondwani leaves school with a Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) and is employed in Blantyre. He has a comfortable house in Nkolokosa, and has a city girlfriend, Stella, who convinces him to change his name from Kondwani to Clement. Poison impregnates Enelesi and he leaves her to go to work in the tobacco estates in the Northern region. When he returns home, he tries to meet her without knowing that she is married to another man. Enelesi's husband catches them at the secret meeting and reports Poison to the chief. Poison runs away to hide with his brother in Nkolokosa, a suburb in Blantyre. While in Blantyre he tries to apply for a job but fails to secure one. Consequently, he starts to illegally sell elephants' tusks. Caught, he is tried and sent to prison.

Kondwani gets into trouble because of his girlfriend Stella. Mr. Big employs Stella as his secretary, and eventually has an affair with her. He arranges for Stella to travel to England, coinciding with his trip there. Kondwani challenges Mr. Big about the affair with his girlfriend, Stella. Aggravated by this, Mr. Big sets up Kondwani by arranging for a customer to pay an insurance premium to him at his house. With a cheque written in his name, Kondwani is tempted and cashes it. He is found out and arrested.

The judge finds him guilty of theft and sentences him to three years imprisonment with hard labour.

The play reveals two typical situations for young people growing up in Malawi. Either they worked hard at school, obtained good qualifications and secured good jobs, or they failed at school and continued living in the village, or drifted to town to do menial jobs. Kondwani and Poison stand for the two experiences. The play suggests only one reason for the failure at school: working hard at school and the lack of it. What is left out is the lack of money for fees and uniform for primary and secondary school pupils. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Primary School required K3.50 (£1 15s at the time) for junior classes, K6.50 (£3 5s at the time) for upper primary, K25 (£12 10s at the time) for boarding secondary school, and K16 (£8 at the time) for day secondary schools. University education was free, and the University students received K10 (£5 at the time) as a monthly upkeep allowance. Money was hard to earn in the rural areas and the city's slums. This also contributed a great deal to children's failure to complete their education.

The second issue the play raises is the attraction of money. It was very hard to earn good wages in the rural areas, and young men either toiled in the villages or resorted to crime, the girls married or turned to prostitution.

The third issue the play raises concerns city life. Young people were attracted to night clubs, and other expensive activities, wasting their small incomes on entertainment. To go to the city to be involved in such activities as drinking of imported beer was seen as being 'modern' and 'civilized'. Okot pBitek's character, Lawino, in *Song of*

Lawino, laments about the way the husband takes to white ways, despising his own. Frantz Fanon has related such behaviour to general psychology of people in independent states[138]. What members of the white colonial community did as regards their social life, became a model which Africans tried to imitate. Country clubs, hotels, drinking and dancing places were part of their pastime. Natives watched them with envy, and desired the lifestyle for themselves. At independence, those who could afford it, including the leaders, indulged in such entertainment. Jack Mapanje describes Malawian bars in his poem, '*The Cheerful Girls of Smiller's Bar* in this way:

> The prostitutes at Smiller's Bar beside the dusty road
> Were only girls once in tremulous mini-skirts and oriental
> Beads, cheerfully swigging Carlsberg and bouncing to
> Rusty simanje-manje and rumba booming in the juke box.
> They were striking virgins bored by our Presbyterian
> Prudes until a true Presbyterian came one night. And like
> To us all the girls offered him a seat[139]...

Entertainment at Smiller's Bar, Mapanje's representative bar of all city bars that existed in Malawi, attracted everyone. The young women, with little education, worked in these places to earn a living as cleaners, and often became prostitutes. Men went to the bars to drink Carlsberg. Kanyongolo, Harawa and Kerr were therefore raising a pragmatic problem. The city entertainment, according to *Growing Wings*, led to expensive desires that led those who did not have jobs to stealing.

Another issue raised by the play is justice. *Wings* shows mitigating factors to crimes the young men committed. The circumstances that people who commit crime live in are shown. Instead of the government attending to the situations, the criminals are punished. This exposure places the justice system under the spotlight. The petty

[138] see Frantz Fanon (1967) *Black skins white masks.*
[139] See Jack Mapanje (1983), *Of chameleons and gods*, p. 22

criminal cases in the play were used to distract the Censorship Board. The real issue was that of 'imprisonment'. While the play portrays the two brothers as guilty of the offences they are charged with, the playwrights aimed at cleverly contradicting the guilty verdict by showing circumstances in which the criminals lived.

Stylistically, there are several interesting features. The characters in the play are common people. This is a shift from the dominant neo-classicist evaluation in which important people occupy the centre of narratives. Besides that, there are distinctive theatrical elements noticeable in the play. Changing of actors into different characters while on stage is indicative of the South African anti-apartheid plays such as *Woza Albert!* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* in which the same actors play different roles.

In *Wings*, Kondwani and Poison play out roles of themselves as young men growing up in Chiradzulu. Preparing for a scene in their home village, this is what the stage directions read:

> Poison and Kondwani roll up their trousers to the knees. Kondwani lights a candle and sits down on the chair, reading an exercise book[140].

With just a roll of a pair of trousers, lighting of a candle, and an exercise book, they have transformed from being prisoners to pupils growing up in a village. In scene five, in a manner typical of a scene from *Asinamali*, the two prisoners present a court scene and it reads:

> Poison stands in the 'dock'. Kondwani takes on the role of prosecuting counsel.
>
> **Prosecutor**: You are Mr. Poison Chobwera?
>
> **Poison**: Yes.

[140] *Growing wings*, p. 158

> **Prosecutor**: Can you tell me what you were doing on the evening of the 5th of March, 1977?[141] ...

In addition to playing different roles like the above, they also speak directly to the audience. Poison opens scene six, which comes after he has been given a suspended sentence for being part of a stealing gang in Nkolokosa, with the following speech to the audience:

> Kondwani was really being harsh with me after the trial. Not that he was comfortable even before... But afterwards he said: 'You're just getting in trouble wandering in town. You'd better find a job[142].

Poison addressed the audience while, in the background, Kondwani changed and took on another character in preparation for the construction work scene that would follow immediately. The stage directions say:

> Kondwani puts on a cap and takes on the role of a capitao on a construction site. He is measuring imaginary walls and consulting architects' drawings[143]...

Soon after Poison finishes the narration, the construction work scene is verbalized in the following exchange between Capitao and Poison:

> **Capitao**: You! You munt! What are you doing? (Poison approaches Capitao, terrified)
>
> **Capitao**: Where is your shovel?
>
> **Poison**: I don't have a shovel.
>
> **Capitao**: You're not even employed here, are you? I don't know your face.
> **Poison**: No. You see I was looking...
>
> **Capitao**: Get out! You're trespassing...[144]

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[141] *Growing wings*, p. 172
[142] Growing wings, p. 176
[143] ibid.
[144] *Growing wings*, p. 176 - 178

Theatre directors such as Barney Simon, and Robert Mclaren introduced Brecht in South Africa. They founded The Phoenix Players and Workshop '71 at the end of the 1960s and 1971 respectively, and used the skills they learned from Joan Littlewood who was known for Brechtian political plays in England. Simon and Mclaren became very influential as they trained anti-apartheid performers, and produced plays that drew on Brechtian style. Episodic structures of the plays, direct address to the audience, 'alienation' of actors from characters in which the actors talk about the characters they play, changing into different roles while on stage, and within the same scene, in addition to story-telling techniques as a way of flashbacks to motivate the activities happening in a scene, were fruitfully utilized in anti-apartheid plays[145]. Corny Mabaso, who worked with Barney Simon at Phoenix Players later effectively exploited the approach in training young people such as Dukuza ka Macu in the early 1970s[146]. By the time the Market Theatre staged plays with young black people such as Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa, and Aubrey Moalusi in 1979, the style had been fully entrenched[147]. In Malawi, Kanyongolo, Harawa, Zagwazatha, and Nambote learned from acting in the plays, directed by Chris Kamlongera and Robert Green, whom Kerr mentioned as being part of the academic directors at Chancellor College[148]. They in turn employed the techniques in the devising and performance of *Growing Wings*.

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Another South African element is the prison setting which Chimsang'aza Kamaliza alludes to in his review of the play after its initial performance at Chancellor College

[145] See Workshop '71's "Survival" in Kente (1984), *South African People's plays*, and in Anne Fuchs (1988), *Playing the Market*

[146] see Magalasi (1999), *Politics, performance and narrative aspects in plays by Dukuza ka Macu*, MA thesis, University of Witwatersrand.

[147] see Anne Fuchs 1988, and Mufunanji Magalasi (2002), "Ethnicity and marginalization in South African liberation theatre: the case of Dukuza ka Macu's Night of the long wake", *Journal of Humanities* 16.

[148] In conversation with David Kerr, November 2004, Zomba

Traveling Theatre in 1984. In *The Island*, one of the most captivating episodes was the 'telephone call' John makes to friends and family in New Brighton. Speaking in turns, John and Winston imagined what their friends and wives could have been doing. The dialogue in the episode is made up of flashbacks recalled by the two from their real experiences before they came to prison. They imagined a shebeen with their friends, and the beautiful girl, Nomhle, whom they desired to go out with. Harawa, Kanyongolo, and Kerr used a similar technique in W*ings*.

The third element the dramatists took from the South African plays was the opening. Athol Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye* opens with the character Johnnie talking to himself, hallucinating as he remembers his dead father. Similarly *Wings* opens with Kondwani's hallucinations, with Poison trying to silence him. The striking similarity in the two plays is that both Kondwani in *Wings* and Johnnie in *Hello and Good-bye* are in psychological distress. They both mumble incoherent phrases. Johnnie monotonously counts from one to ten, while Kondwani recites terms from his physical science and religious education, in addition to verbalizing his experiences with love and money. Such an opening came from the familiarity that the dramatists had with Fugard's plays and South African anti-apartheid plays of the 1970s and 1980s.

Undercutting all the themes in *Growing Wings* is a class analysis of Malawian society. Western education had become the key to social mobility in Malawi. Acquiring it, or failing to do so, determined the class one belonged to. The working and professional classes used education and training as a means to comfortable economic survival. The illiterate and peasant class struggled from lack of resources.

In addition to the class analysis, the play raises a direct connection between the higher class and the justice system. Members of the higher classes established the direction that the society took and the relevant laws that guided it. Everyone, especially those of the lower classes, had to abide by the laws or be penalized. The play exposed the failure of the judicial system in Malawi and condemned it as immoral. For example, Poison only acquired primary school education, which was not good enough to qualify him for a high earning job. He tried to earn a living on Tamara Tobacco Estate as a labourer but left the place because he perpetually owed the estate money for provisions. This occurred despite the fact that tobacco was one of the high earning industries. According to Guy Mhone Malawi's economic policy under Banda allowed for low wages in order to accumulate profit under the guise of the quest for economic growth. As a result, those who owned estates such as foreign companies and top politicians grew richer, while the workers struggled in perpetual poverty[149]. The question that arises from Poison's guilty verdict is: who makes the elephant tusk business illegal? It is the same people who benefit from the superficial protectionist laws. The elephant population is guarded because it attracts tourists from Europe and America who bring income to hotels and businesses owned by members of the higher class. The irony is that the wages of local hotel employees, for example, are not enough to afford them accommodation, even in the hotels that they work. Provision of jobs to local people is also fallacious because a negligible number are employed.

A similar analysis can be undertaken on Kondwani. His education had raised him so high that he threatened the interests of those who had money. He turned into a

[149] See Guy Mhone ed. (1993), *Malawi at the Crossroads...*, p. 1 -33

competitor, as exemplified by the struggle between him and Mr. Big, over Stella. The connection between class and the judicial system is thereby being condemned by the play. *Growing Wings* can be viewed as questioning Malawian society, its class configuration and justice system.

3.7 THEY CALL IT AFRICA by Joe Chimwenje[150] and David Kerr

The play opens on an imaginary planet called Iziana. A group of alien researchers are planning to find out about a place called Africa. Their team leader, Hungu, a military commander-like figure, gives them specific instructions about their task. The bodies of the researchers are covered with weird decorations. Where they stand, they can see

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[150] From 1981 to 1985, Joe Chimwenje attended Dedza Secondary School, an institution reputed for a long tradition of drama. David Rubadiri was the first Malawian to produce Macbeth while he was a teacher at the school in 1958. The performance was attended by, amongst many other guests, the Colonial Governor of Nyasaland, Mr. Glyn Jones. *Central African Times*, a colonial newspaper of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, mentioned the event in one line, as it covered other colonial events (Gibbs P. 1980: 22 - 24). At the time Chimwenje came to Dedza Secondary School, English Drama drew much of its inspiration from the annual festivals organized by the Association for Teaching English in Malawi.

Joe Chimwenje gained performance skills through the French Drama Club, after failing to enter the English Drama Club where competition was very stiff. At the time he came to Chancellor College in 1986 to study for a BA Humanities, Chimwenje did not join the Travelling Theatre immediately. Discouraged by his bad experience with English Drama at Dedza, he joined the French Drama Club. The French Drama Club itself was invited to perform at secondary schools around the country. In 1987, he joined the Traveling Theatre when he was in second year.

For Chimwenje, the connection between drama classes and CCTT was influential. CCTT offered a practical training ground for students of drama. A number of productions such as *Blood* by Steve Chifunyise, *Kwacha Textiles*, which Chimwenje co-wrote with David Kerr, Fugard's *The Island*, and Maishe Maponya's *Hungry Earth* were rehearsed in class, and toured under the banner of CCTT.

In conversation, Chimwenje told me that he thought that CCTT was highly political in its approach to drama. Coming from secondary school, in a climate where headmasters insisted on discipline, Chancellor College was an impressively free zone in which students expressed themselves through readings, performance, and writing. In CCTT, there was the freedom to present political issues to Malawians through performance. Chimwenje was of the opinion that, CCTT was almost equivalent to a shadow opposition political party to the ruling Malawi Congress Party, and the authorities were aware of that (Chimwenje: Interview: 08/03). This situation was made even more significant by the interaction of students from different faculties, especially with Law students such as Kanyongolo, and Chizeze, who, by the nature of their studies, were more enlightened about political issues.

the earth through the galaxy, and present it in poetic form, as shown in the following exchange:

> **1st Researcher**: Across the deepest layers of space,
>
> **2nd Researcher**: Across the dazzle of galaxies,
>
> **3rd Researcher**: Isolated in its atmosphere,
>
> **4th Researcher**: Lies the small planet,
>
> **1st Researcher**: They call earth[151]...

Looking at the earth, they see different forms of life that populate it such as vegetation, rocks, and animals. On closer examination, they become curious about one form of life and the 3rd Researcher comments that ... 'but there is one creature which is threatening this harmony', and the 4th Researcher says : 'they call it man'[152].

The Researchers are given a further instruction by Hungu to find out about this planet. They take a journey to earth and arrive in time to observe the pre-colonial times. They find Manu, a leader of a group of a hunting society, giving orders to his juniors saying:

> Hands on heads.
> (The neophytes obey this and subsequent orders with varying degrees of efficiency.)
> On your bellies. On your heads. On your knees. On your eyes. On your mouths. On your heads[153]...

Manu then prepares his neophytes with medicine from a deity Loviyongo, before venturing into the forest to hunt Nchobosho, the bush-pig. They hunt down Nchobosho and kill it. The problem, however, comes at the time of sharing the meat.

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[151] Chimwenje and Kerr's *They call it Africa*, p. 2
[152] ibid.
[153] *Africa*, p. 4

Manu has the final say in what they are allowed to take, in spite of resistance from the others. The following exchange shows how he orders them:

> ... Kahake you take the brains to give you sense.
>
> **Kahake:** The Brains?
>
> **Manu**: And Tayala (laughing) you get the entrails to give you courage.
>
> **Tayala**: The entrails? What about the legs...
>
> **Manu**: I choose what I want for my household. The rest is divided amongst the village elders[154]...

The neophytes are not satisfied, and Manu sternly reminds them that:

> That is the law of Loviyongo. Without his guidance and my teaching, the vultures would be pecking at your bones now.
>
> **Tayala**: But Manu, the entrails?
>
> **Manu**: Do you question the law?... Don't you know the elders can hear of your rebellion and prepare the punishment of the *iyabi* leaves?[155]

Manu orders them to carry the meat back to the village and, without enthusiasm, they trek back. They are closely observed by the researchers, who report to Hungu that:

> We report that the hunters led lives of extreme hardship -, wrestling a living from the hazards of nature, with which they lived in close harmony... guardians of these beliefs, were able to make lives a little easier for themselves at the expense of women and younger men...
>
> **2nd Researcher**: I assert that knowledge which has been deliberately distorted during transfer to the next generation....

Hungu then says:

> Let the debate enter your inner beings and illuminate the next phase of your research[156]...

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[154] *Africa*, p. 9
[155] ibid.
[156] *Africa*, pp. 10 - 11

A closer reading of this episode reveals the materialist analysis of society which the playwrights employ through the narrative. Man's dependency on nature for survival and the control of what is gained, expressed in clear Marxist language, indicate problems of sharing material things and division of people into social classes in this society. Terry Eagleton, in describing the Marxist analytical tool of literature in *Marxism and Literature* refers to the twin struggles that exist in society namely that of man and nature, and man with another man. In the episode, the men go hunting for meat to conquer one of their natural enemies, hunger. Once the meat has been secured, the issue of control comes into play. Manu takes the nicest parts, which members of the ruling class are privileged to have, while the hunters are given left-overs. When the hunters' grumble, Manu reminds them about the law of god Loviyongo and the ordeal of itchy *iyabi* leaves.

The other issue is that, through the story, the dominant ideology prevalent in this society is exposed. Manu refers to the law of Loviyongo. The materialist analysis in the narrative exposes the injustice contained in the social order, in which there is unequal sharing amongst members of what the society earns through its sweat.

Using a structure in which an episode is dramatized and its essence reported to Hungu in the next, the alien researchers visit different periods of earth's existence and find problems throughout. When they visit the Savanna Kingdoms of King Inkosi and his people, they listen to how the subjects salute the king at a gathering:

> Bayete Inkosi! Bayete Inkosi Elimnyama! (We greet you King, you the black bull of the kraal).
>
> **Induna**: (Spear in hand) Dlungwana, son of Ndaba, ferocious warrior of the Mbelele
> Axe that is sharper than all other axes

Lion armed in the forest like a madman...
Bayete, Inkosi, elimnyama[157]...

The king has come to sentence a traitor of the kingdom, Nobangula, who refuses to let his daughter marry the king because she is betrothed to another man. Angered, the king condemns Nobangula to die by being pushed over a cliff.

In this scene, the praise reveals two possibilities. The people are either too cowed to be critical of the king or huge benefits await them from such exaggerated praises. Faced by a crisis in which someone is about to lose his life to autocracy, no subject raises a word of opposition against the king. Instead, the king is praised, yet he is about to lead in the shedding of Nobangula's blood for honestly stating that, 'my daughter is already betrothed to another man and cannot marry you'.

The extravagance of the praise creates an irony which mocks the king's position, as evidenced in the following lines: "Axe that is sharper than all the axes/ Lion armed in the forest like a madman / Inkosi – king, elimnyama – black bull". The use of the image 'axe' praises the king, and yet describes his cruelty. The village is confronted by a case which could lead to a death. The 'Axe' is one of the weapons that the Inkosi would use, given his warrior background. Given the context of helplessness Nobangula is in, the image suggests barbaric monstrosity on the part of the king, evoking pity for Nobangula. As regards the line 'armed like a madman', there is a quality of uncontrollable rage, which is a danger to the subjects, especially those 'sane ones' who might be critical of him. Such critics are placed at the mercy of the dangerous king. Indeed, kings are very powerful and are 'black bulls of the kraal', and

[157] *Africa*, p. 11

yet, too much power corrupts them. Their responsibility is to lead people on behalf of their ancestors, and yet their desire is to be feared. This 'black bull' quality, in the context of being a barbaric monster and a psychotic killer, becomes a weakness which tragic heroes are reputed for. In the praise, the king is saluted and criticized bitterly at the same time, as is typical of most oral traditional praise poetry in Africa, whether it be the Okyeame and Nkhrumah in Ghana[158] or Ndebele praise poets and their king, Lobengula[159].

Kwesi Yankah discusses the role of the Okyeame, oral poet in Ghanaian society, as myth-maker and myth-breaker. He writes that Kwame Nkhrumah's personal praise poetry reveals how the form carries both praise and criticism of the rulers. For example, Yankah argues that the Okyaeme's reference to 'lion' in praise of the president was double-edged because, in the context that it was used, a lion was shown as both a powerful and cruel ruler of the animal kingdom[160]. The Ndebele of Zimbabwe, according to Tim Couzens, and Landeg White, praised their king Lobengula as 'a lion that roars in the forests and sups on its cubs'. The case of the praise for the Inkosi of the Savanna Kingdom falls within the same ambit.

In the next scene, researchers visit a tea estate during colonial times. The Colonial Bwana comes in carried on a chair, lifted on a stretcher, with indigenous carriers singing the song *machila a bwana salemera – the big boss's stretcher is never heavy* – a song which the playwrights took from the reality of colonial events in Malawi.

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[158] See Kwesi Yankah (1987), "Mythbreaker and mythmaker" in *Research in African Literatures*
[159] See Tim Couzens and Landeg White (1984), *Literature and Society in South Africa.*
[160] Yankah op. cit

In the scene, the Bwana calls for 'Kapitawo', the supervisor. Kapitawo has gone to work on the garden in which he grows maize. When he meets the Bwana, he reports that workers are finding the work too heavy for payment of only six pence a month for women, and nine pence for a man. He pleads with the Bwana for pay rises and the Bwana replies that:

> You tell all people, if they carry on refusing work like so, I ... I shall tell governor to send soldiers here. Understand? Governor[161].

The message of bringing in the soldiers is emphasized by Foloko, one of the carriers and a sycophant of the Bwana. He collapses the umbrella he is holding over Bwana and makes a sound of a shooting gun and says 'Asilikali with guns (as if shooting) boom, boom!'[162]. The Kapitawo insists to the bwana that people will stop working, and the Bwana orders the carriers to destroy his house. The researchers report back to Hungu that a group of people with technologically advanced weapons of destruction force others to be under them.

The exploitation of natives by colonialists whilch led to John Chilembwe's uprising is clear in this episode. Shepperson and Price observe that Chilembwe led people to resist the colonial government because of less pay in the farms around Mulanje, Zomba and Chiradzulu. When the resistors' planned to steal guns at Mandala in Blantyre, and Magomero in Zomba failed, Chilembwe was hunted down and shot at Muloza, a border town, as he tried to cross into Mozambique. His church at PIM in Chiradzulu was subsequently razed to the ground[163].

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[161] *Africa*, p. 19
[162] *Africa*, p. 20
[163] see Shepperson George and Thomas Price (1958), *Independent African, John Chilembwe: the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Uprising of 1915*, Edinburgh: The University Press.

In the third episode, multi-national companies come under the spotlight. Set at an auction, the multi-nationals buy tobacco from local farmers at a very low price, and deduct money as repayment for the loans that the farmers took during the planting season. The scene then moves back to the estate where some members of the farming community beg for alms to feed themselves. A commentator of the auction says:

> But the Africans are suffering: poverty, shortages, drought, famine... the rich nations from the northern hemisphere must help. USAID[164]...

And the beggars themselves join in:

> **1st Beggar**: E.E.C.
>
> **2nd Beggar**: SIDA
>
> **1st Beggar**: O.D.A.
>
> **2nd Beggar**: U.N.D.P.
>
> **1st Beggar**: World Bank.
>
> **Both Beggars**: (Climactically) I.M.F.
> (The commentator gives one coin to each one of them)[165].

It is then reported that the money that the big donor agencies have given as aid is used for building expensive offices, buying cars and paying salaries and allowances for the employees of the aid organizations.

When the researchers travel into the future, they witness the making of powerful weapons by powerful nations, with hypocrisy and greed dominating the way of life. They think an intervention is important, they chant that:

> We prepare...
>
> **1st Researcher**: To travel...
>
> **2nd Researcher**: Mingle...

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[164] *Africa*, p.26
[165] ibid.

3rd Researcher: Stimulate...

4th Researcher: Mobilize...

1st Researcher: Transform[166]...

As indicated above, the form the play uses allows for an exploration of content, followed by an intellectual analysis to reveal oppression. In discussion, the different moments of history are explored by the play to reveal problems that Africa, and Malawi in particular, have encountered. Ownership of the economy by outside powers, and the cynical intervention offered by Non-governmental organizations, are hereby tabled for scrutiny. In addition, the language used in episodes such as that in the Savanna Kingdom is meant to provoke critical interest in society about injustice to common indigenous people. The idea behind this form was to create awareness in audiences. Differentiated from plays produced for pure entertainment, a play such as *They Call It Africa* is an attempt to provoke society to deal with the problem of oppression.

They Call It Africa was performed in the Great Hall at Chancellor College in 1988. The police who witnessed its applause went backstage and threatened actors with arrest, and then confronted David Kerr, who directed the show. Kerr quickly produced the permit from the Censorship Board and avoided arrest. In the middle of the night, one week later, Kerr's office was thoroughly ransacked by the police, and a file containing permits was stolen. *They call it Africa* was banned the following day. Co-writer and actor, Joe Chimwenje went into hiding.

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[166] *Africa*, p. 41

3.8 CONCLUSION: UNIVERSITY THEATRE, SOCIALIST PREMISE AND OPPRESSION IN MALAWI

The 1980s' shift in approach to theatre brought about a number of notable changes. *Chinese Monastery* used traditional arch-rivals, Socialism and Christianity, to contrast progressive liberation in the former, and how Christianity is manipulated by the powerful for their own ends. Using the rivalry as a metaphor, the play commented on the relationship between the leadership and the university community in Malawi. Extending this same theme into a quasi-historical setting, Chizeze centralized the theme of justice and lack of compassion in rulers, in *Tears of Blood*. With a sadistic outcome for the culprit king and the queen, the ending seemed to anticipate coups that were believed to foster liberation in society. In its exploitation of the South African anti-apartheid style of the 1970s and 1980s, *Growing Wings* raised issues of justice. The ruling class made laws that were blind to the social situations responsible for the breeding of crime amongst the lower classes of society. *They Call It Afric*a used history as a witness to oppression of ordinary citizens. It pointed out economic hardships and political dominance over the lower classes by the rich. It indicated that the situation has always been the same from the pre-colonial times to the present. Through the alien researchers, different historical periods were observed.

This chapter has shown how the Travelling Theatre used experimental dramatic forms, influenced by the Socialist philosophy prevalent in Southern African theatre, especially the South African and Zambian experiences, to boldly challenge prevailing autocratic systems. While encoded criticism was achieved, the explicit discussion in parts of some of the plays led the state to ban them. It will be interesting to note how

the winds of multi-party politics diminished the state's power, forcing University Theatre's focus elsewhere, as is shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNIVERSITY THEATRE 1990 - 1999

4.1 INTRODUCTION

By 1991, talk of political change was becoming commonplace amongst ordinary Malawians. A newspaper called *The Democrat,* critical of Banda's oppressive policies, was printed by exiles in Zambia and illegally circulated in Malawi. It later became the mouthpiece for a political party, Alliance For Democracy (AFORD). Besides *The Democrat*, the *Financial Post,* the first legally registered private weekly paper, became an internal mouthpiece against injustice. Aladdin Osman and Jika Nkolokosa founded it in 1991, breaking a resounding decades-old silence of fear that Malawians had succumbed to under Banda. The two papers, and many others including *Michiru Sun, The Star, Chronicle, Enquirer,* and public-place anonymously dropped letters, which Linje Manyozo calls Third Media[167], instituted powerful anti one-party state resistance against government propaganda printed in the state-run *Daily Times* and *Malawi News.* According to a report on democracy by Edge Kanyongolo, Nandini Patel, and Wiseman Chijere Chirwa, the 1990 to 1994 period, commonly referred to as 'the transitional period', had over fifty registered newspapers, most of which took an oppositional stand against the government in power[168].

For a long time in Malawi, there had been speculation on how best to expose Banda's injustices in order to humiliate him into change, after the many political arrests and killings he had was alleged to have been responsible for in the previous decades. Patrick O'Malley, in his book *Living Dangerously*, relates how information was sent

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[167] Manyozo, (2002), Op.Cit

[168] See Edge Kanyongolo, Nandini Patel and Chijere Chirwa's report on Evaluation of Democracy, 2002.

to Amnesty International and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), especially after Jack Mapanje's arrest in 1987. With information sourced from the prison by a mysterious Prison Warder referred to as Noriega, David Kerr and Father Patrick O'Malley sent information to Landeg White at the Centre for Southern African Studies in York. Their reports commented on the continued detention without trial, and mistreatment of political prisoners in notorious centres such as Mikuyu, Dzaleka, Zomba, and Nsanje. White in turn passed the reports over to Amnesty International. At Amnesty, Richard Carver and his team sent the reports to the BBC Africa Service, for inclusion in its programme, *Focus On Africa*, which had gained massive popularity in Malawi because of the many hidden political revelations it aired. In addition, the Malawi Catholic Bishops' Lenten Letter, read in catholic churches around the country on 8th March, 1992, challenged Banda to account for, amongst other issues, the torture of political prisoners, and continued detention without trial of such people as Jack Mapanje, Brown Mpinganjira, and George nga Ntafu. According to O'Malley, the letter became a starting point for unrests that engulfed Malawian cities, forcing Banda to call for a referendum in June 1993, at which Malawians voted for multi-party politics. Pressure groups such as Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), and United Democratic Front (UDF) registered as political parties to contest elections set for 27th April 1994. UDF won with 52%, and went into partnership with AFORD, which had 14%, to replace the one-party government run by Malawi Congress Party[169].

From the onset, the new government identified a number of socio-political issues that needed attention. Democratisation in Malawi, education for girls, human rights,

[169] Ibid.

poverty alleviation, and HIV/AIDS became central issues in the 1990s. Many Non-Governmental Organisations came to join the few that were allowed under Dr. Banda. Their mission was to help with social welfare programmes and the massive responsibility of education for change. Challenged by the changes, University Theatre acted accordingly by producing plays that responded to the situation in the country. Improvisations learned from the Theatre for Development field trips, occasional individual authorship, and the fielding of selected old published plays, comprised the repertoire that the University staged. These included *Kulanga Nyani – To Punish a Monkey* (Smith Likongwe), *Ferocious Stepmother* (Travelling Theatre [TT] Collective), *The First Steps* (TT Collective), *Refugees* (Kerr and TT cast), *Interrogation* (Farid Kamil), *Alamu Mwandibvula – Brother-in-law You Have Undressed Me* (Kamlongera and TT Collective), *Sister Sister* (Steve Chimombo), *Yudas Iskariot*, *Mkati Mwa Malaya*, and *Something is Wrong* (Linje Manyozo). In this chapter, we will look at *Refugees*, *Alamu Mwandibvula*, and *Sister Sister*. The three plays are representative of the various approaches, and issues that the Travelling Theatre used and responded to, as the discussion below will reveal. Agit-prop theatre, use of local language, and single authorship in response to social issues will frame the investigation into the three plays, respectively. In the analysis, I will focus on content, form, issues, language, characterization, and structure, to show how university theatre became affected by the socio-political change in Malawi in the 1990s.

4.2 *REFUGEES* devised by David Kerr and TT cast

Refugees is about the plight of the Mozambican people during wars of liberation from the Portuguese, and the Civil War that followed the country's independence in 1975 between the FRELIMO government and RENAMO insurgents. The play tells a story

of a woman, Tisa, and her two children Limbani and Zacharia. It was staged in the University of Malawi Great Hall in Zomba on 28th May, 1991. The discussion that follows shall, apart from analyzing performance and literary aesthetics, draw comparisons with Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, on which this play was based.

The cast included Patricia Somanje (Tisa, Television Director), Harry Migochi (Zacharia, TV Reporter, Portuguese Soldier, Frelimo Soldier, Renamo Soldier, 1st Red Cross Worker, Forest Ranger) and George Maere (Limbani, TV cameraman/ 2nd reporter, Priest, Drunkard, 2nd Red Cross worker, Policeman[170]. The different acting roles assigned to one performer were managed by change into different characters using suggestive costume, props, masks and mime[171].

The play is seen through the eyes of Tisa and the news crew, which uses a stylized form to show a blend of news reports and dramatization of events. For example, the Reporter opens the play in a similar manner to a television programme by welcoming the audience/viewers in this way:

> Good evening, the subject of our documentary this evening is the plight of the Mozambican refugees[172]...

The mention of 'documentary' in the narration prepares the audience to anticipate the interruptions in the flow of the story, or possibilities of the episodic nature of story-telling common to documentary film format. At the same time, it is also an 'agit-prop' style of Brechtian Theatre used in social awareness plays and campaigns. The style is different from realistic presentation of plays because of the performer-audience discussions, or direct audience address, placed in between the play's scenes.

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[170] Kerr and Cast's *Refugees*, p. 1
[171] ibid.
[172] ibid.

The next scene is a dramatization of the first event. In a mission classroom in Mozambique, a Father Ferreira talks to Tisa just before the soldiers invade the school, as shown in the following exchange:

> **Priest**: Tisa, please listen to me. You must be strong. You are the Head Girl. If you panic, how are the others going to control themselves... Let us put our trust in God...
>
> **Tisa**: Oh father, what shall I say if the Portuguese soldiers ask me any questions?
>
> **Priest:** If you can, try not to talk to them. But if you have to, don't mention anything about Frelimo. Just deny ever seeing them[173]....

The conversation introduces Tisa as having attended a Mission School, besides showing how the Church partly helped in the liberation wars in Africa. In the case of Father Perreira, he is a psychological, if not spiritual guide to Tisa just as young girl. Tisa could have had support from older people in her family at home and the Priest takes their place to support her emotionally. Soon after their conversation, a Portuguese soldier appears and confronts them. The following exchange registers the helplessness of Tisa and the priest in the face of war:

> **Soldier:** Get over there. Sit down.
>
> **Priest**: But I am an ordained priest of the Lord. You can't...
>
> **Soldier**: I said sit down... (The soldier turns his attention to Tisa) What is your name?
>
> **Tisa**: Tisa... Tisa Valente
>
> **Soldier**: And where are you from?
>
> **Tisa**: Thika village, Villa Coutinho, Angonia Province.
>
> **Soldier**: Did you see any Frelimo soldier (Tisa hangs her head in silence) You don't have to be afraid.... What is his name?

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[173] *Refugees*, p. 4

Tisa: Father Perreira....

Soldier: Do you pray to God to give strength to Marshal Samora Machel? Or Dos Santos? Chissano?

Tisa: No. Never.

Priest: This isn't fair to ask the girl.

Soldier: I told you to shut up... (freeze)

2nd Reporter: Our special correspondent in Lorenzo Marques has sent us this photograph of a Portuguese soldier interrogating a school girl at Masambaro Primary school. Six girls were raped. One priest was killed.[174]

The commentary on the death of the priest and the rape of six girls completed the picture of the event, having left the audience with a frozen moment. In addition to that, the report was also meant to kick-start the audience on an emotional trip of Portuguese brutality and rape, which Tisa experiences. Besides that, situating the scene at a Mission school differentiated the Portuguese forces from the FRELIMO, indicating the former as evil forces, and the latter as 'just' liberators. Tisa's first experience of war is hereby illustrated.

In a similar fashion, *Mother Courage* has a Clergyman as one of the characters. In *Refugees*, the play rids itself of the Priest after the scene above, and he never appears again, though his future role is assigned to another character, as will be seen below. In *Mother Courage*, the clergyman, though introduced late in the story, stays in the company of Mother Courage as the narrative advances.

In the following scene, the film crew moves the story to a time after independence in Mozambique. Tisa, now a grown up woman with her two sons, Limbani and

[174] *Refugees*, p. 5 -7

Zachariah, are working in a field. The civil war intensifies and Tisa is forced to run away from the village with her two boys, surviving on wild fruits and dried cassava. On the way, Zacharia feels hungry and ventures to search for food in a nearby village, and never returns to where his mother and brother hide. He has been captured by RENAMO soldiers. Suddenly, Tisa and Limbani meet the soldiers as well. Just by chance, the commander calls the menacing soldier, creating an opportunity for the two to escape. On the way, she loses many things she had packed, including her gin-distilling equipment. All through, she prays to the spirits of her dead husband to guide her lost child.

Brecht's mother-character in *Mother Courage* drags a cart with the help of her two sons and a daughter during time of war. When they reach a check-point, the army takes one of the sons as a recruit. Knowing the repercussions of arguing with soldiers in war time, Mother Courage walks away with the remaining two children and the cart. She survives the war-time by selling wares, including liquor, which she stores in her carriage.

In *Refugees*, Tisa's fate of losing her gin-brewing equipment becomes an indication that she is worse off than Mother Courage whose cart was never taken away. The loss brings awareness about the helplessness with which she will be forced to survive without any kind of enterprise, in the absence of her brewing equipment.

Refugees also introduces an interesting element about Tisa at the point she loses her son. The prayer to her dead husband is worth commenting on. Kerr and Cast seem to suggest the cultural base Tisa relies on. Being a 'black Mozambican', Tisa is depicted

as an ancestral worshipper despite her childhood school attendance at Masambaro Mission School. There are two points to this. First, her husband was killed by RENAMO soldiers. Remembering him is not only useful as a representation of Tisa's cultural beliefs. It also becomes a revolutionary act because of the ideologies the two armies stood for. FRELIMO used Socialism while RENAMO was anti-communist and was supported by the West. Tisa's prayer to her dead husband therefore, signified a two-pronged symbol, indicating her cultural roots and the revolutionary sacrifice her dead husband stood for.

After the escape from RENAMO soldiers, Tisa and Limbani travel a painful journey. Dramatising how Zacharia goes missing, and showing Tisa and Limbani surviving on wild fruits, the play invokes a context on how the refugees arrived in camps.

Reaching Malawi, she registers with the officials and they are given a medical check up. When she settles down, and tries to gather material to build a hut, she meets a Forest Ranger who tries to take advantage of her. He lies to her that the tree-cutting permit she has obtained is useless, and tries to sleep with her. Bruised by war, she pushes the ranger off.

In this case, the Forest Ranger is a sum of local Malawian prejudice against refugees. Without any knowledge about how this woman has suffered, the Ranger sees a Mozambican woman and tries to take advantage of her. Tisa has, however, lived through the brutal world long enough and she physically pushes him off, exposing the physical and spiritual will of survival in her.

In comparison, the Forest Ranger is a continuation of the clergy man, if Brecht's characterization of the Priest in *Mother Courage* is considered. In Brecht's play, the Priest proposes to Mother Courage but is turned down, while in *Refugees*, the Ranger tries to manipulate Tisa, and when she refuses, he tries to physically force her. The idea of using force intensifies the pity that the audience has for Tisa.

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In the next episode, news crews, hungry for best footage, are being assigned to go to the refugee camp, and the Director's statement reveals how they view such human calamities as war. She says:

> Head of programmes has increased our budget by 45 percent. He's sending you out to Malawi. He wants actuality shots... He wants drama, excitement. He wants war wounds, amputations, naked mothers. He wants starving babies, mass suffering...
> We've got to compete with the Gulf crisis. Not only that, there are shots coming out of Liberia, Somalia and Sudan of real action.[175]

Human suffering has now become a commodity for media magnates. The quest for war wounds, amputations, and mass suffering has become a lucrative source of money. The statement is made without any consideration for the victims. The type of competition the news crews face from other war torn areas forces them to act that way. In addition to this, the quote also indicates that many parts of Africa are at war, by the mention of Liberia, Somalia and Sudan. Bearing in mind the competition they have, the crew arrives at the camp and the Reporter remarks that:

> We need interviews... And what about the starving babies? That doctor promised us starving babies... They all look pretty well fed to me[176]...

The contradiction of what they anticipated and found at the refugee camp is very crucial. The crew seems to have preconceived plans of avoiding 'well-fed babies' to

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[175] *Refugees*, p. 30
[176] *Refugees*, p. 31

film 'starving babies'. The misrepresentation of the true picture of catastrophes by the media is hereby revealed. Furthermore, the collusion of welfare personnel, such as doctors, is likewise exposed. The filmmakers entice the doctor to inform them when brutalized babies are found. Desperate for footage, the crew films Tisa holding a Malawian baby, even though she informs them that it was not a Mozambican child.

Tisa's suffering never stops. Soon, there is news about a RENAMO soldier who has lost a leg in a landmine blast. When Tisa follows this up, she finds that it is Zacharia. He is imprisoned by Malawian authorities and is taken away never to be seen again. Furthermore, pressed for money, Limbani also leaves to work in tea estates in Mulanje, five hundred kilometers south. Tisa tries to stop him, but he walks away, leaving her baffled, her hands held high, praying to her husband. It seems Zacharia comes to mock her with a brief appearance, only to be taken away again. Limbani's leaving also adds pain. Though there is a big need for him to search for a job, he leaves at a time when the mother needs someone around. Observing Tisa, the news crew films her in the transfixed position and reports that:

> We found this woman weeping outside her house, almost like an emblem for the wars of Mozambique, a mother bewailing the agonies of her country[177]...

When Tisa opens her eyes, the Reporter approaches her and requests a favour. He says:

> We want you to help. Our director wants us to take a film of refugees – who are half naked ...
> You take off your blouse. Take off[178]...

As if the lie about 'starving babies' was not enough, the news crew intends to direct the type of photographs that fit their brief of 'exciting news'. Finding no naked

[177] *Refugees*, p. 40
[178] ibid.

refugee, the request to Tisa exposes that type of fraudulent approach. When Tisa understands what the Reporter wants, she says:

> You want me to take off my clothes so you can... You want to film my nakedness? Me naked. You film. Stupid fools. Baboons!...
> (Furious) ... I was raped by a Portuguese soldier when I was seventeen. My husband was killed by bandits. I've brought up my children on my own.... And now, you want me to be naked? Me? Nuda? I'm not a prostitute. Nem puta.... "No touch me". Leave me alone[179]...

The audience will surely share Tisa's feeling towards the parasitic insufferable news crew, after the brutality that she has gone through, from the wars of liberation, through the escape from Mozambique to Malawi, and the loss of the children.

The ending of *Refugees* is just as devastating as Brecht's *Mother Courage*. Mother Courage comes back from town to find that her other son has been forcibly taken away by soldiers, and her daughter has been shot. Shocked, and in disbelief, she holds her until someone else confirms the death. The same pain is found in *Refugees* as it ends with Tisa losing all her children and everything else to war.

As regards the acting style, the performers play many roles as the play progresses. The stage directions for scene two state that:

> Tisa takes up her place in the Mission classroom. Limbani puts on the mask as Priest and joins her... Reporter takes off his Reporter's mask and puts on the mask of the Portuguese soldier[180]...

The idea of using masks helps with the alienation of actors from the characters, besides helping the audience as well to separate characters from actors. The

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[179] *Refugees*, p. 41
[180] *Refugees*, p. 4

differentiation achieved in role-playing is a tool for provoking the audience's critical response to the issues being raised by the play.

The Minimalist use of props and costume is also another element worth noting. When the actors transform characters by changing or removing masks, the narrative moves quickly and takes on the African story-telling techniques shared with Brechtian methodology. In story-telling, the narrator takes different characters and changes voice to suit different characters and moods.

As regards refugees as a theme, the play is a portrayal of the life that many Mozambicans led during the wars of liberation. According to Centre for Disease Control, about nine hundred thousand people fled Mozambique into Malawi from 1987 to 1990 because of the civil war[181]. Malawians felt overwhelmed and resentful of their presence. In Mulanje, stories about desperate Mozambicans who worked for less pay in the tea estates were many. According to V. Midaya, Production Manager for Eastern Produce (Mini Mini Estate), what the Mozambicans did provoked a lot of anger from Malawian tea pickers[182]. In this situation, the pain that Tisa went through, summing up the emotional 'through-line' from the first encounter with the Portuguese soldier to the last angry outburst towards the cameramen, was intended to bring awareness about the struggles these human beings displaced from their homes by war went through.

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[181] **Centre for Disease Control and Prevention** (1993) "Mortality Among Newly Arrived Mozambican Refugees – Zimbabwe and Malawi", 42 (24) 468 – 469, 475 – 477, 25.6.1993 (www.cdc.gov.mmwr/preview)

[182] In conversation with V. Midaya, August, 2003.

Thematically, the play also challenged the ethics of journalism. Where do you draw a line between publicizing the plight of human beings, and unsympathetic filming of human disaster? While it was regarded as important to capture pictures of 'amputated legs' and 'starving babies', much of the footage was callously filmed for money.

From the above analysis, it is clear that Kerr and Cast wished to bring awareness to the plight of refugees. Using *Mother Courage* as a narrative base, the Brechtian direct address to the audience, documentary-style of presentation, and the intermingling of narration and footage, challenged stereotypical views society has about refugees. The theme of women continues in the following analysis of Travelling Theatre's *Alamu Mwandibvula (brother-in-law, you have undressed me).*

4.3 ALAMU MWANDIBVULA (BROTHER-IN-LAW, YOU HAVE UNDRESSED ME) by Chris Kamlongera & TT Cast[183]

[183] *Alamu Mwandibvula* is an example of a play created together with the community, encompassing social issues the community faces. Produced in 1995, many members of Travelling Theatre who were involved in the project at the time could not be reached for comments. I therefore decided to have an in-depth interview with the available cast member, Greyson Bongwe, a lecturer in the Department of Language and Communications Skills at Chancellor College who has since died. I also contacted another cast member, Chris Nditani, by email. A personal communication with Chris Kamlongera shall also be referred to.

In my conversation with Bongwe, I learned that he arrived at Chancellor College as a student in 1993. Like many members of the Travelling Theatre, he came with previous experience on stage acting. Unlike many drama students who arrive at Chancellor College having been members of ATEM Clubs at Secondary School, Bongwe never took part in drama when he attended Nsanje Secondary School from 1978 to 1982. Instead, he strengthened his childhood experience of nativity plays at Lilongwe Teachers Training College.

At the Training College, Akwete Sande scripted, directed, played major roles and became the Chairman of the Drama Club. The Club likewise benefited from members such as Joshua Kambwiri, who had attended Masongola Secondary School near Zomba, and Derek Mpeusa, who had been part of a Zomba-based amateur theatre company called Lonjezo. Whereas ATEM staged drama festivals for secondary schools, the students in the five teachers' colleges organized themselves and played to each other around the country. The College administration provided the clubs with a bus, and food for touring groups was provided by the host colleges.

When Bongwe registered for drama as one of his undergraduate courses at Chancellor College in 1993, Chris Kamlongera was teaching Soyinka's *Trials of Brother Jero.* Bongwe was cast the part of Brother Jero. At this time, the CCTT included J. Munthali, Jonathan Mbuna, Stella Hauya, Lucy Chiyenda, Mateyu Msiska, Chris Nditani, and playwright Smith Likongwe.

A play which mixed English, Chichewa and Chitumbuka, created for awareness on issues of *kulanda katundu wotsala* - dispossession from widows[184], *Alamu Mwandibvula* is set in an unnamed city in Malawi. Mr. Tom Fulika works and earns enough to acquire properties including a car. Married to Eluby, who is 'just a housewife', Tom frequents bars for entertainment on his way from work. While at the bar, he flirts with barmaids, and has an affair with one, Mun'deranji. One evening, after a heavy bout of drinking, he leaves the bar with his brother, Ramsey, and they are involved in an accident in which Tom is seriously injured. Ramsay escapes with minor cuts.

While Tom is in hospital, Ramsay makes an inventory of Tom's property, soliciting the help of their niece, Tamara, to list things that are in the bedroom. Eluby and

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Nditani, in the email interview, emphasized the process of creation when he said that:

> *Alamu Mwandibvula* worked out well because it was tackling typical Malawian rural, urban and peri-urban issues. Though spearheaded by Kamlongera in terms of the overall concept, the play was a group production... I think the overall play-creation worked well because this group had done several TfD projects together for Primary Health Care in Liwonde area and Chingale. The play was performed in the Little Theatre at the Great Hall complex, and the Chirunga Open Air.
>
> Chris (Kamlongera) was the Head of FPA then... He was there to facilitate whatever the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre would need for its use and trips (Nditani: emial interview: 15/12/2003).

Kamlongera, in a conversation I had with him, emphasized the TfD approach, especially in how it helped drama students. According to him, the TfD programme was created to introduce students to practical drama, with an intention of giving them skills in field research, which they acquire when, together with the community members, identify issues and problems that need attention. In story and play creation with the members, he said they learnt script-writing, while in the 'facilitation' for the staging of the play with community members, the students practically learnt the dynamics of play directing. The questions that the community asked, when the play stops for discussion of issues, strengthened the students' confidence, as it also made them sensitive and knowledgeable about issues concerning development (Personal Communication: October, 2001). Kamlongera's observations coincided well with what Nditani related in the email interview. They all agreed on the group authorship of the play, which in most cases is created together with communities. Bongwe's observation on previous experiences that students brought from secondary school compliments the views expressed by the former two. The experience that students brought along from Secondary School or Teachers' Colleges' Drama clubs and the TfD field trips they were exposed to helped in creating community plays, one of which was *Alamu Mwandibvula.* In the play's discussion which follows, we will focus on language, structure, and issues.

[184] Term used by S. White et.al in a legal discussion of the same issue, Women Lawyers in Southern Africa

Tom's sister return from hospital where Tom lies unconscious only to find the two at work. Shocked at what the brother-in-law was doing, she sums it up in the statement, 'Alamu Mwandibvula'. The statement implies that the bedroom is a couple's private place. Entering it without permission is an invasion of their privacy, emphatically put in the statement as 'you have undressed me'.

While summing up Eluby's truest feelings towards Ramsey, with a familiar idiom, the terminology used in the title would not have passed the Censor's eye during Banda's rule. The censor guarded against such words as found in the title, for fear of presenting Malawi as an 'indecent' place. Freedom of speech, and the "direct talk" HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns have created an environment in which people are freer to make statements of the sort in public.

Still on language use, the first scene opens in this way:

> (A man tries to pull a girl out of the bar. Low music)
>
> **Rose**: No! No! We are not doing it without a condom. Tigule dankha condom na – we should first buy a condom.
>
> **oMwale**: Okay... give me 2 packs of condoms please?[185]

Displaying intentions for sexual activity and the reference to condoms can be embarrassing to the Malawian public. The play gives us a picture that for campaign reasons, freedom of speech is encouraged to drive messages home. Complimenting the freedom on discussions of sexual issues is OMwale's request for two packs of condoms, followed by an exit with the woman, on their way to sleep together. When the two leave, another conversation goes as follows:

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[185] Kamlongera and Cast's *Alamu mwandibvula*, p. 2

Bottle collector: *Ala koma iwe! Ukuganiza ine ndingafune hule lija. Sindimanyengana ndi mahule ine.* (Do you think I sleep with prostitutes? I do not practice sex with prostitutes?)

Mun'deranje: *Koma iwe! Wati chani?* (Hey you! What did you say?)

All (the girls present in the bar): *Hule ndani? Tiye tuluka ndiwe wopusa eti. Tiye zipita.* (Who are you calling a prostitute? C'mon, get out of here!)[186] (translation mine)

The word 'kunyengana', while it literally means 'cheating on each other', is a direct reference to sexual activity or extra marital sex. In addition to this, the word 'hule' does not just refer to a prostitute. It is also a derogatory term used to describe women who sleep around with different men. Many married women view a 'hule' with suspicion because of her loose behaviour. Men as well respond to the word 'hule', disgusted by the stigma of immorality it carries. Besides that, many men have contracted venereal diseases or have been killed by other men in the company of prostitutes. This 'offensive' word usually comes out during arguments or exchanges between peers of the same sex. This socio-linguistic background accounted for the girls' response to the bottle collector's reference. Ironically, the girls continue doing what the boy criticizes, as can be seen from the exchange and action described below:

Gloria: *Tiye tidzipita* – let's go-, I have already got a condom. (Boyfriend almost leaps and takes Gloria in his arms as Susan exclaims)

Susan: (Desperately or rather pleadingly) We will do it plain.
Shamwali: (Before exiting with Gloria) Plain? Not today, *mangwana* - tomorrow...

Susan: (Bows her face down only to raise it to see one other male patron sitting lonely by the counter. She dances invitingly while dancing towards him. A full smile on her face) Would you mind to come for a dance?

Tom: *Ayi ndakana. Si iwe uja wa plain uja? No... Kodi sukudziwa kuti ine ndikabwera ndimabwerera uyu... Ndiri ndi mkazi ine, wamva?*

[186] *Alamu*, p. 1

> (No, I refuse. Are you not the one who boasts that you do it plain? When I come here, I come for her – pointing at another barmaid. I have a woman already, do you understand?[187] (translation mine)

The reference to 'we will do it plain', and the girl's seductive dance reflects a reality one finds in bars. The 'straight-talk' campaign, done alongside AIDS education has brought a lot of linguistic change in societies around the world. In retrospection, even though HIV/AIDS needs prevention through condoms, a cultural consideration of how information is transmitted could prove more useful than the resentment the above approach engenders in communities (see discussion below). From the present writer's personal experience on HIV/AIDS plays, Kamlongera and his cast maybe guilty of exaggeration. The direct talk is often not possible both in rural and urban areas of Malawi. Interacting with different plays from all the three regions of Malawi, sensitive words are avoided and images are used instead. A man's private parts are sometimes referred to as 'mfuti' – gun. Prostitutes become 'azimayi oyenda-yenda'- women who are always traveling around. This approach to language could have been the students' own thinking on how such issues were expressed. Empirical evidence shows sensitivity on language (personal experience with grassroot developmental performance groups).

In addition to the language use illustrated above, the next episode shows the reason why the girls prostituted themselves, as in the exchange below:

> **Mun'deranji**: *Wapanga zingati lero*? (How much have you made today)
>
> **Ndaziona**: Wait. Let's count K50, K100, K200...
>
> **Munderanji**: *Iii, zonsezi? Ayi ndithu mwina mavuto ena angathe. Kodi ukudziwa kuti abambo achimanga ndi amakala aja anabwera?*

[187] ibid.

> *Akuti akufuna ndalama zawo. Ndiye umamudziwa wa makala uja alibe chibwana*. (All this money? Congratulations. This would surely ease off some of your problems. Do you know that the maize seller came looking for his money, followed by the charcoal man. You know the charcoal man does not take nonsense.)[188]

The idea that prostitution brings income, besides enabling Ndaziona pay pressing bills, is clear. However, without sounding righteous, the celebration of the functions that the money earned can do stretches the problem further. The play does not challenge prostitution, and the possible contraction of HIV, should things go wrong with the condom.

Malawian societies are struggling to cope with the uninhibited language employed in HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, for example in the condom radio advert by PSI. In it, a young man named Mozee, suddenly visited by a girlfriend, Bvuto, asks for a "chishango" from a friend. He goes to join the girl in the bedroom, bidding his friend a goodnight. The suggestion of sex upset many Malawians. For example, Blessings Chinsinga et.al's study on communication strategies used in the distribution of 'starter pack' agricultural inputs to poor people in Malawi, documented a revealing comment on this issue. When a men's focus group in Nsanje district of Southern Malawi was asked about acceptability of HIV/AIDS campaigns, both through radio, and stage plays, one elderly man, Baba Chinga, said: *shitingamvere djolaula djo chifukwa amatibvula pali ana* – we can't listen to taboo because they undress us in the presence of children (Chinsinga 2002). The point was that sex may be freely discussed among age-mates of the same sex. The use of language in *Alamu* would cause resentment towards the campaigns.

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[188] *Alamu*, p. 4

In the following scene, the play moves away from the bar to Eluby, Tom Fulika's wife, who is busy ironing Tom's clothes. She comments on the shirt that:

> *Ndikuti mutayiwona shirtiyi mmene imadera, simungayiyang'ane kawiri. Kuyang'ana mmapewamu anachita kukhala ngati amagwira ntchito ya malasha ... Ife ndiye ochapira ndi odyetsera, enawo ndiye omakhala kugwira. Koma amayife tikudziwonera.*
> (If you could have seen how dirty this shirt was, you would not have looked at it twice. Starting from the shoulders going down, it appeared as if he works in a coal mine... Yes, a job for us housewives to wash, and feed the men, just for the pleasure of others.)[189]

In this quote, the wife's character 'as a housewife' is established. However, she is presented as suspicious, noting from the way she concludes about Tom infidelity just by looking at Tom's dirty shirt. The problem with this kind of presentation is that it does not afford characterization of 'women' as complex. Representing all housewives who face the problem as suspicious, the play leaves out other women who do not gossip, and those who engage in independent money-making ventures. Week after week, Munororama buses fill up with women who travel to South Africa, and Zimbabwe to buy goods for sale in Malawi. The money earned out of such ventures, for many of them, is more than what a monthly salary offers. To make Eluby a representative of 'women' as the scene does therefore is a misrepresentation of the many types of 'housewives' there are.

In the continuation of the scene, Eluby chats with a few other women, while she works. The women observe something in Tamara and enquire about her health in the following exchange:

> *Kodi iyeyu kuyera kumeneku bwanji*? (What is wrong with the girl's skin. She seems to be gaining a lighter complexion)

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[189] *Alamu*, p. 6

Mrs. Fulika: *Mumfunse akabwera. Akudyatu mango aawisi...* (Ask her when she comes... And she eats raw mangoes, in a season like this)

Mrs. Phiri: *Iii, Ngati ndi chidzukulu tidzalera ife...* (Don't worry, if it is a nephew/niece, we will look after it)

Mrs. Fulika: That used to happen in the past. Who will be busy running around for the child. Well maybe you, sister-in-law will take care of the newly born nephew.)

Alamu: *Ndani adzagwire nyasizo*? (Whom does she expect to touch her disgusting dirt?)[190] (translation mine)

The gaining of a lighter skin complexion, and eating of raw mangoes are some of the signs by which elderly women identify pregnant girls. The other issue raised here is the loss of secrecy on issues about birth-giving in urban societies. Tamara's aunts, in anticipation of a baby being born to her, refuse to any future help to her. This was an exegeration because young girls still depend on elderly women on issues of children. The play presents tradition as losing relevance in the cities because communal family life is fading away in the light of urbanisation. While it is true that some cultural practices have stopped being followed in the urban areas, the issue of birth-giving is hereby misrepresented. Malawi is still 90% rural, according to a 2002 DFID report on food security and most people in Malawian cities and towns are still driven by traditions. The women in the play are not too sophisticated to suggest that they grew up probably in Europe, so that they do not care for such things. Family members still care for their young, especially women on birth giving by sixteen year-old girls such as Tamara.

In the next scene, news about Tom's accident is reported by Ramsey. The following exchange shows how Eluby and Tom's niece respond:

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[190] ibid.

Mrs. Fulika: *Eeh kubwerano kumeneko? Anzanuwo ndiye munawayisa kuti?* (surprised as she looks) *Pankonopo mwatani? Ee! Amamenyatu mahule, amaathibula...* (So, this is your coming. Where have you left your brother? (surprised) What is wrong with your hand? Were you beating prostitutes?)

Uncle Ram: (sitting down): *Iyayi, kungoti ... tachita ngozi...* (No. You see, we had a car accident.)

Mrs. Fulika: (Half crying) *Anzanuwo ndiye ali bwanji?* (How is your brother then?)

Uncle Ram: *Aa, sizili bwino* – things are bad. (Mrs. Fulika starts crying uncontrollably. Women come around to calm her. Tamara is crying too, moving up and down...)

Tamara: (After a pause) Shit! *Nkozi yaduwa. Mphasha atandigulire ndani?* (Shit! The uncle is dead. Who will buy me clothes?)
Uncle Ram: *Kodi mukulira chain? Tadzikonzekani tidzipita ku chipatala. Ngati ndanena kuti amwalira ine?* (All leave except Uncle Ram) (Why are you crying? Who told you he is dead?)[191] (translation mine).

The response to Tom's death by the two women indicates how dependent they were on him. As a housewife, there is danger of dispossession. For the niece, it means losing shelter and the support she received from the uncle.

In the final scene, Tom dies, and Ramsey takes his brother's property, including clothes. Ramsey visits the bar wearing some of Tom's clothes. The prostitutes gather courage and reprimand him. Ramsey is defiant, but later realizes his mistake in this speech:

Kodi inu, ndine ndekha ndikuchita zimenezi? ... Anthu ena sakudzichita kodi? Kodi ophunzira, olemekezeka, olemera sakuzichita? ... Kodi ineyo mwanditola chifukwa ndine osauka? (Then keeps silent for sometime) *Kodi mwina ndalakwadi eti? Mkazi uja avutikatu mmene ndamulanda katunduyu. Kodi atakhala chemwali wanga mwamuna wake wamwalira ndiye anthu amulanda katundu, ine ndingamve bwanji?* (Then uncle Ram breaks down and kneels on the floor.)

[191] *Alamu*, p. 8

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> (Why are you blaming me as if I am the only one who does this? Don't even the rich ones, respectable people in society do the same? Are you criticizing me because I am poor? (Keeps silent) Maybe I am wrong. Maybe the wife shall struggle. How would I take it if my own sister's in-laws did this to her?[192] (translation mine)

The two parts to Ramsey's thought process are noteworthy. He firstly defends himself that it is common practice to repossess a relative's property in Malawian society. This is, however, a superficial defence, though a very honest one. It is common in Malawian society to hear members of the society mocking those who do not 'grab' their deceased relative's property. The instigators become even more aggressive if the wife is still young and could remarry. The fear is that the widow 'will use their brother's sweat'[193]. In the second part of Ramsey's closing speech, he changes his position, considering a situation in which his own sister is treated in the same manner. He realizes the mistake that he has made and breaks down, in repentance.

Artistically, the play had many characters. The home scene, for example, had four women and one girl. Two women were just neighbours of the Fulikas, one was Tom's sister, and the other a niece. The bar scene was presented in a similar manner. It had four prostitutes, and three men. In theatre for development, playmakers are encouraged to include many characters to allow for involvement of many community members in the process, from identification of issues, through creation of the play, to performance. This allowance for community participation, according to the participatory communication experts, has a greater potential towards behavioural change, especially for those who participate directly[194].

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[192] *Alamu*, p.18
[193] see S. White et. al., op cit
[194] See Kerr 1991 and Mlama 1991

The other issue is the length of the opening scene. Meant to make a point about Tom's habits of neglecting the wife, it also emphasized issues of prostitution, HIV/AIDS and language. The fact that the issues of condoms and HIV/AIDS were not returned to underscores the scene's episodic nature.

Despite the inclusion of unacceptable words and expressions in the first scene, *Alamu Mwandibvula's* strength lies in its use of Chichewa, bearing in mind that it was a message play meant to create awareness about dispossession of widows and HIV/AIDS in Malawi amongst grassroots people. Closely looking at the use of Chichewa, one is tempted to make a comment along the line of Ngugi's debate on use of vernacular languages reflected in a number of his books. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi recommends the use of vernacular languages in theatre and literature to communicate effectively with grassroots people on developmental issues. He views language as not only useful for communication between people, but also as a carrier of culture. Ngugi makes this point when he discusses *Ngahiika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) and *Maitu Njugira (Mother sing for Me)*. He points out the forms of the plays as including cultural performances such as song and dance, further to the social relationships the plays bear[195]. In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi laments in the chapter ' Imperialism of Language' about the dominance of English as part of the weaponery for oppression of other cultures[196].

A number of critics, including Bheki Peterson, have pointed out the weaknesses of the use of vernacular as suggested by Ngugi. Peterson states that vernacular literature could be limited by geographical spread. He thinks that geography confines the extent

[195] see Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), *Decolonizing the mind*, pp. 44 -57
[196] see Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993), *Moving the centre*, pp. 30 -41

to which the literature can be read to a few population groups[197]. However, in development plays such as *Alamu*, there are points which concur with Ngugi's thesis on language. For example, the central issue is that of dispossession of widows, and it is championed by Ramsey, Tom Fulika's brother. In patrilineal societies, Ramsey is an uncle who has the right to inherit Tom's property and wife in case of death. The use of such familiar cultural practices paves way for clear communication to grassroots people, enabling them to engage with the problems. Gender equality continues in the next discussion which is centred on Steve Chimombo's *Sister Sister*.

4.4 SISTER SISTER By Steve Chimombo

Steve Chimombo's involvement in Malawian performing arts and drama was first noted in 1967, when, alongside Tony Kandiero, he featured in David Whittock's film, which was adapted from Chaucer's 'Cantebury Tales'[198]. He also featured in *Mbalame*, a film made by David Kerr in 1971, featuring Chris Kamlongera as Sikusinja, Peter Nkosi as Gwenembe, Beatrice Masiku, as Gwenembe's girlfriend, James Ng'ombe and Chimombo as members of the village that Sikusinja and Gwenembe came from. As a writer, Chimombo has been part of the literary and performance movement of the university since the early 1970s until his retirement as Professor of English at the University of Malawi in August 2002. As indicated above, *Sister Sister* is his third play, published after *The Rainmaker* and *Wachiona Ndani?* We will focus on his playwriting efforts after the change of government in 1994 because his drama from the previous decades has been amply covered in a number of studies including those by Anthony Nazombe and Francis Moto.

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[197] see Bheki Peterson (1991) on Ngugi and the issue of language in *Classic*.
[198] See John Listrum in James Gibbs 1976

From 1994, girls' education became a focus in discussions about democracy and gender equality[199]. Policy makers agreed that development strategies needed to have a strong educational motivation for girls to enable them make meaningful contributions to the country in all its aspects when they grew up. These proposals were made within the context of women's empowerment debates discussed in different forums around the world, especially after the Beijing Women's Conference in 1993. Steve Chimombo wrote *Sister Sister* as a contribution to this ongoing debate and presented it at the National Day of the Girl in 1997.

Sister! Sister! is about two sisters, Namagetsi and Mwali. Namagetsi is a woman in her late twenties, while Mwali has just reached puberty. The conflict in the play centres around Mwali's refusal to go for initiation. To her all traditions that guide the lives of women oppress them. Namagetsi, on the other hand, thinks that all women are introduced to adult life through initiation.

The play opens with the two women discussing their tradition as they undertake domestic chores. The issues they talk about include sexual relationships, scarification, beads and women's liberation.

In the first scene, Namagetsi pounds maize and sings the following song:

Mwamuna upita mnjiramo	Man going down the path
Dzatenge, ih! Dzatenge, ih!	Come and get it
Ngati ufuna nkonowu	If you want the arm
Dzatenge, ih! Dzatenge ih!	Come and get it
Ngati ufuna mutuwu	If you want the head
Dzatenge ih! Dzatenge, ih!	Come and get it
Ngati ufuna mwendowu	If you want the leg [200]

[199] see a report by Kadzamira and Rutherford 1996
[200] Steve Chimombo's *Sister! Sister*! p.1

Amused about the sister's generosity in offering herself to any man, as stated in the song, Mwali questions Namagetsi to which Namagetsi argues that the offer is limited to her lover. Intensifying the argument is the issue of love which includes a discussion of a man dubbed *fisi* the hyena, whom a girl-initiate sleeps with as the closure to the initiation ritual. Mwali condemns the 'fisi' system as 'heathenism'. For her, sex before marriage is evil. She reports that she has broken off her engagement with Mchanda, her childhood fiancée, for asking to sleep with her[201]. It seems that when Mchanda and Mwali were very young, their parents had agreed that the two would marry when they grew up. Namagetsi thinks it was inappropriate for Mwali to break off the engagement on the grounds she has given, and further thinks Mwali will still 'get it' through the 'fisi' at the 'dzoma' – intiation ritual.

Despite Namagetsi's urging to convince Mwali to accept the traditions, she is not worried because Chiphetsa, their college educated feminist sister, is coming to take her to town. She will leave all the backward traditions with Namagetsi in the village. When Namagetsi temporarily leaves the stage, Mwali shares her new thinking with the audience in this way:

> Is this all I have to look forward to: a lifetime of pots and plates by the fireplace, mortar and pestle under a tree, wood and water pot on the wayside and a child on my back? Is this all Chauta has in store for me? Chiphetsa says women should no longer sing under the shadows of the trees overhanging the pounding place. They should no longer speak from the dust storms of their own sweepings in the backyards of men's compounds... They should emerge, stand and shout from the men's enclaves of the sitting room, boardroom, classroom, pulpit, marketplace and street corner[202]...

Mwali's speech is very articulate. It describes the comments Chiphetsa makes on traditional duties women do, and the sanctioning Chauta, the female God, made on

[201] *Sister!* p.3
[202] *Sister!* p. 11

women's behalf. She thinks the duties are monotonous and Chauta's approval limiting. In lyrical poetry, she reiterates Chiphetsa's description of trees that provide shades for the pounding place, and dust created by women's sweeping, as symbolic of men's authority over women. In its place, Chiphetsa told her, women should live their lives even in 'men's enclaves' of comfort, economics, and lifestyle. Mixed with this eloquence, Mwali illustrates the women's entrapment by means of a circle that she marks on the ground with a piece of charcoal. She says:

> It's like this circle here... Here is the cage around me. When I am inside, I am confined, I cannot get out. I cannot even see the outside world. When I step outside the circle... I seem to look inside at myself and still I can't see or find myself[203]...

Mwali's presentation of what Chiphetsa tells her about womanhood is impressive. It carries, above all, a critique of patriarchal tendencies and subjugation of women by men in societies. While the illustration she makes, using a circle, symbolised men's rule over spaces women occupy, it could have been more exciting if it came from her own local examples, other than those presented to her by Chiphetsa. Consequently, Mwali's argument lacks conviction. The question that this (re)presentation raises is that of endeavours gender activists make to empower women, especially those in rural areas. What type of communication should be used so that the targets for empowerment understand the debates in their own contexts?

The other debate raised in the speech is about gods. While this is not the right space to discuss it, the mention of Chauta, the female god, raises issues of cultural beliefs. By bringing in the gods, observes Victor Dugga on Soyinka and Osofisan, the writer places them for critical debate in which 'heroes are those who stand with the downtrodden...The myths that were valid and respected in the former have been

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[203] *Sister!* p. 12

jettisoned or remodeled to the relevance of the present'[204]. Chauta, therefore, according to Mwali, sanctioned women's oppression. Feminism as a movement, has decided to tear down all the beliefs created by men for women's enslavement. Chiphetsa's eloquence makes that point, through Mwali.

When Namagetsi returns, she tries to make Mwali see the importance of beads and tattoos, such as the ones Namagetsi herself wears on her body. She says:

> At your age you should have a konde tattoo on your face. How are you going to attract the Mchanda's to you?
> ... I know beads and tattoos talk the same language. Much as they beautify us, they are also telling the men around: look at me... When you're married you can continue using the same bead language. With them you can say no, not tonight or it's alright, darling. During periods you can hang your beads above the sleeping place, spread your mat elsewhere and Mchanda knows he shouldn't touch you, for a few days at least.[205]

Mwali is stuck in between forces that intend to win her over. Namagetsi states what she knows about traditions. She reveals the functions of certain types of beads and how they are used as part of the communication system in relationships between men and women. In here is a revelation for possibilities of subversion against men's over-lordship. The beads, as described by Namagetsi, can be used in such a way that men appreciate women's points of view. Chimombo turns his knowledge of the beads into an argument against those who dismiss such traditional communication systems without a full knowledge of their importance.

While the two sisters are conversing, Mwali receives a letter from Chiphetsa saying that she cannot come because of a sudden invitation to a Women's Conference. Mwali's plans of escaping the *dzoma* come to an abrupt stop. The *thobwa* –sweet

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[204] see Victor Dugga (2003), *Creolisation of Yoruba theatre*, p. 113
[205] *Sister!* p. 14 -15

brew - she prepares for the sister has to be given to the counselor who initiates her into womanhood. Namagetsi thinks:

> You have another lesson little sister. We can only liberate ourselves by accepting the beads and tattoos as part of our womanhood. We can only liberate ourselves by using the same beads and tattoos as weapons to fight our slavery.
> ...The difference is this: we're stringing human beads. Every bead has a circle in the centre, every woman is a bead with a hole in the centre. You and I are beaded circles... We join hands with the woman from the next door...
> ...And beyond the next village. Once we bead all women we liberate all womankind. The whole world joined by beads in a universal bond of womanhood[206]...

The concept of women solidarity Namagetsi gives is interesting. It starts with the two sisters and the environment they live in. She suggests that the two should firstly accept objects of their life such as beads and tattoos, and use them as tools for liberation. With that premise, they join other women in the next village, who will also have used the understanding of themselves through their own 'beads and tattoos' for liberation. Joining hands with women around the world, each group with an understanding of what happens in their society, will ensure liberation for all women. At the centre of the solidarity is the usage of their own 'beads and tattoos'.

There is a subtle acceptance of the need for women's liberation through solidarity that Namagetsi suggests. At the same time, she also rejects solidarity that comes from without. The emphasis she makes about using 'their own beads and tattoos' suggests waging a liberation atruggle, starting from within the traditions.

The play closes with a variation of the song that we heard Namagetsi sing at the opening. Mwali uses the form but changes the content:

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[206] *Sister!* p. 27 - 8

Mwamuna upita mnjiramo	Man going down the path
Ndakana, ih! Ndakana, ih!	I refuse ih! I refuse ih!
Ngati ufuna nkandawu!	If you want the bead!
Ndakana ih! Ndakana ih! [207]	I refuse ih! I refuse ih!

And Namagetsi adds:

Ngati ufuna mphiniyi	If you want my beautiful scarification
Ndakana, ih! Ndakana ih![208]	I refuse ih! I refuse ih!

Sister Sister's strength lies in the discussion of traditional customs and the way they relate to women, especially those in the rural areas. Its stylistic beauty lies in the poetry that emerges from below the prose. A woman is either 'a bead with a hole at the centre'[209], or a tattooed wonder of Africa'[210]. To be liberated, women are expected to thread together, starting with the sisters themselves, connecting to the women in the next village, and the next, and the next. Such imagery, provocative in essence, but using a known visual form: *a beaded thread*, gives the play delightful images to watch and listen to. It is radical in so far as it responds to the type of women's liberation which does not take into account the varied nature of the cultures women come from[211]. While the suggestion to understand and accept their contexts before joining others has been made elsewhere, the use of 'beads and tattoos' as an image of 'locality' is very illuminating about how much culture is taken for granted by many feminist critics, who impose understanding from either academic or metropolitan thinking as yardstick of liberation for all women.

The other strength lies in the use of songs. Besides those that accompany pounding, the chameleon's song is injected with new meaning in the debate of women

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[207] *Sister!* p. 28
[208] ibid.
[209] ibid.
[210] *Sister!* p.13
[211] see Chandra Mohanty (1995), "Under western eyes"

empowerment. Namagetsi uses it to mock her sister whom she accuses of attempting to run away from initiation. The response Mwali gives is captivating, as can be seen from the following exchange:

> **Namagetsi**: Yes, go away, and leave me to look after mother and father in their old age. You're like the chameleon in the song abandoning the village to go live somewhere else...
>
> **Mwali**: The chameleon had seen the evils of the village. His sons and daughters were dying left, right and centre under his nose...
>
> **Namagetsi**: None of your relatives is dead.
>
> **Mwali:** The women are as good as dead, if they don't realize that the men are killing them mentally, crippling them psychologically and deforming them physically[212]...

Mwali argues that women who are oppressed are as good as dead. Their lives are dependent on some human beings other than themselves. In a similar manner to the chameleon that had realized the death toll of its family, Mwali has also noticed the death of women and is prepared to leave the village for the city where she will have a new lease of life. Mwali implicitly rejects Namagetsi's moral line of thinking when she threatens Mwali with the accepted moral belief that looking after father and mother should not be contravened, even if it is at the expense of one's growth.

At the level of the play's structure, Chimombo chooses to use a dramatic style in which characters thoroughly discuss the issues without building up emotions, except on two occasions when he wants to make a statement. He makes the women threaten each other with utensils of their traditional chores as weapons. What can be read from it is a suggestion of a more practical war that starts from the local environment, with a discourse that emanates from the local women themselves.

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[212] *Sister!* p 7-8

Another important thing is the mention of Chiphetsa, the urban liberated and highly educated sister. Her failure to come to the village to save Mwali foils Mwali's plans because of the former's international commitments. Having lost hope, Mwali finally succumbs to Namagetsi's pressure to attend initiation. How close are the urban sisters to real issues facing rural women, in their preaching of women empowerment, Chimombo asks?

Another debate Chimombo raises about gender is women's agency for their own oppression. What social power, for example, does Namagetsi gain in her society by being a custodian of traditions that seem to favour and give most power to men? Would it be right then to say that only men are instruments of women's oppression, or that there are some women in the society who gain by supporting the oppressive traditions? Tsitsi Dangarembga, in *Nervous Conditions*, makes Mayi Guru support Baba Mukuru's oppressive views against Tambudzai and Nyasha. Is Chimombo, like Dangarembga, suggesting that some women can choose not to take the path of women's liberation? Or is women's liberation only for the young?

At the level of issues, Chimombo provokes questions about traditional customs and the relationship between men and women in the Mang'anja – Nyanja society, and by extension, Malawian society. As in other gender centred works such as Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*, Mariamma Ba's *So Long A Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Ayeeta Wangusa's *Memoirs Of A Mother*, there is always one woman character who follows tradition, while the other questions it, resulting in the latter winning the debate. With *Sister Sister,* however, it is

different. The defender of traditions wins the debate. Could this be Chimombo calling for an informed discussion before any tradition is castigated? While many gender equality plays and narratives are propagandistic, *Sister Sister* balanced the arguments for all to see before coming down on the traditional side. The question that needs asking might probably be, how does Chimombo's treatment of modernity versus traditions in *Sister! Sister!* compare to Wole Soyinka's in *The Lion and the Jewel*?

Both Soyinka and Chimombo have characters that defend African tradition. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Sidi is very articulate as regards issues of tradition, as exemplified in her exchange with Lakunle over bride price and civilization:

> **Sidi:** ... I've told you, and I say it again
> I shall marry you today, next week
> Or any other day you name.
> But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have
> The full bride price. Will you make me
> A laughing stock? Well, do as you please.
> But Sidi will not make herself
> A cheap bowl for the village spit.
>
> **Lakunle**: On my head let fall their scorn.
>
> **Sidi**: They will say I was no virgin
> That I was forced to sell my shame
> And marry you without a price.
>
> **Lakunle:** Ignorant girl, can you not understand?
> To pay the price would be
> To buy a heifer off the market stall.
> You'd be my chattel, my mere property.
> No Sidi (Very tenderly.)
> When we are wed, you shall not walk or sit
> Tethered, as it were, to my dirtied heels.
> Together we shall sit at table... and eat
> Not with fingers, but with knives
> And forks, and breakable plates
> Like civilized beings.[213]

[213] see Wole Soyinka's "The Lion and the Jewel", in *Wole Soyinka: Collected Plays 2* p. 8 -9

Sidi brings out her knowledge about the importance of a bride price. To her, she would be considered an outcast if she were to be married without bride price. Lakunle thinks such traditions are as a result of ignorance. To him Sidi is ignorant, just like all those she speaks for. Lakunle thinks bride price is not helpful to women in the modern societies he has known and been told about. In civilized societies, women are not bought, and are companions not slaves. They equally deserve the civilized ways.

Similarly, in Chimombo's *Sister! Sister!* the exchange between Mwali and Namagetsi over the place of women in Malawian society raises issues of tradition in a comparable fashion as seen in Mwali's speech:

> Is this all I have to look forward to: a lifetime of pots and plates by the fireplace, mortar and pestle under a tree, wood and water pot on the wayside and a child on my back? Is this all Chauta has in store for me? Chiphetsa says women should no longer sing under the shadows of the trees overhanging the pounding place. They should no longer speak from the dust storms of their own sweepings in the backyards of men's compounds[214]...
>
> It's like this circle here... Here is the cage around me. When I am inside, I am confined, I cannot get out. I cannot even see the outside world. When I step outside the circle... I seem to look inside at myself and still I can't see or find myself[215]...
>
> They should emerge, stand and shout from the men's enclaves of the sitting room, boardroom, classroom, pulpit, marketplace and street corner[216]...

Namagetsi responds in this way:

> You have another lesson little sister. We can only liberate ourselves by accepting the beads and tattoos as part of our womanhood. We can only liberate ourselves by using the same beads and tattoos as weapons to fight our slavery.
> ...The difference is this: we're stringing human beads. Every bead has a circle in the centre, every woman is a bead with a hole in the centre.

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[214] *Sister!* p. 11
[215] *Sister!* p. 12
[216] *Sister!* p. 27 -8

> You and I are beaded circles... We join hands with the woman from the next door...[217]
> ...And beyond the next village. Once we bead all women we liberate all womankind. The whole world joined by beads in a universal bond of womanhood...[218]

Mwali's characterization, just like Lakunle's, defends the so called modern ways. They problematise traditional practices, and suggest modern western ways as more applicable and in tune with the times. Their difference lies in the way the playwrights present them. Lakunle proposes ways that are seen as strange in Ilujinle. The villagers view him as a confused clown. This is attested to by even the way he speaks his English. The idea of memorizing bombastic words from an English dictionary suggests that he might not have even been to England. His ill-fitting and unironed clothes add to the clowning picture. Chimombo, on the other hand, presents Mwali as a serious character. What she raises, though informed by Chiphetsa, the college educated sister, is no laughing matter. Her point is that Malawian women are forced to survive 'under the shadows of men'. Mwali's problematisation of patriarchal tendencies in Malawian society is plausible. Both *Sister Sister* and *The Lion and the Jewel* end with the triumph of tradition over modernity. Both plays suggest that African tradition should be well understood before they are thrown away. What is different, however, is that Soyinka shows ways in which African traditions can also be manipulated by the so-called custodians of culture. Bale Baroka's triumph in the rivalry between him and Lakunle over Sidi exposes the fact that Baroka's so-called traditional custodianship is open to abuse for selfish ends. Baroka does not win Sidi's hand in marriage only because he subscribes to the traditional beliefs, but because he also tricks Sidi into sleeping with him to lay his claim. Soyinka's problematisation can therefore be contrasted with Chimombo's. In *Sister! Sister!*, traditions are the

[217] ibid.
[218] ibid.

starting point for liberation. The weaknesses that Mwali raises about Malawian traditions are all erased when in the end she agrees to go and be initiated at the *dzoma*, after Chiphetsa has disappointed her. While Chimombo plausibly points to where liberation should start, he could have also conceded to the weaknesses of some Malawian traditions.

4.5 CONCLUSION: EDUCATION FOR GIRLS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER IN UNIVERSITY THEATRE OF THE 1990s

This chapter has, focusing on the 1990s, made a number of points. Starting off by pointing out the central issues as democratisation of Malawi, education for girls, human rights, poverty alleviation, and HIV/AIDS, the analysis of the three plays attempts to show how the issues are reflected. Using documentary style, Kerr and Cast highlight the plight of people displaced by war in *Refugees*. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, they create a story about a woman who loses her whole family to wars. In *Alamu Mwandibvula*, the audience is drawn to consider issues of widow-dispossession and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Using Chichewa, the play is created to communicate to Malawian communities about problems that bedevil it. Important to note is also the presence of many characters, which, in message orientated plays, creates opportunities for community involvement. In addition, the 'direct talk' and uninhibited use of language, typical of HIV/AIDS campaigns, problematically hopes to break the traditional restrictions by openly discussing 'sex' in public. Steve Chimombo takes up the discussion about women in Malawian society by writing *Sister Sister*. Through two sisters, he argues about women's liberation in the context of Malawian traditions. Unlike many gender narratives in which traditional African life is chastised, Chimombo proposes, through Namagetsi, a liberation that starts with women who accept their own local cultural setting before

spreading out to join other women. Finally, unlike the chapters on University Theatre in the 1970s and 1980s which focused on the oppressive policies Banda used, this chapter paid attention to various issues of Malawian society. It, however, leaves out shortcomings of democratization, which comes under focus in the next chapter, using Lance Ngulube's *Tippex*.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNIVERSITY THEATRE: 2000 TO 2002

5.1 INTRODUCTION:

A number of notable socio-political and economic factors impacted on University Theatre produced in the period between 2000 and 2002. A brief report of some notable events will help create a context in which drama was produced.

5.1.1 POLITICS

Bakili Muluzi and the United Democratic Front (UDF) had completed a five-year term in 1999. The second elections saw him and his party winning again, beginning a second term of office. The defeated Malawi Congress Party (MCP) went to the High Court to contest the election results, but their accusations of vote rigging by the UDF were dismissed. Within the UDF itself, internal differences saw founding member Brown Mpinganjira break off from the party. Claiming that Muluzi was planning to amend the constitution to allow himself to run for a third term, Mpinganjira formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with Peter Chupa, another Member of Parliament who had left the UDF. NDA has since disbanded. James Makhumula, Treasurer General of UDF, was expelled from the party and he eventually joined the secessionist members[219]. Makhumula's bus company was the major source of funding for the UDF's campaign between 1992 and 1994. Makhumula has since died. The Third Term Bill, which was at the centre of all the controversy, was rejected by Parliament. In the following general elections, the UDF unwittingly took itself out of power by electing economist Bingu wa Mutharika to run as its presidential candidate. Mutharika has since dumped the UDF and formed a new party, the Democratic

[219] see internet published report, *Malawi Alert* 2002

Progressive Party (DPP), to the chagrin of the UDF which started to push for an impeachment to remove him from the position of State President.

As regards media, many newspapers including *The Daily Times, Malawi News, The Nation, Nation Weekend, Chronicle, Enquirer, UDF News*, and *The Advertiser* operated in the country. Since democratization in 1994, a fair amount of media freedom was enjoyed, as compared to Banda's rule[220]. However, despite this evidence of diversity, journalists were still at risk. According to reports from the regional Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Dumbo Lemani, as Minister Responsible for Presidential Affairs, grabbed newspaper columnist and cartoonist, Deguzzman Kaminjolo, by the neck before interrogating the journalist about the 'bad reports he allegedly wrote about the party'[221]. Dumbo Lemani has since died. In another incident, Daniel Nyirenda, the *Nation* Newspaper journalist, was beaten up by Young Democrats, a group of paid vigilantes for the UDF, on a similar accusation as Kaminjolo's[222]. After a conference of newspaper editors in Blantyre meant to discuss issues of violence against journalists, participants were signatory to a memorandum which asked the President to condemn the brutality. According to a *MISA* report, the President never replied. He was later quoted by *The Nation,* giving a stern warning to journalists with a question 'what agenda do you have in your writing?'

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[220] see Kanyongolo, Patel and chirwa op. cit
[221] see internet published report by MISA / IFEX, July 4 1997
[222] see internet published report by IMC Global, July 19, 2003

5.1.2 DEPARTMENT OF FINE AND PERFORMING ARTS[223]

Performances at Chancellor College mostly came from class sessions in the Department of Fine and Performing Arts. Joe Chimwenje's productions included *The Death of an Anarchist* (Dario Fo), *Esu and The Vagabond Minstrels* (Femi Osofisan), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (Ola Rotimi), and the *Mad King Beggar* (Roberts). Linje Manyozo, inspired by the writing skills he attained as an apprentice at the Story Workshop, wrote and produced *Something Is Wrong*, *Judas Iskariot*, and *Mkati Mwa Malaya (Inside the shirt)*. Dzuka Publishers of Blantyre published two of Manyozo's plays in a collection titled *Judas Iskariot*.

Since joining the Department in June 2000, I have adapted Steve Chimombo's folktale novella, *Child of Clay*, into a musical under the title, *Chamdothe, Child Of Clay*, produced Wole Soyinka's *Trials of Brother Jero*, Du Chisiza's *Beyond the Barricades*, and edited a collection of contemporary Malawian plays under the title, *Beyond the Barricades*, borrowed from Chisiza's play title. The contributing playwrights included Getrude Webster Kamkwatira, Smith Likongwe, Innocent Komwa, the late Du Chisiza Jr., and myself. The collection aimed at filling a twenty-six year gap since James Gibbs edited *Nine Malawian plays*, published by Popular Publications in 1976.

Student productions at the College included Du Chisiza Jr's. *Pumashakile, Educating Mwalimu*, Pat Amadu Maddy's *Until Further Notice*, and *Yon Kon*, Soyinka's

[223] In terms of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts (FPA), Chris Kamlongera went on an unpaid leave to head the Communications Unit at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) office in Harare in 1997. He left Joe Chimwenje, who recruited Linje Manyozo, a Staff Associate, to keep the drama programme going. Manyozo has since been promoted to Lecturer after acquiring a Master's Degree. Manyozo is currently in the final stages of his Ph.D. at La Trobe University in Australia.

Madmen and Specialists, Linje Manyozo's *Something is Wrong,* the present writer's, *Wrong Day,* Ngugi's *This Time Tommorrow,* James Ng'ombe's *Banana Tree,* and Farid Kamil's *Interrogation.*

During the same period, two plays were performed in Blantyre and Lilongwe. The first was Lance Ngulube's *Tippex,* performed by Chancellor College Drama Department, sponsored by The British Council. At Chancellor College, the play was acted out in the Little Theatre to a paying and invited audience. In Blantyre, it was shown to journalists, government ministers and members of the diplomatic corps at a media conference. The following performance was staged at the British Council in Lilongwe, attended by amongst many, Sam Mpasu, who was then Speaker of Parliament. The cast included staff members Joe Chimwenje, Stella Hauya and myself, in addition to students Naomi Bandawe and Alexander Banda.

The Nation Newspaper's review of the Blantyre performance celebrated the exposure of the harassment that journalists undergo in Malawi[224], and the *Daily Times* thought the play was a model performance that needs to be shown to drama groups around the country[225]. *WASI Writer* described the script as loosely structured, and that it was saved by experienced performers[226]. Veteran comedian John Nyanga of Izeki ndi Jakobo thought at seventy minutes, the play was short because it left a number of issues unresolved[227].

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[224] See *Nation* Newspaper, 19/08/2002
[225] see the *Daily Times*, 16/08/2002
[226] see WASI Writer, Sept – Dec. 2002
[227] In conversation with John Nyanga after the performance at Mount Soche Hotel on 12/08/2002

Following *Tippex*, a production of Steve Chimombo's S*ister Sister* was staged at the French Cultural Centre by a fourth year drama student, Innocent Komwa, sponsored by WASI Publications. It was after the performance that some of the lines in the play, described as gender insensitive to women, such as 'a woman is a bead with a hole in the centre', were suppressed[228]. Other smaller student groups included College Ensemble Theatre (CET) ran by Chancy Mauluka, Limbika Maliwichi, Edith Shame, Dennis Chimenya, and Khanyiwe Shaba. Mesho Drama, led by Khwesi Msusa and Victor Gama, devised comedies about lives of students, in their relationships with each other and staff members.

Amongst the college student dramatists was Khanyiwe Shaba who came from the Faculty of Science. A talented and committed actress, she was highly commended by critics for the way she executed roles such as Namagetsi, alongside Fiskani Lungu, in Komwa's production of S*ister Sister*.

Between 2000 and 2002, the Department has also had Theatre for Development field trips for students. Two visits have since been undertaken. In August 2002, thirty-seven second year students went, under the supervision of Joe Chimwenje and myself, to Chinyama Group Village in Mulanje, where they worked with eleven villages on the theme 'Voices of Common Villagers In NGO Development Programmes'. This resulted in eleven improvised plays performed by the villagers and the students. The main finding was that top-down approaches were still being used by development agents including NGOs. Common villagers were still being left out of the processes. Another group, overseen by Linje Manyozo, went to Tom Allan Village near Zomba

[228] see *WASI* Writer, Sept – Dec. 2002

to witness the procedure of village trials by Traditional Chief Tom Allan, with an intention of improvising a play on the traditional justice system. The play never materialized as Manyozo had to go away for his Ph.D. studies in Australia. Furthermore, staff members ran participatory theatre workshops for non-governmental organizations such as Project HOPE, AFRICARE, Umoyo Network, Action Aid, and the newly formed National Theatre Association of Malawi (NTAM), an umbrella body for popular drama groups. The workshops focused on skills training in directing, playwriting, community arts administration, and participatory workshop facilitation.

David Kerr returned to the University of Malawi in 2002 on a two-year contract from King Alfred's College. Since his arrival, he has directed *The Monster Within, Scapegoats* and *Murdering the Soul*. Kerr has since taken up a post at the University of Botswana as Professor of Media. An international symposium on 'Theatre and the Nation in Africa' was co-organised by the Department of Fine and Performing Arts and the Centre for African Literature and Languages of Bayreuth University. It was a continuation of Eckhard Breitinger's postgraduate series of African Theatre conferences which started in Germany in 1999. Sponsored by Deutscher Akamemischer Austauch Dienst (DAAD), the conference attracted participants from Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Cameroon, Germany, and Malawi.

One of the highlights of the conference was a presentation by McBrain Ntolera, Shaibu Twaya and a group of musicians and dancers, who spoke about and performed Manganje, an initiation dance of the Yao people. Shaibu is a Ngaliba - boys' circumcision 'surgeon' and counselor - in his Yao community, while Ntolera is a

community theatre facilitator and performer with the Women's Rights and Lobby Group of Zomba. Their workshop focused on Manganje's dance steps, songs, and music, following it with performances, in which all the conference participants took part. Mtolera has since been recruited by the Malawi Prison Service as a Participatory Theatre Communicator in its Public Relations Office.

Having briefly looked at selected events in Malawian Socio-Politics and Drama at Chancellor College, in the period between 2000 and 2002, an analysis of Lance Ngulube's *Tippex* follows. Ngulube is featured for the third time in this study because of the provocative plays he wrote for University Theatre. I explore *Tippex* against the background of the effects of democratization and multi-party politics on Malawian society. It should be noted that between 1977 and 2002, Ngulube had become a radio drama scriptwriter and renowned journalist. By the time of writing, Ngulube had just left the position of Chairperson for the National Chapter for the Media Institute of Southern Africa (NAMISA).

5.2 TIPPEX By Lance Ngulube

The play is set in an imaginary country called Mandasi or Fat Cakes, four years after the end of the dictatorial rule of 'Professor Pendama'. The media, which had hoped for freer working conditions under the new government, finds itself restricted by the new political bosses.

Tippex is about the controversy that follows the publication of an article by a renegade journalist, Simpson Magaleta, in the *Daily Bullet* which Hon. Gwedeza owns. The article exposes Gwedeza, who is also a government minister. The article claims that

Gwedeza had cheated shareholders in his personal business by 'float(ing) shares without informing the shareholders in order to raise money for his gin-distilling company'. Angered by the article, he instructs the Editor-in-Chief, Felistas Mumvetsetsa, to discipline the responsible journalist, Simpson Magalaleta. Mumvetsetsa instructs Magaleta to write an apology, and Magaleta refuses just when Gwedeza comes into the office, followed by a loyal journalist, Benedicto. Told about Magaleta's refusal, and Benedicto's support of Magaleta's position, Gwedeza plans to send Magaleta to Afghanistan which he refuses.

The play opens with Bernadette, Benedicto's wife and a secretary to Minister Gwedeza, waiting for her husband to come home, to celebrate a good day at her office. For organizing the best dry cleaner to wash his suit, on which drunken journalists had spilled red wine at a press conference, the Minister rewards her with a bottle of red wine. However, Benedicto enters in a bad mood after a hard day's work. Undaunted, Bernadette tells him the good news that:

> Honourable Gwedeza was so impressed with his new clean white suit... that he assured me that you are next in line for promotion. He intends to make you, my darling, the new sub-editor of 'The Daily Bullet'.[229]

Surprised, Benedicto enquires about previous plans to promote Simpson, and Bernadette tells him that she thinks 'they have other plans for Simpson!'[230]

The way Benedicto is promoted sounds dubious. The Minister, who has been impressed with the Secretary's performance, promotes the husband instead. Being the minister's secretary, however, does not mean that the wife is in complete agreement with everything that her boss does. She has observed the way news is being written by

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[229] Lance Ngulube's *Tippex*, p. 5
[230] ibid.

journalists including her husband, with the exception of Simpson, that it tows the government and ruling party's official line. Benedicto, aware of power politics, is not ready to join. He knows his job is at risk, as indicated in the following exchange:

> **Benedicto**: Listen for the umpteenth time. My boss loves to read the news. In the same way that she loves to take on major national assignments herself...
>
> **Bernadette**: ... It can't be normal for some super human person to write, report, edit and then broadcast the very same piece of news...
>
> **Benedicto**: We report and mirror the national truth. The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth[231]...

Benedicto's response to the wife's criticism reveals how safe he plays, besides his awareness about problems pointed out. He sounds almost like a stalwart who perpetrates lies, even though he knows the truth, to save his job. The fear he has as a journalist mocks the claim of free media and press in Mandasi, and this is what Bernadette challenges him to accept. She extends the attack to include Ms. Mumvetsesa, who 'writes, edits, and reads the news'. When Benedicto wants to turn on the television for news read by Mumvetsetsa, Bernadette says:

> Why do you bother? There is never anything new on YOUR news bulletin. The same story and always read by the same person, that prima donna – what's her name – Felistas – if you ask me she is just obsessed with the sound of her own voice[232]...

The emphasis on the personal qualities of Mumvetsetsa such as being a 'prima donna', and the obsession 'with the sound of her own voice' is more personal than business-like. As a secretary of the minister, Bernadette has sensed how her boss relates to people, including Mumvetsetsa. For example, after the minister finds out about Simpson's article in the *Daily Bullet*, he calls Felistas, and they have the following exchange:

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[231] *Tippex*, p. 2
[232] ibid.

Felistas: What exactly is the problem, sir? And how can I be of assistance to you?

Gwedeza: You will very soon know...

Felistas: I am at your disposal Honorable Minister. Do I come over to your office, the executive club, your residence...?

Gwedeza: Actually I am coming over to your office right now.

Felistas: (Flirtatious) Would that be proper sir? I mean the employees might feel intimidated by your presence? Worse still we might give away our little game.

Gwedeza: Who cares?...

Felistas: Sir, I strongly propose that we meet at any of the places we usually use as our rendezvous[233]...

Business, it appears, is conducted, not only at a professional level, but at a personal level as well. The Editor-in-Chief is a mistress to the Minister. Ms. Mumvetsetsa's characterization is portrayed in the following exchange between her and Simpson:

Felistas: Simpson, you will have to learn the meaning of the word 'superiority'. Do you want us to start wearing name tags that clearly spell out our titles?

Simpson: That would be fascinating for those of you who drive 4 by 4s. But what happens to people like me? People without titles?

Felistas:... Why should I bother about people like you who are never grateful to heroes of the new dispensation? Heroes who freed you from the yoke of servitude under your fellow black man for 50 years.[234]

While she boasts about the results of being a loyalist to 'the heroes of the new dispensation', her intimidating remarks provoke Magaleta's spite for her, a fact that forces her to spell out the principles she follows to achieve her position. Instead of being silenced, Magaleta continues speaking and says that 'Felly, this idiom makes

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[233] *Tippex*, p. 7
[234] *Tippex*, p. 13

for a little laughter – a happy working day and sound marital relationships'[235]... In the remark, Magaleta further despises Mumvetsetsa for using such means as a way of rising to the top. Nonetheless, people like her can be very influential. When she fails to get the apology from Simpson, she uses another tactic, seen in this exchange in which Simpson's American education strongly comes through:

> **Felistas**: I promise I will smooth things over for you.
>
> **Simpson**: Man, I don't want no smoothing over – what is the problem Felly – my immediate boss, the managing editor, is cool with it. So why are you suddenly turning into a lump of jelly?
>
> **Felistas**: Because, young man, I am, ultimately, the editorial chief for television, radio and the newspaper. In short Simpson I AM THE MEDIA![236]

Could Simpson's critical criting be boosted by his American education? Making no effect on the confident Simpson, Felistas declares: "I AM THE MEDIA". Though Simpson is adamant, the base of her influence and power is clear. This demonstrates that for women like her, it is not how much they know that gives them power to control, but the powerful politicians they are loyal to, both as employees and mistresses.

On the other hand, while it is established that Simpson is an independent journalist, he also enjoys political backing, revealed in the following exchange between Gwedeza and Felistas. Gwedeza says:

> Now, by tomorrow, I want this, this dirty minded reporter to vanish – poof – in a puff of smoke (snaps his fingers) Just like that!
>
> **Felistas**: Sir, I am your obedient servant.
>
> **Gwedeza**: Of course you are!
>
> **Felistas**: But...

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[235] ibid.
[236] *Tippex*, p. 15

Gwedeza: But what. (menacing) Is there a problem?

Felistas: Well, the journalist in question is Simpson Sir... You know, the nephew to the Hon. Minister of Returnees and Ghost Workers.

Gwedeza: Oh that hemp-smoking chap we rescued from exile in the United States?

Felistas: Exactly...

Gwedeza: I see we have a problem here. Simpson's uncle is not only a cabinet colleague but an esteemed drinking partner of mine. So, how do we justify his dismissal?[237]

The combination between 'Returnees' and 'Ghost Workers' is odd. What is clear though is that the welfare of returning exiles to Malawi after 1994 was dealt with between the Ministries of Foreign and Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Education was the one reputed for having 'ghost workers' on its payroll, defrauding the government of millions of Kwachas. Whatever the meaning of the Ministry Simpson's uncle heads, it is clear that Simpson could have owed the job to his uncle.

Simpson's family connection does not only place Gwedeza in a dilemma, it also points to ways in which jobs are being offered to family members. Simpson's background could have given him the courage to challenge Felistas and Gwedeza, knowing very well that he had the support of a minister. One other thing is that Felistas could be aware that people with backgrounds such as Simpson's can rise and take high positions. Simpson's family background gave him confidence to be critical of the Honorable Minister.

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[237] *Tippex*, p. 17

The other important character was Gwedeza himself. In the following exchange, he interrogates Simpson, asking: 'Achimwene –my brother - who pays your monthly salary? What political agenda do you have up your sleeves?'[238] Judgnig by the question, he seems to remind Simpson about who the paymaster was, to pressurize him into comformity. Secondly, he asks about Simpson's political allegiance. By that, he is suggesting that Simpson is working for ends different from what Gwedeza is pursuing: working for the opposition, while earning from Gwedeza, who is a minister in the government in power. The ending of this disagreement, which also concludes the play, is sending Simpson away as shown in the following exchange:

> **Felistas**: Sir, it is the Party's Spokesperson. He wants to know the progress made so far. Says the big fish in Afghanistan is waiting with open arms for this bright young spark of a journalist.
>
> **Simpson:** (Interjecting) Man, you can't make me go. I'm not going I tell you…
>
> **Gwedeza**: Hallo! Yes Mbuya (grandfather)… we are wrapping up the deal. Yah, the chap Simpson is showing signs of interest. Signature? Not a problem – we can obtain it – in fact he has already signed the contract (Simpson – gesture of disbelief) No, no he won't refuse your initial monetary offering of ONE MILLION KWACHA. In fact, he will be delighted[239]…

Conformity is meant to be achieved either through intimidation or corruption and both methods do not work on Simpson. The solution is sending Simpson away. The call that performs the trick is also noteworthy. A political colleague to Gwedeza, afraid that the bad publicity his partner received from Simpson's article could bring their dealing into disrepute, organizes Simpson's placement. The revealed connection between Gwedeza and the Party Spokesperson is very important to our understanding of how politics is used for personal gain in the new dispensation.

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[238] *Tippex*, p. 16
[239] *Tippex*, p. 19

When the play was first performed to journalists in the conference hall at Mount Soche Hotel in Blantyre, there was excitement all through. It was easily recognizable that the government had been shown in bad light, judging by the silence of the Information Minister, who was present. In addition to that, several women were identified as the model for Felistas. The performance of such a play, attended by government officials, and provoking no repercussions on the performers, meant two things. The first was that the Censorship Board had relaxed its rules to accommodate different opinions under multi-party democracy in Malawi. Secondly, the presence of the Director of the British Council, Richard Weyers, and members of the diplomatic corps could have silenced those who made noise when the government was criticized. It should be recognized that the British have had a good relationship with the UDF government. Some of the founding members of the party, such as Brown Mpinganjira, were offered jobs by the British Council after release from Banda's detention camps[240]. Furthermore, the Department for International Development (DFID) has been an important financier of food aid to Malawi in the Starter Pack and Targetted Input Produce (TIP) since 1999[241]. In addition, the media conference at which the play was performed was not only sponsored by the British Council, but its theme centered on governments and how they tended to silence media criticism. The excited reception of the performance was shattered a few months later when a journalist working for the *Nation* newspaper, Daniel Nyirenda, was beaten up and hospitalized for three weeks for 'writing bad reports about UDF'.[242]

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[240] see P. O'Malley, *Living Dangerously*
[241] see Kanyongolo, Patel, Chirwa op. cit
[242] see MISA / IFEX report op.cit

5.3 CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATISATION AND UNIVERSITY THEATRE AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

Basing the analysis on characterization alone, Ngulube's *Tippex* revealed relations of the media and the government in the new millennium. Through Benedicto, it was clearly shown how conformity was used by certain journalists to rise to higher positions. By towing the line of government and powerful personalities in society, they are assured of promotion. Simpson, on the other hand, revealed a complex personality of other journalists. While criticism by people like him was a welcome activity to the growth of society, their social connections exposed contradictions. The critical arguments of such journalists could have been sincere, or made to back other power-mongering personalities in an effort to discredit the government in power, for their own selfish ends. Mumvetsetsa's position, as a mistress and controller of the media, shows how patriarchal tendencies are further perpetrated in the face of women empowerment. Powerful male personalities either place their concubines in high positions, or make concubines of highly placed women, to pursue their personal goals. Instead of putting the women into high positions on merit, as should normally happen, they defeat the growth of deserving candidates. As for Gwedeza, his neo-dictatorial tendency is very clear. What, for example would be the difference between him, who was a Minister in a dispensation that is supposed to entertain freedom of speech and multi-party democracy, and those that belonged to the Banda era? Lance Ngulube's *Tippex* is an indication that the liberation that was promised during the change from one-party to multi-party rule is far from being achieved, as long as personalities such as Gwedeza are allowed to operate as they wish.

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE LIBRARY

From the above discussion of *Tippex*, it becomes clear that the minds of those who produced drama at the university were affected with the Malawian socio-political context of the early 2000s. The relationship of media and politics was just one of the issues in Malawi at the time. Corruption was another. For example, African University Day celebrations held at the Kamuzu College of Nursing, a constituent college of the University of Malawi, in May 2003, witnessed a drama presented by communication students from the Polytechnic, another constuent college of the University of Malawi. The play was a satire in which Parliament gave pieces of cakes to government ministries. To everyone's surprise, the responsible ministers sliced off half of the pieces they had received on behalf of the ministries for themselves before distributing the remainder to the ministries' development projects (personal experience 4/5/2003). The play was meant to present the issue to government through the Vice President and the Minister of Education, who graced the occasion. The criticism on politicians in *Tippex* therefore was just representative of many others that bothered the nation.

SECTION TWO

COMMERCIAL STAGE DRAMA IN MALAWI: 1980 - 2002

CHAPTER SIX

COMMERCIAL STAGE DRAMA IN MALAWI

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Having looked at University Theatre, the following three chapters including the present form the second section of the thesis and they deal with Commercial Stage Drama in Malawi. In the present chapter, I intend to briefly explore factors that led to the drama's birth and advancement. The examination will focus on the origins of drama groups, early interaction of its artists, and their educational levels. It will also look at the socio-politics of the early 1990s, production methods used, and the distribution of leadership roles. The study limits itself to Chichewa and English language drama groups that operate in Blantyre. Due to limited funding for the research, it leaves out others in the south, central, and northern regions that use the two languages, as well as Yao and Tumbuka. The exploration intends to provide a general overview of commercial stage drama, as preparation for the analysis of selected plays in Chapters seven and eight. We will use commentaries made by David Kerr, Chris Kamlongera, Joyce Kumpukwe, and Steve Chimombo. Their remarks will be complemented by in-depth interviews with some actors, directors, university lecturers, and the present writer's personal experience. The argument that this chapter wishes to make is that performance of popular theatre cannot be understood without considering the circumstances surrounding its production. The rationale is in line with similar assertions made by Ian Steadman and Karin Barber as already mentioned in the introductory chapter. The assessment starts with the birth of commercial drama in Chichewa and English.

6.2 CHICHEWA DRAMA GROUPS

According to Patience Gibbs, newspaper reports from the colonial times indicated that Chichewa dramatic performances had been produced in churches and schools as part of school variety concerts, which included traditional dances. In 'The British and the Start of Drama in Africa', Chris Kamlongera also chronicled that the colonial government's Jean's school used theatre to spread messages on good health and education in Malawi[243]. Since the target group for the messages and performances were mostly rural communities, there are possibilities that Chichewa, one of Malawi's commonly spoken languages, could have been used. In 1974, the Travelling Theatre invited Zomba Police Camp Primary School to stage a Chichewa play, *Kambale the Famous Boy*, at Chirunga Open-Air Theatre[244]. However, a key event that saw the birth of the present Commercial theatre movement took place in 1981.

The Travelling Theatre made a TFD field trip to Mbalachanda in northern Malawi, taking along Enoch Timpunza-Mvula's *Lizard's Tail.* The play, improvised in Chichewa with certain parts translated into Tumbuka, was titled *Mchira wa Mtondoori.* The play was staged alongside other improvisations including *Kumanya Mbanangwa* (*Knowledge is Freedom*), and *Nzeru Zayekha* (*Mr. Know It All*), which members of the Travelling Theatre created in collaboration with local participants[245].

The popularity of *Mchira wa Mtondoori* amongst people at Mbalachanda prompted the Travelling Theatre to translate it into Chichewa as *Mchira wa Buluzi* for performances in commercial venues such as Kudya Entertainment Centre, the French

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[243] see Kamlongera (1984), "The British and growth of drama in Africa", *BARAZA* Vol. 2

[244] see P. Gibbs 1980

[245] Kamlongera Ph.D. thesis and David Kerr "Theatre in Malawi" in *The Drama Review* 1987

Cultural Centre, and Lilongwe Community Centre[246]. According to Edge Kanyongolo, who acted in the play, the performers 'had to squeeze through packed crowds to enter the performance halls'. Kanyongolo remembers thinking at the time: 'so, one can also make a lot of money through drama?'[247]. *Mchira wa Buluzi* was later serialized for MBC radio, earning the group high newspaper commendations for the initiative[248]. It was this play, amongst several other factors, that prompted Charles Severe, then working for MBC's Education Broadcasting Unit, to think of forming a drama group which would produce Chichewa plays. In 1982, Kwathu Drama Group was born[249].

In Zomba, another development occurred within the same period. David Kerr remembers how, after a TFD trip to Mbatamira Farm, a group called Lonjezo was created by some of the workshop participants. However, instead of using drama as a communication tool in the way the Travelling Theatre had done, Lonjezo produced plays and performed for paying patrons in Zomba and Blantyre. Mbatamira Farm's Lonjezo and Severe's Kwathu, in addition to Umodzi, which was also formed in Blantyre, were the first to put on commercial productions in Chichewa.

6.3 ENGLISH DRAMA GROUPS

University Theatre, Association for Teaching English in Malawi (ATEM) Secondary School Drama Festivals, and radio drama created an environment to encourage the birth of commercial groups that used English as a medium. Productions created in these sectors became models for aspiring popular commercial producers. James Gibbs

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[246] Interview with David Kerr, August 2003.
[247] Interview with Edge Kanyongolo, August, 2003.
[248] Interview with Kerr
[249] See Steve Chimombo in *WASI* Writer, December 1992, p. 7

wrote about a fledgling drama company, Malimodzi, which staged guest performances at the University Festival in 1974. According to his report, Richard Chide, Emmanuel Mlaka, Space Katenga-Kaunda and McAnderton Chimbayo started the group after gaining acting experience through secondary school drama activities. Alan Cousins coordinated the company. Its repertoire came to include *Shaka Zulu*, *The Ology of Isms*, *The Refund*, and *How Much Land Does a Man Need*[250].

In the report just referred to, Gibbs also mentioned another amateur theatre company, Kwacha Cultural Centre Drama Group. He wrote:

> The Kwacha Cultural Centre Drama Group managed one performance of a one-act play before subsiding under the pressures of city life. Absenteeism, lateness, poor transport facilities, insufficient commitment, lack of talent, and a host of other problems vitiate the enthusiasm of any producer fool-hardy enough to attempt to mount a production in Blantyre-Limbe with a cast of working people. It is with tremendous enthusiasm, therefore, that one salutes the Malimodzi Drama Group.[251]

While Gibbs recorded his disappointment at Kwacha's failure, he noted a number of important issues about independent drama at the time. Firstly, he indicated that in addition to Malimodzi, there was another group which staged plays outside the university. Secondly, the company was made up of working people, signifying the existence of unsubsidized drama in the country. Thirdly, he listed factors that hindered the group's advancement. In raising problems that were faced by Kwacha, he, by extension, recognized problems that confronted independent drama groups in Malawi. Though Gibbs's report did not indicate whether Kwacha performed for paying audiences or not, he hinted on the group's independence, revealing the potential for commercial drama in Malawi.

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[250] In ed. J. Gibbs, (1976) *Theatre in Malawi 1970 – 76,* p. 13 - 14
[251] Gibbs 1976, p. 13

There is also evidence that Owen Mbilizi and Isaac Chirwa, former university students, formed an independent group. Mbilizi taught at Chichiri Secondary School after graduating from The Polytechnic in 1976, where he interacted with university dramatist Chris Kamlongera. Chirwa attended Chancellor College and wrote plays including *The Spear*. Soon after leaving the college, he joined the Christian Service Committee, and also published drama articles in the *Daily Times* newspaper as a freelance reporter. Chirwa and Mbilizi, along with actress Towera Chawinga, currently Mrs. Masiku, staged plays in Blantyre between 1978 and 1981. I remember, as a student and a member of the Drama Club at Chichiri, appearing in programmes which Mbilizi and his cast organized, showing plays such as *Chasing the Cockroach*, its sequel *Catch the Cockroach,* and Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. The group used venues such as Mount Soche Hotel, Chichiri Secondary School Hall, Soche Teachers' Training College, and the French Cultural Centre. Members of the general public patronized the hotel venue and the Cultural Centre, while pupils and student teachers attended the performances in the school halls.

Mbilizi's influence on commercial plays in English did not only come through his company's activities. His participation in ATEM Festivals, while teaching at Chichiri, also contributed a great deal. He adapted and staged Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* under the title *Crossed by Fate* in 1979, Euripides' *Medea* into *Chiwaleso* in 1980, and wrote *Daughters of Their Mothers* in 1981. The techniques of production which Mbilizi used were closely observed by members of the Drama Club including Augustine Lubani, Catherine Tikiwa, Ethel Soko, and Du Chisiza Jr[252].

[252] I was a student at Chichiri Secondary School and a member of the Chichiri Drama club at the time these activities took place between 1978 and 1982.

When Mbilizi left for the United Kingdom to do a BA (Hon.) degree in 1981, Chirwa and Lubani formed the Kuka Players. During its short-lived existence, its repertoire included some of Mbilizi's plays and Chirwa's *The Spear*[253]. The creation of independent groups such as Kwacha, Malimodzi, Kuka Players, and Mbilizi's theatrical participation inspired playwrights, actors and directors such as Du Chisiza Jr., for the commercial sector.

Chisiza wrote *The Deceased Attack* based on *Hamlet* in 1983. According to David Kerr, one of the judges for ATEM Drama Festival in 1983, the play was loudly applauded by audiences at the finals of the competition and turned out the overall winner[254]. When Chisiza formed Wakhumbata Workshop Theatre after leaving the Henry Henderson Institute Secondary School in 1983, he performed *Deceased Attack* as a commercial performance in Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu. It was, however, not only independent groups and personalities that influenced commercial drama. 'Cultural Afternoons', and Radio also contributed to the favourable artistic environment.

6.4 CULTURAL AFTERNOONS AND THE ASSOCIATION OF ARTISTS

The drama activities of the early 1980s made possible the formation of The Association of Artists. James Ng'ombe, an established dramatist and Director of Dzuka Publishers, collaborated with musician Isaac Mkukupha, radio drama writer Thonyi Gondwe, and Kwathu Drama Group's producer, Charles Severe, to form the Association. Its aim was to encourage the growth of performing arts in Malawi

[253] Interview with frank Mwase, 2003.
[254] Interview with Kerr

through organization of afternoon performances of drama and music, commonly referred to as 'Cultural Afternoons'. The most popular event that set it off was the staging of James Ng'ombe's *Not Sparing the Flock*, which he originally wrote as *Chilembwe the Martyr* in 1976. It was performed by a selection of individual dramatists at the French Cultural Centre on 2nd March, 1983[255].

The Association enjoyed a lot of success. It attracted members of institutions such as University music lecturer Mitch Strumpf, who staged a musical under the title *The Last Bus to Chilobwe*. Stella Marris Secondary School English and Art Teacher, Margaret Mbilizi, staged a student production of an extract from Kamlongera's *Chauta's Wrath* under the title *'Makewana – Mother of Children'*. In the five years of the Association's existence, drama was performed alongside music from bands such as Love Aquarius, Kalimba, Allan Namoko and Chimvu River Jazz Band. The popular venues used were the French Cultural Centre and Mount Soche Hotel[256]. However, by 1986, the Association was confronted with political difficulties.

According to the letter which Mike Nambote wrote to David Kerr, the Association was soon suspected of being a front for the ruling Malawi Congress Party to spy on the performing artists for subversion[257]. At the time, the government was sensitive to critics. The presence of Dzuka Publishing Company as a patron to the Association contributed to the mistrust. Dzuka was controlled by high profile MCP politicians such as John Tembo. By 1987, artists left to operate independently, and the Association was no longer functional[258].

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[255] see Kamlongera's Ph.D. thesis, p. 293, and Chimombo & Chimombo (1996) p. 142
[256] Interviews with Frank Mwase and Waliko Makhala, 2003.
[257] Nambote op. cit
[258] ibid.

Radio also contributed to the development of commercial stage drama in Malawi. Severe, who worked as a producer at Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), put on air selected scenes of plays by Kwathu Drama Group in his *Mid-Week Magazine*[259].

Another radio drama programme, *Theatre of the Air*, attracted scripts from young writers, and provided roles for stage actors such as Edge Kanyongolo, Ethel Soko, Vipsya Harawa, Towera Chawinga, Hetherwick Mwalwanda, Du Chisiza, Frank Mwase, and Waliko Makhala. In addition, winning plays from ATEM Festivals were broadcast in it. *Crossed by Fate* (1979), *Chiwaleso* (1980), and *Daughters of Their Mothers* (1981) were aired after winning the competition. Ethel Soko and late John Mathandalizwe, cast in lead roles for some of the plays, cherished the broadcasts as an acknowledgement of secondary school drama. According to Mwase, 'being allowed to take part in *Theatre of the Air,* alongside veteran actors such as Kanyongolo, Franklin Titani, Marvin Hanke, and Augustine Lubani, was very encouraging for a young and upcoming artist'[260] . Those who participated in radio drama and Cultural Afternoons became role models, inspiring the growth of the industry. How did the transition and change to multi-party politics affect commercial stage drama?

6.5 POLITICS AND POPULAR COMMERCIAL STAGE DRAMA

As observed under University Theatre, Banda's oppressive rule grew in intensity with passing time from the time Malawi gained independence in 1964 to around 1989. Though his tyranny was reported outside the country, political leaders of Europe and

[259] Interview with John Nyanga, 2003.
[260] Interview with Frank Mwase 2003

In another instance, a *Financial Post* editorial and an article written by the editors Jika Nkolokosa and Aladdin Osman, demanded, basing their argument 'on our natural right', to be allowed to describe the situation in Malawi because 'the public wants to know'. Likewise, the *Malawi Democrat* newspaper, published by exiles in Zambia, carried articles that exposed some of Banda's right hand men, such as Tembo, as holding chairmanship of up to thirteen companies. The *Democrat* was dropped at crossroads and other strategic places for picking by ordinary people in the urban areas.

Some journalists also openly criticized government policy. At a press conference about food-aid for Mozambican refugees in 1989, Janet Mbekeani challenged government spokesperson, Hetherwick Ntaba, to explain the alleged diversion of international food-aid meant for the displaced people to famine-stricken Malawians. At the time, donors had withheld financial aid, promising to release it when Banda's human rights record improved. Collective and individual courageous acts such as Lipenga's, Mbekeyani's, and the newspapers', showed that Banda was slowly losing his grip on Malawi.

In addition, the Malawi Catholic Bishop's open letter to President Banda, which was read throughout Catholic Churches in Malawi on 8th March 1992, became a decisive intervention in Malawian one-party politics. According to Patrick O'Malley, who participated in authoring the letter, the reading of it in Catholic churches around the country, and the resultant open protests against the government were unprecedented.

He wrote that "the day marked the watershed in the story of Malawi's transition to multiparty democracy"[263].

During this period of unrest, Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre staged plays such as *Barefoot in the Heart* which propagated removal of an evil system of colonial government. In the play, Reverend Woyera is detained during the last years of colonialism. During his stay in prison, he speaks with a prison warder about the reasons he was detained. Following his discussion, a mystical figure, Ngweru Wakumanya, made a speech to the audience about the evils of colonialism. The audience joined Ngweru in the singing and dancing of songs such as *Kundipondereza Ndakana* – I refuse to be suppressed. The timing of the play to the winds of change that blew in the early 1990s, and the open challenge Thom Chakufwa Chihana made to Banda, made the play relevant to the times.

Following *Barefoot*, the Banda government acted decisively by banning commercial groups from performing in schools. Writing in WASI Writer at the time, Chimombo noted that it became illegal for commercial drama groups to perform in educational institutions, and the state-run radio was instructed to stop advertising for performances of commercial drama. The 'banning order' was announced in the Malawi News of 16th – 22nd January 1993, and given as a public notice on 19th February, 1993[264]. Whether by coincidence or not, the French Cultural Centre also closed its two theatres to commercial performances[265].

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263 O'Malley, p. 151
264 see *WASI* Writer, 5. 2, 1994, p. 17
265 see Chimombo & Chimombo, 1996, p. 147

> father". You could see the discomfort in some MCP leaders seated next to him in the front...[269]

University Lecturer Joe Chimwenje thought Chisiza had compromised his values by joining the MCP, which he had publicly denounced through his multi-party plays[270].. Unfortunately for Chisiza, MCP lost the elections in 1994, and he left the party. Chimwenje's views that Chisiza was a compromised artist were therefore proved correct.

Another important event of the transition period concerned politics and a newly formed National Theatre Association in 1992. It brought together theatre groups with an aim of coordinating skills training, and adherence to copyright laws. John Nyanga, Eric Mabedi, and Du Chisiza were in the leadership. Bakili Muluzi, who had previously served as a Cabinet Minister and Secretary General of Malawi Congress Party under Banda between 1977 and 1980, became leader of the newly formed United Democratic Front. The popularity of drama in politics, after Chisiza's *Barefoot*, made advocates of multi-party democracy, such as Muluzi, interested in propaganda plays. According to Kamkwatira, it was alleged that Muluzi gave money to the three theatre leaders. As a result, ordinary members of the Association demanded a share. When the three denied any knowledge of the money, meetings stopped and the Association ceased to exist[271]. Having looked at the politics of transition, formal education amongst commercial actors and directors follows.

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[269] Interview with Ben Msuku, 2003
[270] Interview with Joe Chimwenje, 2003
[271] Interview with Gertrude Kamkwatira, 2003

6.6.1 EDUCATION AMONGST ACTORS, PLAYWRIGHTS AND DIRECTORS

Data collected at a UNESCO National Theatre Workshop held in Zomba between 17th and 21st February, 2003, provided insights into the education of commercial theatre artists and the methods they used in producing plays. The Workshop organizers invited thirty-four people from the three regions, aiming to attract seventeen women and seventeen men. Thirty-three, nineteen men and fourteen women, turned up. Their ages ranged from twenty to thirty, the youngest being two twenty year-old women, while two pairs of men and women aged thirty two were the oldest.

The educational attainment of the participants varied. The lowest qualification was Junior Certificate (JC), followed by Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE), while the highest was a Teacher's Training College Diploma. Other participants had short course diplomas in Journalism, and Restaurant Management. The JC and MSCE qualifications indicated that most of them had ended their educational careers at secondary school level. A closer examination revealed that three types of secondary institutions had been existing, namely Community Day Secondary School, Private Secondary School, and National Secondary School. Of the thirty three participants, twenty-four claimed to have attended national secondary schools, seven community day secondary schools, and two private secondary schools.

The point about educational background is an attempt to expose the fact that the quality of formal education had gone down after 1994, and that it affected, in some ways, methods used in producing plays. Most Community Day and Private Secondary Schools did not have access to the university trained teachers, as had been the case

before change of government. After 1994, most of such institutions recruited secondary school graduates, expected to teach secondary school subjects. At Chinyama Community Day in southern Malawi for example, some primary school teachers were promoted to teach at the Community Day Secondary school without any meaningful training to prepare them. The condoning of such actions by the Education Authorities resulted in poor quality education. It affected the readiness of the student for any kind of higher training that demanded competency in literacy and logic.

6.6.2 LOW EDUCATION AND DRAMA

Most directors and actors joined the drama field as the easier way to secure employment. White collar jobs required an MSCE certificate with 'passes with credit' in the subjects that comprise a mix of arts, humanities, social and pure sciences. Most of the artists had certificates with average passes. Popular commercial drama accommodated the holders of such qualifications, including those who only had Junior Certificate or those that had not gone higher than primary school. For example, Esther Msusa attended Providence Catholic Secondary School up to Form Two. On leaving school, she opted to join Upile Drama Group which used Chichewa, and not Wakhumbata which produced plays in English. In her words she said '*sindinakakwanitsa chizungu* – I would not have managed to perform using English language'[272]. It was a surprise to find a Providence alumna who was unable to communicate in English, given the school's reputation in Malawi. Another actress, Elina Namizinga, confessed that *Ine chachikulu ndi choti sukulu sindinapite nayo patali, ndiye ndinaona kuti ndi chinthu choti ndingachikwanitse* – I never went far

[272] Interview with Esther Msusa, 2003

with school, and I saw Drama as something that I could manage[273]. The low education levels and quality could be an explanation why most performances are dismissed by critics as unsatisfactory in aspects of narrative formation, and frivolous acting. The actor relies so much on the technical ability of the playwrights and directors. He/she contributes less to the creative process other than take instructions from the directors. The problem, however, is that the director or playwright himself might not be fully competent in the techniques of writing and production. The resulting product becomes deficient of many technical and creative aspects required in play productions.

Not all actors, directors and playwrights, however, chose to do drama because of poor education. Gertrude Kamkwatira, for example, went to Stella Marris Secondary School, and trained as a Secretary. Commercial Bank of Malawi initially employed her and then she resigned to work full-time for Wakhumbata. In conversation, she said she could not manage to do both at the same time. Other producer-directors had full-time jobs. Charles Mphoka of Kwathu Drama Group worked as a Field Officer with Blantyre Agricultural Development Division (ADD) and Eric Mabedi as a Programme Officer for the Council For The Handicapped. While this is the case, it should be borne in mind that the Kamkwatira, Mphoka, and Mabedi generation attended secondary school in the 1980s when the quality of Malawian secondary education was closely guarded by employing highly qualified teachers. Noticeable was the ability of that generation of artists in using both English and Chichewa in their performances, as opposed to most of those who joined in the 1990s. The new generation was comfortable with Chichewa and not very competent in the use of English.

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[273] Interview with Ellina Namizinga, 2003

6.7 PRODUCERS AND PRODUCTION OF PLAYS

The word 'producer' needs some explanation. It meant different things to different people in Malawi Commercial Drama. John Nyanga observed:

> *Ine zimene ndimadziwa ndi zoti ukalemba sewero, umamupatsa prodyusa, yemwe amawonetsetsa kuti sini ikuchitika nthawi yanji: mmamawa? ... Kodi nkhaniyi ndi zobvala izi ndi mmamawawo zikugwirizana? Olemba amakambirana ndi prodyusa. Pamene dairektala amakhala wotsiridza kuyiwona... Dairektala amadzifunsa kuti nthanoyi ikuyenda bwanji? Kodi zimene wanena prodyusa uja ndi zimene zikuchitika pa siteji zikugwirizana? Ndiye pamenepo dairektala amafunikanso kuti akhale ndi luso lodziwa kulemba sewero. Akhalenso ndi luso loti atha kuphunzitsa sewero. Iye akhale odziwa kwambiri zinthu zosiyana-siyana zokhudza kapangidwe ka masewero.*
>
> What I know is that when you write a play, you give it to the producer, who checks to see when the scenes are happening, the time they happen, whether it is morning. What about the clothes, do they fit the time that is proposed? That's the writer discussing with the producer. On the other hand, the director's job is final... The director asks how the story is progressing, in the context of what the producer said, to check if there is unity of elements... So, a director is also supposed to know how to write, and produce. He should be versatile[274]...

To Nyanga, a producer occupies a very important place in production. He/she is a Script Editor who discusses the play with the writer in order to test its credibility, suggesting areas for improvement, before handing it over to the director. Nyanga defines 'producer' the way American theatre did. The producer reads the script to understand it before recommending or rejecting it, while the director receives the play after it had been passed. On the other hand, Nyanga's explanation differed from the traditional British definition in which a 'producer' is a 'director'.

James Gibbs, in the *Production Notes* written as a postscript in *Nine Malawian Plays*, referred to the producer in this way:

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[274] Interview with John Nyanga

capability' attests to the low position the actors occupy in the production. The actors' views were only asked for after the casting had already been done. What needs to be quickly pointed out is that though Chatha explained that Mabedi and Mphoka wrote the play, Mphoka said in conversation that the two Kwathu writers presented the cast with a one to two page story outline. The reading that Chatha referred to, in Mphoka's explanation, did not necessarily mean of the whole script, but a narration by 'the writers' of the basic story. The full play was realised through improvisation in rehearsal[277].

Many Chichewa groups produced plays through Improvisation as opposed to written scripts. A basic story outline was introduced to the group. The director, together with the cast, went through a trial and error 'physical staging process' until a performance was realised. Those who provided the initial basic story would then be referred to as the writers of the play. The ability to individually write a play was mostly limited to those who used English.

In the English category, there is no evidence of improvisation. The responsibility of writing rested on the playwright-director. Due to lack of competence in the language, improvising plays with the cast using English was almost impossible. All known English groups such as Wanna Do Ensemble Theatre, Wakhumbata, Alabama, Khumbolawo, Mkumbila, and Blantyre Arts, were led by directors who had knowledge about writing plays. With time, the actors in the different categories learned the play-creation skills: Improvisation for Chichewa, and Scriptwriting for English.

[277] Interview with Charles Mphoka, 2003

When Chatha joined Kwathu, which uses Chichewa and improvisation, John Nyanga directed her in the rehearsal and play creation in this way:

> *... Sabata lomwelo (a Severe) anatipereka mmanja mwa a John Nyanga kuti atiphunzitse sewero... Anayamba kutifotokozera. Atatha anatifunsa ngati tingathe kusewera mu sewerolo? Ine ndinati kwa iwo, bwanji ndipange, inuyo ndiye amene mundiwuze ngati ndikukutha... Titapanga, iwo ndi gulu lonse la osewera anatiyamikira. Kenako tinapitiriza kukonzetsera sewero lija... Titadzapita ku Lilongwe, sewero limene tinapanganso si limene amandiphunzitsa lija.... Ntsikana wina ... analephera chifukwa chodwala, ndiye anandifunsa kuti kodi sewero limene munapedza tikulikonzetsera lija munaliwonera bwino-bwino? Ine ndinabvomereza kuti eee... Nditangoyankha choncho, anandipatsa mbali mu sewero lochedwa Pali Chiyani. Ndinali mkazi, ndipo amuna anga anali a Mabedi. Mwana wathu anali Estere Jekete*[278]...
>
> ([Mr. Severe] handed us over to John Nyanga in the same week to direct us in a play. He started by explaining, and asked us if we would manage. Then I told him that we should try for him to see. He liked it, and the whole group did. We rehearsed three times. When we went to Lilongwe, we did not do the play we rehearsed. I was asked to play a role in place of another girl who could not come because of illness. I was then asked if I remembered the play I saw being rehearsed. I said yes. We then performed *Pali Chiyani – What's to Fear in This?* - with Mr. Mabedi. Our child was Estere Jekete.

Improvisation and the language used created an environment for Chatha's speedy grasp of the process, earning her a role. After only three rehearsals, she was deemed ready to face an audience in Lilongwe. Furthermore, watching the rehearsal of *Pali Chiyani – What's To Fear In This?* was enough to win her a role on the performance day.

The Improvisation method was very common amongst groups that produced Chichewa drama. Ellina Namizinga and Shadreck Jumaina reported, in conversation, that a similar process was used in Alufeyo Performing Arts, and Upile Drama Group

[278] Chatha, interview.

respectively[279]. The method differed from that employed by their English counterparts.

Kamkwatira said she wrote a play in one to two days, worked on it for three weeks, and then gave it to an editor, who, according to her, had to have a background in drama. A discussion between her and the editor, focusing on areas for improvement, followed. Having re-written it, she would present it to the cast[280].

Twaya Sanudi said he spent a great deal of time writing a play on his own before presenting it to his cast[281] (Sanudi, Interview, 2003). It is important to note here that groups which performed in English used complete and individually written scripts. The skills of writing in this category owed themselves to the emphasis on writing that ATEM and the University Theatre placed on literary plays.

As regards the rehearsal process, Kamkwatira said the first step was for the actor to read and understand the play. In an interview with Chimombo, Chisiza made similar remarks in this way:

> In the first place, an actor has to understand that you can't type-cast, where you go on stage and maybe you acted as a barman in one play, you go on to another play in which you're a business man but you want to do the same thing as a barman. I try to make these people understand and appreciate the fact that if they want to go into the profession of acting they have to look into the background of the character, the social structure, the economic structure, the political structure... We also look into speech. People really have to understand how they speak on stage, which is very different from the way one speaks in the streets[282].

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[279] Interviews with Ellina Namizinga and Atate Shadrack Jumaina, 2003.
[280] Kamkwatira, Interview.
[281] Interview with Babaa Twaya Sanudi, 2003
[282] Steve Chimombo interviewing Du Chisiza Jr., *WASI* Writer 2, 2001, p. 5

Chisiza's emphasis on research and character development for each new play was part of the new methodology he introduced after returning from America where he did a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree. He integrated actor training classes with the rehearsal process. Chisiza's methods did not differ much from those used by another actor-director, John Nyanga. Nyanga articulated his technique in this way:

> *Anthu osewera mmasewero masiku ano pobwera kuti adzayamb entchitoyi amapanga zomvetsa chisoni. Amabwera ndi mtima woti amadziwa kuseketsa anthu kaya ku mowa, ku nsika kuphatikidzapo kunyumba kwawo. Anthu amakhala atawaudza kuti iwetu utapita ku drama, utha kukachuka chifukwa iwe umatseketsa ngati John Nyanga. Ndiye akabwera choyamba kupanga kumakhala kuchotsa maganizo amenewo... Choyambirira ndmamulandira ndi mawu kuti, here is a general manager, wasiya nyumba yake, wabwera ndi mkazi wake ndi ana. Ndiye ndimamufunsa kuti pakati pa iwe ndi iye wochenjera ndani? Ndiye amati ayi, iyeyo... Ndiye ndimati, kuti timupusitse ameneyi mpakakumupanga kuti awombe mmanja, tiye tigwire ntchito. Poyambirira osewerawa amamva kuwawa chifukwa si zimene amaganizira. Pamapita miyezi mwina itatu tikuwaphunzitsa.*[283]
>
> (It is a pity to think of what mostly draws actors to drama these days. He has been told by his friends, after cracking jokes to them at the beer-hall, at the marketplace or at his house, that if he joins drama, he could make people laugh in the way John Nyanga does. So, when he comes here, I start by removing those ideas from his mind. Firstly, I tell him that here is a General Manager, who has left his house and has come with his wife and children. Now, who would you say is clever between you and him? And the actor says, I think the General Manager. Then I tell him that to fool him, so that he claps hands for us, let us work... It is difficult for this new recruit when we start, because he never thought that acting is a skill which has principles. Three months pass while he is being trained.)

Nyanga suggested that many actors joined Alufeyo Performing Arts because of his popularity as a comedian, and that they came with misconceptions about the acting career. His initial task, therefore, similar to Chisiza's, was to alert the would-be performer about the reality of performance, before training them. Ellina Namizinga stated that her training under Nyanga concentrated on how to enter the stage and the

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[283] Interview with John Nyanga.

quickness with which she improvised situations given by the director[284]. When Linda Chatha joined Kwathu in 1989, she was told by Nyanga to imagine being a married woman who had a husband and a child. She was then asked to think of how she could act out the role of the woman in a particular situation[285]. The rehearsal, for Atate Shadreck Jumaina of Upile Drama Group, was based mostly on the principle that *anthu owonera aja adzatikhulupirire* – the audience should believe our acting'[286]. It is clear from Chichewa groups such as Kwathu, Izeki ndi Jakobo and Upile that the audience's belief in the credibility of the performance was the key. Groups that used English analysed the script, considered socio-cultural contexts and stage techniques. For both Chichewa and English groups, the actor training and the rehearsal process were interlinked. The performers did not need prior theatre training before joining and being directed in plays.

6.9.1 DIRECTING STYLE

The style of directing in the early 1980s concentrated on trying 'to show' actors how to execute their roles on stage. Frank Mwase, in conversation, related the way Chisiza conducted rehearsals for *The Deceased Attack* at HHI in 1983:

> Rehearsals started at 4 pm. Warm ups, then script. What I saw as the main method directors used was that they showed you what to do. They could tell you "I want you to take four steps to the front, then turn to the left, then do 'such such' a thing"... What was required from an actor was to observe how the director acted this out, and that you had to quickly practice and get used to it[287]...

He further observed that Kamudoni Nyasulu and McAnderton Chimbayo adopted a similar approach when they directed plays for the French Cultural Centre Theatre in

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[284] Namizinga, interview
[285] Chatha, interview
[286] Jumaina, interview
[287] Mwase, interview

1984. The style only changed when Du Chisiza Jr. returned from the drama studies in America. For the first time, the actor was given a chance, though to a limited extent, to comment on the development of his role[288]. However, the change from the 'mechanical' approach did not completely remove dictatorial tendencies by producer-directors until the 1990s when 'participatory methods' of play creation were brought into popular commercial theatre from the Theatre for Development practice.

6.9.2 PARTICIPATORY METHODS OF DIRECTING

By the mid-1990s, many directors had adopted participatory methods in producing plays. The director was no longer viewed as the only person in-charge of the 'creative' process for the rehearsal. Members of the cast contributed views to help develop the roles and the final presentation of the play. When I interviewed Elina Namizinga, she related how John Nyanga as a director dealt with performance and performers, as indicated in the following speech:

> *Amatipatsa mfundo yoyambira. Samamuwuza munthu kuti ukachite zakuti-zakuti. Amangoiwuza kutii iwe ndi wakut-wakuti, pa malo akuti-akuti. Ndiye umadzipanga wekha mpaka kuwonetsetse kuti zomwe akufuna bwanawo zatheka. Ndiye ine ndimaganiza kuti amachita bwino chifukwa timaganiza tokha zopanga.*

> (He would give us a 'key'. He never instructed us on how to perform the role. He just said " you are such a person in such a place". Then, as an actor, I made sure that I understood what he wanted to enable myself reach the level of performance that he wanted. I think that was good because we thought of how to perform for ourselves.)[289]

Nyanga's approach indicated a major shift in directing. Directors no longer shouted instructions to the actors on how to perform. Actors were given a chance to express themselves and give reasons for their choices. With only a basic skeleton of what was

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[288] Makhala, interview
[289] Namizinga, interview

expected in a scene, the actors' creativity was challenged, and the director 'facilitated' the process.

The explanation for this change could be that the groups were at times afforded a chance to attend Forum Theatre workshops, at which 'participation' of community members in the discussions of local problems and the play creation process was emphasized. Matiti, leader of a community theatre group at Chinyama in Mulanje, told me how the workshops included Augusto Boal's methods of Forum Theatre. He related to me how, as a 'joker', he 'facilitated' discussion both in rehearsal and during the performance, when the play was stopped for 'open-ups' to hear views of community members[290]. John Makina, Projects Director of OXFAM in Southern Malawi, uses Paolo Freire's methods in OXFAM Malawi's literacy programmes called REFLECT. He told me that he has worked with theatre directors such as Charles Mphoka, who use the participatory methods at Oxfam[291]. Methods of Theatre for Development, therefore, brought 'the democratic' process into the rehearsal room in which the director's voice was not the only one that prompted creativity in the performers. Having talked about change and participation, the role of women in the organization of Malawian commercial theatre follows.

6.10.1 WOMEN IN MALAWIAN POPULAR COMMERCIAL STAGE THEATRE

Recruitment of male actors into groups had never been a great problem. Actresses, however, were difficult to find and retain. Gertrude Kamkwatira recalled how she concurrently performed in three plays in 1987, because of the few women employed

[290] Interview with John Matiti, Chinyama, 2003
[291] In conversation with OXFAM Projects Officer, John Makina, August 2002.

by Wakhumbata[292]. According to Steve Chimombo, many potential actresses did not last long in drama groups. Jealous boyfriends and husbands stopped them. To the men, being a woman entertainer was seen as a sign of loose behaviour[293]. Late Estere Jekete of Kwathu Drama Group referred to how audiences and members of her community responded to scenes in which men and women interacted as lovers. According to her, audiences failed to differentiate between the character on stage and the real person[294]. Comments such as these discouraged potential actresses from joining.

As a result of the scarcity of actresses, many groups were dominated by men. Twaya Sanudi formed Alabama Theatre with six other men in 1990. Inevitably, he concentrated on plays that either did not involve any woman, or had one woman character. For example, *Black Democracy,* which is discussed in chapter eight, has six men and one woman. Other groups, such as Zawo Arts, used male actors to play female roles. Chimombo reported in WASI Writer how Gift Mawindo earned applauses from the audience at the French Cultural Centre when he played a girl's part in Zawo's popular play, *Chimanga Cha Ku Zimbabwe – Maize from Zimbabwe* - in 1992[295]. Upile Drama group had six men and one woman by 1992. Ten years later, its recruitment of women had not improved. *Mudzasiya – You Will Stop This Behaviour* - had two women and six men. Such scarcity of actresses is partly responsible for male dominance in the drama groups.

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[292] Kamkwatira, interview
[293] see *WASI* Writer, 1992, 4.1 p. 5
[294] ibid.
[295] *WASI* Writer, 1992, 4.1, p.4

6.10.2 LEADERSHIP

Between 1982 and 2002, groups tended to be led by male actor-producer-directors. Charles Severe was director of Kwathu from 1982 until his death in (1991?). He made Eric Mabedi Audience Development Manager, John Nyanga as Stage Manager, while he was the director-producer[296]. Though the dedication of these men was appreciated, their dominance made contributions from committed female members, such as Estere Jekete, minimal. Jekete was one of the founder members of the group and did not leave the group at any time. Sidelining her raised questions of how Severe offered positions of responsibility in Kwathu. Furthermore, according to Nyanga, he could not do the type of plays he envisaged. Frustrated with the realization that he could not change Kwathu, Nyanga broke away to create his own group[297].

Du Chisiza formed Wakhumbata in 1983. He wrote all the plays put on by the group, directed them, and was the producer until his death in 1999. While there is evidence that he trained many actors, his problem, according to Chimombo, lies in the fact that he did not give opportunities to others to write or direct[298]. Mwase left Wakhumbata in 1989 to form Force Theatre, where he produced three plays under the titles *Visions, Cell 313*, and *Trying to Think Positive*. Mwase had been with Wakhumbata from 1983 and the full realization of his creative potential had to wait until 1989.

The other breakaway was Twaya Sanudi. Though he joined Wakhumbata in 1990, he left and formed Alabama Theatre in 1994 as a way of 'finding space to express my

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[296] Mabedi, interview
[297] Nyanga, interview
[298] *WASI* Writer, 12. 1 2001, p. 5

talent'[299]. After Chisiza's death in 1999, Gertrude Kamkwatira became a writer and director, twelve years after she joined the group. Trying to find reasons why Chisiza dominated, Joe Chimwenje, a Senior Lecturer at Chancellor College said Du (Chisiza) inhibited his own growth and that of others by making himself a 'cult figure' in Malawian Theatre'[300].

Male producer-directors' dominance inhibited other people's growth, including that of women. Kamkwatira was Audience Development Manager, and was later promoted to Deputy Artistic Director. Notwithstanding this, Chisiza made the final decisions. In Kwathu, Estere Jekete was not offered any meaningful leadership position, apart from being a member of the Disciplinary Committee. At Tafika in Lilongwe, Katherine Kamnthunzi took control of the group when her husband, Whythone Kamthunzi, died in 2000. Only Lonjezo of Zomba is reported in MUSE to have had a female artistic director, a Ms. Kalianga in the mid-1980s[301]. At the cut-off date for this thesis (2002), women had not been given leadership roles in Malawian Theatre.

6.11 PRODUCTION COSTS OF STAGING A POPULAR COMMERCIAL STAGE PERFORMANCE IN MALAWI

Producer-directors said the growth of Malawian commercial stage drama was inhibited by high costs of radio advertising, transport charges, and hall charges. In 1982, advertisement cost K72 per minute on radio MBC. By 2002, the charge had risen to K1,200 per minute[302]. Kamkwatira said they needed ten one-minute slots, with five on MBC Radio 1 and five on MBC Radio 2, complemented by at least five

[299] Sanudi, interview
[300] Chimwenje, interview
[301] The *Muse*, 1986
[302] Kamkwatira, interview

on MIJ radio, to make sure that a play was well publicized[303]. As regards venues, according to Nyanga, use of French Cultural Centre Open Air or the In-Door Theatre cost K4,000 per day. The Institute for Youth in Lilongwe demanded 35% of gate takings per performance, while schools such as Chipasula in Lilongwe asked for 50% of gate collections by 2002[304]. By the same year, the Chancellor College Great Hall cost outsiders K10,000 per day, and K6,000 per day for the Little Theatre.

As regards tour transport, a fifteen-seater Toyota Hiace cost, according to Wongani Munthali of Wakhumbata, K15,000 from Blantyre to Lilongwe, and K30,000 to K35,000 to reach Mzuzu in the northern region. In addition to the transport expenses, accommodation for the cast and crew had to be paid for. In Lilongwe, an affordable Motel cost between K400 to K650 per single room, or K1000 per double room, totaling to K 4000 per night for a cast of five. A plate of food cost K100 on average, totaling to K2500 for five people. In addition to these costs, the performers needed to be paid K1500 per performance, which totaled to K7,500. A performance at Chipasula Secondary School in Lilongwe cost approximately K42,000, in addition to 50% of gate collections demanded as payment for the hall. With an estimated average of 1,200 audience members, each paying K60 at the door, K72,000 was collected. This did not offer a big profit margin when the hall fees and other expenses were deducted.

Running a commercial theatre company in Malawi had become expensive, but groups such as Wakhumbata found ways of minimising costs. According to Wongani Munthali, Wakhumbata scheduled performances in secondary school and community

[303] ibid.
[304] Nyanga, interview

halls along the Blantyre- Karonga route, taking advantage of the same advertising and transport costs. Through that, they increased the financial returns[305]. The problem, however, is that the method worked for established groups, including Wanna Do, Wakhumbata, Kwathu, Izeki ndi Jakobo, and Alufeyo Performing Arts, which were able to raise enough money for initial costs from previous performances. Small groups such as Khumbo Lawo, Solomonic Peacock, and Upile were restricted to Blantyre and surrounding areas such as Zomba.

6.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined a number of issues that have affected the growth of commercial stage drama in Malawi. Firstly, it reported on the evolution of the two language-based plays. The evolution of popular commercial drama started in mid 1970s with Malimodzi some of whose acting personalities were Richard Chide, Emmanuel Mlaka, Space Katenga-Kaunda and McAnderton Chimbayo. Kwacha Cultural Centre Drama group tried to grow but failed because of organizational problems. In the late 1970s Owen Mbilizi and Isaac Chirwa's activities continued the evolution of popular commercial drama in Malawi. However, the main recognized national movement of commercial stage drama in Chichewa and English kicked off in 1982 and 1983 respectively. Kwathu Drama Group, led by Charles Severe, and Du Chisiza Jr.'s Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre started the movement. They were influenced by University Theatre and ATEM Festivals. As regards advancement of the movement, the Association of Artists, which organized 'Cultural Afternoons', consolidated efforts made by the early groups. Operating in a politically repressed society, popular commercial drama experienced many challenges. The MCP

[305] Interview with Wongani Munthali, 2003.

Government's attempts to curtail its activities by banning performances in venues such as French Cultural Centre, and Secondary Schools, and the reversal of the same through the courts, hinted at the theatre's struggles and new freedoms. What is more, the educational background of actors has shown that many actors, playwrights and directors ended their educational career at secondary school, affecting their methods of production. Chichewa groups used improvisation, while their English counterparts based their performances on written scripts. As regards leadership, the movement started with dictatorial tendencies in the 1980s, which were slightly modified with Chisiza's return from America in 1987. In the mid-1990s, the influence of participatory methods used in Theatre for Development found their way into commercial theatre. As regards leadership, men dominated as women's involvement was hindered by socio-cultural factors. In terms of financial organization, the drama was created under difficult financial circumstances. Big groups, however, arranged tour programmes to reduce costs and make profits, while the smaller ones concentrated on Blantyre and surrounding areas. Despite many difficulties that confronted the commercial theatre movement, the two and a half decades of its existence bear evidence to its creative achievements, some of which form case studies for the following two chapters. It should, however, be quickly pointed out that although the exploration in this chapter has not exhausted all the elements that affected commercial drama in Malawi, it has created a general picture: a context for the plays that will be studied in the following chapters.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMMERCIAL STAGE DRAMA IN MALAWI: CHICHEWA PLAYS

7.1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we examine Chichewa plays, focusing on Izeki ndi Jakobo's *Pa Depoti (At the Bus Depot), I am the Road You Walk*, and *Kukhala (How We Live Together)*. We start with a brief review of critical responses, followed by the profile of the playmaker, John Nyanga. In the analysis, *Pa Depoti* and *I am the Road* will be scrutinized to highlight plot structure, elements of narrative, and integration of humour. The aim is to reveal the plays' usage of language and situations, arrangement of scenes, and costume, in creating comedy. *I am the road* will be further scrutinized for satire, and the way the comedians incorporate their own personal stories as one way of creating humour. *Kukhala* will be contrasted with *Pa Depoti* and *I am the Road*, to expose differences in the way full length and one-act comedies are structured. The main idea for this chapter is to subject the plays to a close reading in order to investigate principles used in the production of Chichewa comedy.

7.1.2 BACKGROUND

Commercial stage drama in Chichewa has had considerable attention from a handful of critics. In 1984, Roziliro Twea and Isaac Chirwa appreciated the comic strategies used, and compared the plays to those produced at Chancellor College Travelling Theatre[306]. In their view, popular commercial Chichewa plays were substandard because they failed to strictly follow principles of theatre, as done at Travelling Theatre. In the same year, Chris Kamlongera included Sylvester Paliani's *Sewero La*

[306] Twea and Chirwa wrote a number of articles in the *Daily Times* in 1984 in which they reviewed drama activities.

Mulandu Wa Nkhanga (A Play About the Case for a Stolen Guinea Fowl), 1930 Kunadza Mchape (There came Mchape in 1930), and Steve Chimombo's *Wachiona Ndani?* as part of his Ph.D. thesis. His aim was to show the growth of drama in Malawi and to demonstrate how the plays reflected problems of the society[307]. Furthermore, in his book, *Trends of Malawian Literature*, Francis Moto studied Paliani's plays as examples of Malawian writing during the colonial period. He also examined Chimombo's *Wachiona Ndani?* 'as a vehicle for the expression and liberation of ... latent frustration and ideas that are difficult to articulate'[308]. Writing for WASI magazine, Steve Chimombo queried the failure by Malawian groups to retain actresses in 'Vanishing Actresses'. In the article, he featured female performers, including the late Estere Jekete of Kwathu Drama Group[309]. In 'Mind Your Stage Business', Chimombo discussed methods used by Kwathu and Alufeyo Performing Arts (APA), expressing worry over the straight-line arrangement of furniture when staging plays. He suggested that the drama groups possibly adopted the style from radio producer Charles Severe who, he said, 'arranged (the furniture) as if the actors were in front of a (radio) microphone'[310]. In 'Chichewa Literature in the Political Context of the 1990s', Malawian Linguist Pascal Kishindo expressed the opinion that Chichewa drama was unsuccessful in breaking new ground because it had been 'stuck' to comedy since the 1980s[311]. Rudo Mkukupha, in her BA Long Essay, looked at the adaptation of Willie Zingani's novels, *Madzi Akatayika (When Water Spills)*, *Ndaziona Ine (I Have Suffered)*, and *Njala Bwana (Sir, Help the Hungry)*. Examining them for elements of comedy and tragedy, she argued that the producer-directors

[307] Kamlongera Ph.D. thesis, p. 247
[308] Francis Moto, *Trends in Malawian Literature*, pp. 28 and 95
[309] WASI Writer 1992, p.6
[310] WASI Writer, 1995, p. 9
[311] Kishindo Pascal (2001) "Chichewa Literature in the Political Context of the 1990s", in ed. C. Bodunde, *African Languages in the Political Context of the 1990s*, Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies No. 56, pp. 153 -170

mixed the two conventions at will without considering the effect that their action would have on the stories[312]. In another BA Long Essay, Innocent Komwa investigated on the aesthetics of Malawian Comedy in Izeki ndi Jakobo's classic, *Kukhala*[313]. Drawing on Chimombo, Chimwenje, and my initial assessment of Chichewa drama[314], Komwa explored the use of costume, humour, characterization, and play structure. He expressed concern about the frivolous utilization of the elements to solicit 'cheap laughs' from audiences.

The importance of these studies lies in the fact that despite ephemeral publishing opportunities for popular Chichewa drama, its productions have received critical attention. This chapter adds some more insights into Malawian popular theatre by examining the drama using a combination of Ian Steadman and Karin Barber's approaches. In the circumstances, it is appropriate to briefly look at the background of the actor-director, John Nyanga.

7.2 JOHN NYANGA[315]

[312] Mkukupha Rudo (2000), *Tragedy and Comedy in Malawi: The Case of Kwathu Drama Group*, BA Long Essay, Chancellor College

[313] Komwa Innocent (2001) *Malawian Comedy: The Case of Izeki ndi Jakobo's "Kukhala"*, BA Long Essay, Department of Fine & Performing Arts, Chancellor College, Zomba.

[314] See Magalasi 2001, "Malawian theatre at the crossroads....".

[315] Nyanga was born in Zimbabwe in 1966 of a Malawian father and a Zimbabwean mother. The only son in a family of three, John attended kindergarten and two years of primary school in Zimbabwe. When his family returned to Malawi in 1971, he completed primary school at Chinyama in Mulanje. He then proceeded with his family to Blantyre where he attended secondary school at St. Pius Distance Education Centre.

Nyanga was introduced to drama in church and school performance clubs which he joined as a young person in the early 1980s. As a member of St. Pius Young Christian Organisation (YCO), and Ndirande Catholic Church Youth Club, Nyanga participated in play productions with stories taken from the Bible. The Ndirande Church Club was approached by Charles Severe, who intended to include local drama for his radio programme, *Mid-Week Magazine*. A series of meetings between them resulted in the birth of Kwathu Drama Group in 1982. Severe trained Nyanga and his colleagues, drawing on his drama experience from radio, ATEM Festivals, and what he saw at the University Drama events. Soon, Nyanga and his colleague Eric Mabedi were identified by Severe as having a talent for spontaneous improvisation. Kwathu proceeded to produce *Aneneri Onyenga (False Prophets)*, and a trio of plays

It is not clear whether Nyanga's adoption of stand-up comedy was influenced by Du Chisiza when he returned from America in 1987, or that he learned it from elsewhere. Patience Gibbs, in her MA thesis, writes about the inclusion of jokes in school variety shows during the colonial period. This practice was also evidenced at Nyungwi Primary School in 1980 where Shadreck Jumaina, director of Upile Drama group, attended. According to Jumaina, teachers asked those who could, to tell jokes at School Assembly when distributing letters to fellow students[316]. However, the presentation of a series of comic anecdotes at commercial shows became popular after Chisiza's return. Chisiza welcomed the audience in the first ten to fifteen minutes by telling a series of short and funny episodes before commencement of major plays by Wakhumbata. Chisiza's opening style was later adopted as an opening formula by commercial groups such as Kwathu. In comparing Kwathu's opening style to popular theatre from other parts of Africa, Barber writes about the 'opening glee' the Oyin Adejobi Company of Nigeria used:

> ... First there is the "parade" around town... then the long wait while the hall slowly fills up and excitement increases with the density of the crowd; and finally the opening glee. The opening glee is heralded by a pause, darkness as the hall lights are turned off, the slow opening of the curtains, the sight of Adejobi already seated center stage, often illuminated only with a single spot, and the entry of his chorus, who appear like fluorescent ghosts in blue lights. As they enter, Adejobi's magnificent voice rises over the hubbub to lead the first song.
> Adejobi then addresses the audience directly, welcoming them, thanking them for coming, sometimes complaining about their small number or congratulating them on turning out in force... Adejobi and the chorus then sing four or five more songs[317]...

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based on Willie Zingani's novels, *Njala Bwana (Help the Hungry), Madzi Akatayika (Spilt Water Cannot Be Recollected)*, and *Ndaziona Ine (The Troubles I Have Experienced)*, in which Nyanga's talent for comedy delighted audiences. The popularity of these plays throughout the country equally brought fame to Kwathu and Nyanga. Soon, Nyanga developed an acting technique, similar in nature to story-telling and stand-up comedy (Nyanga, Interview: 2003).

[316] Jumaina, interview

[317] see Karin Barber (2000), *Generation of plays*, p. 1

It is clear from Barber's comment that popular Yoruba theatre uses a similar method. In talking directly to the audience, a rapport with audiences in different places is established. Interesting to note is that this formula is used regardless of the play that will be performed. While the content of the 'direct talk' might change, the format of presentation remains the same. Likewise, Nyanga's opening changes jokes, depending on the area where they perform, and the type of audience they meet. For example, when they performed at a United Democratic Front's political rally attended by the former president, Bakili Muluzi, the comedians called him 'alamu' – brother-in-law, in one of their jokes. The name was restricted to only those political rallies the president attended. The idea of speaking directly to the audience is therefore an established format in African popular theatre.

Another source of the comedy for Malawian professional popular drama could be the traditional *kuselewula pa chisuwani* – making fun of each other as cousins - and / or *nthabwala* – jokes. In an interview with Nyanga, he stated that their radio comedy series, Izeki ndi Jakobo, started when radio producer Charles Severe asked them to create "nthabwala" –a joke or a funny situation for *Mid-Week Magazine* programme. Nyanga's *Izeki ndi Jakobo* replaced Lameck Hara and Viphsya Harawa's *Bokhobokho*.

Bokhobokho focused on the relationship between an Indian grocery shop owner, Bokhobokho, and Mwanaboyi, his black worker. Its hilarity came from Bokhobokho's stereotypical Indian-affected mispronunciation of Chichewa words, and the sometimes impossible and humiliating tasks he instructed Mwanaboyi to perform. At the time, Severe wanted to replace Bokhobokho by introducing

something new in the programme. However, at Kwathu Drama Group, Severe did not want to develop it into a substantial performance form as Nyanga desired. Nyanga and Mabedi, however, improved on it and created a series of very short stage comedies under the same title. Frustrated by Severe's continual neglect of the style at Kwathu, Nyanga organized his own performances of *Izeki ndi Jakobo* with Mabedi. In 1990, Nyanga left Kwathu to form Alufeyo Performing Arts (APA) with an aim of exploring a personal style of performance, different from Kwathu's[318].

In Malawi, distant cousins have the licence to make fun of each other on issues relating to their sex lives and general behaviour. Those of the opposite sex are allowed to marry, while those of the same sex view each other as 'mulamu- - brother or sister-in-law. Jack Mapanje has included this interaction in one of his poems in *Of Chameleons and Gods*. When the persona of the poem bids farewell to his clan-family, on going for further studies in the UK, the female cousin talks about 'another marriage postponed', and that 'you! a hare ran past between your legs'. By making such remarks, the female cousin commented on the male cousin's intention to study further as a way of deliberately postponing the marriage, to avoid being discovered as impotent. Using the "kuselewula" form, social norms are consolidated, and certain behaviours are kept in check.

The form also found its way into the classroom. Students called it 'kugemula' – creating games about each other, teachers or people in authority. Most recently, it has been referred to as 'kudyetsa ka ka ka ka', which means to feed people ka ka ka ka –

[318] Nyanga, interview

laughter[319]. What's more, Leroy Veil and Landeg White have identified the same form in songs sang as resistance to Portuguese sugar plantation brutality by Sena labourers in the Mozambican cane fields of the 19th Century. The workers abuse their Portuguese overseer with songs which include obscene words about the manhood of the overseer and that of his parents. This is tolerated by the Supervisor, who just smiles, because they sing while working[320].

Back to Nyanga at APA, he trained his own actors including Frank Yalu, Harry Majuni, and Ellina Namizinga and attempted the *Izeki ndi Jakobo* style. Failing to either influence or induce the kind of spontaneity needed in the actors, Nyanga decided to start producing full-length plays with them, similar to those created at Kwathu. Temporary consolation, however, came from the many invitations Nyanga and Mabedi received to stage the two-man comedies. By 1998, they had performed for the State President, at political rallies, and at Government functions. Indeed the hectic programme which Nyanga had with *Izeki ndi Jakobo* frustrated the performers at APA, who were neglected. In 2002, the performers, led by Frank Yalu, Elina Namizinga and Harry Majuni, wrote to Nyanga, informing him of their intentions to form their own company, Kasupe Arts. Because of his busy schedule, Nyanga agreed to the dissolution of APA, and concentrated on Izeki ndi Jakobo. Four one-act plays, thirty minutes each on average, were recorded and released on video by 1998. An earlier full-length play, *Kukhala,* was released in the same year. The video production was made possible with the support of Candlex Limited, a Cosmetics and Candle manufacturing company, and Banja La Mtsogolo, a family planning NGO. Having

[319] My own nephew, Austin Kamwendo was once suspended in 2003 when he was in Form three at Zomba Catholic Secondary and one of the charges from the Headmaster was that he was a noise maker in class, known as "kudyetsa ka ka ka ka! To Austin, he told me, "ndimapanga ka komede kumadyetsa anthu ka ka ka ka" – I do a little comedy, feeding people with laughter.

[320] See White and Veil in Karin Barber's *Reading African Popular culture*, 1997.

briefly looked at the relevant background, the discussion of the plays follows, starting with *Pa Depoti – At The Bus Depot.*

7.3.1 PADEPOTI

In the discussion of *Pa Depoti* and the other plays, the term 'moment', and 'moments' for plural, will refer to play-movements smaller than a scene. A 'moment' is one sub-idea of a scene. The change of a 'moment' is indicated by an introduction of another 'sub-idea' into the scene effected by an entry of a character, or the transition from the 'sub-idea' into a new one by the same character(s). The 'moments' complement each other to make a scene. When a character's entry into a scene does not bring a new idea or shift in mood, the 'moment' has not changed. This approach is in line with Stanislavski's breakdown of a scene. Referred to as 'units', a character (or characters) explores activities of a small idea, and then advances into a subsequent one, in a progression to achieve the scene's completion. It is these units that complement each other to make a full scene[321].

7.3.2 SYNOPSIS

Pa Depoti is set at a bus stop in Blantyre. A man and his wife, Izeki and Maliya, are going to their home in Lundu. As they wait for their transport, a number of events take place. There is nothing that connects what they say and what they do into one complete narrative. As characters, they simply interact with each other and imaginary passers-by.

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[321] See Konstantin Stanislavski 1980, *An actor prepares*.

7.3.3.1 PLOT STRUCTURE

A one-act play that runs for about twenty-seven minutes, *Pa Depoti* can be broken into ten moments of varying length. In moment one, Izeki asks Maliya if she has packed all the clothes he needs for the visit home. In the second, Izeki talks to an imaginary friend, Nyoni, who is travelling to Bangula. It is at this point that Izeki mentions the purpose and destination of their journey. They are on their way to Lundu for 'sadaka' – a funeral cleansing feast, common amongst Malawi's Muslim communities. The mention of 'sadaka' starts an argument between the couple. Izeki claims that Maliya does not bother to bring him extra food and meat when she serves at 'sadaka'. This dispute is interrupted when Izeki catches sight of Rhoda, an old school friend, whom he goes to chat with. This action marks the start of moment Three. Jealous, Maliya pulls him away, threatening to attack Rhoda. In the fourth moment, the couple discusses the type of transport they should use. Izeki does not agree with Maliya's idea of sitting in front of a lorry while he sits behind in the open. He is jealous because on a number of occasions, he has observed drivers touch Maliya's thigh. In the fifth moment, Izeki comments on mini-bus touts. He equates them to announcers at Broadcasting House. In the sixth moment, Maliya talks with an imaginary male acquaintance. She tells him that Izeki is not her husband but just another traveller going in the same direction as she is. Izeki reprimands her and no sooner has he done so than an imaginary young man beckons to Maliya. Izeki warns the young man against such behaviour. In the seventh moment, Sofiya, a mad woman, enters with a baby on her back and a bundle of her belongings on her head. She claims that Izeki is the father of her baby. When he protests his innocence, Sofiya threatens to pull off his trousers. Hoping to appease her, he gives her the money she demands

for the child. She instructs him that they should meet at the bus stop every month in order for him to give her money. Izeki agrees to this in fear. When Sofiya leaves, Maliya asserts that Sofiya's child was fathered by Izeki and she feels jealous because the two have no child in their eight years of marriage. Failing to reach a compromise, Izeki gives up and tells her to believe whatever she wishes. As soon as they finish arguing, Mike, an old school-mate of Maliya enters to start the eighth moment. Wishing to speak to him, Maliya first comments on how well dressed he is, then she asks her husband for permission. Given the go-ahead, Maliya and Mike remind each other of their life at Chichiri Secondary School. Later, Mike gives money to Maliya and to Izeki. Unfortunately, as Mike takes out the money from his back-pocket, two K100 notes fall. Izeki pulls them with his stick and covers them with his right foot. When Mike later hands Izeki a K200 note, Izeki tries to return the K100 notes. Picking them up, Mike asks Izeki to exchange the two K100 notes for the K200 he had given him earlier. Mike snatches the K200 from him, and calls Izeki a thief. When Mike exits, Izeki and Maliya argue over her relationship with Mike. The dispute ends with Izeki grabbing the money from her with the excuse that he will use it as evidence of her extra marital affairs. Izeki takes the money, and Sofiya, the madwoman, re-enters to start the tenth moment. She has come to collect the money they had agreed on earlier. Izeki argues with Sofiya, the madwoman that a month has not passed. As the quarrel continues, Mike then re-enters and threatens Sofiya. Her exit ends the play.

7.3.3.2 PROBING PLOT STRUCTURE

The moments in *Pa Depoti* are intertwined to sustain the interest of its audience. For example, when the couple enters, the husband asks the wife if she has packed all the

clothes they needed for the journey. As soon as she responds, the husband talks to an imaginary friend who is travelling to Bangula, making the movement of ideas in the scene come in quick succession without a dull moment. Furthermore, after claiming that Maliya deliberately passes him by with food at 'sadaka', at the end of moment four, Izeki ends the discussion with the statement *munthu sangalemere nanu. Munthu ngati inu sangagule nanu ma mini basi* [no one can be rich with a person such as you. One cannot buy mini-buses with a person who behaves the way you do]. While the audience is enjoying this, he moves on into moment five with *tamuwonani mkazi uyo... Rhoda, ndinaphunzira naye* [Look at that woman... Rhoda. She was my schoolmate]. This quick transition moves the audience from moment four to five.

A similar rapid transition can be detected between moments six and seven. Izeki concludes the sixth moment with the talk about touts when he says *Ntchito ya ku MBC singawabvute. Nanga sanazolowera zonena* [Announcers' job wouldn't be a problem for them because they are used to talking]. As the audience enjoys the equation between touts and announcers, the wife sees an imaginary friend and pulls the audience along into the seventh moment with *iii, konkuno. Ndangoyima nawo* - Yes, I am still around. No, I am just waiting for a bus with him. He is not my husband - to which the husband responds with a threat to the 'imaginary character' that B*ambo! Anzanu amagumulidwa mano zimenezo* - Hey old man, your friends have lost teeth with such behaviour, you understand!

The transition between the ninth and the tenth moments is probably the boldest. As soon as Izeki takes the money from Maliya as proof of her extra-marital affairs, Sofiya enters and asks for the baby's up-keep money, dragging the audience from the

ninth into the tenth moment, in which the play ends. The placing and pacing of the moments, in addition to the quick transitions between them, need to be acknowledged as a noteworthy performance aesthetic Izeki ndi Jakobo use to 'assemble' a comedy which is episodic in nature.

7.4 LANGUAGE AND HUMOUR

Chimombo expressed worry over the way Chichewa Drama, especially by Kwathu Drama Group, APA and Izeki ndi Jakobo, focuses on words than performance. He observed that they constructed their plays as if 'they are just going to be heard, as happens on radio'[322]. Chimombo's assertion needs to be taken seriously, especially when he outlines Charles Severe's profile in radio production. Furthermore, the late Mercy Nthenda, in a personal communication with the present writer, stated that one of the problems that existed in Malawian Popular drama was the belief that once the actor entered the stage, his/her performance is supposed to be executed by talking all the time[323]. For instance, in *I am the Road*, analysed below, Izeki talks to himself when the play opens. What motivated the approach, according to Nthenda, was the intention to let the audience know what was happening in the play, including the actor's thought process. There was a belief, according to her, that the audience could not follow the story when the actor performed without talking. In addition, she also stated that newly recruited actors used the talking as a way of dealing with their stage fright. What was puzzling about this point, however, was that even veteran actors such as Mabedi and Nyanga continued to use the method, even in their most mature productions. Chimombo's criticism is therefore valid.

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[322] *WASI* Writer 6.2, 1995 p. 9
[323] Interview with Mercy Nthenda, September, 2001

Notwithstanding the evidence shown, however, two other perspectives can be suggested regarding dependency on words, especially when considered within the art of stand-up comedy. Its execution is closer to story-telling than fully-fledged stage performances. Secondly, it is a fact, in the case of Chichewa drama, that the language and its social references are familiar to both the performers and their audience. The use of words, or mere narration, cannot be completely dismissed as incapable of making a performance enjoyable outside radio. For instance, moment three of *Pa Depoti* is made up of a greeting between Izeki and the 'imaginary character' Nyoni. When Izeki says 'aa, akupita ku Bangula' [He is going to Bangula] his words have connotations that only those who are familiar with 'Bangula' as a place and as a social referent can relate to. Bangula is in Nsanje where Sena people come from. Sena language and other languages such as Lomwe or Mang'anja are viewed as backward when compared with the 'Chinyanja – Mang'anja' dialect used in cities such as Blantyre. In addition to the 'Bangula' allusion, Izeki further mentions that he is waiting for a bus going to Lundu. Lundu as a rural area evokes the same 'backward' contempt as Bangula.

Moment four is created around the idea of 'sadaka'. While its 'countryside' sentiments are suggested for humour, it is the way the couple relates while at 'sadaka' that is most interesting. They decide to talk about it, as the following exchange shows:

> **Izeki:** *Akazanga, muli ndi bvuto limodzi tikapita ku sadaka. Umenewo ndi ulemu? Bwanji simumabweretsa mbale? Mudziwona kuti apo pali amunanga. Pang'ono ng'ono, nyama iri pa ine; pang'ono ng'ono, nyama iri pa ine.*
> (My wife, you have one problem when we go for *sadaka*. Is that being respectful? Why don't you give me a plate of meat? You should always take notice of where I sit, bringing plates of meat every now and again.)

Maliya: *Timachita kupatsiridwa kuti kaperekeni apo. Kuli anthu amene amayang'anira miphika. Tsopano ine nyamayo ndizingotenga ndekha?*
(We do not just pick the plates. The people in-charge instruct us about where to take the plates. I cannot just pick them up without being told.)

Izeki: *Koma ulendo uno ... olo mutangoti mphika umodzi pya...* (No, try hard this time; even if it will be just a single pot.)

Maliya: *Kumeneko ndikuba. Tingayaluke.* (That is theft. We will be scandalized.)

Izeki: *Akazanga, anthu azinena tayaluka, tayaluka koma titadya... Munthu sangalemere nanu inu.*
(My wife, people will be talking about the scandal while we have had the meat... One cannot become rich with your kind of behaviour...)[324]

It is clear that the couple is poor, and that they attend funeral cleansing feasts to eat better than they can at home. Izeki thinks Maliya should, in addition to the food they eat at sadaka, take a pot of meat home. Maliya, however, has a conscience. She does not want any embarrassment. Nonetheless, Izeki's repetition of '*pang'ono ng'ono, nyama iri kwa ine, pang'ono ng'ono nyama iri kwa ine* - within a short space of time, you have brought me the meat' - becomes funny. He knows that his suggestions will be very difficult to carry out and yet he insists that his wife should make an attempt. The way he uses 'sadaka' as a concept, and the manipulation of language, drive the audience to laughter.

Another instance of how words are carefully selected for humourous effect is found in moment seven. When the wife greets an old friend, and reports that she is travelling alone, Izeki warns the man off with '*Bambo, anzanu amagumulidwa mano zimenezo* - Old man, your friends lose teeth when they talk to other people's women in that way'. While the word *amagumulidwa* means 'have their teeth demolished' when

[324] Video recording of *I am the road*, Izeki ndi Jakobo, 1998

contextualized in the sentence, it is funnier because the literal meaning of the root-word 'gumula – demolish - exaggerates the power of Izeki's blow. The audience appreciate not only the removal of teeth but also the 'hyperbole' in the claim about physical strength that Izeki makes. The use of 'gumula' is witty and effective. 'Mere narration' and 'witty words', therefore, can satisfy the audience, substituting a fully physicalised performance.

7.5 STRUCTURAL HUMOUR

Another noteworthy dimension in *Pa Depoti* is the way other humourous Moments are set up and followed through. In moment three, when Izeki greets an imaginary friend, Nyoni, who is going to Bangula, he does not ask him the reason for his visit to Bangula. Nevertheless, he volunteers information about their trip to attend 'sadaka' at Lundu. In moment four, the way Izeki and Maliya behave towards one another at the 'sadaka' makes a good follow up to the information volunteered earlier. What is more, in moment five, when Izeki sees his schoolmate, Rhoda, whom he happily greets, the wife feels jealous, pulls him away from her, and asks: '*bwanji simumamukwatira Rhodayo*? - why didn't you just marry Rhoda instead of me?' - Izeki responds with a spiteful remark saying: '*akazi a ku banki amandikondweretsa chimodzi: samamanga mipango pamwamba pa nsalu mu chiuno* - I like women who work for the bank for one thing: they don't tie towels around their waists, above 'lappas''. In this statement, Izeki is indicating to the audience that Rhoda works for the bank, and at the same time compares Rhoda's 'civilised' clothes to Maliya's 'rural' style. When the wife complains about the way that Izeki recommends the manner in which Rhoda dressed, Izeki quickly adds that '*choncho. Nanga wa ku banki amange mpango, apereka nthawi yanji ndalama* - It's alright. If a banker tied

the towel around her, when would she disburse the money to customers?' Though Izeki's last statement does not suffice as a response to the wife's assertion, his ingenuity in quickly adding more spite is amusing.

The mad woman's moment also raises issues worthy noting about costume, humour, and the way moments are arranged. Izeki is wearing ragged khaki trousers, a pair of worn-out army boots, a torn jacket, a dirty cream shirt, and an old Stetson hat. The rags indicate poverty and also manage to set up, in the audience's mind, suggestions of insanity because mad people in Malawi usually dress in similar fashion. When the madwoman enters, she is also dressed in dirty rags. Izeki and Maliya feel threatened because they expect unpredictable behaviour. The madwoman sings, dances, lies on the ground, and then approaches them. She identifies Izeki as the father of her child, and demands money for upkeep. Maliya believes the madwoman. As soon as the madwoman exits, she confronts Izeki.

The humour in this moment, apart from being linked to Izeki's ragged clothes, is also due to the commentary it makes on Izeki's alleged affair with the madwoman. Traditionally, sleeping with a mad person is considered taboo in Malawian society, and calls for a heavy penalty. In this case, the hilarity is taken further when Maliya comments that: '*Inu, mpaka wa misala. Opanda misala simumawawona* - My husband! Up to having an affair with a madwoman, weren't you able to find sane ones?' Izeki's clothes find a follow-through when the madwoman enters. What is more, the allegations that he was the father of her baby provoke more controversy between him and Maliya. As regards planning of the moments, the one before contrasts with that which follows soon after.

In moment eight, Mike, Maliya's schoolmate appears. When Maliya comments on how well dressed Mike is, Izeki downplays the issue by suggesting that Mike could be a car hi-jacker. Maliya, however, insists and asks for permission to speak to Mike. Given consent, Mike and Maliya recognise each other, and go into flirtatious handshakes as they recall their time as students at Chichiri. To add more humour, Mike enquires if Maliya is accompanied on the trip, to which she says: *ndiri ndi bambo awo* - I am with that 'father' [man]. Mike is confused by the mention of '*bambo*' because the word could have meant both 'father' and 'man'. He then reminds Maliya about the news that was delivered to her, while at school, about her father's death. The truth becomes clear that the 'father' being referred to is Izeki. The implication of the reference was that Izeki appeared old and ragged, undeserving of the comparatively highly educated and youthful looking Maliya. Izeki waits for Mike to go, before reprimanding his wife and snatching away the money Mike gives her.

Two things are established here as regards arrangement of moments. Firstly, it is shown that, compared to Izeki, Maliya attracts a better dressed and good looking person than Izeki. Secondly, it is further exposed that Izeki's clothes resemble those of a mad person. These two issues contribute to the humour contained in the moment, and also associate the episode as a follow-through to the motifs that are raised in the previous one.

A fifth example about arrangement can be seen after Mike exits. Two things happen in quick succession. Izeki snatches the money from Maliya. This is followed through by the re-entry of the madwoman to demand more money for her child's upkeep. As

Izeki struggles with the madwoman who threatens 'to pull his trousers off in public', Mike re-enters to threaten the madwoman, saying: '*choka iwe. Ukufuna ndikupange zijazi?* - Go away. Do you want me to repeat what I did to you that time?' - With that statement, the madwoman takes to her heels. Bewildered by the effect of Mike's use of the word *zijazi* - those things - Izeki asks Mike: '*Achikulire, ndifunse tisanachoke. 'Munamupanga zina zache eti*? - Old man, can I ask before we leave? You did 'something' to her, is it not?' Izeki's wit in structuring the question that required 'yes' as an answer left the audience guessing as to what Mike could have done to the madwoman. The first possibility could have been that Mike terrified the madwoman by beating her. Secondly, because the madwoman carried around a baby whose father was not known, Mike could have slept with her: an experience which she does not want repeated. That final act by Mike reverses the notion that the madwoman was attracted to Izeki because his ragged clothes suggests 'insanity'. Conversely, it also presupposes that even well-dressed men such as Mike could 'do something' to madwomen.

In terms of arrangement of the moments, Izeki snatches the money from Maliya to exhibit as evidence of Maliya's extra-marital affairs. Before the money reaches the uncles, Sofiya and the baby, a reminder of Izeki's 'alleged' extra-marital affairs, re-surface to take away the evidence. Secondly, the re-entry by Mike to intervene between Izeki and Sofiya raised issues about the trend of relationships ex-students of Chichiri Secondary school follow. Maliya has a husband who could be mistaken for a mad person, and there are suggestions that Mike could have slept with an insane woman. The humorous question in the audience's mind is 'why are Chichiri ex students attracted to mad people?'

Pa Depoti's ability to create humour through the structuring of the play, manipulation of language, quick transitions between moments, selection of 'potent' words, and use of costume, is commendable. Even though it is a reasonably long story, it can be generally described as *nthabwala* - jokes. The interaction of the characters can also be referred to as *kuselewulana*. The play contains serious messages, and the messages are delivered through words and situations that create amusement. From the video recording of its performance at French Cultural Centre in 1998, it is clear the audience would patronize Izeki ndi Jakobo again, if they replicated their formula, as they did in other one-act plays, such as *I am the Road You Walk*, whose discussion is next.

7.6.1 I AM THE ROAD YOU WALK

Included in the video release with other three plays, *I am the Road You Walk* is an illustration of how Izeki ndi Jakobo's method improves with every play, subtly commenting on ordinary issues of society. Like *Pa Depoti, I am the Road's* narrative is episodic.

7.6.2 PLOT STRUCTURE

I am the road can be broken into six moments. When it opens, Izeki is sweeping the road and complaining about children who abuse street sweepers such as himself, and how adults drop rubbish, such as banana peel, on sections of the road that he has swept. In moment two, Izeki discusses the way men fall in love, citing himself as an example. He says that he met his wife at a funeral, attracted by the way she wept for the deceased. Moment three shows a stranger asking for the way to Chileka Airport. The stranger, apparently a Zimbabwean, it seems, can only communicate in English

and Izeki cannot speak more than a few words of the language. In moment four, the stranger reveals his identity as Izeki's old friend, Jakobo. He pretended to be Zimbabwean, just to test Izeki's ability to speak English. Discovering each other, they analyse the previous exchange and, especially, Izeki's inability to speak English. In moment five, they talk about their business as actors, especially how their women boast about it in the location. The play ends with moment six in which they tell each stories that turn out to be lies.

As observed in *Pa Depoti* above, the transitions in *I am the Road* are brisk. For example, moment one in which Izeki talks about his problems with people as a road-sweeper ends with him saying *'azimayi ndi azibambo ena oyerekedwa amataya makoko, kuwafunsa ali aaa! ndi ntchito yake. Kukwatira'* [some arrogant people just throw a peel anyhow and when asked why they do that, they just say, "that's his job". "Getting married"]. The sweeper's last lines from moment one are connected to a phrase, 'Getting married', which introduces moment two. The moment is about what attracts men to their wives. Similarly, ending moment two using the same formula, he says *'kufunsira kulibe malo'* [proposing marriage has no specific place] and he adds *'wina atampatsa Highway ndimulodza'* [if someone was assigned to sweep the Highway, I would bewitch him]. Connective phrases are quickly added to introduce the next moment.

7.6.3 LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

The main issue raised in *I am the Road* is about the use of the English language by ordinary Malawians. Malawi was colonised by Britain and English has remained an integral aspect of the official communication system. Malawians mostly acquire the

language through formal education in which English Language and Literature are taught from Standard One. Through a gradual process, pupils advance in their knowledge of the language in the first eight years of primary school. By the end of primary school, pupils have acquired a basic understanding of the language enabling them, for instance, to read simple English in newspapers and elementary stories. The ability to speak fluent English in Malawi elevates the status of the speaker in the eyes of the community. Inability to speak English is an indication of lack of formal education. What is more, it also brings ridicule on such people, who are regarded as 'still stuck to primitive rural life'.

Izeki cannot understand or speak English properly. This is shown in the following exchange:

> **Stranger**: Excuse me?
>
> **Izeki**: *Eyaaa* - oh yes.
>
> **Stranger**: How are you?
>
> **Izeki**: We shall meet.
>
> **Stranger**: I don't know whether we shall meet or not, but I am trying to greet you.
>
> **Izeki**: Welcome.
>
> **Stranger**: I understand this is Blantyre.
>
> **Izeki**: *Eh*? Blantyre. *Eeeee*![325]

From this exchange we can see that that Izeki does not know or have much English. He is able to pick out names that he is familiar with such as 'Blantyre'. This exchange establishes a connection between lack of formal education and low status jobs such as

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[325] ibid.

street sweeping. According to the previous moments, such people as Izeki are looked down upon by children and adults alike. The communication between Izeki and the stranger continues, as indicated in the following exchange:

> **Stranger**: I am a visitor into the country. I want you to tell me how I can drive from here to Chileka Airport.
>
> **Izeki**: *Hennn*? (laughs in embarrassment)
>
> **Stranger**: (Repeats)
>
> **Izeki:** *Eyapoti*? - Airport (Pointing at Stranger) *Eyapoti? Kodi iyeyu akuti chiyani inu*? (Friends, what is he saying?)
>
> **Stranger:** I am looking for a way; road to the airport.
>
> **Izeki**: *Rodi? Eyapoti* – Road; airport? *Oooo, ndamumva. Akufuna kupita ku Eyapoti.* (Ooo, now I know what he wants. He is going to the Airport) (Pointing to the road he has been sweeping) Highway. I am the road. (Seeing that Stranger cannot understand him) *Samvanso?* (He still can't understand?) [326]

By picking familiar words as he does earlier on, he works hard to communicate with the stranger. When the stranger does not understand him, Izeki indicates his fears to the audience. Two things are happening here. The first is about the language issue stated above, and the second is the 'inclusion' of the audience in the performance when he verbalizes his thoughts in questions such as 'what is he saying?' and 'he still can't understand?' If found in this situation, many people accept help from others. Izeki verbalizes his dilemma but does not wait for the help. When he discovers that the stranger cannot understand him, he uses simple English words, sounds, and gestures. This is indicated in the following exchange:

> **Stranger**: (Pointing on the road) Oh, this is the road?
>
> **Izeki**: *Eya* - yes. I am the road, Limbe to Blantyre...
>
> **Stranger**: Oh, Blantyre. It goes to Blantyre?

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[326] ibid.

Izeki: (with a flattering smile) *Eee. You woko, ndi yomwe yomweyi, Iiiiiiiinnnnnhhhhh* (imitating a sound of a car). (You walk on with the same road)

Stranger: What?

Izeki: *Iiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnhhhhhh* (Izeki adds a sign of hands turning a car's steering wheel).

Stranger: Ok.

Izeki: *Yuu wokotu*. (You should walk on and on.)

Stranger: With this road?

Izeki: *Eee* – yes - I am the road. *Yuu woko* (you walk), I am roundabout (indicates by drawing an airy circle) *Yuu woko, you woko*, I am roundabout (points in the North Eastern direction) *Yuu woko*, I am roundabout (with a broom, indicates North Eastern road) Zalewa. *Samvanso*? (You use the Zalewa road. Does he still not understand?)[327]

The process continues until the stranger is clear about the way to the airport. The audience enjoys the use of sounds and gestures, complemented by Izeki's limited English vocabulary. Izeki closes the moment, saying: '*wafika. Ukatayika kuno si kwanu* - If you follow that, you will reach the airport. It will be your problem if you are lost because this is not your home'. In response, and as a way of starting moment four, the stranger says in Chichewa: '*Amwene! Ndamva amwene* - I have heard, my brother'. This becomes the turning point for the play. Izeki, surprised, discovers that for all the struggle he went through, the stranger just wanted to test his ability to speak English.

The whole of moment four is spent in re-living Izeki's trouble of communicating in the previous exchange, until another revelation comes about. Still as a stranger, he asks Izeki '*Achimwene, tinayamba takumanapo eti*? - Brother, haven't we met

[327] ibid.

before?' - to which Izeki says: '*inetu mawuwo ndawamva. Si Jakobo iwe?* - I heard the voice. Are you not Jakobo?' - They hug and the audience is happy with the revelation that they are old friends.

All the moments involving the road-sweeper and a Zimbabwean stranger were part of a plan to hoodwink the audience because the two knew each other before. Nevertheless, the audience still celebrates with them at their meeting, and is additionally relieved that Izeki's problems of trying to communicate in English are over.

With their identities exposed, as Izeki ndi Jakobo, they take the audience into moment five. In it, they say God made a mistake in creating Izeki. They extend the humour in this statement by declaring that they are '*anyamata odyera pakamwa... Matenda timadandaula ife ndi amodzi. Ma shingles. Atangoti atibandula mulomo... bizinesi yayima* – 'boys who earn their food through use of the mouth... The disease we worry so much about is Shingles. If it attacks our mouths, we could close shop'. The act of introducing themselves as part of the performance seems to be a traditional approach in Malawian arts. In CCJ Chipinga's *Atambwali Sametana*, two crooks barter a covered bucket of water, and a bag of sand, lying to each other that the bucket contains honey, and the bag has rice. They hurry away after the exchange. On discovering that they have been tricked, they both return to confront the crooked trader. Through the meeting, they discover and congratulate each other for their individual ability to outsmart people. As a way of crowning the scene, they say:

Saguza: *Ine dzina langa ndi Saguza* - My name is Saguza.

> **Paguza**: *Ine ndine Paguza. Simwaona nanga, maina atambwalitu sazimira ai* - I am Paguza. You see, names for crooks cannot be missed.[328]

The common sound of the names, and the opposite stances 'to pull' – Paguza, and 'he won't pull' – Saguza, besides showing their equal ability, is hilarious. The other instance is found in Black Paseli's song, *Napolo*. Singing about the landslide floods that started in Zomba mountain to sweep villages towards Lake Chilwa in the 1950s, Paseli breaks in between to say: *Ife anyamata aku Nyasalande. Okupha nsomba ndi mwala. Nsima timadya ndi zingano* – 'we are boys from Nyasaland. We catch a fish by stoning it. We eat nsima using a needle'. Paseli was a musician who traveled as far as Salisbury in the 1950s and 1960s. Izeki ndi Jakobo's discovery of each other, and the open celebration about their status as comedians seems to fall within Paseli's and Chipinga's tradition.

Following Izeki ndi Jakobo's celebration of their trade is the play-acting of a satirical scene. They re-enact the way their wives boast that 'our husbands are not at home. They have gone to the field at French Cultural Centre.' My suggestion is that the audience appreciates it for reasons examined below.

7.6.4 SATIRE AND POPULAR COMMERCIAL THEATRE

Inside the humour of the women's boasts, and the laughter they provoked, the exchange raises the issue of how popular commercial drama was regarded in Malawian society. Ben Msuku of Wakhumbata was discouraged by his parents from pursuing a career in drama 'in order for him to focus on real career education'. Though, according to Msuku, Chisiza tried to explain to them about the seriousness of

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[328] CCJ Chipinga (1966), *Atambwali Sametana*, p. 7

drama as a career, they did not allow Ben to participate in it until he completed his secondary education at Chichiri[329]. In another instance, Joe Chimwenje related how colleagues at Chancellor College wondered why he applied so much effort in researching popular theatre when 'people such as Izeki ndi Jakobo who had no formal training are successful without it'[330]. Behind these negative views about popular commercial theatre there could be reasons why it is hardly supported by the government. At the cut off time for this dissertation, government had made no effort to formulate a policy to regulate the industry, despite subjecting the sector to censorship laws, and sidelining it by the formation of a national dance troupe in 1987[331].

The emphasis on 'going to the field at French Cultural Centre' was crucial. In Malawi, the word 'field-trips' suggests that 'highly educated experts' are commissioned by government or by NGOs to conduct research of 'national importance'. These 'educated people' travelled in their hired four-wheel Pajeros, Nissan Patrols, or Land Cruisers and spent days or even weeks away from home, enjoying generous daily allowances. The audience's laughter at the mention of 'going to the field at the French...' might have come at the thought of 'people with low education' going 'to the field', leaving their wives boasting about it in the location. In addition, the hilarity could have also been produced by the women's fuss about 'the field', even though the comedians came from Ndirande, one kilometre away, and would go back soon after the show. The irony, however, despite this condemnation, was that groups such as Izeki ndi Jakobo, filled the French Cultural Centre Open Air Theatre, which accommodated between one thousand three hundred and one thousand

[329] Msuku, interview
[330] Chimwenje, in conversation, 2001.
[331] Makhala, interview

five hundred people. Each of the audience members, except children under two years, paid K60 at the door by 1998. Considering these figures, a group would earn K78,000 gross in one afternoon's gate takings. If the 1998 foreign exchange rate of MK 26 to US$ 1 was considered, the gross gate takings of K78,000 would translate to US$2,910.45[332]. With expenses totalling to about K46,000 (US$ 1,717.00) inclusive of venue hire, radio advertisement, rehearsal time investment, it would earn a profit of K22,000 (US $ 821.00). So, while the society registered contempt for popular commercial theatre, the profit margin exposed the condemnation as based on prejudice and ignorance.

Moment six ends the play with yet another hoodwinking prank. Jakobo tells Izeki about a joke he told in Lilongwe, which made people faint with laughter. When Jakobo wants to relate the same joke to the audience, Izeki stops him for fear of causing a fainting crisis amongst audience members. However, Jakobo has a way of dealing with the problem. He asks his friend to start by laughing hysterically, because by doing that, he would diffuse the fatal potency of the joke when it is told. Izeki agrees and laughs for about five seconds, to the amusement of the audience. Having finished, he asks Jakobo to tell the joke, who shakes his head in disbelief, accusing his friend of smoking a lot of marijuana. When Izeki insists on the joke, Jakobo tells him that he never told any joke. In revenge, Izeki lies to his friend that a snake has entered his trousers. When Jakobo goes stiff with fear, Izeki picks up a stick with the intention of hitting the spot where the snake's head is. However, he hesitates and says '*bvuto ndi loti mutu wache wayima pachabe*' (the problem is that its head is positioned on a 'bad spot'). When he shows the audience 'the bad spot', he points at the closed zip of

[332] The conversion to US $ were converted at the prevailing rate then, according to FX Converter on the Internet.

his friend's trousers, and the snake turns out to be Jakobo's 'manhood'. This indicates how much more relaxed about sexual references Malawi had become since the change of political systems from one-party to multi-party politics. It also shows how hard Izeki ndi Jakobo had to think about what to offer to their audience.

In trying to contextualize Izeki ndi Jakobo in Malawian literature, it is helpful to note that the trickster technique resembles that used by CCJ Chipinga in his play, *Atambwali Sametana* (*Tricksters Cannot Shave Each Other's Head*). In the book, the main characters, Saguza ndi Paguza, try to outsmart each other in hiding the wealth that they have stolen from the family of a deceased chief. Pretending to be the chief's nephew from 'Halale' (Salisbury), Paguza hides Saguza in the chief's grave to act as if he is the chief's spirit. When, at Paguza's suggestion, the villagers go to confirm Paguza's kinship to the chief, Saguza responds from inside the grave. Paguza collects the wealth, made up of money, clothes, and jewelry. However, instead of returning to take his friend out of the grave, he escapes. This becomes the start of a series of tricks that they play on each other. Chimombo (1988) has argued that the trickster motif in modern stories is a continuation of the same from fireside stories about Kalulu the hare and his numerous friends such as Fisi the hyena, Nyani the monkey, and Njobvu the elephant[333].

In *Malawian Oral Literature*, Chimombo has shown the way cartoons such as those by Vic Kasinja's (*Joza and Taxina)* are tricksters, and Brian Hara's *Pewani* is the dupe. The cartoons are published in the *Malawi News*. I suggest that Izeki ndi Jakobo continue the same tradition in their comedies such as *I am the Road You Walk*.

[333] see Steve Chimombo (1988), *Malawian Oral Literature*, Centre for Socail Research.

Based on the trickster element, it can be seen that *I am the Road You Walk* is firstly set on the road before the identity of the two comedians is revealed. Through their presence on set, they act as the play's link. Firstly raising the issue of the English Language, the play creates a situation in which Izeki cannot communicate in English beyond a few words. The relationship between inability to speak English and low status jobs is hereby established. Out of it, those who undermine people in that situation are condemned. In addition, people are warned to consider modern education, which includes the learning of the English language, as a tool that helps in communicating with the world, and securing better jobs. Secondly, the play raises questions about the status of popular theatre in Malawian society. In a satirical manner, it challenges the dismissive notions held by the society, considering the revenue that is collected from performances. Thirdly, the play alludes to Izeki ndi Jakobo's popularity as comedians by including an episode in which they talk about themselves. Most important of all, the play falls within the traditional "kuselewulana" and "nthabwala" forms. Having looked at samples of one-act Chichewa comedies, *Kukhala,* a full length comedy, follows.

7.7.1 KUKHALA – IS THIS NEIGHBOURLINESS?

7.7.2 CONTEXTUALISING THE PLAY

In a BA thesis entitled *Exploring Malawian Comedy: The Case of Izeki ndi Jakobo's Kukhala*, Innocent Komwa investigated on characterization, language, costume, and situations in the play. He argued that *Kukhala* survived by typifying its characters as 'stupid', and that Izeki ndi Jakobo played township paupers. Izeki spent his hard-earned money on beer and women, while Jakobo was a responsible man who

maintained his family. On language, Komwa was attracted to the use of sexual innuendo, which greatly amused the audience, but he was quick to condemn the repetition of the jokes. As regards costume, Komwa dismissed the tattered clothing of the characters as clichéd. Even though he identified 'verbal humour', plot complications, and comedy of character, he did not agree with the way they were used in *Kukhala*. He concluded that the play was substandard[334]. The present study takes a broader descriptive approach. In this section, I will explore the method of play structuring, drawing comparisons and contrasts with the methodology apparent in the one-act plays analysed above.

7.7.3 STRUCTURE

Kukhala was produced in 1992, and was recorded on video in 1997. It featured Nyanga as Izeki, Mabedi as Jakobo, late Estere Jekete as Anankhoma, Jakobo's wife, and Winnie Muheziwa as Anambewe, Izeki's wife. The play is divided into four scenes. Scene one opens with the two friends singing a song as they return from a beer-hall. The song accuses brother Billiati of neglecting family responsibilities, to the point that he fails to attend the funeral of his mother. Stopping to take a rest, the two drunkards reminisce about their afternoon. Through their conversation, the audience learns that Izeki spends his money on beer, and Jakobo trails along with him as a 'minder'. While Jakobo's support is usually a success, today has been different. He has been beaten up by a newcomer to the beer-hall. It has been a bad day for both of them because Izeki as well, hiding behind beer sellers, was reported and equally manhandled. It is, however, their description that makes the afternoon's event humorous. For instance, Izeki says *sindinawonepo munthu akugwa ndi chibagera,*

[334] Komwa (2002), BA Long Essay, p. 17 - 19

koma lero ndamuwona. Munthu wake iweyo –' I have never seen a person falling to the ground after being punched by another, but today I witnessed it when you fell'. Instead of supporting Jakobo, who backs him all the time, Izeki openly laughs at the friend's misfortune.

The scene has four moments. In moment one, Izeki and Jakobo enter. They sing until they decide to take a rest. Moment two is the description and re-enactment of the fight at the hall. Wishing to establish that he is more powerful in moment three, Jakobo attempts to start a fight with Izeki. In moment four, Jakobo tries to persuade Izeki to go back to the beer-hall. The two part ways at the end of the scene.

Scene two is set at Jakobo's house. It is late at night and Izeki enters to find Jakobo's wife, Anankhoma, waiting for her husband to come home from the beer-hall. Izeki introduces the object of his visit. He reports that, from his observation, someone in the location made a mistake in marrying a wife whom he never deserved. Using an image of shoes, Izeki says the couple has the left shoe on the right and the right on the left. He continues that the same has happened to another family. To Izeki, the situation needs to be 'corrected'. When pressed to explain clearly, Izeki reveals that he is attracted to Anankhoma. She suggests that Izeki return the next day when he is sober to raise the issue again. He agrees and leaves.

Three moments make this scene. Moment one is the arrival of Izeki and the salutations they exchange. Moment two is the introduction of the purpose for Izeki's visit and the discussion about it. In moment three, Izeki makes a prolonged farewell which could have been caused by either drunkenness, or because he did not want to

return to his wife. When he finally leaves, Jakobo's wife exits to mark the end of scene two.

Set the following morning at Jakobo's home, scene three starts when Jakobo wakes up to find that his wife, Anankhoma, has gone to draw water. On her return, he wants to go to work but Anankhoma tells him what Izeki said the previous day. Shocked, Jakobo wants to visit him right away. He stops when Anankhoma informs him of Izeki's impending visit. Anankhoma advises Jakobo to hide. Within a short while, Izeki arrives. Assured that Jakobo has gone to work, he pulls his chair close to Anankhoma's and re-introduces his proposal. Anankhoma then excuses herself to go and make tea. She re-enters with Jakobo who attacks Izeki. Jakobo is determined to either 'kill' Izeki or let Anambewe, his wife, know about the advances he made on Anankhoma. Izeki chooses the latter. They exit, with Izeki held like a thief, to report the matter to Anambewe.

The last scene is set at Izeki's house. When the couple leaves their home, Izeki is in their custody. On arrival at his home, Izeki shakes himself free of Jakobo's hold and challenges him to a fist fight. Jakobo is taken by surprise and when he approaches, Izeki floors him with a punch. In an attempt to diffuse what the others might say, Izeki tells a different version of the story to Anambewe. When Jakobo and Anankhoma try to give the correct account, Anambewe defends Izeki. The two couples first swear at each other and then boast about the attractiveness of their partners. Eventually defeated in their plan, the Jakobos leave for their home. After their exit, Anambewe refuses to talk to her husband. When she speaks, she registers her disappointment and threatens to leave him. Izeki tries to defend himself.

Unconvinced, Anambewe leaves for her parents' home. The play ends with Izeki frightened that his wife might leave him. He runs after her.

Closely looking at the structure, there is consistency and progression of the story from the first scene to the last. Unlike the one-act comedies which string together a number of different episodes, *Kukhala* has one clear story. The exploration of criticism leveled at the plays about costume, straight-line furniture setting, play construction, characterisation, and frivolity is next.

7.7.4 COSTUME

As regards the issue of tattered clothes in Malawian comedies, Komwa observes:

> All through the play, the costume Izeki and Jakobo use are tattered clothes – Izeki in a conspicuously tattered t-shirt and an equally worn-out pair of trousers; Jakobo in more or less the same, only with a worn-out policeman's cap as a difference.[335]

There are two explanations that can be offered for the use of such costumes. Firstly, it does not need to be repeated that comedy is presentation of narratives in a funny manner. Nyanga says he works very hard to make his fans clap for him. His awareness that members of the audience could have stayed home to watch soccer on television, or films made in America, makes him stick to what he has discovered pleases them[336]. Secondly, the play incorporates the costume into the story of *Kukhala*. In Scene One, when Jakobo wants to start a fight to prove his strength, Izeki asks for time to take off his shirt. The reference to 'taking off a shirt' that was already torn, added to the humour. The same effect is also achieved in Scene Three. After Jakobo comes out of hiding to challenge Izeki, the couple wish to humiliate Izeki, as

[335] Komwa (2002), p. 30
[336] Nyanga, interview

normally happens to thieves who have been caught in rural areas and high-density locations in Malawi. Anankhoma says: '*mumubvule malaya*' [take off his shirt]. It is the same torn shirt that is being referred to for comic purposes.

The idea of comedy through costume can also be seen in other one-act plays. As stated above in the discussion of *Pa Depoti*, the madwoman identifies Izeki through the ragged clothes he wore. Additionally, Izeki's wife commented on the smart clothes that Mike, the old schoolmate, wore, in comparison to her husband's. In *I am the Road*, Izeki's clothing was meant to signify the poverty of street-sweepers. The costume helped in drawing a difference between him and the smartly dressed Stranger, who later turns out to be his old friend.

The incorporation of costume is further turned into full use in *Maloto*, which has not been included in this study. When the play starts, Jakobo converses with an imaginary person. He confides in him about Izeki's clothes. He suggests that Izeki might be from 'Mento', referring to Zomba Mental Hospital. In response, Izeki talks to yet another imaginary friend. In his speech, he registers his fear in standing next to certain people '*chifukwa simungadziwe. Mwina ndi a sing'anga*' (because you might never know; he might be a medicineman). All these references made the costume to be part of the play and provoked hilarious responses from the audience.

7.7.5 STAGE SETTING

The point about straight-line setting of furniture is valid. The actors' movements become awkward, making the performances lose their realistic credibility. This is made worse by the actors' in-training which emphasizes that 'they should not show

their back to the audience'[337]. Though this might be the case, it should be quickly pointed out that the groups do not worry very much about techniques that make negligible difference to their plays. To them, furniture is set on stage using the same principle that actors should face the audience in performance. Another factor is that the productions are mostly performed on proscenium stages in which the audience sits directly opposite the stage. As regards the French Cultural Centre Open Air Theatre, the size of the stage, and the shape of the concrete seating plan, poses problems. Though the stage has a thrust stage-extension, I have personally observed how groups struggle firstly, to fill the twenty-five metres by fifteen metres stage-area, and secondly, to connect with the audience watching them from all parts of the auditorium. Those who set the furniture in a straight line, or perform while seemingly lined up at centre stage, have managed to avert the problem. Wishing to provide maximum visibility at all times, especially of the front body, the actors mostly perform while standing in straight lines at stage centre. This setting and blocking are in line with the technique which highlights facing the front and not showing the back to the audience.

Criticism on popular theatre by scholars has oftentimes disregarded the informal training that actors of popular commercial stage drama are given. Many of the actors, and the director-producers who train new recruits, are not products of universities or drama colleges. They are given in-house training when they are hired, or copy from what they see their counterparts do[338]. In addition, the theatre groups operate in a hostile economic environment in which they have to make money or close shop. It could be because of these factors that the emphasis is not on elaborate techniques,

[337] Chatha, Nyanga, interviews
[338] Joe Chimwenje, "Whither Malawian Drama", Research and Publications Conference 1995, p. 9

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which they might not even be aware of. Rather, they focus on what is easy to achieve, condoned by their 'unsophisticated' yet paying patrons.

Karin Barber explains the root of such misunderstandings when she differentiates popular Yoruba theatre from 'art' theatre that is produced at the university. She says 'popular theatre had little in common with the 'art' theatre of the universities'. Barber's emphasis on 'art' theatre contrasts the college drama or university theatre's techniques with popular drama's 'improvisation' and 'spontaneity', which are drawn from the experience of real life[339]. This indicates that 'popular theatre' has the ability to create its own techniques, at times completely different from, or seemingly in opposition to, those used in 'art' theatre. In line with Barber, I suggest that worrying about standing or sitting in 'straight-lines' on the 'popular stage' is very valid as regards 'art' theatre. Its necessity in popular theatre, however, depends on the judgment of popular artists, based on how their audiences respond.

7.7.6 BUFFOONERY IN COMEDIES

Another point to be made is about buffoonery or use of traits of 'stupidity' in comedies. Komwa says:

> (S)tupidity in characters was considered to be funny, and therefore a very important aspect of comedy. Many groups that performed included stupid characters in their plays. These were often rewarded with catastrophe in the end... The other thing that came out as integral part of the comedies was confusion in language. Characters that were uneducated often mispronounced English words... 'Take a seat' (meant) 'carry a chair'; 'go ahead' (meant) 'pita kwa a Hedi (go to the headmaster)'[340].

It can be noted here that Komwa is not happy with the way the drama groups used buffoonery, in which characters are typified as stupid. Straightforward and tired jokes

[339] see Barber 200o, *Generation of plays*, p. 3
[340] Komwa (2002), Long Essay, p. 20

such as the confusion of language noted in the quote, to him 'are not funny anymore' to use Chimombo's words.

The point that Komwa raises is partially valid, especially in the way that popular comedies are produced in Malawi. Chimombo has noted elsewhere that some groups are formed by break-away members. Finding themselves on their own, with no immediate plays to produce, they rely heavily on the repertoire of their previous company, resulting in repetition of tired jokes and known stories. For example, when members of Upile Drama group broke away from their director Shadrack Jumaina to form Upilire, their first play *Upilire* resembled *Mudzasiya*, the last production they staged as Upile. A scene which has two sorcerers, who cannot find their way back after casting a spell on a young man, is included in both productions. Members of the audience who had seen *Mudzasiya* at Mount Soche Hotel on 1st March, 2003, acknowledged the similarity and booed the group as 'wokopera' – copycats. In addition to that, many Chichewa drama groups in the southern region include in their plays a character who speaks with a Lomwe/Mang'anja accent as John Nyanga does. At best, they provoke unpleasant remarks from the audience members who are familiar with Nyanga's technique. Komwa's assertion on 'confusion of language' as comedy, which he raises in the quotation, should also be acknowledged within the same condemnation of borrowing tired jokes. Having said that, it should be quickly pointed out that there is a different perspective that can be offered to this debate. Comedy or creation of fun has always been biased. It has long relied on the stupidity of "other" people contained in racism, tribalism, sexism, and mistaken identities. To dismiss the use of buffoonery wholesale would be erroneous. For example, the urban and rural characterization has been successfully used. In Chris Kamlongera's play,

Love Potion, which is included in James Gibbs' *Nine Malawian Plays*, Uncle Nkeka spends a night at the house of his niece Agnes and her husband Bill. He has come to attend a court hearing, following theft of his two goats[341]. The mention of 'stolen goats', associated with Uncle Nkeka, has connotations of primitiveness connected to rural life. Though Uncle Nkeka is not shown as a buffoon in the play, his rural background creates potential for such characterization in an urban setting.

Another example of buffoonery comes from Vic Kasinja's cartoon *Joza* and Brian Hara's *Pewani*. As stated above, Chimombo concludes that Kasinja's and Hara's trickster and dupe cartoon characters come from fireside stories about Kalulu the hare. Closely looking at Chimombo's interpretation of the cartoon-characters, it can be seen that Joza, city slick and town-wise, makes buffoons of characters around him. As for Pewani, he is the rural buffoon who finds himself in great danger because of ignorance about ways of the city.

Buffoonery in professional popular theatre is present even in West African theatre. Olu Obafemi and Femi Abodunrin, in *Character is Beauty*, attest to this fact when they comment on the use of *Yeye* Tradition in Yoruba popular theatre:

> All these dramatists in their own different ways draw heavily on tradition. While Duro Ladipo drew his thematic and technical materials from myth, history, legends and rituals, and Ogunde works with the mythical and the secular, Moses Olaiya has taken the traditional form of slapstick entertainment which cuts across ritual festivals and folktales. It is the entertainment form called *Yeye* or *Efe* whose main function is the provision of laughter in the midst of self and public ridicule... This tradition of theatrical farce also includes the performances of entertainment groups who convert the cultic and the ritual to the profane... Such groups include the itinerants like the *Etiyeri* (a comic mask who wears a rabbit-like mask) and the Apidan theatre group (an acrobatic *Egungun* spectacular group). It is this form

[341] Kamlongera in James Gibbs 1984, *Nine Malawian Plays*, p. 107

> of traditional popular entertainment upon which Moses Alaiya builds his Alawada theater group[342].

If words such as 'itinerant' and 'Egungun' are marked in Obafemi and Abodunrin's comment, the idea of creating fun using dressing in the plays by the groups in question is clear. 'Itinerant' – schedule means that the groups created repertoires to perform in different places. These performances included mythical figures from Oral traditional performances such as Egungun. From Chinua Achebe's account of the seriousness of the (Egungun) Egwugwu masquerade in *Things Fall Apart,* it is remarkable that groups such as Moses Alaiya's Alawada theater dressed the masquerades with comic masks, and moved from place to place.

The merit of Komwa's argument against 'buffoonery' lies in the rejection of 'copycat' humour which many drama groups do, as they imitate ways in which big theatre companies present characters of their plays. However, buffoonery cannot be completely dismissed because it is one of the major techniques of characterization in comedy.

7.8 CONCLUSION: RE-READING MALAWIAN CHICHEWA POPULAR COMMERCIAL DRAMA

In exploring Chichewa Commercial Drama, I have provided extra perspectives to those adopted by Komwa, Chimombo, Chimwenje, and indeed, my own early works. Using Barber's and Steadman's 'descriptive' analysis, the chapter has investigated how one-act Chichewa comedies are put together. It has shown that, contrary to the critics' indiscriminate dismissal of the plays as 'assemblage of unrelated jokes', the productions are well planned. I have been particularly impressed by the placement of

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[342] Olu Obafemi and Femi Abodunrin, Character is beaty, pp. 92 - 93

transitional phrases to create quick connections between moments. In addition, the moments are carefully set for others that provide contrasting follow-throughs. It has also been shown that costumes are carefully used to create humour. Furthermore, understanding traditional forms such as *kuselewulana* and *nthabwala* reveals a bigger part of the mystery surrounding Chichewa comedies. I suggest that while the critics' worries over the plays were partially valid, an additional perspective is that they did not consider other factors, as this chapter has done. Besides, what drove the making of these productions, according to this exploration and the artists, was the desire to please their audiences, and to make money. The artists placed popular appeal above other considerations. This is quite different from the approach used in 'art' theatre produced at University. In the next chapter, I will explore the popular Malawian English Commercial Drama, drawing on the work of Du Chisiza Jr., Gertrude Webster Kamkwatira, and Twaya Sanudi.

CHAPTER EIGHT

POPULAR COMMERCIAL STAGE DRAMA IN MALAWI: ENGLISH PLAYS

8.1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines popular commercial plays in English. Playwrights' background will be explored before analysis of the plays. *Check It Out, Democracy Boulevard* (Du Chisiza Jr.), *It's My Fault* (Gertrude Kamkwatira), and *Black Democracy* (Twaya Sanudi) will be assessed, focusing on aspects of narrative, characterization, plot structure, humour, and social context. The aim is to investigate aspects of theatre which Malawian popular English plays paid attention to. We will start with a brief background, specific to commercial plays in English.

8.1.2 BRIEF BACKGROUND TO POPULAR COMMERCIAL DRAMA IN ENGLISH

Apart from the newspaper reports in the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News*, commercial stage drama in English has received less scholarly attention than drama produced at the university. Scholars alluded to it in passing as part of 'Literary Drama' but did not emphasize the professional/commercial aspect of the productions[343]. The category was neglected notwithstanding the fact that attempts at commercial theatre had been made before the 1980s. For instance, by 1975, Malimodzi Theatre and Kwacha Cultural Centre Drama Group had existed outside the institutionalized theatre of ATEM Festivals and the University of Malawi. The two groups were the first recorded amateur companies to produce popular commercial plays in the early 1970s[344]. Secondly, I recall performances that Owen Mbilizi and Towera Chawinga

[343] see Kamlongera 1984, Ph.D. thesis, and Kerr 1988 and 1998.
[344] See ed. J. Gibbs 1976, p. 13

(Masiku) staged between 1977 and 1981. Known for their roles in the radio drama programme *Theatre of the Air,* the two performers, joined by Augustine Lubani and Isaac Chirwa, staged their plays in Blantyre under the name Owen Mbilizi Tsine and Friends.

In the early 1980s, the movement was consolidated by a combination of efforts by individual groups. In 1983, after winning the ATEM Festival competition, Wakhumbata Workshop Theatre presented *The Deceased Attack* at the French Cultural Centre[345]. The play was popular because of its political message. In 1984, Chirwa and Lubani, former actors from Mbilizi's company, formed the Kuka Players. The group featured actresses such as Roziliro Twea who had been part of the Travelling Theatre from 1979 to 1983. Groups which included Wakhumbata, Kuka Players, and those that produced Chichewa plays consolidated the idea of popular commercial theatre in Malawi.

In spite of the many productions that were staged in the 1980s, consistent commentary on popular theatre only started in 1990 with the founding of WASI Writer, thanks to Steve Chimombo, editor of the magazine, and author of most of the articles. A playwright and Professor of English, Chimombo saw the publication essentially as a journal of records. In a series of articles, that included 'Mind Your Stage Business', 'The Death of Drama', and 'Vanishing Actresses', he provided a chronicle of commercial theatre in the country. Together with his wife Moira, he wrote *The Culture of Democracy: Language, Literature, the Arts and Politics in Malawi* in 1996. In it, the two provided a history of Malawian political theatre, amongst other

[345] Mwase, Makhala, interviews

chronicles of Malawian arts, showing how it had evolved during the transition from one-party to multi-party politics in Malawi. From these references, it can be appreciated that Chimombo has been the most consistent chronicler and most prolific critic of Malawian commercial theatre. He is not, however, the only academic to have commented on the phenomenon. Both Christopher Kamlongera and David Kerr have contributed to the commentary. Kamlongera's doctoral thesis, *Problems in the Growth of Popular Art Form: The Relationship Between Drama and Society in Malawi and Zambia*, Kerr's books, *Popular African Theatre*, and *Dance, Media and Entertainment in South East Africa* are worth consulting, though they make cursory remarks on the commercial experience. JJ Chimwenje's essays presented under the titles 'Whither Malawian Drama' and 'Chancellor College Travelling Theatre and the Development of Popular Theatre in Malawi' managed to relate a general historical picture of the movement's consolidation in the early 1980s. The essay I wrote under the title 'Developmental Paradigms and Underdevelopment of Stage Drama in Malawi' only went a short way to compensate for the general neglect and misunderstanding. From my present perspective, I can see that there were elements I had myself misjudged. In the pages that follow, I intend to provide a critical analysis of the Commercial Theatre in English by drawing on Ian Steadman and Karin Barber's 'descriptive' method. I aim to steer away from the 'prescriptive' literary principles which were responsible for the dismissal of commercial theatre. I begin with Du Chisiza Jr.

8.3 DUNDUZU "DU" CHISIZA JR.[346]

For various reasons, *The Deceased Attack*, which was based on *Hamlet*, made Du Chisiza Jr. popular. The play's popularity owed much to the topical issues it raised. It made a major political comment through theatre on Banda's political career. In Mwase's words, 'the play raised the issue of Chisiza Jr.'s father' (Mwase, Interview). The uncle in the play was associated with Banda as the man who kills his brother to marry his sister-in-law. David Kerr, a teacher at the University in Zomba at the time, and a judge at the ATEM Festival in Lilongwe in 1983, recalls that 'the play was a provocative statement against Banda's tyranny'[347]. With the same cast, Chisiza staged the play in secondary school halls and other venues, becoming established as a commercial dramatist. Together with the school friends, they made Wakhumbata Workshop Theatre to set a new pattern of commercial theatre in Malawi.

Wakhumbata Workshop Theatre was funded by Chisiza's stepfather Bazuka Mhango. This phase lasted until 1984 when Mhango sent Chisiza to Philadelphia School For Performing Arts in America where he did a Bachelor in Fine Arts (BFA) degree (Makhala, Interview 2003). While he was away, Mhango's funding for Wakhumbata stopped. Waliko Makhala and Frank Mwase led Wakhumbata and they staged plays

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[346] Du Chisiza Jr., the last of the four children born to the prominent Malawian political economist Dunduzu Chisiza, was born in 1963, a few months after his father was killed in a car crash on the Zomba-Blantyre road. Kanyama Chiume, a Cabinet Minister in the Banda government, wrote that Chisiza Sr., who had attained University education in Economics at Birmingham University in the 1950s, had already worked as a civil servant under the British colonial administration, and had written a monograph on African economics, was considered an early victim of Banda, as Banda established a dictatorship in Malawi (Chiume, 1982). Chisiza Jr. attended various primary schools in Blantyre and was admitted to Chichiri Secondary School in 1977. As a member of the Chichiri Secondary School Drama Club, he benefited from the presence of Owen Mbilizi, who was a patron of the club from 1977 to 1981. Though Chisiza's involvement in the club was limited, his enthusiasm for drama grew. After spending two years at Chichiri, he transferred to Henry Henderson Institute (HHI) Secondary School in Blantyre where he obtained the Malawi Certificate of Education in 1983. It was, according to Mwase, while he was at HHI that he staged an extract from Goldoni's farce, *Servant of Two Masters* and wrote *The Deceased Attack* (Mwase Interview 2003).

[347] Kerr, interview

including *Mosquito, The World Loved Us* and *The Eye of Chimuzu*[348]. On Chisiza's return three years later, he rejoined his friends to transform the School Drama Club approach that had characterised Wakhumbata's production methods. According to Wakhumbata actor Wongani Munthali, Chisiza's classes included Voice and Speech, Stage Acting, and Stage Management. The training was connected to production of plays which Chisiza wrote[349].

Chisiza began to feel frustrated when *Me Nobody Knows*, a play he intended to stage after his return, was refused permission by the Censorship Board in 1987. Mwase said the production raised issues of a girl who was being abused by her father, and the Censorship Board disapproved of its performance in Malawi[350]. In 1992, Chisiza told Chimombo that fifteen of his plays had been turned down by the Censorship Board[351]. As a way of dealing with the problem, Chisiza resorted to writing in 'experimental forms' those plays that were likely to be considered controversial by the Board. *Fragments* for example, was a result of such an undertaking. The play had an episodic structure, mixing dance, song and dialogue, and incorporated scenes from rejected plays including *Me Nobody Knows*. Mwase recalls the integration of a dance extracted from *Me Nobody Knows*. Suggestive of incest between a Reverend and his daughter, it was included as part of the opening scene for *Fragments*'[352].

Chisiza's approach to drama was derived from a combination of his experience from the ATEM Drama Festivals and his American education. He wrote his plays with literary standards in mind, and incorporated elements which he thought would appeal

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[348] Mwase, interview
[349] Munthali, interview
[350] Mwase, interview
[351] Chimombo interviewing Chisiza, WASI Writer 2002.
[352] Mwase, interview

to his audience. He manipulated the English language, to the delight of his spectators. For example, he integrated into the script repetitive rhyming words, experimental phrases, and exaggerated description of characters' actions. Describing these as 'extravagant writing' in 'Developmental Paradigms...', I suggested that Chisiza's *The Deceased Attack* would have been better if he had avoided elements that were used out of context and held the advancement of the performance[353]. With hindsight, I can recognize the advantages of Chisiza's approach and I have since put aside my 'prescriptive' response.

In an interview with Chimombo in 1992, Chisiza told him that he had written over seventy plays[354]. They included *The Deceased Attack, Chitowero, Nyamirandu, Fragments, Check It Out, Black Bra Wizo, Barefoot in the Heart, Democracy Boulevard, Truman's Corner,* and *Operation Tidy.* These, amongst others, indicate the range of themes tackled including politics, love, crime, and HIV/AIDS. He self-published fifteen of the plays in four collections namely The *Deceased Attack and Other Plays: Du Chisiza Classics*[355], *De Summer Blows and Other Plays, Democracy Boulevard and Other Plays*, and *Barefoot in the Heart and Other Plays*[356].

Academic critics have had a few positive words to say about Chisiza. According to David Kerr, efforts were made to attract him into the University after his return from America. However, his popularity and the commercial success he soon enjoyed distracted him[357]. Chimombo, however, was dismissive. He said 'Chisiza is a good

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[353] see Magalasi (2001), "Malawian theatre at the crossroads", p. 35
[354] see Chimombo interview with Chisiza.
[355] Published by Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre in 1992.
[356] Published by Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre in 1998.
[357] Kerr, interview

actor but not much of a writer'[358]. Joe Chimwenje thought 'Chisiza had established himself as a cult figure who wrote his own plays, played the major roles and never listened to any criticism'[359]. Ex-Wakhumbata actor, Waliko Makhala, said Chisiza did not want to join the university because 'he felt it would not have satisfied his needs of "making theatre" as the university's emphasis fell on "teaching theatre"'[360]. Makhala's comments show that Chisiza and other popular dramatists paid little attention to the way the University conducted dramatic activities, both as an academic discipline and a profession. For instance, when Chisiza returned from America in 1987, the Department of Fine and Performing Arts and the Travelling Theatre were already in close collaboration. Productions including *Chiwaleso, Tears of Blood, Genuine Tears,* and *Ulemu Unlimited* were performed, and they involved students including Watipatso Mkandawire, Ben Wokomaatani Malunga, Ulemu Chilimira, Sylvia Nankwenya, and Catherine Tikiwa[361].

Some of Chisiza's ex-colleagues at Wakhumbata expressed worry over his approach. Mwase described one of Chisiza's weaknesses that he 'thought he was too educated and successful in a sector in which he had no competitor. He made himself an unapproachable 'demi-god', because people such as Edge Kanyongolo and Viphya Harawa, who could have shown him a thing or two, had moved to other careers'[362]. Zondwayo Juwa, who worked with Chisiza as an actor from 1992 to 1995, left Wakhumbata because 'Chisiza shouted and humiliated me and other actors at rehearsal'[363]. In a biographical play, *Tribute to Du Chisiza Jr.*, Kamkwatira wrote

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[358] The present writer in conversation with Steve Chimombo, Hotel Chisakalime, 1992.
[359] Chimwenje, interview
[360] Makhala, interview
[361] see the *Muse*, 1987
[362] Mwase, interview
[363] Interview with Zondwayo Juwa, 2003

about how she persevered humiliation from Chisiza when she said 'I would be shouted at and sent away from rehearsal for being twenty minutes late'[364]. In spite of his weaknesses, Chisiza produced thought provoking and entertaining plays, some of which include *Check it Out* and *Democracy Boulevard*, whose analysis follows.

8.4.1 CHECK IT OUT by Du Chisiza Jr.

Soon after his arrival in 1987, Chisiza quickly re-organised Wakhumbata and produced plays, one of which was *Check it Out*. The play was based on contemporary urban social issues. This was seen as a move away from traditional plays such as *The Deceased Attack*, which he wrote before going to America.

8.4.2 SYNOPSIS

Check It Out is about a young man, Max Vukuza, whose father, Dr. Jim Michael Vukuza, works as a Manager of a firm in Blantyre. The Vukuza family resides in Namiwawa, one of the wealthy suburbs of Blantyre. Max calls himself 'Doctor', and girls from all walks of life vie for his attention. His stepmother, Nandi, who grades and approves girls for him, condones Max's affairs.

Mrs. Vukuza is a health fanatic who regularly drags the whole family to Dr. Mfani's surgery for medical check ups. One such family examination revealed a health problem that would break the family apart. Giving results after tests are carried on the family, Dr. Mfani confirms that all are still enjoying a healthy life except for Max who is diagnosed as being HIV positive. Mrs. Vukuza moves Max to the guest house fearing that the disease might spread to the other members of the family. Everything

[364] Kamkwatira, *Tribute to Du Chisiza Jr.*, unpublished play written in 1999 soon after Chisiza's death.

Max is kept away from the rest and he becomes depressed by the isolation. One day, Max's sister, Blessings, visits and cheers him up with a youthful chant in which Max's charm for girls is praised. Seemingly comforted, Max asks Blessings to accompany him to his favourite spots in the city. When Blessings leaves to dress up, Max becomes overwhelmed with memories of his past free life. After dressing up in 'dazzling' clothes, he fetches a rope and hangs himself. Hearing the news of the son's death, Jim fails to contain himself and he commits suicide. Though not stated, the death of the father brings to an end the happiness and material wealth enjoyed by the family.

8.4.3 CHARACTERISATION

Max Vukuza is the main character for the play. Newly out of school and working, he is a spoilt young man who comes from a wealthy family. He is adored by many girls, some of whom are still at school. His friends admire him, and he is ready to pick arguments with other young men over girls. The rivals are usually Indian or Coloured young men whose parents have shops or motor vehicle workshops in the city. Max's favourite spots in the city are big hotels such as Ryalls, cinemas including Apollo Visitarama, and restaurants such as The Lunch Box Take-Away. While seen as well placed in society, Max's weakness is girlfriends, of which he has twenty-seven. Pampered by the affluent environment, his extravagant interaction with girls leads him to his death.

Blessings, Max's youngest stepsister, is fifteen years old and at school. She has no boyfriend, and is very close to him. She likes pampering him out of admiration for his 'free' life, and she wishes to have a lover, just like him. Emotionally attached to Max

and very supportive of him, she stays with Max until his untimely death. Salome, Max's middle stepsister, has a boyfriend whose personality is slightly similar to Max's. Salome supports Max when he is healthy, but is advised by the mother not to be too close to him because 'HIV/AIDS is contagious and has no cure'. Claire, the eldest stepsister, knows how to play 'wealthy' to intimidate Max's girlfriends with the intention of maintaining Max's popularity amongst them. She also supports Max before the revelation that he is HIV positive.

Nandi Vukuza, the stepmother, shows love for Max to please her husband, by whom she has three daughters. She encourages Max to be loose by bringing pretty girls to him and yet when he is diagnosed with HIV, she is the first one to distance him from the family. She sidelines Max out of ignorance about the disease, drives him into a depression which leads him to his death. The father, Jim Michael Vukuza, is not close to the children, and that becomes a thing he pays a high price for when Max kills himself. He ends his own life in grief. Minor characters include Max's girlfriends Cleo, La Shaunze, Abygail, Nutty; friends who include Fraid, John and rival Osman. The community is represented by a Christian born-again preacher referred to as Brother, and Dr. Mfani, the family physician.

Chisiza's choice of names for his characters shows the way he planned *Check It Out* as a play for young people. For example, the name Dr. Mfani would have attracted the attention of policemen in Malawi. 'mfani' refers to a bundle of dry marijuana, which was illegal. Mentioning a name of the sort, viewed as anti-institutional, in a country trapped in political repression, delighted the audience. Nutty, another name, came from Bob Marley's song, *Nutty Dread*, which was very popular in Malawi at the time.

La Shaunze, with a ring of Spanish in it, brought an exotic feel and appealed to the youthful audience who fantasized about life outside Malawi. 'Vukuza' means 'to shake vigorously'. Taken from a popular streetwise colloquial term of the time, *ndikuvukuza mphwanga*, meaning 'I will beat and shake you badly 'young brother' – small one', the word provoked loud applause from audience members who identified in it an element of street culture. A splash of these names, amongst others that sounded youthful such as Claire and Abygail, embellished the play for the youthful audience's enjoyment.

8.4.4 PLAY STRUCTURE

Act One of *Check It Out* establishes how Max interacts with his family, the girls, and the community. Scene one is created around the chant which praises Max as an exotic and admirable lover. He performs it with his two sisters, Blessings and Salome. Scene Two is about Cleo, one of Max's girlfriends, who visits the Vukuza family. The way Max proposes to girls and communicates with girlfriends before he is reprimanded by a 'born-again' preacher, who is merely referred to as Brother, in scene three. Max, who does not heed Brother's advice, contradicts most of what he says about Christianity and good behaviour. On Brother's exit, John, Salome's boyfriend, who is also a friend to Max, enters and together they celebrate their popularity amongst girls. In scene four, Abygail and La Shaunze fight over Max. Abygail claims that she offers him money and clothes, while La Shaunze maintains that she gives him 'real' love. Scene five, which centres around Blessings' birthday, shows the popularity enjoyed by Max amongst girls and how other boys envy him. Scene six includes reflections that Max makes on life, death and heaven. With Nutty, another girlfriend, Max paints heaven for her as a technologically advanced place with highly sophisticated

entertainment equipment. Osman, Nutty's Indian boyfriend, calls at Max's place and is shamefully rejected by her.

Having shown the type of life that Max leads, Act two follows with the after-effects. The first of the ten scenes is about Dr. Mfani and how he breaks the news that Max is HIV positive. When he states the diagnosis, Max's parents wonder whether to send him abroad for medical attention or not. In their discussion, it is revealed that Nandi is Max's stepmother. She suggests to Max that he moves to the guest house in scene two. She then phones Dr. Mfani to advise Max to take an indefinite bed-rest. In scene four, the family starts to disintegrate when an argument between Mr. and Mrs Vukuza exposes two issues. Firstly, Nandi is Mr. Vukuza's second wife. Secondly, they discuss HIV/AIDS and how it is spread. All of them are ignorant about it. Nandi claims that it is contagious, while the children think it is genetic. Scene five is a tense moment between Max and Cleo, the girlfriend. She confronts Max about his state before breaking off the affair. In scene six, Max receives a letter from Nutty, ending their friendship. It is in scene seven, after Blessings visits Max to chant his 'check it out' praise, that he commits suicide. A procession for his funeral passes through the stage in scene eight, while in scene nine, the whole family reminisces about their loved brother Max. Nandi condemns Max's womanizing behaviour, and the father is very upset because of the accusations. The play ends with scene ten in which a Reverend comes to report the death of Mr. Vukuza to the wife, who by this time has lost her sanity.

8.4.5 SOCIAL ISSUES

The first issue the play raises is the careless way in which Max leads his life, mistaken by young people as carefree and enviable. With access to money and freedom to engage with different girls in sex, Max's so-called 'good life' results in the contraction of the HIV virus. When he tests HIV positive, the mood of the play changes from happy to sad. Dr. Vukuza accuses his wife of pampering Max because he was 'just' a stepson to her. The open challenge infuriates Nandi who claims that Max's promiscuous behaviour was inherited from the father.

Another important issue raised is the spread of 'fanatical' Christianity in Malawi in the 1980s. The incorporation of the 'born-again' Brother was topical for the play. Firstly, this theme reflected the presence of charismatic churches in Malawi, especially in the cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe. By the mid 1970s, the Assemblies of God and the Christian Fellowship Centres had taken root in Malawi. The Assemblies of God undertook crusades in the suburbs of the cities, conducting prayers in open places, and distributing leaflets. Fellowship Centres for lunch-time prayer meetings were opened in Limbe and Blantyre. These crusades brought a new approach to the spread of the gospel in comparison to traditional churches such as the Roman Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Presbyterians. A second issue is raised when Max refuses to listen to the 'born-again' Brother'. It shows the freedom with which the Vukuza family led its life. His act suggested that children from rich families enjoyed frredom of choice. Inversely, children from poor homes were mostly guided by Malawian traditions, which did not permit them to go against their parents and norms of society, including religious matters. The play placed under the spotlight

the issue of freedom to choose lifestyles amongst children who come from rich families, and its dire consequences, as a warning to impressionable young people who ignorantly envied such a lifestyle.

8.4.6 CHECKT IT OUT AND SOCIETY

The play starts from the high point of Max's popularity with girls. When it opens, we hear Cyndi Lauper's song, *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun.* The choice of the song, judging from the 'Americanised' context Chisiza and the youth operated in, is prompted, firstly, by the wording of the title, which incorporated the word 'wanna'. Secondly, the song encapsulates the theme of the play in which the youth demanded to be free to explore their capabilities as young adults, which includes being left alone to make their own decisions on sexual matters. When the song finishes, Max Vukuza goes into his own praise drill, in which he leads and his sisters respond with refrains, as the following exchange shows:

> **Max**: Check it out!
>
> **Sisters**: A guy from Burundi
> Takes only brandy,
> Wears clothes that are baggy,
> Crazy about African beauty.
> He walks.
> He talks.
> He's good.
> He's bad
> He's cute
> He's the best...
>
> **Max**: Check it out!
>
> **Sisters:** He's Max ... Max... Max Vukuza
>
> **Max**: Yeah...
>
> **Sisters**: Check it out![365]

[365] Du. Chisiza Jr. (1998 a), "Check it out" in *Democracy Boulevard and other plays*, Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre, p. 69.

Having warmed up his audience with *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*, the character Max Vukuza is introduced through the rhyming lyrics, praising the way he appears as a commendable ideal lover. Noticeable in the eulogy is the way he dresses, his love for 'African beauty' and his charm. Also striking is the American usage of such words as 'bad', 'good', and 'cute'. Soon after the chant, Max's way of wooing girls is illustrated, as the following exchange shows:

> **Max**: ... Hey, call Jane up for me, telephone number 631 807, and tell her that the "Doctor" would like to talk to her.
>
> **Blessings:** What if her Pa answers the phone?
>
> **Max**: The doctrine remains intact. The Doctor wants to talk to her. My D.O.A. is valid for both parents and their daughters.
>
> **Salome**: Who is this one now? New on the scene?
>
> **Max**: The latest...
>
> **Salome**: Did you make the first move or did she?
>
> **Max:** In our love federation it's not only abominable but illegal for a dude to make the first move on a chick. We let them crawl[366]...

The appeal to the youthful audience continues in this passage as he talks about love and girlfriends. The use of words such as 'Pa', 'making a move', 'dude', 'chick' is in a manner similar to that of American city youths as presented in Hollywood movies. The creation of sentences such as 'the doctrine remains intact' is also worth noting. Instead of expressing the idea simply, Chisiza uses an unfamiliar construction to demonstrate his ability with the English language. The accolade D.O.A. would have stood for Doctor Of Amity. As young secondary school students, in letters to lovers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we used the word 'amity' to mean 'love'. I first heard

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[366] *Check it out*, pp. 69 - 70

about it in 1975 from a fellow pupil Cornelius Masakasa, who had been introduced to the word by his brother Felix, a student at Mulanje Secondary School. At the same time, the term could have also been used to ridicule the reverence that MCP loyalists accorded President Banda. Banda was a medical doctor, who was dubbed 'Destroyer Of the Federation' (D.O.F.) by his Zambian counterpart, Kenneth Kaunda. Kaunda gave Banda the accolade not only in recognition of Banda's outspokenness about the Federation, but also because it was broken in 1960. My suggestion is that Chisiza created D.O.A. in line with his reference to love, and at the same time, he could have used it as a parody of D.O.F. Furthermore, his mention of 'love federation' in the quote was a way of creating a new context for the word 'federation', away from how it was known in Malawian politics. Through the new context, Chisiza was able to suggest his theme of love and sex:

> **Max**: ... We let them crawl...
>
> **Sisters**: And crawl, and crawl ... until you're ready to drawl. Hoo!
>
> **Max:** And then we catch...
>
> **Sisters**: And touch and touch until they are ready to hatch. Mhooo![367]

There are two things that can be suggested by what is happening in this scene. Firstly, there is a sexual game in the wordplay in which the sisters participate. Secondly, we may recall that Vukuza is a 'Doctor', and has all these women praising him. Could this have been a reference to Banda, whose *mbumba* (Members of the Malawi Congress Party's Women's League) sang praises for him as their only leader? Whatever the implication, Max's interaction with the sisters has similarities with the way Banda related to his dancing party women.

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[367] *Check it out*, p. 70

Max used his sisters to make telephone calls to girlfriends. At times, this method was confronted with problems, as shown in the following exchange:

> **Blessings**: Is that 631 807? May I talk to Jane please? The Doctor would like to talk to her. No, not Dr. Jacob, Dr. Max... Max Vukuza... Check it out! (Phone is hung up on the other end).
>
> **Max**: What happened?
>
> **Blessings**: He just hung up on me...
>
> **Max:** What did you say?
>
> **Blessings**: ... I asked if I could talk to Jane.
>
> **Max**: Yes, and he asked who was calling and you said, "The Doctor."
>
> **Blessings**: Doctor Max Vukuza...
>
> **Max**: Yes, then what did he say?
>
> **Blessings**: He just said "stupid", and hung up...
>
> **Max**: You must have said something else...
>
> **Blessings:** Nothing, I swear, apart from just "Check It Out!"
>
> **Max**: "Check it out"? To old folk?... Christ baby! We don't say 'Check it out!" to people of another generation... It's hazardous to their health. Might have been better to say, "Check it in!" Check it out? ... But all the same ... (it) doesn't give him the right to be rude... Give me the phone... (Dials) Hello? Listen big guy... I want you to meet me down town... Ryalls Hotel, pool side. I have to talk to you 'cause I don't like your jive'. 2.30 sharp! or you're a dead man.[368]

The idea of phoning a girl and being shouted at by the girl's parents was a 'scandal' that appealed to the youthful audience. It was a familiar encounter between young people and their lovers' parents in their 'development' to adulthood. The repetition of 'Check It Out', and the way Max addresses the person at the other end as 'big guy', are a continuation of the use of American mannerisms, as evidenced in some Hollywood movies. In addition, the mention of a high class meeting place such as

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[368] *Check it out*, p. 70 -71

Ryalls Hotel in Blantyre pleased his secondary school graduate audience. They imagined Max Vukuza as a man who frequented places where only those with money went. Chisiza's plays such as *Misidi Burning,* which is about police and criminals, and *Papa's Empire*, on the Mafia, suggest that in a place such as Malawi where American movies were adored, Chisiza included the references to the mannerisms and fancy places such as hotels to appeal to the audience. Observations I made in the earlier paper condemned such arbitrary inclusion, especially of language, which I said confused characterization. For example *Misidi Burning* is set in a rural area in Malawi, and has Malawian policemen talking in a similar manner to the way characters in American police television series do. In this dissertation, however, closer investigation reveals that Chisiza's inclusion of the mannerisms was a strategy to achieve popular appeal amongst members of the audience. An exploration of how the family reacted to Max's behaviour follows.

When Cleopatra, one of Max's girlfriends, comes to visit, the following conversation takes place between her, Max, and the family, as Lionel Richie's romantic song, *Penny Lover* plays in the background:

Blessings: Hi! My name's Blessings.

Cleo: Nice to meet you, Blessings.

Claire: I'm Claire. How do you like my brother?

Salome: And I am Salome – my friends call me Lome.

Cleo: Hi, Salome!

Salome: That's what my enemies call me...

Max: Hi, everybody, this is Cleo. Egyptians call her Patra – I call her my Inamorata – I give her 85%, how much do you give her?

Sisters: Seventy-four.

Blessings: His bedroom is ... comfortable but that will be when you hit 87%.

Cleo: Thank you – I'll aim for it...

Claire: What are you gonna drink – Night Music, Teachers, Seven Up – that's imported from South Africa. Of course Ginger Ale, Brandy, Fanta, that's not imported.

Cleo: I'll take some California Wine Cooler, thank you[369]...

The atmosphere of a comfortable, rich home, whose inhabitants behave like 'azungu' (white people) is being established in this scenario. It is noticeable that the children's lovers freely come to the family house. This is not the case with other homes, which are considered less 'civilised' for not behaving like 'white people', restricting their children from bringing their lovers. Chisiza is offering a vision of the freedom many members of his audience wished to have. The involvement of the sisters to comment on the beauty of their brother's lover is an extension of the fantasy of 'behaving like white people'. It is not normal amongst Malawians for sisters to openly discuss a brother's love life to the point of suggesting to the girlfriend that 'his bed is more comfortable'. Furthermore, Claire's reference to 'South African' and 'imported drinks' is not only a suggestion of class, but also puts forward the values of the family, which Cleo 'beats' by mentioning a drink with an American name.

There is a lot of competition between Max's sisters and Cleo to show how wealthy and civilized they are. Max's introduction of the girl as Cleo and later as Patra extends the fantasy game, while calling her 'my Inamorata' is an attempt to create mystique around her. Few of the audience members could have known what 'Inamorata' meant. Firstly, 'inamorata' is Latin for 'loved one'. Additionally, amongst the Tswana and

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[369] *Check it out*, p. 74

Sotho, 'ke a morata', means 'I love her'. 'Mrati waka' means 'my loved one'. In an effort to highlight class, which in Malawi is always associated with foreign and Western orientated mannerisms, Chisiza included 'inamorata' to add 'foreign' colour to the play. All this becomes part of the amusement, which reaches its climax when the mother enters, as indicated in the following exchange:

> **Max:** Where is Mom?
>
> **Claire:** You can wait, then, sweetheart for another hour or two.
>
> **Blessings**: She's in the bedroom.
>
> **Max**: Is she looking hot enough to meet a guest or is she looking droopy-droopy?
>
> **Mom**: I ain't sweetheart – maybe your girl is. By the way, I give her 55% - you better work on your hair, sweetheart, you need a hairdo[370].

Nandi joins in the children's game of 'youth love', adding enjoyment for the audience, which might have wished to have a mother similar to her. She grades the girl's beauty at 55%, rating her as possessing average looks, and therefore not commendable, uses American manner of speech, and criticises Cleo for not having a proper 'hairdo', to earn herself a commendation as a 'cool mom'. However, while the introductions are taking place, Max's other girlfriend calls on the phone, as the following conversations and exchanges confirm:

> **Blessings**: Hello – Dr. Vukuza's residence. May I help you? ... What's your percentage? Ninety – five? Career? ... Hold on! Max... Leticia's on the phone ... Ninety five percent, very pretty. Her father's a GM. She's a qualified secretary – 140 words shorthand. ...
>
> **Max**: Excuse me, sweetheart. Priority ... you're good, but someone else is better. Hang tight ... Yah... Check it out! Sorry honey, I can't fit you in today... Say what! 200 – 200 bucks? Where? What time? I'll be there in ten minutes. Bye Cleo.
>
> **Cleo**: Can I use your phone, please?

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[370] *Check it out*, p. 73

Mom: Sure, you're most welcome to it.

Cleo: (Dials) Hello? May I talk to Collins? ... Can you pick me up somewhere ... Well, I'm in a dilapidated neighbourhood somewhere in Namiwawa to see a cheap friend whose car's broken down... How long should I wait or should I call someone else?

Sisters: Uuuuuh!

Claire: I give you 95 %, baby, for character. You are really something else...

Max: Oh! Cleo, I gotta find you here, don't go anywhere...

Cleo: Can I use your phone again, please?

Sisters: Please ... No![371]

Notwithstanding the fact that Cleo is present, Max is further shown as someone who is in much demand by girls. He does not know who to hold on to, and runs to the other leaving Cleo at home. Cleo herself is almost similar to Max as regards behaviour. Seeing Max openly double-crossing her, she called another boyfriend to pick her up from 'a dilapidated neighbourhood in Namiwawa' she refers to as 'cheap'. The downgrading of Namiwawa as 'dilapidated' ran contrary to the knowledge that members of the audience had about it, so did the 'cheapness' of Max Vukuza. It was the delight that came from situations and dialogues such as these that Chisiza's audience looked for, especially when Cleo boasted and placed herself a class higher above the 'affluent Vukuza family'.

Mrs. Vukuza, a health fanatic, makes the amusement short-lived. Dr. Mfani visits the family and reveals that Max is HIV positive. Threatened by the incurable condition Max is in, the mother suggests that he stays alone 'so that we can save the others' (p.92). She does not realize the amount of pressure she exerts on Max's mind. Before

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[371] *Check it out*, p. 74

long, Max devises a plan out of the depression, as shown in the following exchange and stage directions:

> **Max**: Get yourself ready, Sis, 'cause you and me, we're going out on a date'. We're gonna paint the town red 'Cause Max is back on the scene'. I want you to wear my favourite clothes and I am going to wear the ones you picked – your favourite, I assume.
>
> **Blessings**: That's right ... Let's see who's first.
>
> **Max**: You've got three minutes.
>
> **Blessings**: Four and a half...
>
> **Max**: Four only. (Max puts on loud music. Dresses in the clothes Blessings chose. He is dazzling. Pausing for a moment, he fetches a rope, and in tears, ties it around his neck, killing himself. Lights fade to a ghostly dark blue.)
>
> **Blessings**: Max, I'm ready. I've taken three minutes. (Comes back in. Notices Max. Screams and runs out)[372]

The seclusion depresses young Max to the point that he commits suicide. What starts off as fun ends up in a tragedy. The isolation, contrasted to the attention he receives from his girlfriends and sisters at the start of the play, intensifies the ending. When the play opens, a group of three sisters perform with him the 'Check it out' drill. In the end, the presence of only one praise singer emphasizes the feeling of loneliness in the psyche of Max, made worse by his removal from the main house. The 'dazzling' clothes he wear before hanging himself, and the playwright's request for 'a ghostly dark blue' light for the time after the suicide is meant to add to the shock on the impressionable young audience.

At the time Chisiza staged the play in 1988, HIV/AIDS was not well known in Malawi. One Malawian patient had been reported in 1985, and subsequently treated in South Africa in 1987. In conversation, David Kerr reports that the World Health

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[372] *Check it out*, p. 106

Organisation (WHO) held an HIV/AIDS awareness Workshop for media practitioners in 1987. He remembers Charles Severe and other theatre artists to have attended. Additionally, Kerr suggests that *Check it out* could have been the first Malawian play about HIV/AIDS (Kerr, October, 2004). Additionally, Chisiza's stay in America, where HIV/AIDS was being discussed in the media, especially when Ebony Magazine carried articles that Magic Johnson, one of the top black basketball players was infected, could have inspired him to warn the Malawian youth about it. It is clear from Chisiza's treatment of the play that he incorporated a warning to the youth through their favourite subjects: affluence, lovers, and American mannerisms. In addition to that, by setting the play in Namiwawa, he responded to their fantasy of life led by so-called rich families.

The structure of *Check It Out* is easy to follow. Chisiza based it on an ordinary story about young people growing up in Malawi and the phenomenon of HIV/AIDS. By creating two acts which complemented each other, using the cause-effect baseline, he took along the audience from the behaviour of Max to what its effects were. Added to structure was characterization. Though parents were involved in the story, the emphasis was on the young people. The names he gave his characters and their behaviour reflected the fantasy about names, beauty, and exoticness amongst Malawian youths. Characterisation was complemented by use of language. Having identified the popularity of American movies and the lifestyle portrayed in them, Chisiza incorporated the elements to achieve popular appeal. Most importantly, *Check it Out* raised the issue of HIV/AIDS which was not commonly discussed in Malawi at the time. He tackled the myths that were circulating about the disease, and how misinformation could have affected communities. But if the discussion about

affluence, American mannerisms, and love affairs was how Chisiza charmed his audience in *Check It Out*, he also interested them in politics through plays such as *Democracy Boulevard.*

8.5.1 DEMOCRACY BOULEVARD by Du Chisiza Jr.

Democracy Boulevard was first performed on 13th August, 1993 at the French Cultural Centre, five months after Malawians had voted for multi-party democracy in a national referendum held in March, 1993. After *Barefoot in the Heart, Democracy Boulevard* was Wakhumbata's major political play in the transition period, and it was a celebration of freedom from political censorship on issues concerning the MCP Government. It was about the tyrannical acts and atrocities committed by the Banda Government from the 1960s. The play had an episodic structure in which each scene or two explored a different idea, with different characters.

8.5.2 PLAY STRUCTURE

Democracy Boulevard opens with an MCP Branch Chairman announcing a party meeting at the football ground. Finding a barber's shop open, the Chairman forces the owner, Fokasi, to close it in order to attend the meeting because 'everything, inclusive of the barber and the scissors he used belonged to Kamuzu Banda'[373]. The statement brought into focus one of Banda's praise songs, *Zonse Zimene Za Kamuzu Banda (Everything Belongs to Kamuzu Banda)*, and the name of the barber reminded people of Focus Gwede, a top police officer who was arrested for allegedly plotting, alongside Albert Muwalo, to assassinate Kamuzu Banda in 1976. When Fokasi argues, the Chairman threatens to deal with him later. Scene Two is between Woza

[373] Du. Chisiza Jr. (1998b), "Democracy Boulevard" in *Democracy Boulvard*, Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre, Blantyre. p. 121

Kaposa and his wife Hilda, who is repeatedly late from party meetings where she dances with other women for Kamuzu Banda. Accused of escapades with party officials, Hilda reports Kaposa to the Chairman for 'harassment of Kamuzu's Mbumba'. The Chairman sends youth leaguers for Kaposa and he is tied up in 'nyakula' style. During the later part of Banda's reign, villagers who were seen as critical of the MCP and petty thieves were punished by binding their arms at the elbows behind them. So, arriving at the Party chairman's house bound in that way, Kaposa is questioned, after which he is sent to the Police for detention.

Between the scenes of Kaposa with Hilda at home and the chairman's residence, there is a scene about an MCP party meeting at which party officials register their loyalty to Banda. The play also includes a scene set at a detention centre. Attempting to prove their innocence, four prisoners claim that no charges have been brought against them since they were detained. The scene is followed by one in which four masked men are seen guarded by a heavily armed policeman. The four represent ministers Matenje, Gadama, Sangala, and Member of Parliament Chiwanga, who were murdered by Banda's agents in 1983. Four women, standing for politicians' wives or daughters, speak to each one of them in turn. The women quote lines from each of their political speeches. A policeman then shoots three of the detainees. Gadama, whose body could not be pierced by bullets, is stabbed to death. After the episode, the exploration moves to workers' demonstrations where some people are shot by the police. Then there is the scene of Chihana's treason trial. It is reported that common people who had come to witness the trial were chased away by members of the Malawi Young Pioneers. Then the play moves to the issue of Malawi Catholic Bishop's Lenten Letter. After this episode, two men discuss the abundance of newspapers founded during the

transition. When the performers come on stage to bow, an interesting addition is made. The performers pretend to be members of Ahude, a fictitious political party whose members had come to address a rally on multi-party democracy. Using the audience as a rally gathering, the performers interact with them by shouting slogans before Chisiza closes with a speech. In the speech, he congratulates Malawians for voting against the MCP Government's wish to continue policies of one-party, and warns the people to vote wisely in the coming general elections on May 27, 1994. Members of the audience are then encouraged to join in a song.

8.5.3 DEMOCRACY BOULEVARD AND POLITICAL CHANGE

It could have been impossible to stage *Democracy Boulevard* when Banda still had political power. Attempts at staging political plays had been made in the 1970s and 1980s at University and ATEM Theatre. However, the use of language was either metaphoric or cryptic, hiding behind layers of symbolism, in an effort to evade censorship and detention. *The Rainmaker, Wachiona Ndani* (Steve Chimombo), *The Deceased Attack* (Chisiza), *Chinese Monastery* (Chizeze), and *Mad Prophet* (Innocent Banda) are examples of the type of theatre Chisiza openly celebrated by staging *Democracy Boulevard*. Through the performance, he declared that the days when literary metaphors masked political criticism were over.

8.5.4 LANGUAGE

Let us briefly explore the language more closely. In scene one, Woza reprimands his wife for coming late from party meetings. A key exchange goes like this:

> **Woza**: Where have you been? Just where in the world have you been?...

Hilda: (Unconcerned) I went to Chileka. (Taking off her head-gear). We went to welcome the Ngwazi, our Nkhoswe No.1. Any more questions?

Woza: Welcoming HE – 12 midnight? Don't give a bad name to a good man, or is it the other way round?... In 1971, he became the Life President; thereafter he started detaining so many people, and ruled this country with an iron fist., in a very monocratic and tyrannical style. Today, he is about to destroy my marriage, because my wife believes she belongs more to him than me. Ain't that sweet, sweetheart??

Hilda: Woza, you can play with other people, but just don't play with the Ngwazi, the Party and the Government.

Woza: I don't even see why you're trying to separate the three. They're all one in this country, and one is all[374]...

Woza's words indicate a general feeling of political freedom to speak one's mind, which had been long suppressed in Malawi. His detailed account of Banda's atrocities as prelude, and the playfulness with which the final question 'ain't that sweet sweetheart?' is put, celebrated the freedom of 'finally' being able to speak out. Secondly, the critical response to Banda and his style of government in the phrases 'monocratic and tyrannical', 'they're all one in this country, and one is all' would have earned any speaker detention without trial before 1993. Chisiza creates his own words such as 'monocratic'. In the way the word was used, it referred to 'one man's rule' as opposed to 'democratic rule' which entails a consensus of different parties. Chisiza speaks for many disgruntled Malawians through Woza to raise the long suppressed feelings towards government leaders who refused to differentiate between party and state issues.

The play is noteworthy in that it approximates what Bheki Peterson, in his article titled 'Performing History Off the Stage: Notes On Working Class Theatre', describes

[374] *Democracy Boulvard*, p. 122

as 'performing history'. Peterson used the phrase to describe the staging of workplace oppression and police victimization as the main focus of black workers plays in the 1970s and 1980s[375]. When the opportunity presented itself, Chisiza staged a chronicle of some of the most painful events in Malawi under Banda. His references to the 1960s uprising against Banda by Silombera and Yatuta Chisiza, to the deaths of the four cabinet ministers and to the Bishop's Lenten letter were not only reminders of the ills, but a re-staging of the history of Malawi.

The closing scene raises an issue about freedom of association. The Wakhumbata cast discusses current politics with the audience. Taking advantage of the time, in which many political parties emerged to contest in the first multi-party elections, Chisiza illustrated how easy it had become to form a political party. Most importantly, he projected towards general elections, as shown in the following speech:

> We stand here sailing in the waters of multi-partyism because you voted for the right thing. If you had voted for the wrong thing, I would now be addressing livers and kidneys inside the belly of crocodiles. But now, even if I was thrown into the Shire River, crocodiles would welcome me as "mzathu - friend". The new generation of crocodiles in the Shire refuses to eat multi-party advocates. And at the moment those crocodiles are criticising us asking "What are you doing?" When are you going to start sending us the single party advocates?" And we respond, "In multi-party state the word is reconciliation, the culture is tolerance, the spirit of forgiveness[376]...

Presenting the multi-party political environment as tolerant of other voices, Chisiza creates grim humour around the issue of feeding opponents to crocodiles. The idea behind this could have been to contrast the hardships experienced during Banda's reign, and to further project on what was to come under multi-party rule. In addition,

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[375] Bheki Peterson 1990 in *Critical History Review*
[376] *Democracy Boulevard*, p. 170

he spoke to the audience, knowing that '(they) are the very same people that also attend rallies of UFMD, MDP, MNDP, AFORD, MCP and UDF':

> Do not vote for AFORD because your neighbour comes from the same village that Chakufwa Chihana comes from. Do not vote for MNDP because your father worked for Tim Mangwazu. Do not vote for MDP because it thrilled you with Channel Africa campaign propaganda. Do not vote for UDF because it was the first to release a manifesto. Do not vote for MCP because you still believe that Banda was given by God to rule this country[377]...

While he humorously presented critical ideas, he alluded to some factual issues of the transition. The statement which stated that 'do not vote for AFORD because your neighbour comes from the same village that Chihana comes from', he was commenting on ethnic tendencies that characterize the way some Malawians relate to each other. The 'Tim Mangwazu MNDP's vote' presents a question of loyalty based on material benefits. The MDP's propaganda through South African Broadcasting Corporation's Channel Africa was a reminder of how that party launched itself as a party for some Malawians living in Johannesburg. For the UDF, he wanted to celebrate the haste with which it produced a manifesto, ready for the impending general elections. In fact, the first pressure group to be formed was AFORD, but UDF won popularity because AFORD showed bias in recruiting people from the Northern region, while the UDF enlisted its members from all the regions. As for the MCP and Banda, Chisiza wanted to mock the 'invincibility' loyalists claimed Banda possessed. Ironically for Chisiza, this was the last major political play he wrote about multi-party politics before being signed up as a Deputy Minister of Culture and Youth in the very MCP government he criticised.

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[377] Democracy Boulevard, p. 171

It is clear from this exploration that *Democracy Boulevard* responded to pressing issues of the time to give Malawians a play that chronicled history on stage for all to see, and projected into the future, beyond one-party to multi-party politics. Through language, characterization, and current issues, Chisiza made audiences applaud, dance and sing along to a turning chapter in Malawian politics, before going against his own words to join the MCP government. The picture of Commercial English stage drama, however, would not be complete without discussing its activities in the new political dispensation, thorugh works by some of Chisiza's apprentices like Gertrude Webster Kamkwatira. After working with Chisiza from 1987 till his death in 1999, Kamkwatira took over the leadership of Wakhumbata. A remarkable woman whose career I will briefly survey, Kamkwatira wrote, directed and acted in the plays.

8.6 GERTRUDE WEBSTER KAMKWATIRA[378]

[378] Gertrude Webster Kamkwatira was born in Mwanza in Southern Malawi in February 1966. Daughter of a Member of Parliament, Webster Kamkwatira, who served in the Banda Government, Gertrude seems to have taken her leadership qualities from him. She attended Stella Marris Secondary School from 1982 to 1985, and in 1986, she enrolled for a Diploma in Secretarial Work at Our Lady of Wisdom Convent in Limbe. In her words, she said 'my interest in drama started when I was in lower primary school' (Kamkwatira, Interview: 2003). She recalled how her teacher invited pupils to lead in the creation of plays for end of year concerts. Always jumping at the opportunity when offered, she recalled suggesting plays about 'nurses' or 'people at the market'. This childhood interest was strengthened when she attended Stella Marris Secondary School. Though she was more interested in the Debating Club, she auditioned for an ATEM festival play and secured a role. This experience from Stella Marris, in plays such as *Makewana*, directed by Margaret Mbilizi was a precursor to her involvement with Wakhumbata.

Kamkwatira's completion of the Secretarial course coincided with the return of Du Chisiza from America in July 1987. Impressed by Wakhumbata's plays, she approached Chisiza when *Cry the Beloved Soldier* was in rehearsal. She was encouraged to take part in plays that still needed to fill up roles for women. Somewhat hesitant at the start, she gradually gained confidence, partly because of the Workshop training that Chisiza offered his actors. She joined Wakhumbata at the same time that she secured employment with Commercial Bank of Malawi as a Secretary. Noting her typing skills, Chisiza used her to type scripts, which he dictated to her at times. Through this interaction, she learned the technique of playwriting from Chisiza.

During rehearsals, she found Chisiza a very temperamental director who shouted at his actors. She, however, paid attention to the way Chisiza directed the plays. At blocking time, for example, she was bold enough to ask why she had to move in the directions she was being told to go. If she was uncomfortable with the movements, she would tell him about it. During her leisure time, she worked out what the different roles required. In 1988, Patani Frank Mwase, who also observed Chisiza very closely, was promoted from actor to Assistant Director. Mwase held the post until he left to start his

own company, Force Theatre, in 1989. Working both as an administrator and performer, Kamkwatira was entrusted with the post of Audience Development Manager. By this time, Kamkwatira was still working in the Bank as a Secretary. Since most of the performances were staged at weekends, Kamkwatira managed to balance her bank work with the theatre demands. During tours of the main cities such as Lilongwe in the Central Region and Mzuzu in the North, she started of on Friday evenings, returning on either Sunday night or Monday morning. The demand of the two jobs started to take a toll on her, and in 1996, she resigned from the Bank to work full time at Wakhumbata. She continued to combine the administrative work and the acting. Aware of how hard she worked, Chisiza promoted her to Assistant Director, and by the time Chisiza died in 1999, she had gained considerable experience of many aspects of playwriting, directing and theatre administration. With the support of Wakhumbata performers, she took over the artistic and administrative leadership.

By the time Chisiza died, Kamkwatira had already written *Parting Points*, but she realized the advantages and appropriateness of putting on a play about Du Chisiza. As a result, she wrote and directed *Tribute to Du Chisiza Jr.* After this initial experience, Kamkwatira led Wakhumbata with plays that told women's stories. Between 1999 and 2002, she wrote and directed over seventeen plays. In addition to those mentioned, others included *Delilah, The Divorce, It's my Fault, Who is Fooling Who, Two Superpowers, Sarah, Breaking The News, Lack Feat* and *Why I Love Judas*. She also directed *Winds of Change* by Ngongi Chisiza, and a version of Moliere's *The Miser*.

In 2001 and 2002, Kamkwatira took *It's My Fault* and *Two Superpowers* to the "Theatre in the Park Festival" in Harare, Zimbabwe. After the festival, twenty-nine shows were staged around Zimbabwe to critical acclaim (Herald 2002). The group also performed in Zambia, Namibia, and South Africa. In 2002, Kamkwatira became Chairperson in the newly formed Southern African Theatre Initiative (SATI) where she worked with Davis Guzzha, Executive Director of Rooftops Promotions in Zimbabwe, Mpho Molepo of the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, Fred Philander, Namibian journalist and actor, Mavhungu Lerule, South African Community Theatre activist, and Ackson Tembo, a Zambian playwright.

Locally, Kamkwatira and Ambokire Salimu were very instrumental in the drafting of the constitution for Theatre Association of Malawi. When it was finalized, she was elected President of the Association. Salimu, a lawyer by profession, became a member of the Board of Trustees for the Association. In 2002, Kamkwatira was made a Board Member of the Arts and Cultural Trust Fund, representing the Malawi theatre practitioners. She also founded Women in Malawian Theatre. By the cut off date for this dissertation, the group had performed educational plays about women at hospitals, schools, and community centres. She was also chosen as a Country Representative of the International Association For Children's Theatre (ASSITEJ), and attended a number of children's theatre conferences in Zambia and Uganda.

Kamkwatira is a versatile playwright whose plays tackled a number of issues in Malawian society. She has written on women's relationship's with men in plays such as *The Divorce, Why I Love Judas,* and *Sarah*; on relationships between women in *Two Super Powers*; on HIV/AIDS and family communication in *Breaking The News*; and on contemporary multi-party politics and Malawian society in *Who is Fooling Who*?

After leading Wakhumbata for five years, a rift occurred between her and the Chisiza family. In a personal conversation with Mrs. Towera Chisiza, mother of late Du Chisiza Jr., she told me that the name Wakhumbata belonged to her mother-in-law. She contested the continued use of the name by the group when the family benefited little from the proceeds of Wakhumbata's productions (Chisiza T., July, 2003). Kamkwatira resigned from Wakhumbata and formed Wanna Do Ensemble Theatre. She took with her actors including Arthur Mainja and Phyllis Dinala. She has since been joined by former Wakhumbata actor Ben Msuku, and recruited Gift Namachekecha, a graduate of ATEM drama festivals from Mtendere Secondary School in Dedza. Khumbo Mhango, Chisiza Jr's half-brother, and Chisiza's cousin Wongani Munthali, took over the leadership at Wakhumbata. As might be expected from this sequence of events, there have been attempts to attack Kamkwatira. The press has carried reports of her as having squandered money belonging to the Theatre Association. However, with a supportive Board of Trustees, she survived the onslaught, and cleared her name through an audit of the Association's financial books by a firm of Chartered Accountants.

8.7.1 IT'S MY FAULT

8.7.2 SUBJECT MATTER

It's My Fault is about Clementina; her husband Isaac Khomeliwa; their servant Onefold; the medicine man, Theng'e; and Isaac's uncle, who is just known as Uncle. Clementina suffers at the hands of Isaac when she challenges him about his extra-marital affairs. Onefold suggests that 'just as many Malawian women do to calm down their husbands, she should visit a herbalist'. Clementina initially dismisses the advice. When the beatings continue, she visits Theng'e's village. Theng'e gives her the medicine, together with guidelines which he warns her not to disobey. She is told not to show any signs of pity for Isaac, however much he suffers as a result of the herbs. Back home, Clementina places a plant in a flower pot, and quietly says the words that Theng'e instructed her to. When Isaac returns home, he changes into a loving and caring partner. Days pass, and wishing to be with Clementina all the time, Isaac stops going to work. More days pass and Isaac starts to do house chores, and advises Clementina not to bother about them. Every time Clementina goes out shopping or for any other business, Isaac wants to accompany her. Alarmed by this strange behaviour, she tries to stop him from doing the chores, and advises him to go to work. Hardly has she shown pity when she starts behaving strangely. She starts talking to herself, laughing, dancing, and takes off her blouse. Alarmed, Onefold volunteers to direct Clementina and Isaac to the medicine man's place. They drive to Mulanje, picking up Uncle on the way. When they arrive at medicineman Thenge's place, he tells them that the madness is irreversible because the utensils that were used in administering the initial concoction had been thrown into Lake Malawi. Clementina's situation worsens. She starts to terrorize everbody present including

Theng'e himself. The play ends when she runs out into the village, with everybody chasing after her.

8.7.3 WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The central issue of the play is domestic violence and how Clementina tries to resolve it. When we meet her for the first time, she is 'sponging her face'[379]. Onefold notices the swollen face, and is concerned, as indicated in the following exchange:

Onefold: Madam, what's wrong?

Clementina: Aaa, Onefold, don't start meddling in people's affairs...

Onefold: Don't say that madam. This is abuse of human resource.[380]

Though Onefold's pity is accompanied with a comical phrase such as 'abuse of human resource', his concern is clear. Clementina rejects his advice because Onefold is a servant, but the negative response does not mean that Onefold cannot help. Rather, Clementina fears that Onefold's familiarity with her problems will dilute her authority over him. Clementina reports Isaac to his relatives, and Uncle comes, as tradition demands, to help in giving advice to them. However, Clementina informed Isaac's uncle without Isaac's knowledge. When Isaac learns this from the uncle, he is angered. At Clementina's arrival from work, 'Isaac rushes and grabs her' to ask 'why would you go to my home without my permission and knowledge?'[381]. When Uncle tries to intervene, Isaac challenges him, saying:

> Whose side are you on? Get out of here or if you want you can marry her. After all, she has been frequenting your house without my knowledge... And you (squeezing her neck), get out of here before I regret my actions[382]

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[379] Gertrude Kamkwatira, It's My fault, first performed in 2001, p. 5
[380] *It's my fault*, p. 6
[381] *It's my fault*, p. 18
[382] *It's my fault*, p. 18 - 19

With this kind of aggression, and following Uncle's failure to restrain Isaac, the stage is set for Clementina to take action against her husband. She summons Onefold who gives her directions to Theng'e's village. In desperation, she embarks on a course of action whose consequences she could not predict.

Kamkwatira does not give any lasting relief to Clementina. She creates a character whose problems increase as the play advances, until she is completely destroyed. According to Ben Msuku, Clementina's character is constructed as a way of making women realize that the power to find solutions for their problems can not be provided by anyone but themselves. In conversation, Msuku said 'what is highlighted in Kamkwatira's plays is that women should find ways of dealing with their problems, besides being careful about the advice they take from people, including other women'[383]. Kamkwatira herself feels that her way of articulating women's rights is by making them central characters, and not by attempting to resolve their problems. To her 'their strength remains inside themselves'. She feels that 'my duty as a playwright is to hint to them, individually, that "woman, you have a big problem to resolve"'[384]. In the case of *It's My Fault*, Kamkwatira shows Clementina's desperation and her vulnerability to misleading advice. Judging by the way Clementina's story ends, Kamkwatira rejects her character's decision to use herbs as a way of resolving problems in marriage.

[383] Msuku, interview
[384] Kamkwatira, interview

8.7.4 RELATIONSHIPS AND CHARACTERISATION

It's My Fault is constructed around differences in social relationships. Isaac and Onefold come from the same area, Mulanje, where the Chilomwe language is spoken. In spite of that, when the play opens, Isaac interacts with Onefold in this way:

> **Onefold**: Moseliwa? (How are you?)
>
> **Isaac**: (Just stares at him)
>
> **Onefold**: Good morning sir. How was your night?
>
> **Isaac**: (Still stares at him)...
>
> **Onefold**: Bwana, madam said I should tell you that there is no soap, cooking oil, colgate...
>
> **Isaac**: Where did she tell you this?
>
> **Onefold**: In the kitchen sir when I was preparing...
>
> **Isaac**: I have told you before I don't like to eat food prepared by a worker[385]...

Isaac's position as an unsympathetic employer and arrogant master of Onefold's is clear. Firstly he treats him with contempt by not responding to his greeting. When Onefold reminds him about needs of the house, he speaks angrily. Onefold's relationship with his employers worsens further in an exchange with Clementina:

> **Onefold**: Madam, don't believe in this kapilire – persevere in marriage – phenomenom...
>
> **Clementina**: (Furious) Onefold can't you hear once... You are here as a houseboy and that's what you are paid to do[386]...

It is clear that Onefold is a servant, employed by the Khomeliwa family. While Onefold sincerely wants to help, the problem is that the help is coming from the wrong quarters and is rejected. Later in the same scene, Clementina finds Onefold

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[385] *It's my fault*, p. 2
[386] *It's my fault*, p. 7

sitting on a chair, and she says 'And what's that? Who do you think you are to be putting your 'butt' on those chairs?'[387] Clementina openly shows contempt for Isaac, and includes an American expression 'butt' to emphasize her class position. The contempt with which Isaac is treated induces in him a similar attitude. When Uncle comes to visit, Onefold exchanges words with him in this way:

> **Uncle**: (To Onefold) Malume - Uncle, can you please tell your madam to come over here.
>
> **Onefold**: Oh sure sir, no problem at all.
>
> **Uncle**: Of course there is no problem. It's your duty to be sent around...
>
> **Onefold**: Just consider yourself lucky that I have accepted. Don't start bossing around. It's a privilege and not a right to send somebody's worker.
>
> **Uncle**: Eee Achimwene, pepani I didn't mean to provoke you...
>
> **Onefold**: No, you villagers need to be told facts. It's true that I am a houseboy, but that does not make me liable to abuse by anyone.[388]

While he knows that he is a worker, Onefold, who 'at least' has primary education, considers himself superior to the illiterate Uncle. This is made worse by the fact that Uncle lives in the rural areas. Noteworthy is also the way Onefold speaks English. His sentences are too good to be made by a standard eight person (see full discussion under "Language").

Relationships deteriorate when Isaac returns from the office to find Uncle in his house. Isaac lectures him on how expensive life is in the city. Asking him about the planting season, Isaac tells him not to expect any fertilizer because he needed to pay fees for his children. Onefold enters with a tray of tea and when Isaac insists that the

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[387] It's my fault, p. 8
[388] *It's my fault*, p. 10

uncle drinks it, uncle refuses and asks for the bananas that he brought from the village[389].

The interaction in the Khomeliwa household indicates the way they graded each other as regards class. Uncle is at the bottom of the classification because he is illiterate and lives in a rural area. Onefold feels he is above Uncle in status because he has some primary education and lives in the city. Clementina, as Isaac's wife, feels superior to Onefold because he is just a servant. Isaac thinks he has a higher status because he is a man and is superior to all of them.

8.7.5 STRENGTH AND VULNERABILITIY IN CHARACTERS

Having arranged the characters in a hierarchy, Kamkwatira turns them around. Clementina's wish for solutions to her problems with her husband grows. Uncle leaves in anger after being mistreated by Isaac. Aware that the problem is deteriorating through Isaac's unwillingness to listen to any advice, Clementina 'shakes her head' and has the following exchange with Onefold:

Clementina: Sit on the chair.

Onefold: No madam, I will squat, don't worry.

Clementina: No, I said sit on the chair.[390]

The earlier contempt Clementina showed towards Onefold is dramatically reversed. The same chair she warned Onefold not to 'put his butt on' is now being offered to him. The ground is being leveled to show the mutual dependency between human beings. Clementina asks Onefold for directions to Theng'e's village and manages to undertake the trip.

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[389] *It's my fault*, p. 15
[390] *It's my fault*, p. 19

A turnaround also happens between the other characters. When Clementina goes mad, Isaac has no one to talk to and he asks: 'Onefold, is she mad or not?' Onefold suggests taking her to Theng'e, and Isaac adds that 'we should go home first and ask Uncle to escort us'[391]. Onefold has scored 'one more point' when Isaac acknowledges him as helpful in his use of 'we' to refer to himself and the servant. Before they reach Thenge's village, they pick up Uncle at his house. When they arrive at Theng'e's place, Isaac, lacking confidence to speak with the mediceman, says, 'Uncle, tell him like I told you'. When Uncle replies that he could not because he did not know where it all started, Isaac turns to Onefold and says 'you saw everything. Can you narrate to him?'[392] Isaac's arrogance has been deflated, and he solicits help from both Onefold and Uncle when he is confronted by Clementina's crisis.

The creation and the reversal of social class relationships provide interest for the play and fills out characters. Starting with strengths, Isaac and Clementina play master, and when things go wrong, they are made to feel vulnerable, turning to the people they considered themselves superior to. Onefold and Uncle, both of whom start as vulnerable, turn into strong characters who help to resolve the crisis. Interestingly, Onefold's snobbishness over Uncle is never diffused by the end of the play. However, the balancing of characterization in the other people made the play credible.

8.7.5 LANGUAGE AND HUMOUR

As regards language, Onefold and Uncle speak with a Lomwe accent. The use of this tone of voice became popular through its constant use in comedies by Kwathu Drama

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[391] *It's my fault*, p. 33
[392] *It's my fault*, p. 35

Group, particularly by John Nyanga. It is commonly used in Chichewa plays produced by groups from the South and Central regions, and enjoyed nationwide. The use of this regional intonation is one of the elements through which groups including Izeki ndi Jakobo, Alufeyo Performing Arts, Kwathu Drama Group, Azizi Drama Group, and Upile Drama Group create humour. As indicated above, the Lomwe accent is viewed as primitive, and it delights the audience when it is used in contrast to the Nyanja/Ngoni accent and the street language of the cities.

Similar employment of accents and language in popular theatre has been reported from other parts of Africa. David Kerr reports about the way popular audiences in West Africa, particularly Nigeria and Ghana, were delighted when plays by touring Nigerian companies included Kreole and pidgin English. In South Africa, Mbongeni Ngema included a buffoon from the Shangaan tribe in his play *Township Fever*. While there was delightful acknowledgement of Zulu language in a play which used English, it was the Shangaan character's intonation of English words which drew more laughter. For example, the character's mispronounciation of 'champagne' as 'kampani' did not only emphasize the buffoonery in characterization, but also indicated the employment of the Shangaan accent in relation to English words. Another usage of accent in South Africa was that of Afrikaans, which was viewed as the language of the oppressor in anti-apartheid plays. Produced in Zulu, Suthu, or English, the plays characterized white policemen and civil servants as villains who spoke with an accent, imitative of Afrikaner white people. This inclusion excited anti-apartheid audiences in performances of plays such as Workshop '71's *Survival*, Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema's *Woza Albert*, and Dhlomo Collective's *Jika Jika Jive*,

and *When the Locust Comes*. When Kamkwatira adopted the Lomwe accent in her play, she used it as a way of appealing to the Malawian popular audience.

Secondly, while *It's My Fault* raised serious issues, it included a lot of humour. For example, Onefold argues with Uncle when he sends him to call Clementina. Onefold thinks it is 'just a privilege, and not a right to send other people's houseboys'. The statement pleased the audience because of the reversal of status. As a servant, Onefold needed to be respectful of his employer's uncle. In addition to that, more humour came when Isaac reminds uncle of how expensive life was in the city. When the uncle is offered tea, he refuses. Instead, he calls for the bananas that he brought from his home. As a result of this action, the uncle responded to Isaac's snobbishnes, to the delight of the audience. Isaac's change of plans from having a cup of water to tea, following Uncle's refusal, also creates humour because the audience realizes that Isaac's offer of tea to Uncle was insincere.

Kamkwatira is also consistent in her use of language and characterization. For example, Clementina uses American idioms. When she finds Onefold sitting on the sofa, she tells him to 'remove his butt'. As an educated and a middle class character, Clementina could have picked up the idioms possibly from American soap operas such as *Days of Our Lives, Loving*, and *The Bold and the Beautiful* shown on E-TV and MNet, South African satellite pay television channels. On the other hand, it could also be an indication of language use which Kamkwatira inherited from Chisiza Jr., with whom she worked for twelve years.

Another example comes from Onefold. He has only standard eight education but occasionally, his usage of language is too good. Firstly, he advises Clementina about the 'kapilire phenomenon'. 'Phenomenon' is a complex term to have been taught to him in primary school. Secondly, in responding to Uncle, who had sent him to call Clementina, he tells him that 'it is not a right but just a privilege to send someone else's houseboy'. The phrase does not have a Chichewa equivalent and sounds advanced, being spoken by Onefold. Onefold could have repeated the standard eight class for a number of years, offering him a chance to learn more complex English words, given the way 'repeaters' of standard eight tend to memorise 'bombastic' language while in primary school. Kamkwatira could have also included the words and phrases because of their popularity with the audience as clichés. The talk of 'rights', for example, is very common in both the urban and rural areas because of gender equality campaigns and the growth of trade unions in Malawi. The problem with the way Kamkwatira made Onefold speak English as a semi-literate character is that she does not offer any background information for such use.

It can be seen that Kamkwatira, like her counterparts in popular commercial theatre, includes a number of elements which are known to be enjoyed by the audience. Besides her skill in the structuring of characters and story, as evidenced by the way she handles conflict and relationships in the play, she also incorporates humour, as expected by the popular audience. She uses phrases and words which can be easily identified by the audience, and also uses the American idiom to bring delight. The exploration of ways in which another of Chisiza's apprentices, Twaya Sanudi wrote his play, *Black Democracy* is next.

8.8 BLACK DEMOCRACY by "Babaa" Twaya Sanudi[393]

Kopolande, the central figure in *Black Democracy,* is a widowed ex-policeman, who has become a corrupt car dealer. Buying in South Africa and selling in Malawi, he

[393] Twaya Sanudi's parents originally came from Khambalale village in Chiradzulu district, in Southern Malawi. They moved to Kapeni in Blantyre, where Twaya was born in 1963. They later settled in Ndirande Location of the same district. Sanudi's interest in drama grew because of his proximity to Chisiza Jr. When Wakhumbata staged Chisiza's *The Deceased Attack* at French Cultural Centre in 1983, Sanudi became anxious to join the group. However, he could not take part in the dramatic activities because his Moslem parents feared that theater might interfere with his faith. In 1984, Sanudi went to Bilira College of Distance Education for his secondary education. While there, he joined the Drama Club and eventually became its Chairman. After leaving Bilira for the Central College of Commerce in 1988, he joined the College's Drama Club. Returning to Ndirande after Central College, Sanudi, together with his friends, formed a group called Magic and Power Theatre in 1989. Unfortunately, the group did not survive the departure of the members, who were selected to go to University.

In 1990, Sanudi moved out of his parents' home to stay at Chisiza's house in Ndirande, and eventually joined Wakhumbata. While with Wakhumbata, he participated in *Papa's Empire, Barefoot in the Heart, Democracy Boulevard*, and *Dzira*. From Chisiza he learnt techniques of directing, writing, and management of a theatre company.

In 1994, Sanudi left Wakhumbata to form Alabama Theatre. In his own words, 'I left Du because I wanted to test my abilities' (Sanudi, Interview: 2003). Sanudi praised Chisiza for the training and experience he offered novices such as himself. Later, he bemoaned the fact that Chisiza failed to fully develop many of the people he worked with because he denied them the use of any of the resources that Wakhumbata accumulated over time. Sanudi thought it was difficult to do more than dream of becoming writers because there was very little free time between touring plays. As a result, Wakhumbata's repertoire was entirely made up of Chisiza's plays. Furthermore, according to Sanudi, Chisiza paid the actors very little. Illustrating his point by relating to financial affairs of the early 1990s, Sanudi said an actor at Wakhumbata earned K200 from a tour that earned K100,000.00. With no signed contract to stipulate conditions of service, the payment depended on how Chisiza felt (Sanudi, Interview: 2003).

In 1994, Sanudi formed Alabama with friends, including Twaliki Wisiki, Francis Lepete, Duncan Matola, and Wanangwa Nyanga. Since the group's formation, Sanudi has written and directed *Dimoro Prison, Battle of Agatama, Black Democracy, Love Explosion, Money Means Power, Last Temptation, Winds of Polygamy, Black Maria, Cry of A Patriot,* and *Lavender*. In these plays, he tackled social issues and politics. *Dimoro Prison* is about prison life. *Battle of Agatama* focused on the evils of Civil War as experienced by innocent civilians in Mozambique. *Black Democracy* dealt with the multi-party situation in Malawi and also how Democracy failed in practice. *Money Means Power* presented the interference of political influence and religion in young people's freedom to choose marriage partners. *Winds of Polygamy* looked at promiscuity by senior cabinet ministers, and *Lavender* focused on prostitution. *Last Temptation* was about a priest's dilemma, as Father Payere-payere officiated a marriage and became attracted to the woman. The Priest's visits to the couple's home almost broke the marriage.

In addition to being a playwright, Sanudi is Artistic and Executive Director of Alabama. In 2000, Alabama's play, *The Last Temptation*, was chosen to represent Malawi at the Southern African Theatre Initiative Festival held at the Market Theatre Laboratory in Johannesburg, South Africa. The selection showed recognition of Sanudi's creative efforts. He became Chairperson for the Southern Chapter of the Theatre Association of Malawi, initiating a number of landmark festivals which helped in establishing closer working relationships between drama groups in Southern Malawi. We now turn to examine one of his most controversial political plays, *Black Democracy*.

clears the cars through customs by bribing officials. We see him living comfortably with his sons, often in the company of his ex-police colleague, Danida Ndokota Phiri. *Black Democracy* is loosely structured with play 'moments' that do not relate to each other. Issues of corruption, politics, prostitution, love, and religion form the subjectmatter.

8.9.1 CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISATION

The play has eight characters. Kopolande and Danida are the central characters of the play. As ex-policemen, they share their views about society, implicitly defining what democracy means to Malawians. Kopolande has four sons: Amon, Robyn, Koko, and Edmond to whom he gives freedom to choose their lifestyles. Robyn is a born-again Christian. Armed with Gospel teachings, he sometimes challenges the father's lifestyle. Edmond, a graduate of a Canadian University, shows-off the family's comfortable position by being a womanizer, and indulges in excessive beer drinking. Amon, the eldest, is the most sensitive. Though he is a womanizer and a drunkard, he shows respect to his father, and tries to guide his younger brothers. Koko, with a weak personality, follows stronger characters such as Robyn. The freedom that Kopolande gives his children breeds chaos in the home.

Outside the Kopolande family is Teresa. Besides being Amon's girlfriend, she practices prostitution. Bakayawo, a servant in the Kopolande household, is from the Yao community. The interaction of the characters brings the audience closer to an understanding of issues Malawi grappled with in the so-called democratic dispensation between 1994 and 2002.

8.9.2 CORRUPTION

The first issue the play tackles is corruption. Kopolande has a contact, Kaprivi, who works in the Customs Department and organizes low charges for Kopolande's imported cars. Edmond, Kopolande's born-again son, challenges his father about the dishonesty, as shown in the following exchange:

> **Kopolande**: ... spiritually, you seem to be making great strides. By the way, are you coming from church?
>
> **Edmond**: Yes, today is Sunday. I am making great strides though some people are regarding me as an imposter, because they say you concentrate on illegal deals. Even the way Reverend Ngomonda preached today (demonstrating)... "The Lord will punish all those who do illegal deals"[394]...

Kopolande is being cynical when he comments on Edmond's 'spiritual strides'. The remark shows how contemptuously he viewed the criticism of his business dealings, based on Christian principles. The way Edmond presented the feeling of the Christian community about his father's business morals is also noteworthy. He related the content of the Rev. Ngomonda's sermon, through which his father was criticised.

Kopolande did not take the criticism kindly. In reply, he attempted to expose the Rev. Ngomonda's own wrong-doing. He spoke about the way Ngomonda abused church collections 'to build three houses', 'gives wrong advice to married couples', and how 'he hides behind home visits to sleep with other people's women'[395]. Cmoplementing his attack with political rhetoric, Kopolande says 'my friend Korona spent fifteen years in Banda's detention. At his release, he found the wife with triplets. Who do you think was responsible? Rev. Ngomonda of course'[396]. Kopolande's attempt to justify

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[394] Babaa Twaya Sanudi, *Black Democracy* first performed and video recorded in 1998, moment two
[395] ibid.
[396] ibid.

his activities by creating a smokescreen did not remove Robyn's and Ngomonda's criticism about the corruption. Instead, it confirmed their concerns. Noteworthy in Sanudi's reference to the Church is also his confusion over church denominations (see full discussion under "Humour" below).

8.9.3 PROSTITUTION, CULTURE AND MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY

The playwright links prostitution and multiparty democracy. In moment nine, Teresa provokes an angry response from Kopolande and Danida when she says: 'Amon, what are you up to? Did you think you could manipulate me with your money? You think you can buy my arse with your money? You don't even reach a climax in bed'[397]. The frankness with which Teresa challenges and despises Amon, in front of his father, was not commonplace. It is still considered disrespectful to speak in such a manner in front of elderly people. Sanudi could have created such confrontation to indicate the liberty with which the youth were crossing boundaries of Malawian culture. The inclusion of the word 'arse' is indicative of the young people's swing towards Hollywood films' manner of speech. While prostitutes such as Teresa would not speak proper English due to the little formal education they possessed, the American words had become commonplace, owing to availability of Hollywood films on video. Teresa's statement and behaviour provoke the following response from Kopolande and Danida:

> **Kopolande**: Tell me, who is that lady? Is she a Malawian?
>
> **Danida**: She is Malawian.
>
> **Kopolande**: You mean her umbilical cord was buried right here?
>
> **Danida**: Right here. *Kwa a Kunthembwe* – In Kunthembwe area.

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[397] *Black Democracy*, moment nine

Kopolande: What does she do to earn a living?

Danida: Fulfilling the whims of Indians and some cheap blacks. She has aborted more than ten times.[398]

The question about Teresa's identity, especially when he asked: 'You mean her umbilical cord was buried right here?' shows that Kopolande and Danida view Teresa's behaviour from the perspective of the southern Malawi's Nyanja culture. They suggested, through the question, that a Malawian woman cannot behave in the way Teresa did. The mention of 'umbilical cord' invokes a traditional ceremony conducted amongst the Nyanja when a child is born. After birth, the umbilical cord is buried by the side of an anthill, as the child's protection against witchcraft. As the child grows, the community advises him/her on how society works, including respect for elders, who might share knowledge about one's birth. The disrespectful manner of speaking, adopted by young people and by prostitutes such as Teresa raises issues about the unquestioning adoption of the so-called western life.

In moment sixteen, Teresa's behaviour takes the prostitution debate further. She enters Kopolande's house and demands one thousand kwacha as payment for sexual services rendered to Amon. The two men question the frankness in this way:

Danida: I told you after general elections that give two years to this democracy. It would grow wings and horns, and that it would lack a sense of direction, its horns consequently stabbing the very same people who brought it. You see our little madam here is like our new democracy, which needs to be jealously guarded at all times. But she doesn't want that. She has completely gone astray without realizing the terrible repercussions. On what grounds is she demanding money? (Turning to Teresa.) Did Amon's father take part in breaking one of those ten commandments?

Teresa: I just need my K1000.

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[398] ibid.

Kopolande: Danida, did we vote wisely to witness this immorality?

Danida: Your friends, the most impeccable ones, failed to make history with prostitution and they died like Jezebels. You should quit your dirty profession and go back to school. (Tereza cries) Ahnnn! Ahnn! Don't cry for us. You should cry for yourself and your future.[399]

When Danida states that 'she is like our new democracy', he links prostitution to multi-party democracy in Malawi. Kopolande's enquiry, 'did we vote wisely to witness this immorality?' complements Danida's reasoning that the prostitution came about because of the change of government from Banda's one party dictatorship to Muluzi's multi-party rule. Danida's closing with the reference to Jezebel is an attempt to bring reason through Biblical morality, while Kopolande's additions connect the behaviour to failures by the present government. In moment seventeen, Danida says 'Democracy alone cannot suffice. It should be spiced with a little dictatorship. If you say everyone should be liberal, next time you will be surprised at the very same people defecating rights on trees, and trenches because the government is too democratic'. By making statements such as these, the play suggests that Malawians were slowly learning to cope with democratic freedom. Others amongst them enjoy the democracy without remembering the responsibilities that should accompany the rights.

8.9.5.1 BLACK DEMOCRACY AND AUDIENCE

8.9.5.2 CHICHEWA EPISODES AND ORAL CULTURE

The play touched on Orality. Bakayawo, Kopolande's servant, brought in the dimension that highlighted the way rural people are sidelined by the literate. Coming

[399] *Black democracy*, moment sixteen

from a Yao community, Bakayawo related part of the thinking amongst his people in Chichewa, and celebrated oral culture as shown in the following exchange:

> **Kopolande**: Kumudzi uli ndi ana angati? (How many children do you have?)
>
> **Bakayawo**: Saatini (Thirteen).
>
> **Kopolande**: Koma iwe, child spacing sukuyidziwa iyayi? (Don't you know anything about child spacing?)
> Bakayawo: Mulungu akakupatsa mbamvu, iwenzo ngati zukupuma, umangodalizidwa ndi anawo. Bwanatu ine ndimadabwa. Ife ozauka timakhala ndi ana ambiri, koma olemera, kugwima... (When God gives you the strength, and if you don't give yourself enough rest, you get blessed with many children. You know Sir, I get amazed sometimes. Poor people like myself have many children, and I don't know why those choose to have only a few. It could possibly be their quest to get richer through magic).

The debate about 'thirteen children', 'child spacing', and 'belief systems' is oftentimes irreconcilable because of the divide between urban and rural influences. Urban-based people always try to convince those in the rural areas to modernize and change their cultural ways for the European ones. They urge the rural people to follow their example of living like Westerners. In the case of child-spacing for example, there is evidence to show that a number of women have failed to conceive again after using birth-control tablets. Other women have given birth to children with deformed organs, or with down-syndrome. All these effects are known as possible failures of the new ways that rural people are urged to adopt.

The question of cultural beliefs and Western medicine has been a centre of controversy since the Missionaries came with the first hospitals. The argument for western medicines has always been accompanied by the contemptuous view towards African medicine and traditional practices. Western medicine has always been presented as modern and scientific, while African medicine and beliefs have been

dismissed as backward, heathen, and superstitious[400]. As a result, a majority of Africans publicly agree to the Western ways, and continue with their traditional practices in the enclosures of their homes. Bakayawo's point about different views between the poor and the rich can be partially clarified through this explanation. Belief in Christianity, Islam, and western medicine is a performance most urban-based Malawians and Christians stage for modern civility. In private, they still pay attention to their cultural beliefs. The urban-based still visit their homes in the rural areas for spiritual and medical help when western methods fail.

It was a surprise to find a Chichewa episode that lasted for up to twelve minutes in a play that otherwise relied on English. Popular commercial theatre in Malawi did not create bilingual plays. Chichewa and English drama were mostly dominated by the particular languages, save for an incorporation of a word or a line from the other languages. Sanudi's inclusion of this episode could have possibly been to create hilarity through the surprise which Chichewa words and sentences always drew when they were included in an English play. The other explanation could be that Sanudi, who created plays in English, was acknowledging the fact that Chichewa plays, and those created in other ethnic languages, were more popular than those created in English. This conclusion can be verified by noting the sizes of crowds pulled by the different language dramas. Outside secondary school, college, and university hall performances, English drama is less popular than that created in local languages.

[400] see Shula Marks and dagma Engels (1995)

8.9.5.3 CITY YOUTH CULTURE

When the video recording of *Black Democracy's* performance on 18th August, 1998 was viewed, it showed that the majority of the audience was young people. Out of an estimated sixty people who attended the show, fifty seven were aged between fourteen and thirty years. There was one baby, and a couple aged approximately between thirty-three and thirty-six years. Though there has not been any study to investigate the age-groups that attend popular drama shows, observation indicated that young people mostly watched the plays. This was possibly the reason why Sanudi included forms that appealed to them in *Black Democracy* such as *rap* and *romance*.

The play incorporated American rap singing, and western romance. In Moment Three, Amon brings a plate of food and a drink. He is followed by Edmond who calls Bakayawo, the servant, to bring him his breakfast. Amon reprimands Edmond for treating the servant like a slave. Edmond despises Bakayawo and delivers his response in a rap music style which includes rhyme. He says 'that old man is a 'sakha' who needs to be put in a 'sack' and be 'sacked'. He is a 'sakha' who 'suckled' his mother's breasts recklessly' (moment three). The word 'sakha', deriving from Malawian street language, means 'a sleepy and backward person'. 'Sakha's' common sound with 'sack', 'sacked', and 'suckled' brought the American rap music style into performance. While the meaning of the song was not clear, the sing-song sound of 'sakha', and the rudeness to Bakayawo, raised wild applause.

Another instance of rap is seen in moment eight. It is Kopolande's birthday, and the four sons throw a surprise party for him. They bring him a cake and instead of the

normal 'happy birthday' song, they perform something of their own creation. It goes 'Jah people are old people / It's a party for my Pa / It's a party for my Pa / There he is / He is looking good / We are partying for real'. Even though the performance includes odd lines such as 'Jah people are old people', the shortness of the lines, the repetition of the 'pa' sound in the words 'Pa', 'party', 'partying', and the talking-singing rhythm of American rap delighted the audience.

Moment twelve has a combination of western youth romance and rap music. Amon comes into the sitting room with girlfriend Teresa. They playfully chase each other around and they hug and kiss, and then walk around hand in hand. When they stop, they hug again and look into each other's eyes, and exchange the following words:

Amon: Girl
I used to think that love is a waste of time
Now I realize what love is.
Before you came into my world
My life was like a forlorn desert
But now you are like my oasis.

Teresa: Amon
I have been walking around on a long and winding road
Looking for the right guy.
Finally I got you.
There is one thing I would like to say.
When it comes to caressing
You are second to none
When it comes to touching
You are second to none
When it comes to kissing
You can beat the rest of the world.
Your love is exceptional.
(In giving you life)
Your mum really did a good job.[401]

Though the relationship between Teresa and Amon is confusing, as in one moment, Teresa is a prostitute and then a lover in another, the two behave like lovers in this

[401] *Black Democracy*, moment twelve

episode. The love-starved life of Amon, expressed through the word 'forlorn' and 'desert', is broken by Teresa, who enters as an 'oasis' into his life. Amon's evocation of feelings of 'heat, thirst and longing for water in a desert', representing a life before meeting Teresa, is contrasted to his discovery of an 'oasis', a desert spring, that would quench his thirst of love. Teresa reciprocates by relating how Amon was a welcome "finding" at the end of the 'long and winding road'. Could this be an acknowledgement to her life as a prostitute before meeting Amon? Teresa praises his ability at 'caressing', 'touching', and 'kissing' making his 'love ... exceptional', earning his mum a commendation for giving him life. The 'romantic' words incite loud applause from the audience because of their familiarity. They were common lyrics from popular American dance music bands and singers such as Tender Love and Care (TLC), Brandy, Tu Pac, and Gabrielle.

Chisiza appeals to the youth by invoking their fantasy about the luxuries of good life, and Sanudi makes the most of the lover's scene to achieve the same effect. The idea of 'young romance' delights those who watch the plays. However, soon after the romantic episode, Robyn, Edmond and Koko come into the sitting room to chase Teresa out of the house with the following dialogue:

Edmond: She should get lost

Chorus: She should get lost

Edmond: Go to hell baby

Chorus: Go to hell baby

Edmond: We don't need ya

Chorus: We don't need ya

Edmond: Uhule wachepa nawo (You're too young for prostitution)

Chorus: Uhule wachepa nawo

Edmond: Dziko likamazungulira (When the world spins)

Chorus: Dziko likamazungulira

Edmond: Usamazungulire nalo (Don't just follow)

Chorus: Usamazungulira nalo

Edmond: Uzachita chizungulire (You will go dizzy)

Chorus: Uzachita chizungulire

Edmond: Get lost

Chorus: Get lost[402]

The rap performance manage to please the youthful audience. The inclusion of American youth culture phrases such as 'get lost', 'go to hell baby' and 'ya' for 'you' was very welcome to the fans. Furthermore, the brothers decide to use Chichewa words, with one rhyming word-root, 'zungulira' (spinning or going round). 'Likamazungulira' (when it spins), 'usamazungulire' (don't spin with it), and 'chizungulire' (dizziness) were used to achieve the rap effect using Chichewa. Instead of feeling pity for Teresa, who was being chased out by people, dressed like American gangsters, the rapping brought pleasure to the audience.

8.9.6 HUMOUR

Sanudi's tactic of bringing variety and appeal to his youthful supporters continued with his incorporation of humour in *Black Democracy*. In moment one, Kopolande finds Danida drinking beer and he warns him about the habit in the following exchange:

Kopolande: Busy drinking?

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[402] *Black democracy*, moment twelve

Danida: Busy drinking.

Kopolande: But beware of the drinking habits because they might coincide with judgment day.

Danida: I am gearing myself for the year 2000. Don't say judgment day. The word judgment really bothers my mind. I wish the person who was binding the Bible could have removed the last chapter.

Kopolande: Revelations?

Danida: Yes. (mimicking a preacher) "Eee! the angel, Eee! the angel". The angel what?[403]

Danida makes a parody of Bible stories, to the delight of the audience. Rejecting the words of the Bible, or making fun of it, as he did in saying 'The angel what?' would be considered blasphemous. What pleased the audience in Danida's subversion, however, is a matter of speculation, which could include shock, or joining in the fun created from anti-institutional tendencies, as Danida showed in 'The angel what?'

Within the same moment, Danida creates more humour when he refers to the issue of floods in Malawi. People who live along the Shire River are advised yearly to relocate to higher grounds every time the rainy season starts. Danida observes that it is these poor people who are always victims of the floods, not the rich. What is more, when Kopolande warns Danida that the features on his face are waning because of beer drinking, Danida responds that he drinks to find solace in a world where the human race is endangered by disasters such as floods. He says:

> Floods everywhere, damaging property of those who are below poverty line. And I don't really understand floods. They usually dispense with the people who are below poverty line, sparing the people who are robbing and raping our country. I mean the most corrupt figures. Even if those floods can come today, you hear that they have taken people at Safarao (village), leaving the rich behind.[404]

[403] *Black Democracy*, moment one
[404] ibid.

The idea that floods struck poor people was not only reminiscent of avalanches that devastated villages in Phalombe in 1993, or annually in Nsanje, it also registered how poor people continuously experienced suffering, leaving out 'rich' and 'corrupt' people. The mention of 'the rich' and 'the most corrupt ones' showed that many Malawian politicians and government technocrats continued Banda's system of self enrichment through corruption, as revealed in unending newspaper tales about it. Danida's wish was that 'the rich and corrupt' should be washed away from the surface of the earth as punishment.

More humour is drawn by ridiculing priests. In moment two, Robyn challenges his father about the life he leads as a corrupt car dealer, provoking the following response:

> Was that Ngomonda talking about me? He himself gives wrong advice to married women. Danida, you remember what he said to Janet Chaoneka. "Mayi Janet, mu banja mulibe phindu lene lene koma mu U sistere. Mayi Janet, musalilire mkaka wa khathi khathiwo koma lilirani njira ya Yehova". Where have you seen a married woman divorcing to become a nun? (Madam Janet, there is no real gain in marriage but in being a Nun. Don't worry about having a husband for sexual satisfaction, but cry for the way of the Lord).[405]

As discussed above, Kopolande's defence against the accusations about his corruption was weak. He did not reject what was being said about him. Instead, he pointed out Bishop Ngomonda's weaknesses. However, the exposure of Ngomonda's deeds was humorous because priests are viewed by ordinary people as holy. A public discussion of their scandals draws a lot of curiosity, and disbelief. Sanudi, however, confuses facts in his debate about the church. Raymond is a Born-Again Christian, who should

[405] *Black democracy,* moment two

be attending charismatic churches such as Christ's Citadel, Winner's Chapel, Assemblies of God, and Pentecostal Church. Notwithstanding that, Sanudi presents Ngomonda as a Catholic priest who asks Janet Chaoneka to divorce and be a Nun. While his idea was to create humour, he confused titles that belonged to particular denominations. Priests belong to the Catholic Church, Reverends belong to the Presbetyrian denomination, and Pastor is an Adventist or Baptist title, which the charismatic churches in question also use.

Sanudi, just like his counterparts in Chichewa drama draws amusement from ethnic differences. While Nyanga uses a Lomwe accent, Sanudi rely on Yao and Sena. For instance, when Bakayawo enters to deliver a letter about Kaprivi's death in Moment Three, he says *Bwana, kalatayi andipazira a nyono. Ati zavika, apita kwa Walala* – 'Sir, I have been given this letter by, what do you call him?..... He says he won't come here because he has gone to Walala'.

Yao people pronounce 's' as 'z' when they speak Chichewa. For instance, the Chichewa word 'andipaTSira' is pronounced as 'andipaZira'. Bakayawo's use of the 'z' instead of a 'ts' identifies him as belonging to the Yao community. The same analysis applies to the word 'ZaVika' which Bakayawo uses in the second sentence. Other ethnic groups in Malawi would say 'SaFika'. The Yao pronunciation of 'v' for 'f' gives a clue about the ethnic group they belong to. Furthermore, Bakayawo uses a Yao word, '*nyono*', which means 'what do you call him' in Chichewa. Its transference from Yao into Chichewa added to the ethnic joke.

As regards reference to Sena people, Danida contrasts the way this population group viewed virginity in the olden days as compared to contemporary times. He illustrates the variation through an anecdote which he narrates with a Sena accent, accompanied by an imitation of a deep baritone voice which Danida claims that his Sena wife spoke with. He relates a bedroom conversation he claims to have had with her on their first night together: '*Ndinu woyamba baba kundipatsa mkaka wa hybrid'* (You are the first person, my husband, to give me 'the hybrid milk' – to sleep with me) (moment fifteen). 'Baba' (father, man, husband) was a common word in Sena, Mang'anja, Chichewa and Lomwe. However, it was frequently used by the Sena people. Sanudi used it, accompanied by the accent and the baritone voice, to delight his audience. *Black Democracy* relied on humour to sustain the interest of its audience. Making fun of priests, subverting Bible stories, and ethnic references were some of the ways with which hilarity was brought into the play.

Black Democracy attempts to define democracy in Malawi in the way Sanudi saw it in operation. He draws from the story of a corrupt ex-policeman, his ex-workmate, his children, and a young woman. Through it, he raises issues about corruption, prostitution, and politics in the new dispensation. In amusement, through Yao orality, Chichewa episodes, adoption of American youth culture by young Malawians, and the contradiction of Bible stories, he delights those who watch, as he rated Malawian democracy as 'black' and 'confused'. Contradicting the speculation Chisiza makes about freedom and better life under multi-party rule in *Democracy Boulevard*, Sanudi raises critical problems about the democracy that accompanies multi-party rule, implicitly expressing nostalgia for some of Banda's methods of civil control.

8.10 CONCLUSION: POPULAR COMMERCIAL PLAYS IN ENGLISH, SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND POLITICS

Chisiza Jr.'s HHI production in 1983 marked the entry of the second 'generation' of Malawian English commercial dramatists. Extending what had been started by Malimodzi, Kwacha and Mbilizi in the 1970s, Chisiza's company appealed to, firstly, the secondary school audience, bringing in the general public after the play's success at ATEM Festivals. Using subtle political commentary that few were ready to make in the Banda era by staging *The Deceased Attack*, Chisiza and Wakhumbata opened the public venues for further commercial stage drama in English. In addition to this, his return from America made him more popular, owing to the fame of American 'youth' mannerisms to which the audience had been introduced through the mass media. He created plays such as *Check It Out*, which included the audience's dreams and fantasies. His frustration with Banda's autocracy made him produce plays such as *Democracy Boulevard* to interest Malawians in multi-party democracy. He offered the play as an historical evaluation of Banda's rule and a projection into the future with multi-party democracy. Kamkwatira, who took over Wakhumbata from Chisiza after his death, in the words of Wakhumbata's radio jingle, 'continued the journey' of theatre. Centering the plays on women, she steered away from male dominated stories. In *Its My Fault*, for example, she claimed to have re-directed plays from giving easy solutions to problems that women faced. Instead, she left the female characters in difficulties. Through this method, she hoped to inform the women that resolutions to their problems lay in their hands. Kamkwatira structured *It's My Fault* by contrasting strong points and vulnerabilities for each character, creating a credible story that arrested the audience's attention. Twaya Sanudi and Alabama Theatre used an eclectic style of performance to raise issues under multi-party rule in *Black*

Democracy. The style allowed him to expose the problems Malawian society faced under the multi-party rule. He incorporated humour, oral tales, and raised issues about youth culture, corruption, and prostitution. It can be clearly seen that the exploration of the four plays reveals that, like Chichewa stage drama, Malawian popular English plays survive by their appeal to the audience in a way that makes commercial sense.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

STAGE DRAMA IN INDEPENDENT MALAWI: 1980 - 2002

9.1. THE THESIS OF THE THESIS

At this point of the dissertation, it would be correct to critically question what the thesis of this thesis is. Right from the start, the assumption or the hypothesis of the investigation was that change had occurred in Malawian stage drama between 1980 and 2002, considering not only some of the newspaper reviews that celebrated it, but also the many political developments that took place in Malawi, in the southern African region, and Europe. What was not clear, however, was the nature of the change. Having come this far with the discussion, it can be confidently stated that indeed, independence affected stage drama in Malawi in two ways namely ideology of aesthetics and organisation.

9.2 IDEOLOGY OF AESTHETICS

What turned out to be the ideology of dramatic aesthetics in stage drama was influenced by the political and social developmental policies that were implemented under the banner of independence in Malawi. In university drama, the 1970s' strict rules adhered to by the Censorship Board induced a number of theatre artists to find ways of outmaneuvering the performance blockade to keep political criticism in the plays without being detected. For instance, Lance Ngulube's *Phuma! Uhambe*! and *Because of Charity* attest to this. The ability to have rebellious drama written and staged in a country whose legal and political institutions watched for the issues contained in the plays is testimony to this. What is more, the spirit of confronting the

system was too strong to manifest itself subtly in some dramatists. Innocent Banda's *Mad Prophet* for instance spoke directly against what he saw as evils of the independent state: a commentary similar to what political analyst Frantz Fanon did in the late 1950s. In the same way, Dede Kamkondo never fully managed to hide the topical issue of political succession in *The Vacant Seat*. In the 1980s, the dramatists did not only attempt to confront or outmaneuver the authorities as the '70s had done, but the decade witnessed the change of performances' ideological approach from liberal humanism to socialist methods of conscietisation through theatre. The truth in Francis Moto's observation made on Steve Chimombo's *Wachiona Ndani*? "as a play created under suppression" should be emphasized at this point that the creation of such drama was an attempt to suggest a challenge to the unhelpful conservative capitalist practices using socialist methods. The question to ask could be, was the adoption of socialist methods an indication that performance approaches encompassed in Liberal Humanism, with their adherence to conservative Aristotle's *Poetics* were not radical enough to deal with Banda's equally conservative and capitalist stranglehold over Malawi? Interesting to note is the fact that when Banda grew old and was removed from power, the 1990s University drama concerned itself with issues of social development, other than the confrontation of the political system. Also noteworthy is the fact that social development was pushed to the centre when multi-party democracy was ushered in by its advocates after the change of government in 1994. However, the political honeymoon with the multi-party leadership did not last long. By the turn of the millennium, plays that bashed the political system were back. At the time, some of the multi-party leaders had started to abuse power so dramatists such as Lance Ngulube responded with plays such as *Tippex*.

The influence of political and social developmental policies on ideology of aesthetics did not only take place in University drama. Popular commercial drama was also affected in its own way. For Chichewa drama, the low education of the theatre artists was a factor that determined its direction. (Mis?)Interpreting western stage drama aesthetics, mixing them with traditional forms, the practitioners formulated new methods of play creation that appealed to their paying audience. Put in another way, the present writer suggests that popular Chichewa stage drama re-modeled the then existing drama aesthetics to create a new form which can be called Malawian comedy. From the discussion of the plays above, it is clear that the created Malawian comedy had its own unique structure and pace of performance delivery. What was further notable was that for popular commercial theatre to survive, both in English and Chichewa, it had to keep innovating in order to sustain the interest of its popular clients. This was, in most cases, done without paying attention to the dictates of formal theatre produced at the University. Kamkwatira's *Its my Fault* could have been read as strongly leaning on "the accepted" western literary principles in terms of structure, but the use of language by Onefold, in a number of situations, could be viewed by academic critics as misplaced, yet that approach delighted the popular audience. What is more, Sanudi's *Black Democracy* kept mixing issues and terms. He described a Pentecostal Pastor as a Reverend and called him a Priest in other situations. Furthermore, he leveled criticism on "Reverend Ngomonda" for advising a woman-member of the congregation to be a nun. Mixing Catholic and Pentecostal doctrines could be read as erroneous and ill-informed. The popular audience, however, celebrated with the gossip about "holy people" that was being dished to them for their pleasure. So, it can be clearly seen that independence influenced popular commercial drama. Despite the little education that many of the dramatists

from the lower classes of society had, they created drama that earned them an income, while unwittingly suggesting a new way of producing drama in Malawi. What can therefore be seen as an ideological and aesthetic significance of Malawian stage drama is the invention of Malawian comedy by the popular dramatists, especially John Nyanga and Eric Mabedi who were popularly known as *Izeki ndi Jakobo*.

9.3 ORGANISATION

The influence of independence was not limited to ideology of aesthetics alone. Independence also affected organization of Malawian stage drama. The strictness with which drama was monitored by the Censorship Board played a major role in keeping university drama and popular commercial drama apart. The act of frustrating people such as David Kerr when they applied for permits to shoot films in rural areas was deliberately done in order to stop the convergence of university people and the rural masses. John Minnis has indicated how the Banda regime planned to have few educated people in the country to prevent rebellion against his policies. What testifies to this suggestion is that when the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre produced a Chichewa play, *Mchira wa buluzi*, and staged it at popular venues such as Kudya Entertainment Centre and the French Cultural Centre in 1981, dramatists in popular theatre had a concrete model to base their creativity on. Consequently, popular Chichewa stage drama was born. What is more, infiltrating the Association of Artists to check on artists' activities for subversion can also be seen as a planned move to block the advancement of theatre in Malawi. According to Nambote, the Association did not last for long when some of the artists discovered the real truth behind its formation. Furthermore, when the involvement of popular stage drama in political propaganda during the transition to multi-party proved useful, Bakili Muluzi wanted

to buy the leaders of the popular drama fraternity for further propaganda projects. Identifying them as artist leaders and financially rewarding them behind scenes created suspicion of deceit amongst the theatre artists who were members of the Association. As a result, the organization stopped functioning as many more artists wanted a share in the financial rewards. But when change of political systems came in the 1990s and political oppression was shelved for a while, University drama alongside popular drama groups travelled the country with plays of social development. In addition, the multi-party political system made it possible for a new Association, free of political influence to emerge in 2001. By the turn of the millennium, university drama and popular commercial drama interacted freely in pure entertainment, social development performances and drama workshops. It can therefore be seen that the context of Malawi as an independent state delayed opportunities for the organization and growth of a national theatre.

9.4 FILLING THE GAP IN MALAWIAN THEATRE SCHOLARSHIP

This dissertation can confidently claim to have attempted to fill the gap in Malawian theatre scholarship that existed in the period between 1980 and 2002. While the focus in this study has mostly been the interaction of politics and drama in Malawi, it has brought about a number of insights about independence and drama in the period under the spotlight. For example, it has unearthed ways in which ideological aesthetics of Malawian drama have been underpinned by politics, as the decades progressed, besides suggesting a more compatible theoretical approach to the understanding of the uniqueness of Malawian drama. Besides ideology and theory, the study has also provided a long awaited thorough documentation and analysis of a sample of plays, players, and issues in Malawian stage drama. It has not only managed to advance the

knowledge about Malawian drama that James Gibbs, Patience Gibbs, Chris Kamlongera, David Kerr, and Steve Chimombo had made known, it has also managed to bring forth new insights on Malawian drama between 1980 and 2002, which otherwise laid "uncollated" and "uninterpreted" in the scattered sources and commentaries by Malawian commentators and practitioners. Finally, besides asserting the ideological significance of Malawian popular stage drama and filling the knowledge gap, the study has revealed an agenda for further research. Insights in Malawian Radio drama, Theatre for Development, Secondary School drama in English, French and possibly Chichewa, Yao and Tumbuka still await thorough and comprehensive investigation.

9.5 POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR MALAWIAN STAGE DRAMA

The exploration of University theatre revealed a number of areas that need attention. Firstly, many play scripts produced in the period between 1970 and 2002 remain unpublished. Secondly, the major studies of Malawian Theatre still remain inaccessible to people who need them. They are in English, and are shelved in University libraries, both inside and outside the country. Thirdly, the University had not, by 2002, substantially interacted with practitioners from other sectors. As such, popular theatre practitioners viewed University theatre as elitist, inaccessible and obscure. Fourthly, government has not been urged strongly enough to assist in the advancement of drama. While the Ministry of Sports and Culture exist, its interest mostly lies in sports, uncritical safe neo-traditional performances, and the so-called preservation of the Malawian heritage. Fifthly, while there is innovation in popular drama, many of the practitioners need training so that their ways of producing drama can be institutionalized and acknowledged. The training could also be a learning

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opportunity for the practitioners to acquire other methods that are used by such sectors as the university, or what practitioners in other parts of the world employ in their craft. These problems, amongst others, need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The following are a few suggestions on how this can be done.

9.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, there has to be a deliberate policy by both government, private sector, and all stakeholders to publish Malawian plays to enable further scrutiny and analysis of the nature of Malawian drama. This is owing to the fact that many plays still exist as unpublished manuscripts. In addition, the Theatre Association of Malawi should be tasked to document performances in script-form, video, and other formats so that preservation and analysis of the performances could be used as a base for advancing the practice. Secondly, if many popular dramatists cannot qualify for university entrance to study drama, the course can be offered, in the short term, by selected technical colleges, or alternatively, in the long term, a Drama College could be founded to offer the training. While it is possible to bring about innovations through commonsense approach, informed art enables practitioners to go beyond mere imitation of known and popular artists. Thirdly, the language of drama training should be compatible with the level of education, especially of the popular dramatists who have primary school education, or are illiterate. Popularity of drama in indigenous language in this country is reason enough to give confidence to the so-called experts to help train the artists in a language that the artists are comfortable with. What is more, the National Theatre Association should organize regional and national festivals that include plays produced by popular and university dramatists. The festivals could include talks, workshops and practical sessions offered by the different

dramatists who present their work. Additionally, the Ministry of Sports and Culture should team up with the Ministry of Education, other issue-based Ministries and the university in order for them to come up with a model of drama and theatre education that combines intellectual, entertainment, and issue-based social developmental theatre. Furthermore, Government should regulate and closely monitor facilities for theatre to lessen exploitation of the income earned by the popular dramatists. A commonsense assessment of ways in which facilities are rented to the artists reveals that the facilities are offered to them at highly opportunistic prices, and as shown in this thesis, seems to have no price limit. Moreover, minimum wages for theatrical artists need to be legally regulated by government, and monitored by a Union of Artists which could fall under an Arts Council. As regards recognition, dramatists who have been innovative in their careers should be duly acknowledged by government and the university so that their innovations are validated for adoption by other practitioners. In terms of publicity, drama, arts, and cultural periodicals, websites, and other media outlets need to be created in order to review and promote dramatic activities, using languages and designs that every Malawian dramatist and the general public can access and understand. On associations, the National Theatre Association and other groupings such as the Visual Arts Association of Malawi (VAM), the Music Association of Malawi (MAM), the Malawi Writers' Union (MAWU), the Photographers Association of Malawi (PAM), and the University of Malawi's Department of Fine and Performing Arts (FPA) should form a government-backed Arts Council of Malawi which will be guided by a Cultural Policy that will look into, among other things, the Arts and Culture Industry and the relationships between artists at both local and international levels. Presently, because the industry is not recognized, there is no base for protection of any artist. Consequently, foreign

artists operate in the way they like. Some of them masquerade as international NGOs when they start and later begin to exploit what could have deservedly gone to local art[406]. Lastly, meaningful Southern African regional corporations need to be sought for in order to expose talent beyond the borders of Malawi, and the university should invigorate research into Malawian drama to rightfully place it in world theatre. The start of a postgraduate degree programme in the Fine and Performing Arts is an example of an activity that should be encouraged for a strategic growth of drama in Malawi. It is the belief of the present writer that the above recommendations, amongst others, will lessen the silence that tends to characterize the scholarship of Malawian drama as had happened between 1980 and 2002, and will also advance the practice. Such activities shall keep not only local and international dramatists informed about new insights and innovations in Malawian drama and theatre, but also put Malawian drama on the regional, continental and world map.

[406] Nadzikambe Theatre Company and The Story Workshop are examples in question in which foreign artists put up Theatre acts that exploit resources that could have gone to local artists. Furthermore, groups such as Nadzikambe are not only exploiting the resources but also promoting art from their home countries and continents other than Malawian art, and when the company goes outside the country to perform, it is viewed as a Malawian theatre company.

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