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Yet as these actors play possessed characters, they themselves do not become possessed. Spirit possession, therefore, disturbs the process of identification. It produces detachment, which, according to Bouko (2009:32) implies that 'the actors are constantly aware of the theatrical illusion and never seem to be fully involved in the drama: their presence damages the illusion.' In this development, as Bouko (2009:33) observes:

The characters they embody is a fragile construction that uncovers their real personality. Instead of hiding their personality behind a character, the performers highlight universal features that are part of their identity as individuals.

The actors always remind and indicate to the audience that they are presenting possessed characters. They do not lose their self in the process of playing characters and the spirits that these characters possess. They fit into Richard Schechner's (1990: 36) concept of the 'half actor' who himself is the one observing, manipulating, and enjoying the actions of the other half (the character). Padmanathan Nair as quoted by Schechner (1990: 36) remarks that, 'while acting, half of the actor is the role he does and half will be himself.' Mudzvova, Bizure and Mpofo indicate when they are about to be possessed and when they are playing the unpossessed characters. After her role as a traditional healer, Mpofo, as stated before, talks to the audience

in a way that suggests that she is merely presenting a role. She is, therefore, a half actor 'who does not forget himself/ (herself)' (Schechner, 1990:37). This ambivalence undermines identification of audiences with character or actor, which in turn limits the hypnotic effect on audience's emotions. The audience focuses on the story and make a judgement on what is happening. The audiences' intellectual presence remains active as the performance does not exploit or appeal to emotions in order to lock the semantic and semiotic environment of the performance. The audience remains what Augusto Boal (1985:3) calls 'the liberated spectator' that is not a victim of locked authorial and monolithic readings of performance. Although the audiences in *Rituals* do not fully fit into Boal's idea of the 'spec-actor' since that is not the intention of the play, they however possess semiotic autonomy as the style of performance encourages them to read the performance in their own terms.

Actors' mannerisms augment the destruction of identification. The *Rituals* cast proposes 'disgusting' mannerisms to their roles. Some prick their noses, others cough every now and then, some play with saliva, some spit saliva as they talk, and some are playing with mucus in their nose rather than blowing it out. Some speak like cartoons. Knowing that farcical expressions convey emotions and augment psychological acting, this cast proposes farcical expressions that make it disgusting but funny to watch. Some make faces and they all compete to make zombie faces. They behave as if they are wearing masks by merely rearranging their faces. In fact, in the last episode, the cast wears zombie faces and do the most unthinkable. John always farts loudly. That is disgusting, but funny. These mannerisms disrupt emotional attachment and sometimes those not used to the style wonder as to what this cast is presenting. The horrible mannerisms dilute the depth of realism, as there is no relationship between these mannerisms and internalisation of character.

The cast exaggerates these mannerisms, especially in the last scene, so much that the audiences burst into laughter while other audiences looked as if they are on the brink of vomiting because of the horrible and disgusting mannerisms. The mannerisms, therefore, undermine the build-up of emotions; hence, the spectator focuses on the facts delivered by the

performance. Even when the lights turn off in preparation for a new scene, the audiences keep on laughing and commenting on the action of the previous scene without being emotional.

The costumes also help to destroy the fixed integral character symptomatic of linear performances. The cast wears funny costumes. The intention is to make audiences laugh. The costumes are either too big or too small. John, the teacher, puts on a red school uniform that belongs to children doing infant level. He has a small short and shirt in a bright red colour. The material itself is not for school uniforms. The spectre of a teacher wearing an infant school uniform heightens laughter. Rutendo, who plays Ester Ndoro in this scene, has a small built, yet she wears this big oversize skirt made of crimpling. It is crucial to observe that the costume is anachronistic to the period of 2008 in which the play is set. Rather, the costumes belong to the eighties going back to the fifties. The crimpling skirt creates humour just as the safari suits bring back memories of years gone by. The intention, in the researcher's view, is to prevent costume from playing a psychological role in the Stanislavskian sense.<sup>1</sup>

Song and dance help *Rituals* to imbue democratic values in a number of ways. Song and dance undermine the development of rigid and integral characterisation, which promotes identification. True to post-linearity, when an actor sings or dances on stage s/he quickly moves out of character and becomes her/himself. Moreover, song and dance make *Rituals* a hybrid performance text. Castagno (2001:35) remarks that:

The hybrid play is a literary and theatrical crossbreed, a blending of genres and disparate sources both textual and performative. The hybrid play may take on a myriad of forms and combinations; from literary patsche to collage-like performance pieces.

The hybrid text serves a democratic function as it prevents the cumulative climax of the linear narrative. Moreover, it creates characters from a variety of sources that are largely gestural and

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<sup>1</sup> Constantin Stanislavsky developed a method of acting in psychological realism called the psycho technique. In this, method, the actor becomes the character and loses consciousness of himself as an individual.



meta-dramatic. Thus, when the *Rituals* cast dances and sing *mbakumba*, *mbende* and *isitshikitsha*, they disrupt the linear construction of performance through hybridity. Dance also enhances 'external gestural progression' of character because the stimulant to character is not internal and psychological. Bouko (2009:33) observes that:

The musical dimension tends to accentuate the scenic presence of the actors. When they are singing or when the grain of their voice is highlighted, their authenticity and sincerity increases and counterbalance the fictional role. In such cases, the actor on stage is defined through his/her double identity, which contrasts with dramatic conventions and deprives the spectator of his/her conventional marks. What he/she encounters is not a theatrical character, but an individual type' that is constructed on a specific post-dramatic hybridity.

It is in this capacity that dance and song undermine identification, hence helping to engage the critical faculties of the spectators.

Moreover, the cast takes the opportunity of dance and song to destroy the divide between the audiences and the performers. The dances and songs are common traditional Shona and Ndebele pieces . As they sing, the audiences clap, whistle, ululate, and chant. Although no spectator actually dances on the set, the researcher saw audiences moving their legs, head and arms rhythmically which strongly suggest that the audiences also dances as the cast dances on set. Sometimes the cast does not finish all the lyrics of the songs, which gives the audience the room to fill in the missing lyrics. This is evident in all the dances and songs. The intercourse between the performers and audiences is of great significance in democratic terms because it makes the audiences part of the performance. This makes the performance quite experiential for the spectators. Audience involvement certainly destroys the imaginary lines of division between performers and audiences, which consequently destroy the potential of identification and emotional escapism.

As performers relate with audiences, the process of 'dematrixing' comes into effect. Through song and dance, they move out of character, which reminds the audience that the cast is presenting a theatrical piece whose message deserves their interrogation. Dematrixing, through song and dance helps to curb emotional built up because they act as *narrativus interruptus* or agents of anti-climax. Dance presents an opportunity of substituting the spoken word with verbs of movement. This is evident in the rape scene. Rooftop stages the scenario of rape between Sarudzai and Murambiwa through movement and physical theatre. Daves Guzha, the director, uses *Mbende/ Jerusarema* dance that is historically known for its pro-creation movements to stage the rape scene. The dance is highly erotic and involves twerking around the waist. This presentation is crucial because the savagery, barbarity and violence of rape is withdrawn from the scenario so much that spectators emotions do not focus either on crying about the rape or being furious about the rape. The experience of rape is quite disturbing, but the dance curtails the disturbing violence of rape. Consequently, audiences watches rape on stage, but they do not drown in tears of sorrow.

The rape scenario serves its purpose of presenting rape as a crime against humanity and it leaves a question in the conscience of the audiences; how can we deal with perpetrators and victims for them to heal and reconcile? Rather than mourning or being shocked by the horror of rape; song and dance enable the audiences confront the dark side of society. Rather than crying, the largely African spectators laugh during and after the rape scene. This laughter raises a number of questions during the post-performance discussion. One white spectator, a visitor to Zimbabwe, notes how she is surprised to see people so many spectators laugh after the rape scene. In her view, spectators should be sorrowful and sad.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, if it were a realist play, then audiences would have empathised with Rudo and cry with her. However, song and dance neutralise the horror of rape so much that many spectators do not go through that horror. Song and dance cushion the audience from the negative emotions of rape. This is an example of how

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<sup>2</sup>I am aware of experiments that point to the fact that Africans do not empathise. Rather, they are always inclined to laugh. William Sellers and Julian Huxley did such experiments (see James Burns 2000, 2002) It would be wrong to advance that African audiences do not empathise. The structure of African theatre prevents empathy and emotional orgies as dance and song disrupt the building up of emotions to an empathetic climax.

the post-linear style, through song and dance, encourages the audience to reason rather than to be lost in emotions.

The researcher realised that the laughter of the audiences has many undercurrents. First, some are relieved to realise that the rape encounter is just a theatrical presentation. The emotional detachment impresses on them that the proceedings on stage are not real; they are just inventions of reality albeit being based on what obtains in the real world. This realisation creates a sense of relief and emotional detonation. So, rather than crying, the audience laugh. They laugh at the shocking revelation of the dark sides of society. They laugh at themselves, perhaps being afraid of weeping uncontrollably. The scene realises its objective of presenting horror and violence without evoking obvious emotions that are stimulated by such circumstances. Thus, Goodman and De Gay (2000:261) conclude that:

Post-linear performance... often operates contrary to the belief that performance exists as escapists, feel good environment. Post-linear can be hard work for the audience. Effort is required to dispel confusion and understand what is going on, and discomfort can be the result of being presented with a dystopian picture of a particular slice of life of our social and political reality.

The idea of enabling the audience to confront the ugly side of humanity, therefore, helps in stimulating the minds of the audience thereby making performance a site of intellectual engagement rather than indoctrination. By forcing the audience to confront the horror of rape, *Rituals* demonstrates that society, 'by means of performance' can confront its dark side whose fate and destiny it can alter. Goodman and De Gay (2000:261) reiterate this point:

Through post-linearity, gaps are provided for us to insert our views, our experiences, or for us to self-consciously chart our own course through material based on our likes, dislikes, or habits. These habits become clear through the process of active engagement. In this sense, post-linear performance can be called 'generative performance'. If a dystopia is presented (for example, racial prejudice or sexual abuse) it is rarely presented as fatalistic or unchangeable. Instead it is presented as a strident revelation:

look at this- did you know this is happening?! Followed by an implicit: Do something about this.

Martin Esslin (1959:127) advances the same opinion:

By keeping the spectator in a critical frame of mind it prevents him from seeing the conflict entirely from the view of the characters involved in it and from accepting their passions and motives as being conditioned by 'eternal human nature.' Such a theatre will make the audience see the contradictions in the existing state of society; it might even make them ask themselves how it might be changed.

In this regard, by probing the audience to think about change without prescribing to them how that change must come to be, the post-linear style certainly acknowledges the intellectual and semiotic autonomy of audiences, which, is the essence of democratic theatre.

Indeed, in *Rituals*, one does not identify with any character. The play does not allow spectators to identify heroes or villains. The diversity of characters and the episodic nature of the play, make each episode independent. What we see are clips, snippets of life and not one story that covers the lives of a few individuals. No one is punished or deified. The play does not celebrate any party. It does not take sides within Zimbabwean politics. It does not suggest any solutions to the problems on stage. One is not sure whether Sarudzai actually goes back to complete the *kutanda botso* Ceremony. The play simply ends without suggesting whether the *kutanda botso* is good or bad. It just points out to neglected notions of spiritual healing ingrained in the cosmic views of Africans. The openness of the play opens one's eyes to the broader picture that compels one to decide on his own at his own time. Indeed, *Rituals* demonstrates how the 'scriptible', post linear style helps in liberating intellectual agency of audiences by undermining identification, emotional attachment, and prescribing solutions. It does not compel or persuade anyone to adopt a course of action but leaves it to an individual to pontificate by himself. When a play frees one from the albatross of emotions, it frees his capacity to think and modify the destiny of his country. Indeed, style does have a bearing on democratic commitment.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the effectiveness of the post-linear style in creating democracy in a Zimbabwean performance. It has noted how this style liberates the spectator as it allows him/her to make her own decisions pertaining issues raised in *Rituals*. The article has identified various techniques, which makes post-linear theatre democratic. It has also pointed out how the context of the healing rituals creates a public sphere where subaltern characters also wield the power to effect change. In brief, this article has indicated the significance of style in enhancing the democratic commitment of *Rituals*.

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## Public Order Statement

**Kelvin Chikonzo**

This article harmonizes the customary tension that characterise the relationship between politically committed theatre and strategies of staging that promote democracy in performance. Using a production called *Rituals* from Zimbabwean in southern Africa, the article demonstrates the possibility and feasibility of creating committed theatre which enables the spectators/ audiences to make their own meanings of performance as opposed to indoctrination and monolithic readings that usually characterise performances of committed theatre. The article examines the efficacy of neo indigenous post linear staging techniques such as half acting, dematrixing, dialogism, polyvocality, carnivalesque, interruptus and de-representation in creating a style that respects the spectator as an autonomous body of performance with the right to intellectual and semiotic freedom. The turn towards 'democracy in performance' is significant given that contemporary protest theatre now has to imbue democratic values.



Bio for Chikonzo kelvin, Cogent Arts

Dr Chikonzo is a senior lecturer who has researched intensively on protest theatre in Zimbabwe. He is interested in studying various aspects of democracy protest theatre as a way of ensuring that protest theatre does not replicate the oppression that it purports to fight against in terms of multi-vocalism, mediation of agency and liberating the spectator.

ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT





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