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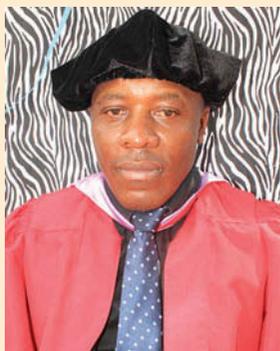
# Post-linearity as a democratic style for protest theatre in Zimbabwe

Kelvin Chikonzo<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** This article investigates the contribution of neo-indigenous post-linear style in creating democracy in politically committed theatre in Zimbabwe. This approach is quite critical in the light of the fact that political theatre or protest theatre in contemporary times in Zimbabwe predates its practice upon democratic intentions. Whilst there has been a lot of attention on how protest theatre has become a public sphere that promotes civic engagement and participation on issues of common interest, there has been scant attention on the significance of style to these democratic values. There has not been much awareness amongst practitioners on the importance of style in creating democracy in performance. The significance of style hinges on liberated spectatorship and avoidance of indoctrination, monolithic readings and excessive reliance on emotional orgies which cripple the spectators' ability to think and engage. Using Rooftop Promotions' *Rituals*, the article interrogates how this production solves the dilemma of style and democracy in contemporary protest theatre in Zimbabwe.

**Subjects:** Theatre & Performance Studies; Performance Theory; Practice and Practitioners; Visual Arts

**Keywords:** Post-linear; protest theatre; democracy-in-performance; Zimbabwe; spectatorship



Kelvin Chikonzo

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Kelvin 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.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article harmonises the customary tension that characterises 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.

## 1. Background and introduction

One of the greatest challenges in contemporary protest theatre in Zimbabwe is how to produce protest theatre that challenges oppression without replicating the very structures of oppression that protest theatre seeks to subvert. This need has become very crucial especially in a context where protest theatre has to imbue democratic values. Although many protest plays were produced by the protest movement in Zimbabwe to challenge the dictatorship of the state, the stylistic approaches of these plays reinforced indoctrination and propaganda at the expense of dialogical processes that could promote diversity of opinion and the participation of plural voices (Chikonzo, 2011; Moyo, 2012; Nebeta, 2015). The question of style became critical so much that during the 2014 Protest Arts International Festival (PAIF), a festival for protest arts in Zimbabwe, the author together with a colleague in the department of theatre Arts engaged practitioners and producers on this matter. One of the major issue concern raised by the artists was the difficulty of escaping from the agit prop type of protest theatre because it had been established as a style of preference. The dilemma of style was compounded by the manner in which some of the productions that attempted to escape from the agit prop traditions found themselves locked in the realist canon without realising the oppressive dynamics of realism in protest/transformational theatre. Armed with the writings of scholars such as Dolan (1988, 2001), Belsey (1980), Stowell (1992) and Redondo (1997), we explained at that festival that realism was still not ideal to notions of liberation and participation that protest theatre sought to promote. In any case, productions such as Rooftop Promotions' *Heal the wounds* (2011) and *Waiting for Constitution* (2010) that relied on realism had undermined spectators liberation in favour of preaching and being mono-vocal (Chikonzo, 2011).

This article, therefore, revisits Rooftop Promotions' *Rituals* in an attempt to reveal how the neo-indigenous and traditional post-linear staging employed in this production synced well with the notions of democracy in performance. It seeks to unveil how *Rituals* provided an answer to the issue of style that promotes democratic spectatorship in protest theatre. This article unveils how the use of post-linear staging techniques such as half acting, interruptions, dematrixing, carnival-esque, dialogism, polyvocality, detachment, de-representation, stylised acting and hybridity make *Rituals* a game changer in terms of creating a style that promotes democratic spectatorship. This style influenced subsequent productions such as Vhitori Entertainments's *Protest Revolutionaries* (2012) and Edzai Isu's *No Voice, No Choice* (2011) which helped to enlighten the protest theatre movement on the importance of democratic spectatorship. This article, therefore, explores the significance of style in liberating the spectator in a context where the theatre in question borders on democratically committed activism. By this, the researcher implies how the post-linear performance, such as *Rituals*, provides mechanisms that allow the audience to create their own readings of the performance. These plural and diverse readings restore the power of the audience to make their own meanings of performance and of the political reality that performers present on stage. *Rituals* did not seek to provide the audience with monolithic, imposed understanding of political reality. One of the key aspects of liberating the spectator is the way in which performance deals with the idea of identification and emotional orgies (Boal, 1985; Esslin, 1959; Willet, 1977). Fourie (1988, p. 79) observes that "identification is the human ability to pick up another person's vibes, to empathise with others. Such feeling is based on shared values". Fourie (1988, p. 79) adds that identification is a two-pronged process: there is introjection where the recipient assumes or adopts the feelings of the other party (e.g. of fictional characters) and projection where the recipient projects his feelings onto the other party (characters).

When identification and empathetic attachment run without disruptions as in realist plays such as Rooftop Promotions' *Waiting for Constitution* (2010), they lead to what Brecht as cited in Boal (1985, p. 103) calls "emotional orgies". "Emotional orgies" are products of empathy, which Boal (1985, p. 102) defines as "the emotional relationship between the character and the spectator and which provokes, fundamentally, a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character". The spectator, in Boal and Brecht's views, becomes a victim

of character, so much that he attaches himself emotionally to the character. He identifies with a character so much that he abides by its decisions. In protest theatre, such a development is not welcome, as it undermines the semiotic autonomy of the spectator in making sense of the ideas generated by a character. The researcher is not implying that the process of viewing performance must be devoid of emotional engagement or identification. Like Boal and Brecht, the researcher submits that such emotional attachment must not drown the intellectual capabilities of the spectator so much that he or she fails to interrogate ideas generated by characters in a performance.

## 2. Theoretical framework: conceptualising democracy in performance

*Rituals* fits into the stylistic construction of post-linear theatre. To demonstrate how it fits into the post-linear schema and the implications of the post-linear style to democratic engagement, the researcher applies Barthes' (1977) concepts of the open and closed text. The researcher also borrows from other exponents of post-linearity such as Goodman and De Gay (2000), Castagno (2001), Selden (1985), Bouko (2009), Wright Steven (2007), Lehmann (2006), Schechner and Appel (1990) and Turner (1990). Roland Barthes as quoted by Selden (1985, p. 76) argues that the "lisible" is the closed text "which allows the reader to be a consumer of fixed meaning. The 'scriptable' is the open text that allows the reader to generate his own meanings". The reader becomes a producer; the text gives the reader the liberty to produce his or her own meanings. Goodman and De Gay (2000) have expanded the meaning of Barthesian concepts of "lisible" and "scriptible". To them, the lisible refers to linearity in performance whilst the scriptible resonates well with post-linearity.

Lehmann (2006, p. 6) notes that:

The writerly texts, 'open texts' are texts which require the spectators to become active co-writers of the (performance) text. The spectators are no longer just filling in predictable gaps as in a dramatic narrative, but are asked to become active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning making and who are also willing to tolerate gaps and suspend the assignment of meaning.

In Barthes' (1977, p. 43) view, the "death of the author" characterises writerly, post-linear texts because these texts do not confine meaning to the intentions of the author and the director. They defy the monolithic and homogenous construction of the world that the author/playwright proposes. They celebrate diversity and plurality of interpretations and as such, they are incredulous to authorial universalist tendencies.

While Barthes coined the concepts of the "lisible" and "scriptible", their actual application to performance is indeed the contribution of Goodman and De Gay (2000). The linear style is the lisible, the "readerly", and the closed text while post-linear style is the open, the "scriptible", writerly text that provides the spectator with the liberty to create his own meanings of the performance. Goodman and De Gay (2000, p. 258) observe that:

Linearity and clear narrative structures have ... politically ... been associated with totalitarianism, or on the softer side, conservatism. The performance invited by linearity (as either an actor or a citizen) is one following the line, whether this be dictated by tradition, a political party or a playwright.

The post-linear style recognises the significance of the audience as producers of plural meanings. It celebrates the provision of interpretive liberty to the spectator. Goodman and De Gay (2000, p. 259) reiterate this point by observing that:

Adopting an embodied perspective to understand post-linear performance recognises that the bedrock of live performances is the body, more specifically, the bodies of the audience in

the act of deciphering, assimilating, or enjoying the experience provided by the alchemy of bodies and technologies on stage.

Post-linear performances celebrate intellectual engagement. The performance is not a site of indoctrination and brainwashing the audience. It is not a site of preaching to the audience and undermining their semiotic resistance. The performance does not seek to provide the audience with monolithic, imposed understanding of political reality. The post-linear performance thrives on “suspended meaning” where performers create images “which have no precise signification and which leave the spectator free in his/her sensory interpretation” (Bouko, 2009, p. 33). Wright Steven (2007, p. 83) adds that post-linear performance entails a process of de-representation:

Which promotes a continual confusion of cohesive representation. De-representation maintains a specific level of presentation, yet deliberately eschews a clear reading in order to create a fluctuating multiplicity of interpretation.

The plurality of interpretation and dismantling of authorial logos comes into being because, as Lehmann (2006, p. 3) observes, the post-linear performance:

Has the power to question and destabilise the spectator’s construction of identity and the ‘other’ more so than in realist mimetic drama, which remains caught in representation and thus often reproduce dominant ideology.

Thus, the pre-occupation of the post-linear project is to create democracy in performance by liberating the spectator’s intellectual agency and semiotic capabilities.

One of the key aspects of liberating the spectator is the way in which performance deals with the idea of identification and emotional orgies (Boal, 1985; Esslin, 1959; Willet, 1977). Fourie (1988, p. 79) observes that:

In simplistic terms, identification is the human ability to pick up another person’s vibes, to empathise with others. Such feeling is based on shared values, a common background, education, culture and the like, in fact anything that makes intersubjective fellowship possible.

When identification and empathetic attachment run without disruptions, they lead to what Brecht as cited in Boal (1985, p. 103) calls “emotional orgies”. “Emotional orgies” are products of empathy, which Boal (1985, p. 102) defines as:

The emotional relationship between the character and the spectator and which provokes, fundamentally, a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character: whatever happens to the latter happens vicariously to the spectator.

The spectator, in Boal and Brecht’s views, becomes a victim of character, so much that he attaches himself emotionally to the character. He identifies with a character so much that he abides by its decisions. In protest theatre, such a development is not welcome, as it undermines the semiotic autonomy of the spectator in making sense of the ideas generated by a character. Emotional orgies, therefore, undermine the intellectual agency of the spectator to read the performance and indeed the world “by means of performance”, beyond the eyes of the character. Emotional orgies, therefore, lead to a logo-centric reading of performance that undermines plurality of interpretations. The researcher, therefore, reveals how post-linear techniques empowered the spectator by destroying “emotional orgies”, identification and restoring audiences’ semiotic autonomy. The researcher’s mission in this section is to demonstrate how this model of theatre empowered the intellectual agency of Spectators that watched *Rituals*. In so far as it stimulated the critical faculties’ of the spectators without indoctrinating.

### 3. Post-linearity and democratic commitment in *Rituals*

Rooftop Promotions, a theatre production house from Harare in Zimbabwe, produced the play *Rituals* in 2012. The play is one of their many productions that border on activism which promotes debate and dialogue on issues of common interest in Zimbabwe. *Rituals* is an episodic play directed by Daves Guzha, choreographed by Gibson Sarare and featured Joyce Mpofo, Silvanos Mudzvova, Rutendo Chigudu, Chipu Bizure, Zenzo Nyathi and Mandla Moyo as the cast. The play provoked debate on national healing and reconciliation which was topical in the aftermath of a decade in crisis that reached its peak in the political violence of June 2008 that accompanied presidential elections of 2008. The challenge with *Rituals* was how to present debate and dialogue on a moment of madness that was still fresh in the memories of many Zimbabweans without allowing chaos, emotions and replication of violence to overtake this process of debate and dialogue. The original script written by Stephen Chifunyise was of a realist nature, but Daves Guzha turned it into a post-linear performance.

Post-linearity manifests itself through stylised acting. Stylised acting uses the carnivalesque technique which according to Castagno (2001, p. 10):

Has to do with strange combinations, the overturning of expected norms and the grotesque. Usually featured are abrupt shifts from high and low diction, whether slang, specific speech regionalisms, colloquialisms, or profanities. Carnavalesque characters conflate bestial and human traits or exhibit other oddities.

The actors do not control their voices in order for the spectators to feel emotions through dialogue. Rather, their voices are highly pitched with remarkable projection. It seems as if the actors are in some kind of competition to make the loudest noise. The actors in John's Healing scene, namely Joyce Mpofo (Healer), Chipu Bizure (Mavis), Silvanos Mudzvova (John), Rutendo Chigudu (Ester Ndoro) and Zenzo Nyathi (Muchoro) all speak on top of their voices. In Ndaba and Buhle's healing episode, these actors deliver lines at high speed without pausing to breath and allowing one to feel emotions. The police officer (Silvanos Mudzvova) whom the Organ for National Healing has sent to inform Ndaba and Buhle to come to a meeting rushed through his lines. To someone who trained using the Stanislavskian psychotechnique, such rushed deliveries would be an indicator of poor acting. Yet in *Rituals*, the rushed deliveries effectively detach emotion from voice. The performance clearly alerts the spectators to the fact that these actors are merely presenting scenarios of life. The performance directs the spectators' attention on facts rather than emotion and in so doing enables the spectators to retain their intellectual autonomy with regard to the interpretation of signs and images on stage. The detachment engendered by rushed deliveries disrupts the purity of dramatic dialogue so much that the play relies on everyday speech rather than dramatic dialogue. As a consequence of this development, dialogue ceases to reveal the internal psyche of a character, according to Esslin could have been instrumental in creating identification and emotional orgies that persuade the spectator to suspend reasoning.

This destruction of identification and emotional orgies is augmented multiple casting. A cast of five people play as many as 30 characters in this play. The cast is composed of Rutendo Chigudu, Silvanos Mudzvova, Zenzo Nyathi, Joyce, Chipu Bizure and Mandla Moyo. In the first episode, the *Kutanda Botso* ceremony, Chipu Bizure plays Sarudzai the Member of Parliament, Rutendo plays Chipu (Personal assistant to Sarudzai), Silvanos is the village head, Mandla Moyo is Chief Nyazema. In the following episode, John's healing episode, Chipu Bizure plays Mavis (John's sister), Rutendo becomes Ester Ndoro (family relative), Silvanos plays John (the teacher who killed people in 2008), Zenzo Nyathi is John's uncle and Joyce Mpofo is the traditional healer while Mandla Moyo plays personal assistant (*makumbi*) to the healer. In the next episode, the Rape episode, Rutendo plays Charity who is an elder sister to the rape victim, Chipu Bizure plays Rudo, Silvanos becomes the local Councillor calls to mediate over the rape issue. Zenzo Nyathi plays the rapists while Joyce Mpofo and Mandla Moyo now play father and mother to the rapists. Multiple casting is, therefore, significant because it prevents any single character and actor from dominating the struggle for

change. It prevents the audience from identifying a particular character from any background as the champion or enemy of the people's struggle for change. For this reason, it evenly distributes transformative power and agency across various members of society.

Multiple casting also enables *Rituals* to present a wide array of diverse voices. A cast of six actors present diverse voices in divers situation and it is in this multivocalism that *Rituals* becomes dialogical. Castagno (2001, p. 35) observes that dialogism occurs when:

The play is 'fundamentally polyphonic or dialogical rather than monologic (single voiced). The essence of the play is its staging of different voices or discourses, and the clash of social perspectives and points of view.

Actors present different people from diverse social, political and economic backgrounds. Through multiple casting, the play glides through various communities in Zimbabwe. These diverse communities reveal diverse and different stories related to people struggle against violence and their vision of healing and reconciliation. Thus, through multiple acting, the play moves from Nyazema in Manicaland Province, to Mashonaland Province and finally to Matabeleland. In this journey, the play takes the audience through different communities. The actors in this play are able to switch from speaking fluent Manyika dialect, to Karanga dialect, Zezuru dialect and Ndebele language. In addition to this, they also speak English. They defy rigidity and fixation of character because they do not allow a fixed regime of given circumstances to govern them. They refuse to be fixed and possessed by character. They are "split or bifurcated characters" (Castagno, 2001, p. 9) They prevent the audience from identifying with a single character. The split identities use the technique of "interruption" that is:

Used to break continuity, impede the easy access of form and content. A character changes into another character, interrupting the previous characters' through line. Interruption causes the audience to refocus attention, to work at 'getting it' in a sense. (Castagno, 2001, p. 9)

The play creates "interruptions" by rotating status in different episodes. For example, in the first episode, Silvanos Mudzvova plays the character of the village chief who presides over Sarudzai's *Kutanda Botso* Ritual. He has dominant Status. However, when Silvanos plays John (the mad teacher) he loses that dominant status. In addition to status, the actors change roles in terms of being good "guys" and bad "guys". In the first episode, Chipo Bizure plays the role of Sarudzai who is a villain because she has insulted her parents and the community. However, in the following episode, Chipo Bizure then plays Chipo, who is a rape victim in this play. In the third episode, Chipo Bizure is sister to John where she seeks to help his brother cleansed from the spirits of the people he killed. These shifts of status and likeability, prevents audiences' sustained identification with any actor or character because of the systematic interruptions that the actors perform.

Moreover, the actors express different character proposals. The cast devotes a lot of time to physiological characterisation so much that the contrasts of character between episodes is so sharp. The gaits, gestures and facial expressions and actors postures create diverse characters. There is however, a slight problem with their voices, as actors cannot really create different voices for different roles. For example, Chipo Bizure's voice remains the same when she plays the characters of Sarudzai in the *Kutanda Botso* Scene, Rudo in the Rape scene and Mavis in John's Healing scene. Similarly, for the respective scenes mentioned above, Silvanos Mudzvova's voice as Chief, Village head and John remains the same. Likewise, Rutendo Chigudu's voice as Chipo, Charity and Esther Ndoro does not change. However, they compensate for that weakness with effective physiological characterisation. The emphasis on physiological variations demonstrates how the actors form their characters externally rather than internally. The cast does not seek to play the psychological characters that actors create internally. They rather concentrate on the

external physiological construction of character. Because of this, the actors present roles rather than represent them. They present characters; they do not become the characters.

The cast of *Rituals* also relies on dematrixing because they clearly show the spectators that they are acting a role rather than becoming the role. Castagno (2001, p. 62) observes that an actor is dematrixed:

When he (1) fractures the mould of a specific character (2) directly acknowledges or addresses the presence of the audience or 3) foregrounds the presence of the actor over character.

In dematrixing, as Lehmann (2006, p. 6) points out:

There is also a deliberate blurring between the characters of the actors and disabled performers themselves as they address the spectators and let them know they are being starred at and are returning the gaze.

Dematrixing is evident when Joyce Mpofu, who acts as a healer in John's healing episode, treats the audience as part of the community that has come to attend the ritual. After dealing with John's madness, she walks around the stage talking directly to audiences. She identifies one woman and tells that "Iwe, *chibereko chako chinoda kugezwa*" (Your uterus is dirty, it needs to be cleaned. The Healer (Joyce Mpofu) tells another spectator that "Iwe, *siyana nembanje dzako*" (stop smoking marijuana). It is customary for healers to deliberate on someone's problems without his or her consent because they would be in trance. The other audiences laugh but the two spectators are shocked and surprised that they are also participants in the play. When *Rituals* begin, Silvanos Mudzvova makes the audience aware that they are members of the Nyazema, Beta and Mutasa ethnic groups that have granted him permission for the rituals in the play to proceed. Thus, audiences clearly see that they are in theatre; they need not identify with the action on the stage, but rather focus on the situations on stage. In this way, "dematrixing" and "interruptions" always rejuvenate audiences critical and intellectual engagement rather than emotional attachment and identification.

Bouko (2009, p. 32) reiterates that the post-linear performance celebrates the "disintegration of the dramatic character" because the actor is "defined both as a character and an individual". Spirit possession serves such a dematrixing function in *Rituals*. For example, Silvanos Mudzvova plays the character of John who is possessed by the spirits of the people he killed during the political violence of 2008. Thus, Silvanos Mudzvova plays both John and John's spirit simultaneously. When Mudzvova plays John, there are two manifestations of characterisation. There is John as well as the spirit that possess him. Hence, Mudzvova at certain times plays John, and at other times, plays the spirit that John possesses. Similarly, Joyce Mpofu plays the healer, but the healers' spirit also possesses. There is double characterisation in that instance, of the healer and of the spirit in the healer. Spirit possession in *Rituals* creates bifurcated identities that dismantle integral characterisation. Hence, by playing healers and playing the spirits of the healers, the actors are simultaneously bifurcated.

Joyce Mpofu is a female; she plays the role of a female healer, yet a male spirit possesses her. That destroys illusion of reality. The healers are young but the spirits in them make them old. Possession distorts age configurations, which disrupt the normal construction of integral characters. They, therefore, split the psychological basis of these characters. Mpofu becomes what Turner (1990, p. 11) calls "androgenic" character, which is "at once male and female". She also displays what Turner (1990, p. 11) calls "theriomorphic character" in the sense that she is both human and spirit.

Chipo Bizure who acts as Sarudzai also displays double identity due to possession. Bizure plays the Member of Parliament character of Sarudzai. However, she simultaneously plays the *rombe*

spirit that possesses Sarudzai. There is actually a conflict between the two characters as they fight to control Bizure. Either of the character has to prevail in order for her to display a single character profile. However, throughout the *Kutanda Botso* ritual, the characters clash so much that Bizure suffers from schizophrenia or split personality. When it seems that the *rombe* dimension is dominating, her assistant reminds her that she is an MP. When the MP personality takes shape, the community reminds that she is a *rombe* in dire need of spiritual cleansing. She is both Member of Parliament and *rombe*, contrasting and conflicting psychologies that makes her character less rigid and integral.

It is difficult, in the researcher's view, to identify with characters that are not human. Fourie (1988) writes that identification is a product of connectedness and homology between character and the self that the spectator sees in a character. In the absence of that homology, identification is difficult. Spirits are supernatural characters, human beings look at them from a distance because the spirit world is a world that humans do not know much about in this three-dimensional form. Thus, characters with spirits are always detached from the spectator. He or she looks at them from a distance. Moreover, spirit possessions are ephemeral; they cannot run for the entire duration of a play. The spirit comes, unleashes its insight, and returns to spiritdom, leaving mortals to continue with their lives. The ephemerality of possession necessitates the development of other character proposals and psychologies in order to sustain the play. For this reason, the play becomes episodic rather than linear.

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, p. 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, p. 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 Schechner's (1990, p. 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, p. 36) remarks that, "while acting, half of the actor is the role he does and half will be himself". Mudzvova, Bizure and Mpfu indicate when they are about to be possessed and when they are playing the unpossessed characters. After her role as a traditional healer, Mpfu, 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, p. 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, p. 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 Ngoro 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 she or he quickly moves out of character and becomes herself or himself. Moreover, song and dance make *Rituals* a hybrid performance text. Castagno (2001, p. 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 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, p. 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 the post-linear style, through song and dance, encourages the audience to reason rather 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, p. 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, p. 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.

Esslin (1959, p. 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.

#### 4. 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 or 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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#### Notes

1. Constatin Stanislavsky developed a method of acting in psychological realism called the psychotechnique. In this, method, the actor becomes the character and loses consciousness of himself as an individual.
2. 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 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.

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