

**The role of popular culture in HIV/Aids Interactive performances
and workshops:
A Case Study of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company (ITTC)
based in Johannesburg**

Natasha Mazonde (400324)

BA Hons Theatre Arts, University of Zimbabwe
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University of the Witwatersrand
Wits School of Arts
Dramatic Art Department
Faculty of Humanities

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Table of Contents

Statement of Originality	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Dedication	iii
Abstract	iv

Chapter One: General Introduction

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Rationale	2
1.2	Research Questions	4
1.3	Conceptual Framework	4
1.3.1	What is Culture?	4
1.3.2	Defining Popular Culture	5
1.4	Elements of popular culture	8
1.4.1	Syncretism	8
1.4.2	Subversion	9
1.4.3	Language	10
1.4.4	Orality	11
1.4.5	Adoption	12
1.4.6	Adaptation	12
1.5	Literature Review	13
1.6	Research Methodology	15

Chapter Two: Background to the Interactive Themba Theatre Company (ITTC)

2.0	Introduction	18
2.1	Cultural Background	19
2.1.1	Township Culture in Sophiatown	20
2.2	Popular performance culture in Sophiatown	22
2.2.1	Music	23

2.2.2	Cinema	24
2.3	The Pioneers of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company	25
2.4	Conclusion	26

Chapter Three: Manifestations of popular culture in ‘Accepted’

3.0	Introduction	27
3.1	A summary of the play	28
3.2	Syncretism in the dance <i>Woza!</i>	29
3.3	Orality as questioning device	30
3.4	Call and Response	32
3.5	Language	33
3.6	Conclusion	34

Chapter Four: The Cultural Framing of Content in ‘Beyond the Line’

4.0	Introduction	36
4.1	About the Play	36
4.2	Context	38
4.3	Subversion in <i>Beyond the Line</i>	38
4.4	Syncretism in dance	41
4.5	Language	42
4.6	Audience Participation	43
4.7	Conclusion	44

Chapter Five: Popular Culture in framing ‘Hear Me Out!’

5.1	Introduction	45
5.2	Summary of the play	45
5.3	Syncretism in Dance styles	46
5.4	Fostering a culture of tolerance through orality	47
5.5	Hotseating	48
5.6	Adaptation	49

5.7	Conclusion	51
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Chapter Six:Implications of applying popular culture as a framing device in	52
Applied drama and theatre practice	

Chapter Seven: General Conclusion

7.0	Introduction	57
7.1	Summary of Research Findings	57
7.2	Recommendations	58
7.3	Concluding Remarks	60

Bibliography	61
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Statement of Originality

This work has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Any errors of omission or commission in translation or otherwise are entirely my own.

Signed: 

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Dedication

To all those who believe in the 'power of education'

To all those who have perished because of HIV/Aids

and

To all those affected and infected, I say there is hope

To my dearest mother, I will always look up to you for inspiration

and

Thank you for believing in me

Abstract

This research report focuses on an area of study that has been long overdue in the field of HIV/Aids education. In spite of multiple interventions to curb the spread of the disease using methodologies drawn from different fields of study, the HIV/Aids pandemic does not seem to be abetting. Hence contemporary development discourse has to engage with people's culture as a possible alternative to influencing behaviour change. Applied drama and theatre has emerged as one such possibility due to its interactive, dialogic, participatory, distanced yet empathic mode of communication. It is in the light of popular culture's relevance to the field of HIV/Aids communication that this study bears particular significance.

Culture has been regarded as a driving force in the transmission of HIV/Aids through certain traditional ideologies such as patriarchy which is understood as a system that favours male dominance over women. The study employs the technique of subversion in popular culture to frame such an ideology in the performance interventions done by the Interactive Themba Theatre Company. In studies addressing HIV/Aids, a realisation has been made that information disseminated in development interventions has not impacted on the sustainability of most projects. There is need for engaging in dialogue with performances as it is imperative to understand what motivates people's behaviour, and through the incorporation of techniques in popular culture that frame reality, address these motivations appropriately. Through the incorporation of popular culture techniques such as syncretism, subversion, orality, adaptation, adoption and language, the study focuses on how popular culture frames performance interventions at the ITTC.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study focuses on an analysis of the role of popular culture in HIV/Aids performances using the Interactive Themba Theatre Company (ITTC) as a case study. According to Guins and Cruz (2005), popular culture is regarded as having its base in the experiences, the pleasures, memories and cultural values and norms of the people. It has connections with the hopes and aspirations of the people that become scenarios in everyday practices and experiences within a given society, (Guins and Cruz, 2005:288). The term 'popular culture' tends to be ambiguous because of the word 'popular'. In this study popular culture refers to the everyday situations and circumstances that people in a given society identify with. In applied drama and theatre interventions addressing HIV/Aids, the question of the most appropriate way to frame intervention performances has disturbed scholars of applied theatre as well as practitioners. But with the advent of HIV/Aids, the issue has become even more problematic. Recent studies on development communication using the media of drama and theatre suggest that most interventions tend to overlook the role that culture plays in performance interventions. Hence the focus of this study is to analyze how ITTC performances are framed and packaged using popular culture as a framing device.

HIV/Aids cannot be effectively addressed in isolation of cultural, social, racial, economic, gender and political circumstances of those affected and infected. As such there has been a fervent obsession in the quest for the best ways to frame performances that speak effectively to this problem. It is in this respect that the question of how to make these theatre interventions more sustainable that this

research study is based. The study thus focused on popular culture as a structuring device by assessing its role in as far as it engages the spectators to interact with performance interventions.

1.1 Rationale

Research indicates that culture is one of the leading social drivers of the HIV/Aids pandemic, and that the disease leaves its imprint on the social lives of both infected and affected people. The motivation of this research study was to assess how popular culture can be integrated into performances addressing issues related to HIV/Aids. I was particularly encouraged by the school of thought which claims that, as a mode of cultural production, applied theatre can best engage with cultural frames of reference that are believed to be the driving force behind HIV/Aids transmission. The intention of this study was to challenge such notions, by focusing on manifestations of popular culture in performance interventions and how such cultural elements impact on the spectators' interaction with the performances.

Chinyowa (2005) maintains that African culture in its pre-colonial context was one of the primary means of articulating the people's memory, history, religion and morality, and that the African theatre tradition seems to draw upon the populist impulse for remembering, performing and celebrating culture. He further notes how applied theatre practitioners have increasingly turned to indigenous expressive modes in communicating developmental issues. Following Chinyowa's (2005) observation, this study examined how indigenous expressive modes such as popular dances and songs have influenced the framing of HIV/Aids interventions, and how such interventions become interactive, dialogic and participatory. HIV/Aids raises challenges related to stigma and

discrimination, both of which have important cultural and social dimensions. As part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations sector on AIDS (UNAIDS's) work on culture and HIV/Aids, research has indicated how stigma and discrimination are rooted and reflect existing social inequalities and thus prompting a need for close examination of local cultural dynamics that lead to stigma and discrimination in society. In this respect, it becomes inadequate to engage with communities without taking into account their culture, values and belief systems as the society's culture cannot be separated from the people's social lives (UNESCO, 2003). New content such as in HIV/Aids drama and theatre interventions may be integrated with the popular culture of a given society, as popular forms of culture are familiar to the people's frames of reference. The existing forms of popular culture can reinforce the social change that may be occurring within society. Hence the relevance of integrating culture in drama and theatre processes cannot be overlooked.

The choice of the case study was by no means accidental. The Interactive Themba Theatre Company (ITTC) has been creating performance interventions in schools, community based organizations and corporate organizations in Gauteng since 2002. The primary focus of the ITTC theatre methodology has been to influence people's behavior by preventing the spread of HIV/Aids. This is achieved through devising performance interventions that assume audience interaction, participation and dialogue. The ITTC's integration of popular culture in its workshops and performances is given validity as they seek to address certain cultural beliefs that have become drivers to the transmission of HIV/Aids. It therefore became interesting to carry out a research on how popular culture can be integrated as a framing device in HIV/Aids interventions.

1.2 Research Questions

This research study was informed by the following questions;

1. How does popular culture inform the framing approaches of workshops and performances at the Interactive Themba Theatre Company (ITTC)?
2. How can the theatre practitioner engage with the coding and decoding of popular culture in framing performances dealing with HIV/Aids, sexuality, gender, stigma and discrimination?

1.3 Conceptual Framework

1.3.1 What is culture?

The UNESCO report on cultural policies defines culture as,

The totality of what human beings make of their world. It is what gives people and places their unique identity and character. It includes modes of life, the fundamental rights of human beings, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 1982).

UNESCO's HIV and Aids Sector is strengthening and systematizing knowledge and best practices in the use of creativity and artistic expression in HIV/Aids education as well as developing youth friendly tools and materials. UNESCO goes further to maintain that the use of creativity and the arts is widely recognized as an effective, non-formal education tool, particularly resourceful for sensitizing young people about HIV and Aids. Dance, hip-hop, puppetry, shadow theatre, painting, graffiti, poetry, song, among other modes of artistic expression, can be incorporated in theatrical performances as compelling forms of entertainment. Indeed visual arts, music and other forms of creative expression can have an impact on individuals and communities through their portrayal of

social concerns addressing pertinent issues such as poverty, discrimination, sexuality and HIV/Aids.

Malinowski (1942), a social anthropologist, asserts that culture, by creating new environments, is responsible for creating new situations to which the biological subject must respond. He maintains that society, and the culture which constituted it, is always in active response to novel conditions. Malinowski thus attempts to define culture as 'an enormously complicated behavioral web responding to complex needs that can be ultimately traced to the individual' (1942:31). As an organization, ITTC has come to recognize the importance of understanding how a people's cultural values, practices and beliefs engages with HIV/Aids education in order to influence behavioral change.

1.3.2 Defining Popular Culture

This study adopted Fabian's (1997) definition of popular culture as 'cultural expressions carried by the masses incorporating both the modern and traditional codes and symbols' (Barber, 1997:18). According to Chinyowa (2005) such contemporary cultural expressions are reproduced by society as patternings in the form of codes, symbols, metaphors, structures and other cultural devices that make up the people's worldview. This point of view suggests that society can be viewed in terms of a structured cultural vocabulary provided for it by the community at large. When translated to the issue of HIV/Aids, it becomes crucial to consider a people's cultural beliefs and values when framing interventions to assume more dialogue and participation from the audience. The performance itself should not be separated from the people's own culture and value systems which they can easily relate to. The framing of HIV/Aids interventions therefore needs to begin by a thorough examination of the people's culture, value systems

and cultural forms of expression as these can be incorporated in the interventions to assume a distanced yet empathic mode of communication.

As observed by Desai (1991), central to an understanding of the Theory of Popular Culture is the consideration of the cultural dimension with regards to the 'people' as the point of emphasis. Desai (1991) further observed how the issue of language comes into play as a medium through which communication can take place. The theory of popular culture seeks to address the people's language (in its broadest sense) as a significant element with regards to performance interventions addressing HIV/Aids and other related issues.

Chinyowa (2005) maintains that the role of culture can be analyzed from a play theory perspective since play is not just an element of culture but culture itself bears the character of play. Thus popular culture can also be understood through the lenses of 'play' as a theory of performance. The structure of ITTC performances seems to have elements of play through the series of games and exercises found at the beginning of the interventions. In this study, the theory of popular culture, in particular its play dimension will be used to analyze the structuring of meaning during performances. As Bretherton (1984) argues, play as a cultural element has the ability to create symbolic alternatives to reality which reflect and impact on human experiences. The element of play can be incorporated in performance to mirror society. Key to the focus of this study is the question of how performances addressing HIV/Aids and other related issues can be made more dialogic rather than mere platforms of disseminating information, hence the need to adopt popular culture as a conceptual framework.

The concept of popular suggests that the term embodies an empirical sociological basis that refers to an existing social category, which is 'the people'.

The people refer to a defined community or society with which a particular type of culture is common among them. As Hall and Whannel (1964) maintain, the aspect of popular can suggest a carry-over of folk forms into early urban industrial culture. If the notion of the popular is in some way grounded in the notion of the people, as an existing demographic category, then it is easy to slip into the assumption that each stratum of society has its own distinctive culture, a way of life and a range of expressive forms and genres which are peculiar to it and which affirm its identity. As these are integrated in interventions, the performance becomes more participatory and interactive.

The term popular is also used in some instances to define indigenous expressive forms such as dance, song and music, which incorporate formal stylistic elements in performance interventions. The incorporation of elements such as dance, song and music within a performance has a compelling effect on the audience, who may be able to relate to their indigenous art forms. Hence in situations where they can identify with such popular artistic elements spectators are drawn more closely to the action within the performance making the intervention more dialogic. Fabian (1990) has suggested that performance itself is the site of emergent consciousness; that in the moment of improvisation certain kinds of social knowledge are generated. He goes on to assert how such performance occurs in sites established by the artistic and social conventions which define the syncretic nature of such elements in performance.

The aspect of popular can also be understood with regards to an area of exploration, rather than attempting to classify it as a discrete category of cultural products. Religion, as Fabian (1990) further notes, is another fundamental category of popular expression which is linked with the rise of a wide range of new artistic genres. One of the objectives of the ITTC is to question and

interrogate certain traditional and religious practices that most African societies follow and which seem to be contributing to the spread of HIV and Aids. Through performance, the ITTC aims at effecting behavioral change by incorporating popular culture techniques in framing such ideologies and traditional beliefs in performance.

1.4 Elements of popular culture

The theory of popular culture makes reference to the following elements; syncretism, subversion, language, orality, adoption and adaptation in the framing of HIV/Aids interventions at the ITTC.

1.4.1 Syncretism

The syncretism phenomenon was developed as early as the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century by different theatre practitioners and theorists such as Craig (2005), Balme (1999) and Meyerhold (1989).

Syncretism can be understood as the integration of performance elements of different cultures into a form that aims to retain the cultural integrity of the specific materials used while merging diverse cultures and theatrical elements. In post-colonial societies, syncretic theatre generally involves the incorporation of indigenous cultures into the Western dramaturgical framework, which is itself modified by the fusion process. The process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together in performance can be termed theatrical syncretism (Balme, 1999:1). According to Balme (1999) the notion of syncretic theatre is:

One of the most effective means of decolonizing the stage because it utilizes the performance forms of both European and indigenous

cultures in a creative combination of their respective elements, without slavish adherence to one tradition or the other (Balme, 1999:2).

In *The Predicament of Cultures*, Clifford (1988) describes syncretism as a form of cultural contact, a conscious process, an intellectual effort to incorporate foreign elements into one's own culture, re-interpreting and appropriating them. Clifford (1988) further notes how syncretism can be viewed as a form of intentional hybridity of diverse cultures. Syncretism becomes a crucial component of the communicative structure in performances. Colpes (1987) asserts how even in Western culture there exists a tendency to reassess syncretism as an inventive and creative process equating this to the creative elements of popular culture such as song and dance. Syncretism is based on mutual respect and reciprocal exchange of values and beliefs. The significance of incorporating popular culture as a framing device in performances needs to consider the element of syncretism as a structuring mechanism. Clifford (1988) explains how syncretic processes tend to become hybrid. This relates to the nature of popular culture which is characterized by a fusion of both the modern and traditional cultural elements.

1.4.2 Subversion

The most significant articulation of subversion in this study is its prominent place in the deployment of popular culture in framing performances especially with regard to HIV/Aids interventions. This is because some forms of popular cultural productions, it has been argued, entrench ideologies which not only promote the spread of the disease but also create popular stereotypes and myths that lead to denials. Therefore the integration of popular culture as a framing device in interventions can be used subversively to question reality through the dictates of patriarchy. In this respect, the society's cultural resources are appropriated in

performance to express ideas and viewpoints that are against its interests, for instance when seeking to keep people under a specific code of behavior. In most performances subversion would be incorporated in the process of framing performances that seek to question certain behavioral and traditional practices that the society follows. Most of the performance interventions that incorporate subversion as a framing technique address the challenges related to traditional ideologies such as patriarchy, which is seen to be domesticating women. Through the incorporation of subversion in structuring performances, there is an opportunity to interrogate such ideologies as patriarchy that most African societies tend to take for granted.

1.4.3 Language

Macionis' (2009) studies on culture emphasize the relationship that exists between language and culture. He observes how language allows for the continuity of culture. He speaks of cultural transmission as a process by which one generation passes culture to the next and how every society transmits culture through speech. In popular culture, language possesses an intercultural function. Interculturalism entails the interaction and exchange between diverse cultures within, between and across regions within a larger framework of society (Barucha, 1996:159). Language has the capacity to fuse symbols from distinctive cultural backgrounds. The relationship that exists between the element of language and popular culture defines the notion of how people perceive the world through the cultural lens of language. As Allan and Carmen Luke have argued 'globalization has generated new kinds of identity, new forms of intercultural communication and new forms of community' (2000:282). In popular culture, the alternative remains that of an intercultural approach in language that respects cultural diversity as a function of popular culture.

The relationship of the audience to the performance is one of shared meanings and perceptions rather than that of alienation and distance. The use of different languages that are mutually intelligible speaks to the idea of incorporating popular culture as a framing device in performance. The framing of interventions from a popular cultural viewpoint would thus mean adopting and adapting codes and symbols in people's language that are in common usage. As a framing element, the aspect of common language assumes an active involvement on the part of the audience during the performance as they experience a sense of community. There are instances where performers need to contextualize their language as a mode of delivering information. This is usually achieved when certain key information needs to be passed on to the audience. Hence the performers often switch to local languages in order to make the intervention more accessible to the audience.

1.4.4 Orality

Orality refers to the way that language is used in thinking and speaking in populations that do not have a widespread access to a written form of their own language. Orality comes out of the study of oral traditions and it values cultures that rely on orality through an anthropological lens. Orality and storytelling have close ties. For instance stories can be told or communicated in modes such as drama, music, painting and dance. Tomaselli (1989) articulates how orality becomes a key to understanding what he terms the semiotics of popular culture in performance. ITTC performance interventions analyzed in this study have shown how popular culture through the element of orality promotes audience participation and interaction through the 'call and response' technique. Chinyowa (2009) has observed how the 'call and response' technique has its roots in traditional African narrative performances. It was a means by which the

storyteller received constant feedback from the audience. As an element of popular culture, orality advocates for a dialogic relationship between the audience and the performance intervention as stories are shared between the performer and the audience.

1.4.5 Adoption

Adoption functions as an element of popular culture when the existing indigenous culture remains dominant in performance but the characteristics and styles of modern culture remain as identifiable elements within the performance. When theatre practitioners incorporate the element of adoption in framing performance interventions, they engage in a selective process of incorporating foreign elements of culture. Richard Schechner points out that 'there is no culture uninfluenced by foreigners, invaders, evangelists (Moslem, Christian, and Buddhist), traders and colonizers' (in Balme, 1999:15). The indigenous culture in this instance remains structurally intact although there is evidence of elements of diverse cultures adopted in the framing of meaning. Adoption operates from an angle of gradual change within the dominant culture of a society. Popular culture therefore entails a situation where both the traditional and the modern culture come into contact.

1.4.6 Adaptation

Following an understanding of adoption as a process of assimilating modern elements of culture into the traditional, adaptation can be defined as the establishment of an equilibrium state of the traditional and modern cultural elements in performance and a balanced number of elements from both cultures being utilized. The process of establishing an equilibrium state in performance speaks to the idea of fusing diverse cultural performance elements such as song,

dance and music into a state of equilibrium. Popular culture incorporates adaptation as a framing device as it is a culture that assumes a hybridity of cultural elements which are fused in structuring performance interventions.

1.5 Literature Review

Not much appears to have been written on the role of popular culture in applied drama and theatre interventions on HIV/Aids; hence this study will mainly draw from the work written on culture and HIV/Aids over the past years. The challenges associated with HIV/Aids have proven to be especially difficult because they differ from culture to culture and meanwhile the use of creativity and the arts is being widely recognized as an effective, non-formal educational tool, particularly resourceful for sensitizing people to HIV/Aids. UNESCO's Cultural Sector work on HIV/Aids is strengthening and systematizing knowledge and best practices in the use of creativity and artistic expression in HIV/Aids education as well as developing user friendly tools and materials. Indeed, the visual arts such as music, dance and drama performances can greatly impact on individuals and communities through their portrayal of social concerns addressing sensitive issues such as the HIV/Aids pandemic which continues to pose a serious threat to the population of sub-Saharan Africa.

Recent studies such as the UNESCO (2003) report on Culture and HIV/Aids have shown that most development interventions advocate for responses to HIV/Aids that are culturally appropriate:

Understanding what motivates people's behaviors, knowing how to address these motivations appropriately and taking into consideration people's cultures when developing programmes addressing HIV/Aids

are essential to changing behaviors and attitudes towards HIV/Aids (UNESCO, 2003).

HIV/Aids cannot be addressed in isolation of cultural and social circumstances of those who are affected and infected, thus it becomes crucial to understand what motivates people's behavior if the intervention aims at affecting behavioral change.

Bronislow Malinowski regards culture as everything pertaining to human life and action. He views culture as:

That aspect of behavior that is learnt by an individual and which may be shared by pluralities of individuals and transmitted to other individuals, along with the physical objects associated with such learned patterns and activities (in Firth, 1957:58).

This study adopts Malinowski's views on culture where he maintains that culture involves everything that has to do with human life. For instance having popular cultural expressions like dance, song and music reflected in performances can reflect on human life and behavior patterns in development communication. Since the pandemic of HIV has had an impact on the social lives of communities, it became necessary to reintegrate aspects of culture in communicating HIV awareness and education. Boal in *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995) also argues for the recognition of cultural approaches in theatrical performances. He asserts that theatre, as a mode of cultural production, becomes a reflection of real life. The importance of integrating popular culture as a framing device in interventions relates to Boal's notion of culture as it cannot be separated from everyday life. Theatre practitioners and cultural activists working on HIV/Aids need to consider devising interventions that are culturally appropriate to maintain sustainability.

Contemporary popular theatre scholars such as Frank (1995), Rohmer (1999) and Mda (1993), argue for a semiotic understanding of culture. They advocate for the incorporation of dominant cultural signs in performances such as symbolic dances, songs and rituals. According to Rohmer, such dominants serve to determine and even transform the structure of performances (in Chinyowa, 2005:28). With this view in mind, this study focused on how ITTC theatre practitioners engaged with the coding and decoding of popular cultural symbols in an attempt to address issues of stigma, discrimination, sexuality and HIV/Aids. An understanding of how the community's popular culture operates would assume a comprehensive study of the people's values, traditions, performance background, which, when integrated in development interventions, can easily be accessible and understood by the people.

1.6 Research Methodology

In order to fully understand the role that popular culture plays in applied drama and theatre performance interventions, I was involved in the field together with ITTC theatre practitioners at the different sites where they had performances. For this reason, this research was carried out using ethnographic observations as the key methodology for studying ITTC plays addressing HIV/Aids and other related issues.

McNeill defines ethnography as 'writing about a way of life, descriptions about the way of life of a group of people by the researcher' (1985:54). During ITTC performances my observations mainly focused on how cultural genres such as popular songs, dances and poetry within the South African context were incorporated in creating meaning and how such elements like Zulu and contemporary dances were framed and made to speak to HIV/Aids. Within this methodological framework, Pollock (1998) notes how the positioning of the

spectators as co-agents in the production of cultural meaning place a mandate on them to be involved in the process of creating new possibilities that can be translated into their daily lives. Ethnographic observations enabled me to gain more insight into the ITTC methodology. Pollock (1998) further notes how ethnographic observations can be limiting in instances where they become more subjective. I had to complement my data collection strategy by carrying out interviews, analyzing documents and journaling my experiences and observations. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) assert that the use of a collection of methods reduces the effect of the peculiar biases and assumptions that can be experienced during the research process.

Through conducting interviews with theatre facilitators and performers of the plays that I managed to observe, I focused on the structural considerations that the theatre facilitators had to make in the process of creating their performances. My main objective was to find out how they treat the issues of culture and whether they consider the role that popular culture plays in their performances and interactions with the spectators. My interviews followed a more conversational and exploratory approach. I did not limit myself to structured interviews but rather followed the more informal approach of interviewing which enabled me to gather a diversity of views on how popular culture manifests itself in ITTC performances.

Bearing in mind, as Lincoln and Guba (1981) have argued, that documents have their own advantages as well as limitations, my study also relied on documentary material on the Interactive Themba Theatre Company. I consulted previous studies that were carried out on the organization itself and the documentation on the performances that were carried out in the past. These documents were easily accessible hence they became constant sources of reference. As Taylor (1989)

notes, my personal journal became a sourcebook that also enabled me to reflect on the data I had collected. It became a record of the evolving processes and relationships emerging from the data.

The next chapter focuses on the historical background of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company. The chapter explores the formation of the ITTC in relation to the multi-cultural history of Sophiatown where the ITTC was launched, and how the organization has ably infused popular culture in its performances to speak to the mostly cosmopolitan audiences of Johannesburg.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND TO THE INTERACTIVE THEMBA THEATRE COMPANY (ITTC)

2.0 Introduction

The integration of popular culture as a framing device in ITTC performances may be said to have been inspired by the multi-cultural background under which the organization emerged. This chapter explores the formation of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company. The chapter examines how ITTC's historical background informs its current popular cultural framing approaches. An analysis of the environment under which Themba emerged will help answer the question of how the organization's background relates to its incorporation of popular culture as a framing device in performance.

The ITTC falls under Themba HIV/Aids organization which is a Johannesburg based non-governmental organization involved in the use of applied drama and theatre in addressing the scourge of HIV/Aids among the youth and adults in South Africa. The organization was launched in 2002 in Sophiatown. After five years, it had reached out to fifty thousand South Africans, educating them about the HIV/Aids pandemic through interactive drama and theatre. The organization trains its own actors and facilitators from disadvantaged backgrounds, constantly creating jobs for the youth. It started as a project for school drop-outs in Alexandra Park and Soweto. In Sophiatown the group was based at the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre, but it has since grown to become a full time organization with members drawn from various suburbs around Johannesburg.

The initial group members recruited into the organization were from Soweto and Alexandra Park. They were trained as actors, facilitators and peer educators on

HIV/Aids. Central to their training was the use of applied drama and theatre techniques in HIV/Aids education. Themba HIV/Aids Organization's Annual Report points out that:

The first year, 2002, was one of experimentation. We devised with the actor-educators a unique interactive methodology that uses a range of interactive theatre techniques including Forum Theatre, Dramatherapy, Psychodrama, theatre games, improvisation, formal teaching methods, play devising, play directing and performance (2005: 2).

The actor-educators were supposed to go back to Soweto and Alexandra townships to devise a project that would ensure information dissemination on HIV/Aids using these various techniques. The idea was that if the young people from these townships would go and teach about HIV/Aids to their peers they would make a better impact than having people from outside teaching them. At the centre of their approach was the use of various drama and theatre techniques to make the interventions interactive. It can be noted that the ITTC's current approach to performances has been informed by the multi-cultural environment that prevailed during the time of its formation. The interactive approach that ITTC emphasizes in their interventions enables participants to identify themselves with the performance by engaging in dialogue. This new approach becomes a path-breaking approach in addressing the HIV/Aids pandemic.

2.1 Cultural background

Sophiatown became the symbolic centre of black culture around Johannesburg in the 1940s' and 1950s'. It was the focus of the arts, politics, religion, and entertainment for the mixed races that occupied the township. The township was founded in 1899 and named after the original investor's wife. Whites stopped buying

property there when the Johannesburg Town Council located a new sewage disposal facility next to Sophiatown. Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Chinese began buying plots and building houses. As segregation and apartheid became more and more entrenched in South Africa, people of all racial groups came to live in Sophiatown.

After World War 1, the population grew rapidly as the country industrialized and the Johannesburg Town Council worked to clear slums in the central city. As white owners built barracks and rented them out, poverty, overcrowding, violence and the lack of public services characterized life in Sophiatown. On the entertainment side, life in Sophiatown was characterized by a sense of community, music, dance and home brewed beer. Beer brewing was mostly done by women to supplement their meagre resources. The women's beer drinking rooms called shebeens became centres for vocal and instrumental music and dance. After the Second World War, the population of unemployed and unschooled young men in Sophiatown grew rapidly. Residence permits were not required there and bad references in one's passbook did not automatically condemn a person. As industry in Johannesburg grew, Sophiatown became the home of a rapidly expanding black workforce, as it was convenient and close to town. Sophiatown was one of the oldest black settlements in Johannesburg and it held an almost symbolic importance for the fifty thousand black South Africans that it was home to, both in terms of its sheer vibrance and its unique sub-culture.

2.1.1 Township Culture in Sophiatown

Sophiatown became popular because of the cultural hybridity that existed. Hannerz (1994) believes that the multi-cultural environment that existed in Sophiatown led to the emergence of South African urban culture as it is understood today. Hannerz's

understanding of culture is that culture belongs to social relationships and sets of such relationships that define society.

In Sophiatown's youth-oriented culture, the dominant element was an obsession with the United States in general and African-American achievements in particular. The Chevrolet convertible, driven by elegant gangsters, became one of its dominant symbols. As a result gangsters exercised physical control in the streets and expressive control over fashion and other trends of popular culture such as music and dance. Urban African schools began to promote American models of cultural modernization. Teachers were among the most enthusiastic transmitters of American popular performance traditions. There was a clear association of African-American performance culture with urban cultural autonomy. The Second World War dramatically increased an 'international' consciousness among urban African performers. Africans in Sophiatown developed a strong community identity. Entertainment played its part through the backyard shebeens and dance parties that gave expression to this new proletarian identity.

A sense of glamour and excitement that pervaded the Johannesburg black entertainment world in the 1950s' was largely created by African journalists such as Todd Matshikiza, Walter Nhlapo and Can Themba and others who were at this time writing for magazines such as *Drum*, *Bantu World* and *Zonk*. Their evocative and penetrating commentary on the Johannesburg cultural scene helped give black communities a dynamic, resilient self-image and a positive sense of achievement despite the government's tightening stranglehold on everything they valued. Without these writers, no coherent, authentic account of Sophiatown's culture would have been possible. In the Sophiatown Renaissance, men and women were no longer ethnically divided inheritors of black rural tradition, but urban, well-heeled and sophisticated.

In the Johannesburg of 1959, the multi-racial collaboration on the stage musical '*King Kong*' represented at once an ultimate achievement and final flowering of Sophiatown culture, a typically sturdy South African 'hybrid' that the devotees of racial and cultural efflorescence unequalled in the urban history of South Africa. Even as a memory, Sophiatown serves as a symbol, a legendary point of reference for black writers and artists of every sort. Even to date, a number of African writers and performers are still trying to quest for the artistic and professional spirit that Sophiatown once embodied. The youths of Sophiatown have taken for granted their urbanizing environment and have since begun to form a culture based on American lifestyles, a harmonious blend of cultures, colours, races, art, music and dance. The emergence of the South African urban culture during this period was no longer the unstable residual social category that had worried the apartheid regime, with its controlling concepts of cultural respectability. Vital to this innovation was the emergence of the cinemas and community halls that provided a space for creative performances rather than alcohol abuse as the primary source of attraction.

2.2 Popular performance culture in Sophiatown

The role of popular performance culture in the social world of Sophiatown was, as Coplan (1985) maintains, conditioned by the relations between the urban African community and the apartheid power structure. Indeed, the environment itself was multi-racial. Shebeen society, primarily a working class institution, flourished among all of Sophiatown's varied population. The issues of black experience in South Africa's industrialization, cultural transformation in a racial caste system and processes of urban social change were all embodied in Sophiatown's performance culture.

2.2.1 Music

As noted by Coplan (1985), Sophiatown set the pace giving urban African culture its pace, rhythm and style during the 1940s' and 1950s':

A new synthesis of urban African culture sprang up, shouting for recognition. Materially poor but intensely social, crime-ridden and violent yet neighbourly and self-protective, proud, bursting with music and literature, swaggering with personality, simmering with intellectual and political militance, Sophiatown was a slum of dreams, a battleground of the heart in the war for the city's, and even the country's suppressed black soul. (Coplan, 1985:37)

Music was the central feature of the urban culture that developed in Johannesburg and in Sophiatown in particular. It was here that most important developments in indigenous jazz took place, particularly in the 1920s' and 1930s' where the urban culture of the slumyards emerged. Centred in Doomfontein, situated in the eastern part of the city centre, Johannesburg was known as 'marabi', possibly derived from the township of Marabastad in Pretoria. 'Marabi' reflected the way of life and gave the African working classes a new sense of identity. Wilson 'King Force' Silgee, a famous jazz saxophonist maintained that:

Marabi was the environment. It was either organ but mostly piano. You get there; you pay your 10 cents. You get your share of whatever concoction there is and you dance. It used to start from Friday night right through to Sunday evening (www.sahistory.org.za, Accessed on 6 Jan 2010).

Music was fundamental to the new culture of the yards. It created the vivacity and the energy of the shebeen parties. The sound of 'marabi' was original and improvisational. African musicians in Sophiatown developed their own new sound called 'Tsaba-tsaba' which contained African melody with American swing and jazz. 'Tsaba-tsaba' was essentially a working class form of dance music. Walter Nhlapo, a music journalist asserts:

Everybody spoke of Tsaba-tsaba..... There were no radios to broadcast it all over, but everybody sang it. There were no printed copies of it, but some dance bands played it, it had the spirit of Africa in it (Coplan, 1985: 154).

'Tsaba-tsaba' eventually evolved into 'kwela' which began as street music based primarily on the penny whistle. Younger juvenile musicians blended indigenous music with American musical elements into a new form of street music. The term 'kwela' means 'pick up' and 'kwela-kwela' was often the name given to the police vans that roamed the streets, wanting to pick up pass offenders or illegal street corner gamblers. The present framing approaches at ITTC reflect and embody trends in the development of music in Sophiatown. Township music was a fusion of diverse cultures which entails notions of popular culture as a framing device in ITTC performance interventions.

2.2.2 Cinema

One of the major contributors to Sophiatown culture was the cinema. Movies of the time informed much of the behaviour, language and dress patterns that emerged particularly amongst the gangsters of Sophiatown. The gangsters of Sophiatown derived their own sense of style and culture from American gangster movies of the time. They not only adopted the styles of gangsters in American movies but also

used similar language. Lines from movies were incorporated into the slang of the day. The township culture of Sophiatown became a product of the hybrid cultures that were incorporated in performance. This relates to how popular culture is viewed, as it incorporates the modern cultural elements and the traditional cultural elements relevant to contemporary performance culture.

2.3 The Pioneers of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company

The pioneers of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company grew out of this mixed cultural environment that existed in Sophiatown. Sophiatown became the home of the organisation and this is where it was launched in 2002. The initial group of people recruited into the organisation was made up of youths from Sophiatown. These individuals obviously brought with them that South African urban culture which was characteristic of those performances during the days they were growing up. The pioneers of the organisation also accommodated school drop-outs into their pilot projects. The projects were originally set up in response to an invitation from Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, the then director of the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre in Sophiatown, to deliver HIV/Aids education and awareness performances to young people using interactive theatre and participatory training workshops.

During the pilot projects, the Interactive Themba Theatre Company provided the space where the audience would engage with the subject matter and also allow room for reflection. The province of Gauteng became the target community for the projects. Thus the South African urban cultural environment under which ITTC emerged had an impact on the nature of interactive performances that were produced as this new sub-culture seemed to have spread throughout the whole of Johannesburg and other cities. Among the objectives of the organisation was the idea of enabling open and informed debate between young people and their parents,

teachers and community leaders about sex, HIV/Aids and cultural norms which pressured the young people into risky behaviour. The pioneers of the project were not professional actors, but were youths recruited and trained to be performers, actors and educators around life skills on HIV/Aids. Most of these actor-educators came straight to the organization after matriculating without having attended any drama schools. As Stanislavsky (1936) observes, when performers come to perform on stage, they often portray elements of their cultural background as this cannot be separated from them. The pioneers of the ITTC were influenced by the cultural background that prevailed in Sophiatown as the organization was launched. It is under such a background that popular culture has been integrated as a framing device in ITTC performance interventions addressing HIV/Aids.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the background to the Interactive Themba Theatre Company in relation to the cultural environment under which it emerged. It is evident that the organisation grew out of an environment characterized by a new street culture, typical of the township of Sophiatown. It was this emerging popular culture, reflected in Sophiatown's performance culture, that enabled ITTC theatre practitioners to engage with popular culture in framing interactive performances and this also translates to the current cultural framing approaches at ITTC which draw on popular culture as a framing device.

The next chapter provides a performance analysis of *Accepted*, one of the ITTC's performances that address issues of sexuality and HIV/Aids. The chapter examines how popular culture is integrated in the framing of content in the play.

CHAPTER 3

MANIFESTATIONS OF POPULAR CULTURE IN '*ACCEPTED*'

3.0 Introduction

Amongst the objectives of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company is the idea of bringing about behavioral change among the youth and adults in South Africa with regards to HIV/Aids so as to assist the communities in living healthy and safer sexual lifestyles. Addressing behaviour change is one of the most challenging tasks that HIV/Aids interventions have faced in recent years. Key to this challenge is the idea that such endeavors depend on the individual and his or her cultural background which plays a significant role on their day to day behavioral patterns. Rowan (1999) explains how difficult it is to deal with the self for today's psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors. He further asserts how most interventions addressing HIV/Aids have failed, and worse still, how issues that deal with the sustainability of such interventions remain questionable. In the search for an approach that can engage more with the individual, ITTC has come to realize the importance of incorporating popular culture as a framing device in their interactive performances and how one's cultural background plays a significant role in the manner in which one interacts with the performance.

Desai (1991) asserts that the major challenge with interventions that address issues related to HIV/Aids is that they are rather limited and assume a prescriptive approach. He advocates for a more dialogic research practice that reflects a serious appreciation of the cultural and socio-economic conjectures as they are understood by the people. It is through this interaction that a people's popular culture comes to play a significant role. This chapter analyses the role of popular culture as a framing device in structuring meaning in the performance of the play, *Accepted*.

3.1 A summary of the play

Accepted is a play that seeks to explore issues of sexuality particularly within the South African context where the idea of same sex relationships has become a crucial subject with regards to the HIV/Aids pandemic. *Accepted* is an exploration of issues dealing with same sex relationships including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersexual (LGBTI) relationships. The play explores the lives of young teenage students in such relationships. Prince, a 19 year old gay student becomes the central character who is being discriminated and stigmatized because of his sexuality. The school Principal is a 42 year old man who strongly opposes the issues of gayism and lesbianism. He is threatening to call a school governing board meeting concerning Prince's sexuality. In the play, the Principal becomes a symbolic character embodying the views of society and how they react to gay and lesbian people. The play also explores issues of disclosure and the fears that people have when opening up about their sexuality. Pontsa is a 17 year old lesbian who disguises as a heterosexual. The twist of her situation unfolds when she discovers she is having an affair with Steve and at the same time with Busi, who is bisexual. Steve and Busi are siblings and are both in a relationship with Pontsa. This web of related relationships has put the characters at risk of contracting HIV. Most characters are in denial about their sexuality which is why Pontsa is involved in a lesbian and heterosexual relationship. According to Pontsa, she fears being 'a victim of hate crime' if society finds out that she is lesbian. She would rather keep the issue of her sexuality in disguise and use Steve as a cover up. This, according to Pontsa, will make her look normal and no one will question her.

3.2 Syncretism in the dance, *Woza!*

In *Accepted*, syncretism was incorporated in the framing of the dance piece titled *Woza!* This dance was introduced and performed at the beginning of the play as a way of enrolling the audience into the performance. African popular culture manifests itself in the drumming and singing which signalled the beginning of the performance. The performers began by singing and drumming to the dance piece entitled “*Woza!*”, a Zulu word referring to the idea of alerting someone or raising alarm. Drumming and singing are popular cultural elements which can be identified within an African setting and culture. During most occasions drumming and singing refer to the idea of achieving a sense of community, coming together, giving and sharing. This is usually done when people are gathered in a circle. The audience was largely Wits University students from the Dramatic Art Department. The performance was shown to the students as a pilot project where they could critique the framing before ITTC could tour it around communities in Johannesburg. The audience could relate to the dance judging by how they were humming and nodding their heads.

The dance routines that each cast member performed were typical and representative of their cultural and performance background. The dance routines also represented the manner in which ITTC performers interact with their environment and how they perceive their lives. However all this can easily pass as their cultural background which in turn influences what they deliver on stage to the audience. Popular culture manifested in the performance through syncretism incorporated in the fusion of different dances. *Pantsula*, *Gumboot* and a fusion of the *American-break-dance* and *Hip-hop* were all merged in coming up with the dance. As Balme (1999) observes, such a fusion of different performance styles in dance assumes the syncretic nature of the performance which becomes a key popular cultural framing element. The strength of incorporating syncretism in framing the

dance lies in the manner in which the audience engaged with the performance to the point where some audience members joined the performers during the dance.

3.3 Orality as a questioning device

Orality and oral tradition have roots in the African traditional narrative of storytelling. In the performance of *Accepted*, the element of orality was incorporated in framing questions for the audience members. Performance interventions addressing HIV/Aids and issues about sexuality need to pay more attention to the role that popular culture plays in creating meaning in performance. By engaging with the culture that people are familiar with, theatre practitioners can encourage participation and dialogue thus effecting behavioral change. The incorporation of popular culture in performance invites genuine participation and audience interaction (Gould, 2004). In *Accepted*, culture and religion are being questioned and interrogated. The character represented by the Principal is a controversial figure and yet central to the development of the story. He denounces same sex relationships as he claims that, *“Prince is doing things that are against our religion and our culture and he should go to church and let the pastor pray for him”*. During the facilitation phase of the performance, ITTC facilitators questioned the audience about whether the Principal was justified in denouncing Prince’s sexuality. The audience members had to give their opinion on how best to deal with individuals such as the Principal who always base their arguments on culture and religion. The audience was confronted with such questions as ‘if you were Prince’s mother, how would you react to the news that your son is gay?’

The technique of questioning in performance has been regarded as a popular cultural framing device in interactive performances, where performances are normally followed by an interactive discussion facilitated by the theatre practitioners.

Gunner (1994) maintains that after presenting a performance, questions would be asked and a discussion follows on the subject matter presented. Such an approach relates more to narrative performance. The ITTC seems to have adopted a skilful way of questioning advocated by O'Neill and Lambert (1982). They both concur that this technique of questioning will invite the spectators to become actively involved with the performance. Often spectators' responses are shaped by their beliefs, values and perceptions to life, which all according to Schechner's (1984) definition of culture, can be incorporated in an understanding of the meaning of culture.

The Interactive Themba Theatre adopted a theatre methodology that draws from the audience participation tradition as articulated by Boal (1985). It is a unique theatre methodology in the field of performance and applied drama, thus it can be linked to Boal's concept of spect-actorship. The ITTC has incorporated elements of Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, Image Theatre and Simultaneous Dramaturgy. What is central in the manner in which ITTC embodies Boal's techniques is the idea that both methodologies emphasize the importance of the process that spectators go through in coming up with solutions rather than the solutions themselves (Boal, 1992:230). Issues related to the sustainability of applied drama and theatre interventions addressing HIV/Aids and other related issues should assume spectator participation as the core process of framing such performances using popular culture. Central to the ITTC methodology is a sense of the participatory approach between performers and spectators. This is usually realized through the facilitation process with the spectators and the use of short 'cameo' scenes that demonstrate a variety of possible responses to situations involving sexual encounters and to stigma and discrimination, among other issues that are related to HIV/Aids (2005:5). As articulated by Balme (1999) in this particular instance, popular culture as a framing device would thus allow for a negotiation of group solutions to the problems of

stigma and discrimination. Orality has thus been integrated as a popular culture element through the group discussions that followed the performance and the question-answer sessions between the performers and the audience.

In the play, there is evidence that society influences how individuals should behave and relate to their existing surroundings. This is why all relationships in the play are characterized by disguise. The Principal is a married man but he is also having an extra-marital affair with Busi one of his students. Pontsa is a lesbian who disguises as heterosexual which leads up to her getting involved with two siblings. The fear of being discriminated is what keeps such characters in secretive relationships. In the event that one chooses to disclose their sexuality, society will stigmatize them, as evidenced by Prince's situation.

3.4 Call and Response

The call and response technique has its roots in traditional African narrative performance such as storytelling. In most HIV/Aids performance interventions, the Interactive Themba Theatre Company has developed a culture of 'Breaking the Silence' about HIV/Aids and issues related to sexuality largely because of the limitations imposed by culture and religion which often hinder communities from openly speaking about such sensitive issues in public. Culture and religion thus become barriers to effective communication as it may become taboo to speak about certain issues relating to sexuality. ITTC incorporates the call and response technique in framing interventions and this technique has roots in cultural performances such as storytelling where the performance assumes a dialogic quality between the teller and the audience. The audience is directly engaged with the action of the play by having them affirm and take up roles within the action. In the play, members of the audience assumed roles such as gay men and lesbian women.

It was also apparent that such a stance would not only engage the audience interactively but in such situations the audience is at liberty to bring with them their personal views and ways of thinking. Their cultural background would shape the manner in which they interact with the performance.

ITTC has taken up a stance of fostering tolerance and acceptance of all citizens within a given society regardless of their sexuality. Within their theatre methodology, the strength of incorporating the call and response technique lies in the belief that by having the audience actively engaged with the performance, this will alter the way they perceive individuals in same sex relationships; becoming more tolerant towards them. ITTC believes that the call and response technique can help to correct the misconceptions that people have about same-sex relationships thus becoming tolerant of individuals in such relationships.

3.5 Language

Macionis (2009) notes how language allows room for the continuity of culture and how, through language, culture can be passed on from generation to generation. In popular culture the element of language possesses an intercultural function, that of integrating diverse cultural elements. In ITTC performance interventions the idea of switching from one language to another assumes new forms of intercultural communication as popular culture entails a fusion of both the traditional and the modern. As a framing device, the power of language lies in its ability to create new alternatives to performance and new forms of community. The strength of creatively making use of local language explains the manner in which the performance becomes accessible to the audience as they can relate with the content of the performance in languages that they are familiar with.

The idea of contextualizing different languages to make them speak to content in the play becomes a cultural framing approach. In *Accepted* performers made use of alternative words and different languages to define *Intersex*, *Trans-gender* and *Bisexual* by incorporating different languages which came from the audience. These words were displayed on colour coded cards. Most cultural performances rely on narrative and orality as means of communication. The use of colour coded images can be regarded as an element of popular culture as they make use of the visual, artistic element with the written word. The images become a constant source of reference during the performance. The incorporation of colour was for the purposes of emphasis. Words on a red background symbolized danger as attached to the traffic light sequence. In the performance such words defined risky behavior such as unprotected sex. Language served to mediate the way in which the audience perceived the content of the performance and through the use of coded symbols, a popular approach to information dissemination was realized. For the audience which was largely university students this became appropriate.

3.6 Conclusion

In *Accepted* popular culture has manifested itself through the dance performed at the beginning as an enrolling mechanism for the audience. Through song and dance the audience became active participants during the performance. Framing techniques such as syncretism, language, call and response and orality have demonstrated how popular culture operates as a framing device in the play *Accepted* as an intervention strategy.

The next chapter examines how the ideology of patriarchy is framed in performance using popular culture. The chapter is an analysis of *Beyond the Line* an ITTC

performance exploring patriarchy as a contributing factor to the abuse of women and children and the spread of HIV/Aids.

CHAPTER 4

THE CULTURAL FRAMING OF CONTENT IN '*BEYOND THE LINE*'

4.0 Introduction

Cultural expressions are always more than mere reflexes of social, economic or political conditions. According to Fabian (1978) culture does not simply mirror, it symbolizes and this always has a sign- function which thus makes it semiotic. More than that, he asserts that any living culture must be viewed as a communicative process in which a society not only expresses but also generates and forms its world. Fabian also asserts how culture was seen as a factor of resistance, a formidable opponent to change during the 1950s' in most African states such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Presently these countries, to an extent, accept that culture offers an enabling environment to development communication and framing meaning in performance (Barber, 1997).

Studies at UNESCO's Sector on Culture and HIV/Aids indicate that certain cultural values and beliefs become social drivers of HIV infections and that Aids itself leaves a footprint on people's social and cultural lives. The performance of *Beyond the Line* affords spectators an opportunity to interrogate their cultural values and belief systems which have become barriers to the effective implementation of HIV/Aids interventions. In their analysis of the role of culture in performance, Marion Frank (1995) and Zakes Mda (1993) have taken up an extended view of popular culture as a framing strategy in performance.

4.1 Summary the play

Beyond the Line is a play that portrays the life of Billy Mogale, a 37 year old man who works in a construction company. Billy is married to Rebecca who is employed as a Personal Assistant at an IT company. Rebecca earns more money than her

husband and her boss Katlego happens to be her ex-boyfriend. The couple has been married for six years but they have no children. They are living with Buhle their niece. Buhle's parents died of HIV/Aids. Billy has been sexually abusing Buhle for the past three months but she has been threatened to keep it a secret or else she will be taken to an orphanage. As the play begins we hear that the couple got into a fight the previous night. Billy feels challenged by his wife now that she earns more money. He is complaining that she gets home late everyday and does not cook for him. Rebecca tries to explain that she is working late for the family to survive but despite her explanation she is beaten up. The beating up seems to be related to the lack of children in the marriage. During a confrontation Billy walks away from Rebecca shouting, "You can't even give me one single child". Rebecca takes a fertility test and she is told that she can conceive. The doctor encourages her to take an HIV test and her result comes out positive. In breaking the news to Billy he gets so aggressive and threatening to beat her up again as he blames her for sleeping around and infecting him with the HIV virus. Billy is in denial as he knows the chances that he is also HIV positive are high. He gets so agitated and more abusive toward his wife.

Meanwhile Billy continues to force himself on his niece Buhle, sexually abusing her, and threatening her to remain silent if she wants to continue getting favours from her 'favourite uncle'. The play closes with yet another confrontation between the couple. Billy still refuses to take the HIV and fertility test. He remains in denial and continues blaming Rebecca calling her names such as "slut woman" and "prostitute". Buhle tries to tell her aunt about what has been happening to her and when Billy becomes aware of this, he quickly dismisses the two and threatens to kill Buhle if she mentions anything to her aunt.

4.2 Context

The content in *Beyond the Line* was to a considerable extent influenced by the context within which the play was created. The play was performed at two different locations, a prison setting and a corporate setting both of which are in Midrand, Johannesburg. The occasion which informed the content of the play was the commemoration of World Aids Day on the 1st of December and the 16 Days of Activism against women and children. Both occasions are commemorated annually during November and December to remember those people who have perished from HIV/Aids, to encourage a sense of hope for those who are living with the virus and the idea of caring for those affected and infected by HIV/Aids. The 16 Days of Activism against women and child abuse are days focusing on the education of communities about women and child abuse. They also focus on awareness campaigns for women and children in abusive relationships and the dangers of not openly speaking about abuse. Through artistic presentations and speeches at different locations, communities are able to engage and interrogate these issues with the hope of creating a safe environment for themselves. It is through the theme of abuse of women and children that ITTC became aware of the need to address and reinforce the dangers that women and children face through popular culture as a framing device that mirrors and interrogates reality.

4.3 Subversion in *Beyond the Line*

Subversion has been incorporated in framing patriarchy, an ideology that resonates throughout the performance of *Beyond the Line*. The technique functions as a means of questioning the ideology of patriarchy, giving the audience space to interrogate its own cultural values and belief systems. As a popular culture technique, Handelman (1990) notes how subversion can be incorporated in framing performance

interventions for manipulative reasons. Women are conscientised about their present predicament hence given an opportunity to interrogate traditional ideologies. Men within the audience are made to witness how their domineering behaviour can become detrimental to the lives of women and children. Ross Kidd (1980) also elaborates how society's cultural resources can be appropriated to express ideas and viewpoints that are against its interest.

Patriarchy can be understood as a cultural belief system that supports male domination over women. It is common in most African cultural settings whereby the male party is regarded as the dominant and powerful figure within the family, with other members becoming submissive to men. Patriarchy does not necessarily speak to a family context but also extends to a community setup whereby men within a specific locale are given positions of status and authority for example the issue of chieftainship in most African villages. In most African communities, patriarchy has become a defining quality that has come to be understood as the culture of the African people. Patriarchy not only explains how society functions but it controls women. Patriarchy can be understood simply as control by men. The culture of most African countries is patriarchal. Women in patriarchal societies constantly fight for their rights and sometimes they struggle just to survive without power and domination from men threatening them. Through patriarchy women are domesticated. The values and systems of patriarchy become more manipulative towards women.

Rebecca becomes a victim because Billy believes she is not supposed to earn more money than him. She is constantly being blamed for not being able to bear children. Billy exercises his dominance as he refuses to take both the HIV and fertility test arguing that all his brothers have strong and healthy children therefore he is fit to have children. Rebecca's duties and responsibilities are reduced to child bearing and

cooking for her husband. She cannot provide both which is why she suffers abuse. Women in patriarchal settings are forced to accept their situation without much critical reflection. The play has demonstrated how the domestication of women takes up a popular culture frame.

Beyond the Line portrays patriarchy as responsible for not only the abuse of women and children but also for the spread of HIV/Aids as women are deprived of their right to negotiate for safe sex in marriage. Rebecca is accusing Billy for excessive abuse of alcohol and having extra-marital affairs with women in the taverns then coming to force his way on her. Rebecca feels that it is from these extra marital relationships that her husband could have exposed himself to HIV. She is also convinced that, it is at this point that she also got infected with HIV. In the play, the technique of subversion is employed as a framing device in deconstructing patriarchy. Billy becomes a patriarchal symbol who constantly subjects his wife to physical and emotional abuse. As a woman, Rebecca remains submissive and suffers from the negative effects of patriarchy. Throughout the play, Billy's actions are constantly questioned through employing subversion as a framing device.

In *Beyond the Line* children are portrayed as key symbols of strengthening marriages in African societies. This seemingly a domestic confrontation between Billy and Rebecca sets the stage for a more serious theme of patriarchal abuse. Studies in HIV/Aids indicate that domestic abuse has become one of the major challenges contributing to the spread of HIV/Aids and most of these abusive cases remain a secret in most homes. Billy's domineering actions in the family have become what Sue-Ellen Case describes as 'cultural gender inscription' (1988: 130) which refers to the manner in which culture becomes a barrier to progression through gender norms and practices that disadvantage women.

4.4 Syncretism in dance

By way of introduction the performance opened with a dance entitled, *Woza!* As mentioned in the previous chapter, dance is a framing strategy that the actors normally use as a way of introducing themselves to the audience and at the same time enrolling the audience into the performance. This particular dance involves a fusion of both modern and traditional dance routines. The dance is also representative of the diversity of cultural backgrounds that exist within the group of ITTC performers. The nature of the dance is freestyle, whereby performers can experiment and incorporate different styles from African-American to Zulu traditional dances. The dance becomes an Afro-American piece because of how the performers are able to fuse together western dance routines with local art forms. Not only does this serve to identify the performers but it becomes useful as each member of the audience is able to identify with at least a specific aspect of the diverse dances being performed.

In an interview with one of the performers, initially the performers would do a Zulu dance as part of the introduction. As a popular cultural framing approach, the dance piece went through a process of adaptation and modification. ITTC adapted the Zulu dance to make it speak more to the multi-cultural group. They achieved this by fusing modern, contemporary and traditional dances and songs. The intention was to make them more accessible to the audience. It is at this point that popular culture manifests itself in the process of framing dance. Meaning is derived from the manner in which the audience can interpret the dance according to their own cultural understanding of the dance routine.

When the performance was taken to a Juvenile prison setting I observed that the audience got absorbed with the dance and song at the beginning of the presentation.

The young inmates responded well, they could engage with the performance since they related and identified with the action on stage. The performers took advantage of this and maintained the same level of audience participation and engagement throughout the performance. Syncretism was also incorporated in dances that implicated elements of patriarchy. For example dances such as *gumboot dance* became dominant in the dance routine. *Gumboot* dance is usually associated with men. It was performed in the mine setting by male mine workers speaking out to employers about their grievances at the workplace. One therefore did not expect to see women performing this dance. In *Beyond the Line* the dance routine seems to be borrowing extensively from dances performed by men.

4.5 Language

As a popular cultural framing device, the language of the play was contextualized to suit a multi-racial audience. The performers occasionally switched between Zulu and English to make the performance accessible to the audience. Here it became apparent that the spectators had a huge role to play with regards to how the performance was delivered. Within the prison setting, it was also evident that there was a diversity of races, ages and cultures which meant that ITTC had to consider the multi-cultural nature of the audience with regards to how they delivered the performance. In instances where the performers attempted to emphasize key issues, they would alternate the language. For example when Billy complains that Rebecca cannot have children, the performers emphasized this statement in both Zulu and English to frame the source of abuse and women's responsibilities in a patriarchal setting.

4.6 Audience Participation

The technique of audience participation that ITTC employs in performance borrows extensively from trends in African narrative performances that emphasize dialogue between the performer and the audience. The ITTC framing methodology incorporates aspects of the audience participatory tradition and the spect-actorship concept articulated by Boal (1985). In this process the audience engages in discussions based on the performance and they come up with solutions to challenges raised within the performance. The ITTC framing methodology emphasizes the facilitation process which comes during the performance phase. As articulated by Balme (1999), through the audience participation technique in popular culture there is room for negotiation of group solutions to challenges raised in the performance.

When the performance of *Beyond the Line* was taken to a corporate setting, the audience was actively involved in the discussion that followed the performance. ITTC performers facilitated the discussion. Among some of the issues that were brought to the fore was the question of the work that non-governmental organizations are doing with regards to HIV/Aids. The audience gave ITTC practitioners interesting feedback such as the need for more education on HIV/Aids for communities who need to be constantly reminded about the dangers of putting themselves at risk. The NGO sector together with other HIV/Aids activists also need to continue implementing programmes that help in the eradication of stigma and discrimination surrounding the disease if their work is to become sustainable.

Popular culture manifested itself in the techniques that ITTC employed in framing questions during the discussion with the audience. Just as in storytelling, the performer provokes the audience into getting constant feedback thus paving the way

for the development of the story. Questions during the discussion were open ended which gave the audience room to interrogate the challenges and problems arising in patriarchal settings and the work that theatre practitioners together with HIV/Aids activists need to address in their interventions. The audience also felt that despite all the interventions taken into communities addressing HIV/Aids, the communities also needed to play their role by changing their behavioral patterns. It is such abuse of alcohol on the part of Billy that sometimes exposes people to the risk of getting infected with HIV/Aids.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how African ideologies such as patriarchy can be framed in performance using popular culture. The framing of content in the play has also demonstrated how popular culture functions as a source and context through which meaning is created in performance. Through syncretism, language, audience participation and subversion the value systems of patriarchy were challenged and interrogated as they are considered to contribute to the spread of HIV/Aids. The integration of popular culture as a framing device thus enabled the audience to question the ideology of patriarchy which is often considered as a crucial driver in the transmission of HIV/Aids.

The next chapter is an analysis of *Hear me out!* one of ITTC's performances addressing the stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV/Aids. The performance seeks to encourage a culture of breaking the silence about HIV/Aids through eradicating stigma and discrimination. It also focuses on encouraging disclosure and acceptance among those people affected and infected by HIV/Aids.

CHAPTER 5

POPULAR CULTURE IN FRAMING '*HEAR ME OUT!*'

5.1 Introduction

Although contemporary theatres for development scholars acknowledge the role that culture plays in interventions and performances that address HIV/Aids and other related issues, there is not much to be gained by merely affirming such presence. Rather it is more appropriate to go further and examine how popular cultural elements such as adoption and adaptation can facilitate the process of framing meaning in performance. Without engaging with people's culture as one of the driving forces behind the spread of HIV/Aids, applied drama and HIVAids activists run the risk of addressing symptoms of the disease rather than its root causes.

Analysis and observations of *Hear me out!* were done during the rehearsal space, whereby most of the framing, structuring and contextualizing of the content was done. The rehearsal became the central site where ITTC facilitators engaged in framing the meaning of the play as a pilot performance in the presence of two Indian women who came to watch the play and give feedback before it could be taken out to the community at an Indian Primary school. These two Indian women will therefore be regarded as the audience for *Hear me out!*

5.2 Summary of the play

Hear me out! portrays the life of Mr. Nkabinde, a 40 year old father who has a drinking problem. His wife has died from HIV/Aids and now he lives with his only daughter Portia who is 15 years of age. The play begins with Mr. Nkabinde drinking alcohol in the early hours of the morning. He appears to be in deep thought. As Portia walks in, he immediately demands that she goes and buy him another beer. Portia pleads with her father not to continue drinking as his health keeps

deteriorating but he insists alcohol is a stress reliever for him. The action shifts to Peter's room, an 18 year old school leaver. Peter is involved in a relationship with Portia and Lerato who are both studying at the same school. At Peter's house, Portia walks in to find Peter and Lerato kissing and cuddling. Portia confronts the two and threatens to leave. Peter realizes the mistake he has done by letting Portia leave. He drags Lerato out of his house and rushes to see Mr. Nkabinde who is busy drinking. Peter encourages Mr. Nkabinde to stop drinking as this is evidently impacting on his health. Peter tries to encourage Mr. Nkabinde to stop abusing alcohol and accept his HIV positive status. He points out that being HIV positive should not be regarded as a death sentence. He talks about how Mr. Nkabinde can lead a normal life even though he seems to have given up on his life and that of his daughter, Portia. Mr. Nkabinde is in denial about his HIV positive status therefore resorting to alcohol as an escape route for his problems. At school Lerato and her friend Dineo are seen stigmatizing and discriminating Portia. Dineo is in the fore-front as she accuses Portia, "Hey, you think we don't know that your mother died of AIDS. And what about your drunkard father he's also sick of AIDS". The play closes with Mr. Nkabinde refusing to listen to Peter's advice. Instead he tells him to leave as he wants to sleep.

In the play, the issues that kept resonating were the ideas of promoting a culture of breaking the silence about HIV/Aids and the eradication of the stigma and discrimination that surrounds the disease. There also exists the problem of alcohol abuse, which contributes to young people having multiple sexual partners thereby putting their lives at risk of contracting HIV. Disclosure remains the biggest challenge that society faces when people decide to open up about their status due to the stigma and discrimination that may result. People are not willing to come out in the open and talk about their status let alone talk about the subject of HIV, which further

puts them at risk, as they continue exposing themselves and other people who may not be aware of their status.

5.3 Syncretism in dance styles

As a process of enrolling both the performers and the audience, ITTC facilitators began with drumming and dancing. In assessing the role that popular culture plays in framing performances, one needs to analyze the origins of that particular dance and where in terms of culture, the dance could be located. Balme (1999) speaks of how in syncretism, elements of two or more cultures and religions are merged and absorbed into one another. He further describes syncretism as 'a conscious, programmatic strategy to fashion a new style in performance' (1999:2). The performers fused local South African traditional songs and dances such as *Shosholoza* and *Gumboot* dance with elements of the *Bharatanatyan* dance originally from India. They also incorporated elements of the *ghumar* dance which normally has more physicalisation through rotation and palm movements. Generally the dance itself could be regarded as a fusion of all that the performers could bring to the stage either from their cultural experiences, research or from what they had been exposed to by the media through television and movies, mostly modern dances such as hip-hop and ballet. The syncretic dance served the purpose of enrolling both the audience and performers. Popular culture was integrated in the performance as a framing device in the manner in which diverse dance styles were syncretised. The strength of syncretism as a framing element lies in how the dance itself became accessible to the audience as meaning could be drawn from its performance.

5.4 Fostering a culture of tolerance through orality

Fleishman (1989) has described orality as the basis of performance and communication in township theatre. He argues that orality is a central component of

the way performances are framed especially in workshop situations. In a similar vein, Tomaselli (1981) views orality as a key feature in understanding what he terms 'semiotics' of performance within the context of South Africa. Audience response remains a crucial factor for all forms of performances that assume an oral nature within them. During the rehearsal of *Hear Me Out*, orality as a popular cultural framing element could be observed through the 'call and response' technique that was employed in order to encourage a culture of tolerance and acceptance with regards to HIV/Aids. ITTC performers would call out the statement '*I am HIV positive*', and the audience gave the response '*I still care for you*'. Both the performers and the audience would still exchange roles within the call and response process. According to the performers themselves, ITTC believes that one is HIV positive until proven negative. This is a stance initiated to promote HIV/Aids testing among the youth and adults in South Africa. By having the audience affirming such statements it is believed that this will transform their way of thinking and give meaning to the statements.

5.5 Hotseating

Through the process of hotseating characters within the play, ITTC was also able to create a platform for initiating dialogue and debate on the issues raised in the play. Hotseating is a process whereby the audience is given a chance to question characters in the play about their behavior and what motivates their actions. The technique of hotseating the actors prompted the audience to engage in dialogue. For example Dineo was asked how she knew Portia's HIV status if she had not gone for an HIV test before. Peter was asked why he was having multiple sexual relationships and whether he knew his status or that of Portia and Lerato. Peter justified his risky behaviour and the idea of having multiple sexual partners by saying that his friends were doing the same and he did not want to feel like a coward by

having one girlfriend. Peter mentioned that he does not want to be isolated by his friends. The audience feedback to such would be a way of accommodating Indian values and belief systems as they were in a position to give feedback on issues raised based on what their culture speaks of with regards to such behaviour among the youth.

5.6 Adaptation

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, ITTC performers had to present a pilot performance of the play before two Indian women who would then give feedback and determine whether culturally the content of the play could be appropriate for presentation before an Indian primary school audience. The ITTC's process of adapting the play was to a great extent influenced by the feedback which came from the two women who witnessed the pilot presentation. As part of their feedback they gave a brief background about Indian culture. They emphasized how the community's manners and ways of communication with one another remain one of the most important components of the culture. The idea of respect for one another is also a central lesson that they teach within their culture. For the Indian community, adaptation to any culture or embracing another religion is always carefully negotiated.

The conservative nature of Indian culture meant that the performance could not directly mention words such as sex, dating, hugging and kissing as this would offend the audience who were going to watch the play. Hugging and kissing would thus be questionable under Indian culture which is highly reserved. Terms such as oral sex and thigh sex needed to be replaced by less offending words. The framing of *Hear me out!* had to be adapted in order for the content of the performance to become appropriate and accessible to an Indian audience. This was effected through

contextualizing the language and content of the play to make it accessible to an Indian audience. The initial stages of reframing the performance considering the feedback that came from the audience involved a process of adapting the script, taking note of all the feedback given by the two Indian women. This process involved removing words that could be offending as mentioned earlier. As suggested by Rafika, one of the women, words such as 'no condom', 'masturbation' and 'dating' are regarded as taboo within Indian culture. Such words had to be replaced by less offending ones or completely removed.

The use of certain gestures and the idea of maintaining a certain distance between characters of the opposite sex also became a matter of concern. In the end ITTC resorted to incorporating what Balme (1999) terms the 'semiotics' of performance, whereby most of the content and issues raised within the play are symbolically represented through the use of images, signs and symbols and having the audience interpret such symbols on their own. Through the use of colour coded images embodying messages and words related to HIV/Aids, the audience would be able to relate with the performance in a manner which is less offending to them.

Apart from incorporating colour coded images to convey meaning, the performers also made use of their bodies as a semiotic device. As noted by Balme (1999), this process is referred to as 'effacement' by creating a code in which the neutrality and changeability of the body would give the meaning of the action. By minimizing words through effacement, body signs would serve to underplay the performers' ethnicity becoming the most important signifier of meaning. Rather than making use of the words regarded as taboo in Indian culture, performers would make use of gestural motions that simply reflected the idea of two individuals in a sexual act, for example gestural movements suggesting the idea of hugging and cuddling.

The dances and music in the play were also contextualized and made to speak to the content of the play. In the scenarios, ITTC devised dance patterns and accompanying songs that implicated a sexual encounter, individuals in a relationship, the use of condoms and also the impact of HIV/Aids within the society and how this has affected the youth in South Africa. Most of these dances and songs incorporated a fusion of different languages and dance patterns from diverse cultures. Through the technique of adaptation which was employed throughout most of the play's content, ITTC came to realize that popular culture can be incorporated in framing performances that can be performed before any audience regardless of its cultural background.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how popular culture can be employed as a framing device in performance. The ITTC performance had to be performed before an audience with a highly conservative culture. In framing its performance, ITTC employed the technique of adaptation through the rehearsal of elements such as language that had to go through significant change for the play to become more appealing to the audience. The contribution given by the two Indian women was very vital. It gave ITTC practitioners a sense of direction as to how the framing of the play had to be realized using popular culture techniques such as syncretism, orality and adaptation which were employed throughout the framing process in creating meaning thus making the performance more accessible to the target audience.

The next chapter focuses on popular culture and how it has been framing performance interventions in applied drama and theatre. The chapter will also draw from applied drama and theatre interventions done by other theatre practitioners and how this relates to ITTC work in HIV/Aids education and awareness.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS OF APPLYING POPULAR CULTURE AS A FRAMING DEVICE IN APPLIED DRAMA AND THEATRE PRACTICE

In the previous chapters, the role of popular culture in framing performances has been shown to manifest itself through the incorporation of popular culture techniques such as syncretism, subversion, adaptation, adoption, language and hotseating that contribute to the realization of meaning in performance. The deployment of such techniques in the framing of interventions opens wider possibilities for participation and dialogue. However it is also crucial to note some of the implications of applying popular culture as a framing device in applied drama and theatre practice.

The role of popular culture as a framing device in performance lies in its ability to create meaning. As pointed out by Balme (1999), these popular culture techniques are employed in structuring meaning in performance interventions. The study adopted Fabian's (1997) definition of popular culture as 'contemporary cultural expressions carried by the masses incorporating both the modernist elitist and traditional tribal culture (in Barber, 1997:18). As a function of development communication, popular culture is characterized by the use of popular language, adoption and adaptation of codes in common usage, active involvement of the audience and modes of production which fuse together traditional and modern cultural expressions. Schechner (1985) notes how the incorporation of popular culture in framing performance serves not only to create meaning in performance but also to reinforce what the society encounters on a daily basis. The incorporation of popular culture in performance will thus facilitate a process of self reflection providing a basis for new understanding of ideas, values and perceptions. The relationship between popular culture and applied drama and theatre as a discourse has been

realized by some theatre practitioners such as Lynn Dalrymple who have also applied the use of traditional elements in their interventions.

Dalrymple (1994) makes reference to the use of traditional forms such as dance in community education. She explains how tradition and culture are not fixed or bound, but become free flowing, flexible and interactive. There is increasing pressure on most African states to pass on key information from a global perspective and in the case of HIV/Aids, it is information about survival. The concepts to be passed on may be inaccessible or may contradict or run counter to the sets of values and viewpoints that define the culture of a community. In South Africa and indeed throughout Africa, this has meant attempting to convey HIV/Aids information from a biomedical paradigm to communities with a different world view. The difficulty lies in the channels of communication and understanding. The significance of incorporating popular culture in performance therefore comes into play. As the study has demonstrated, ITTC draws extensively from popular culture as a framing device in assuming interactive performance interventions.

Dalrymple's approach to community education mainly draws from a range of both popular and traditional cultural forms adapted to inform and suggest ways of responding to the modern health crisis of HIV/Aids. Unlike the lecture with its linear message about the five ways that Aids is transmitted, performance becomes a much more complex system of signs. It immediately allows for different points of view to be presented thus assuming a sense of cultural interaction which is also noted as a central feature in popular culture. Popular culture makes reference to the use of expressive forms such as plays, poems, songs, dances and the use of images in most ITTC performances. These elements become enabling resources, or mechanisms of creating meaning in performance. Such elements also draw on a range of both popular and traditional cultural forms which can be adapted and made

to speak to the content of the performance. Dalrymple's performance interventions have since adopted traditional dances drawn from the Zulu heritage, folk dances such as the Zulu *gumboot* dance and *isicathimiya* after the style of Ladysmith Black Mambazo and drum majorettes. Popular culture thus speaks to a fusion of such dances which vary from traditional to modern. Elements such as syncretism would thus assume a fusion of cultures which exists in equilibrium when the performance is carried out.

This study has shown how popular culture can be incorporated in performance. Through its framing techniques, popular culture can be made to speak to reality. Many indigenous dance forms represent gender roles that are inherent in their society of origin. Most of these societies are patriarchal and the oppression of women is socially accepted and regarded as common. Women are considered to be weak and inferior to men as witnessed in the performance of *Beyond the Line*. The incorporation of dance to express such issues would thus speak to gender and social power relations. Such a stance needs to be carefully considered and the meanings of dances reflected upon. This speaks more to the aspect of the cultural framing of content through popular culture. The technique of subversion was employed in instances where the performance engaged with the culture of conformity to obsolete traditional ideologies by challenging some of the community's cultural resources and viewpoints.

Chinyowa (2009) makes reference to the potential that applied drama and theatre have in engaging with participants so as to bring forth alternative realities in the specific context of HIV/Aids education in South Africa. The relevance of popular culture as a framing device in performance is observed in the manner in which indigenous modes of expression such as poetry, song and dance give meaning and become innovative ways of addressing the HIV/Aids pandemic. As the ITTC

methodology mainly aims at addressing behaviour change through interactive performances, Munro (1997) also notes how key problems in HIV/Aids become situated in the very nature of the affliction. He observes people's attitudes to sexual relationships are deeply embedded in the cultural habits, social expectations and power dynamics of the community. It is therefore befitting that interventions and performances addressing HIV/Aids be undertaken through the integration of popular culture in framing the meaning of performances.

Findings emerging from the interviews carried out with ITTC facilitators and performers regarding the role of popular culture in the framing of performances indicate that the organization's current framing approaches have been influenced by ITTC's cultural background which was the township of Sophiatown. The role of performance in the social world of Sophiatown was conditioned by the relations between the urban African community and the apartheid power structure. As articulated by Coplan (1985) an analysis of the performance environment that prevailed in Sophiatown facilitated an understanding of the current application of cultural forms of performance and composition. One of the most outstanding qualities of the performance culture at ITTC is that it is not one single culture, but rather assumes a range of different cultures representing every level of a diverse South African community. Hybrid mixtures of these cultures also exist in current ITTC performances analyzed in this study.

Popular culture is being perceived as an emergent culture reflected in ITTC performances. Within this new development in cultural terms, the traditional oral forms are still present. On the basis of such an analysis, traditional performance forms within the Zulu culture have been present and incorporated in the urban cultural context in a mediated form. What is retained in this urban context is the rhetorical potential and the performance form, although the content has to a large

extent changed. As one of the ITTC's objectives is to bring about behaviour change among the youth and adults in South Africa with regards to the context of HIV/Aids, findings in this study have shown how this has become a challenge from a cultural point of view. There are cultural clashes within the communities that ITTC engages with which impact on interventions addressing HIV/Aids, among other issues. For example the Indian culture follows conservative values and beliefs which demand that ITTC practitioners be sensitive to such cultures when framing their performances. The ITTC rehearsal of *Hear me out!* was carried out before a small Indian audience and the content distanced the audience from the performance. It is through the innovative and creative use of popular cultural techniques that the performers carefully negotiated their way in framing a performance that was accessible to that particular community.

Following the above findings, it has become apparent that some applied drama and theatre interventions overlook the importance of researching into their target audience during the planning stages which poses a negative effect to the sustainability of their interventions. From my observations of the performances at the ITTC, there was not much evidence indicating that the facilitators had engaged in target community research, with regards to the Indian culture and its values hence they had to adapt and contextualize the content of their performance *Hear me out!* before it could be taken out to the community. The role of popular culture in framing performances and creating meaning has facilitated an understanding of the relationship that exists between popular culture and applied drama and theatre as a discourse.

CHAPTER 7

GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.0 Introduction

This study undertook to investigate the role of popular culture as a framing device in performance interventions. The study focused on the work of the Interactive Themba Theatre Company (ITTC) based in Johannesburg as a case study. The ITTC is an interactive theatre company that incorporates the use of popular culture techniques in promoting dialogue and influencing behaviour among young people and adults to prevent the spread of HIV/Aids in South Africa.

7.1 Summary of Research Findings

The study began with an exploration of the background to the Interactive Themba Theatre Company in relation to understanding the cultural environment under which it emerged. This background paved the way for a deeper understanding of how popular cultural framing approaches incorporated in ITTC performances enable audience members to interact with the performance. It has also been apparent that ITTC grew out of a cultural environment that was hybrid in nature. Sophiatown became a legendary township which fused elements of foreign popular culture with local cultural systems. An understanding of this new type of hybrid culture which was reflected in Sophiatown's performance culture enabled ITTC practitioners to integrate popular culture in framing current interactive performances.

As analyzed in the plays studied, the role that applied drama and theatre play in development communication goes beyond mere information dissemination. The incorporation of popular cultural expressions does support this suggestion. It is evident that popular culture influences the framing approaches to performances that assume a participatory and interactive nature. Meaning is derived not only from how

the performance is delivered to the audience but from how the audience itself interprets the popular cultural frames incorporated in creating meaning.

Manifestations of popular culture in performance involved spectator engagement and participation during the performance as there existed a sense of familiarity with the performative action. Such was the case in ITTC performance interventions analyzed in this study. Through the employment of popular culture techniques, performances assumed audience participation through orality and the call and response technique. These performances also incorporated syncretism and language which remain key techniques in defining popular culture.

As a framing device in performance, the role of popular culture in performance speaks more to the idea that it has the ability to create meaning in performance when popular cultural techniques are incorporated. Fabian's (1990) studies on popular culture have suggested how performance becomes a site of emergent consciousness, maintaining that in the moment of improvisation there emerges certain kinds of knowledge. He speaks of performance as emerging from an artistic and social convention and ITTC performances analyzed in this study justify Fabian's views. Evidently through the device of popular culture and the incorporation of its techniques in framing performance, meaning was created through the audience's interaction with the performance.

7.2 Recommendations

The UNESCO report (2003) on Cultural studies has defined popular culture as the totality of what human beings make of their life pointing that culture is what gives the society its unique identity and character. The incorporation of more creative approaches to development interventions is being recognised as an effective tool particularly useful when sensitizing the youth about HIV/Aids. Culture becomes a

product of the active, purposeful and productive activity of the people. This view has far reaching implications for the cultural dimension of performances addressing HIV/Aids.

There is therefore a need for applied drama and theatre practitioners to incorporate popular culture in their interventions so as to engage with the participants' worldview and bring forth alternative realities in the specific context of HIV/Aids education.

Chinyowa (2005) has observed how it is not enough for applied drama and theatre practitioners to merely affirm the presence of culture in their work. He recommends that they go further and examine how such culture functions in the process of signifying meaning in performance. Through such techniques as syncretism and orality, popular culture was able to bring about a new consciousness to people's understanding of values, ideas and perceptions to HIV/Aids.

In order to effectively utilize popular culture as a framing device in performance, there is need for ITTC practitioners to engage in target community research before engaging with the communities. This will facilitate an understanding of the culture of the people and how best to incorporate popular culture within the performance thus making it accessible to the people. Research into the target community will also facilitate dialogue and participation of the people during the performance by incorporating popular cultural elements that the particular communities can identify with. The importance of understanding how a people's cultural values, practices and beliefs engage with HIV/Aids education cannot be overemphasized. As noted in the study, to understand what motivates a people's behavior and knowing how to address such motivations calls for a consideration of people's cultures. The study has demonstrated how popular culture can frame HIV/Aids workshops and performances, a field that most scholars and cultural activists have tended to ignore.

Further research would need to focus on the relationship between popular culture as a framing device and audience reception in performances.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

Previous applied drama and theatre interventions have overlooked popular culture's significance as a framing device in HIV/Aids performances. The effectiveness of popular culture in such performances was dependent upon the application of popular culture's framing techniques such as syncretism, language, adoption, subversion, adaptation, orality and hotseating. In addressing behavioral change, it is therefore crucial to consider the cultural background from which the audience operates as this has an impact on how they perceive their way of life. ITTC has managed to make a considerable impact in HIV/Aids education and awareness by incorporating interactive approaches in their methodology, and popular culture has found its rightful place in the framing approaches of ITTC's performance interventions.

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- 2) Remo Chipatiso- Programmes Manager, Training & Development
- 3) Sweetness Buthelezi- Communications, Media Liaison Officer
- 4) Bongani Sihlangu- Programmes Manager, Advocacy & Campaign
- 5) Bheki Simelane - Actor Educator, Snr
- 6) Lisiba Komelane -Training Coordinator
- 7) Tshepo Letsoalo- Trainer