

https://dspace.org/

An exploration of theatre as activism as an anti-homophobia intervention amongst Zimbabweans living in South Africa : a practice led research project of The Trial of the Senior Citizen.

Ndlovu, Bhekilizwe Bernard

2011-05-31
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9970

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Chapter One

Introduction

General Introduction

In this chapter I give a general introduction to the layout of the research report beginning with a brief description of the complex problem of being a gay person in Zimbabwe. I then introduce the target audience, the group paranoia that has kept the divide and rule tactic alive. I discuss Theatre as Activism as an intervention and practice led research as a research method. I look at the research question generated by the research problem in this research. I give a concise layout of the research format and roadmap of the project. A brief description of *The Trial of the Senior Citizen* is part of this chapter.

This research seeks to explore Theatre as Activism as an anti-homophobia intervention amongst Zimbabweans living in South Africa. Zimbabwe is one of many African countries that have maintained an unwavering intolerance for gay people. President Mugabe publicly declared that they will not be tolerated, calling them all sorts of names. This has led to the serious silencing of gay people and their sympathisers leading to socio-economic, psychological, and legal and health problems affecting gay people and the general populace of the country.

South Africa and the Target Population

It is extremely dangerous for anyone at the moment to stage any drama addressing the problem of gay people in Zimbabwe as the laws of the country do not protect the rights of gay people. It is against this background that this study takes advantage of the current movement of Zimbabweans to other countries to address an issue that is critical but cannot openly be addressed in Zimbabwe. South Africa still grapples with problems of violence and discrimination associated with homosexuality but its constitution explicitly protects gay people. This study is therefore strategically positioned in South Africa for the safety of the actors and this researcher-practitioner.

Group Paranoia and Divide and Rule

Zimbabwe is a former colony of Britain and stands liberated from colonialism by nationalist movements through which Robert Mugabe took over from Ian Smith as Prime Minister in April 1980. Robert Mugabe's rise to power has seen Zimbabwe spiral back to problems similar to those experienced during the colonial era and even worse, including tribalism, partisan attitudes, homophobia, racism and xenophobia. The government of Robert Mugabe and his party ZANU (PF) has seen groups of people being targeted at a given time and declared the enemy of the nation. The nature of group manipulation by Mugabe and the ZANU (PF) rule can be traced right back to the formation of ZANU (PF). The formation of the party was masterminded by a special group of four who were later got rid of by Mugabe and reduced to political spectators. Heidi Holland has this to say about Mugabe and Edgar Tekere in her psychobiography of Mugabe called *Dinner with Mugabe*:

> The two formed a bond while imprisoned in Rhodesia with Enos Nkala and Maurice Nyagumbo, a foursome that became known as Super-Zanu after deposing their original leader Ndabaningi Sithole in prison (2008:40).

This resumed in the early eighties when all forms of wrath were directed at the Ndebele ethnic group on flimsy allegations of threatening to overthrow government by sponsoring a dissident guerrilla force under ZAPU which was mainly supported by people from Matabeleland. The focus on the Ndebele people subsided when the white community fell out with Robert Mugabe and his party. In the year 2000, ZANU (PF) went on the rampage invading farms owned by white Zimbabweans and repossessing them under the guise of a state land redistribution programme. This was done in a violent and vindictive manner with a number of white farmers being killed and some being arrested.

In 2008, Robert Mugabe's group wrath was turned against the Shona speaking people of opposing political affiliation. Close to three hundred anti-ZANU (PF) Shona speaking Zimbabweans were killed by axe wielding ZANU (PF) supporters after Robert Mugabe had lost in the presidential election (Zimbabwe Human Rights in Crisis Report 2008).

Mugabe's intolerance for difference had been rekindled in 1999. Having always declared his hatred for gay people, there was an attempted 'arrest' by a gay rights activist while he was

on his way to shop at Harrods in London. Mugabe then described Blair's government as 'little man' who used 'gay gangsters' against him (Holland 2008).

One gets the feeling that the story of Zimbabwe is a story of intolerance for difference dating back to the past, heightened during colonialism and skyrocketing during Robert Mugabe's reign. Judith Garfield Todd makes the following comment in her book, *Through The Darkness: A life in Zimbabwe*:

> I found it difficult to understand how people who had suffered at the hands of oppressors could so readily become oppressors themselves (2007:136).

Discrimination has become so pronounced in Zimbabwe that I shudder to think where the country will go if there are no conscious efforts to reverse this. Holland asks the critical question when she says,

> Perhaps we ought to rely on psychologists, rather than politicians to tell us how long this impact should last (2008:210).

A Theatre Intervention on Discrimination and Divide and Rule

This study brings the theatre dimension within the jigsaw puzzle of Zimbabwe and explores a theatre that can address the challenges gay people have suffered at the hands of Robert Mugabe and his supporters. What makes gay people unique and important to focus on is the fact they are publicly exposed to prejudice and suffer the worst form of discrimination in Zimbabwe. They are the meeting point of all discriminatory Zimbabweans. Traditionalist Zimbabweans under the influence of male masculinities and sexualities have dismissed gay people as 'unAfrican'. Christians have called them 'evil' and 'demoniac' and ZANU (PF) supporters call them 'British gay gangsters' (Epprecht 2008). Mugabe sits comfortably at the centre of all this manipulation and fuelling of group divisions for self aggrandisement. It would seem that he is the pivot of the machine of hate and discrimination. He is the megalomaniac who presided over the division of his people into a tribal, racial and homophobic nation. Holland summarises it well when she says:

> Mugabe's skill over the years is focusing Zimbabweans on an array of enemies, the British, the white farmer, the parliamentary opposition- is deliberately designed to

> mobilise hatred in his followers in such a way that apparently disconnected adversaries appear to form a single category against whom the masses can rage and rally. After briefly calling for unity and brotherhood at independence, Mugabe has relentlessly inflamed frustrated, angry Zimbabweans with the power of his rhetoric, sometimes using their resultant aggressive energy to attack his chosen enemies (2008:119).

A Complex Problem and the Need for Complexity in handling it

With all these factors contributing to homophobia in Zimbabwe and Mugabe's mischievous manipulation of the situation, there is need for an equally complex attempt using different angles to address this problem. Gays and Lesbians Association of Zimbabwe (GALZ) has tried lobbying against this oppression to not much avail. This study, therefore hopes to take advantage of the situation of the scattered people of Zimbabwe to begin a conversation and dialogue using Theatre as Activism around the challenge of gay rights in Zimbabwe. I use Theatre as Activism as a term coined by Mr Warren Nebe as a course title for masters' students at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Theatre as Activism

The theatre that this research explores is in the area of Theatre as Activism. This is so because Theatre as Activism seeks to confront the people who perpetrate homophobia to get them thinking and feeling. This play derives its content from documented stories of the people of Zimbabwe that were collected through research using the narrative inquiry method. The fact that real life stories are used to create the drama seeks to give the intervention a mirroring effect. In addition the drama creates the distance that safeguards people's identities. It is a theatre that seeks to change mind sets by negotiating beliefs and attitudes through the safety of distance (Jones 2005, Landy 2001). This report explores a more detailed definition of Theatre as Activism in chapter three.

The Research Problem and Questions

There are very few plays in Africa, apart from South Africa, that address the existence of gay people, let alone gay rights. There also appears to be no recorded documentation of theatre

that engages audiences in an open dialogue about gay rights in Africa. It would seem that it is difficult to create a piece of theatre that does not create binaries or oppositions. The attempt to create dramas that focus solely on gay rights creates the problem of binary oppositions between straight and gay people.

The main question that this research grapples with therefore is whether a form of theatre that addresses the complexity of homophobia for Zimbabweans living in South Africa- without entangling the theatre piece in binaries and oppositions - can encourage change in mindsets by making the audience think and feel about what they see and hear on stage. Can the theory of distancing (Boal 2006) be used to make the audience view this problem not from too close, but from a distance to bring about insight? The other question that this research explores is how can the excitement of difference and plurality become the driving force for the creation and presentation of the creative piece so that the building of the community of Zimbabwe happens along those lines?

Practice led Research

This research is carried out within the field of practice led research where the researcher takes active part in the events of the research right from story collection to the making and presentation of the creative piece. Stephen Goddard sums it up well in his article *A Correspondence between Practices* by saying,

> This is part of a wider research strategy that recognises and values the role of a reflective practitioner within the process of a reflective practice. Rather than relying only on the written component of an exegesis to demonstrate a reflective process, it can also be reflectively performed within the practice itself (Barrett and Bolt 2007:117)

I take a central place in seeking to unravel, record, interpret, and position, from an insider's perspective and experience, the processes they use within the context of professional contemporary practices in the field. I place my stories in historical, social and cultural contexts and in the process form a neo narrative or new story shaped through autobiography as a portrait-of-self that mirrors and situates my experiences (Barrett and Bolt 2007).

The problem of discrimination in general is something I have experienced and witnessed in Zimbabwe. Belonging to the Ndebele ethnic group in Zimbabwe places one in the second group of those groups most discriminated against in the country after gay people (Zimbabwe Human Rights in Crisis Report 2008). I started the process knowing full well that my involvement was not only going to be academic but emotional too.

Research Format and the Roadmap

This research report consists of a creative project and written report. The creative project was done with seven performers who took part in the play called *Trial of the Senior Citizen* where a Robert Mugabe figure, called 'the Senior Citizen', was tried as a metaphor of the manifestation of different forms of discrimination with particular emphasis on homophobia. A jury trial system is used with the audience being enrolled as the jury. Some of the performers were straight while others were gay and from Zimbabwe. The researcher is himself straight but believes in the cause of gay rights and the rights and freedoms of all oppressed groups in Zimbabwe and the world over.

The written report places the creative study in context reflecting on the politics of Zimbabwe, the history of oppression and the sexualities found in the country. It discusses the situation of gay people and the politics surrounding them in Chapter Two. Theatre as Activism is discussed at length in Chapter Three showing how other forms of theatre would not work in addressing the challenge at hand. The report explores the research process, the methodology and the gathering of stories in Chapter Four. The playmaking process is discussed in detail in Chapter Four and makes a critical part of the report as the constitution of the cast makes the process an integral part of the research. Chapter Five evaluates the performances and reflects on what happened from the perspective of what worked and what did not seem to work. The play makes use of a facilitator who acts as the jury foreperson. The evaluations of the facilitator's reflections make part of the performance analysis. A sample of the actors' reflections and an audience member's reflections also form part of the qualitative evaluations. Changes are proffered in accordance with the reflections.

Having introduced the report writing format, it is imperative to delve into the historical perspective of this research showing how the problem of gay people is placed within a

society that has grown with it, and that the problem does not exist in isolation but reflects associations with other forms of oppression and discrimination. The research treats this issue using Theatre as Activism focusing on the play, *The Trial of the Senior Citizen,* a Practice led Research Project. The play is the centre of focus throughout the report.

Chapter Two

The Historical context of Zimbabwe

In this chapter I put the violation of gay rights into historical perspective. I trace the problem of oppression and discrimination from Zimbabwean events such as Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence and Robert Mugabe's one party state attempts. I discuss the *gugurahundi* genocide; the resultant tribalism and false unity accord are discussed. The hypocrisy of the West, President Mugabe's cronyism and legacy of betrayal are part of the historical context of this research. I then look at the homophobic people of Zimbabwe and President Mugabe's African homosexuality construct, the religious and traditional blend, and the story of former President Canaan Sodindo Banana and Jephta Dube. I make revelations of same sex relationships in the history of Zimbabwe, male masculinities, homophobia and gay rights in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe is a country that has suffered different forms of oppression since time immemorial. Having been colonised by Britain, the country went on to experience emancipation attempts that date back to 1896 when there was the first liberation attempt by Zimbabweans. This was to be followed by more organised nationalist uprisings that saw Zimbabweans resorting to the armed struggle.

Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence

The final oppressive stance was spearheaded by Ian Smith whose selfishness saw him refuse to grant black Zimbabweans voting rights but fighting to free Rhodesia from Britain through his infamous unilateral declaration of Independence on 11 November 1965. Although he pursued this stance of freedom, he opposed black majority rule and vowed that it would not happen in a thousand years (Smith 1997).

The Liberation Struggle

ZAPU and ZANU (PF) then led an armed struggle that culminated in the Lancaster House Negotiations that brought an end to white minority rule ushering in a new government under Robert Gabriel Mugabe and ZANU (PF). To the chagrin of most Zimbabweans

Mugabe's rule was not to bring an end to oppression but to divide the Zimbabwean community. (Nkomo 2001, Todd 2007, Tekere 2007)

ZANU (PF)'s One Party State Campaign

Having had ZAPU as the other part that fought alongside ZANU (PF), Mugabe tried to assimilate the party by selling the idea of a one party state to crush all forms of opposition in Zimbabwe. Todd says,

> In October 1981, Mugabe toured the nation, emphasising his belief in the urgent necessity of a one party state. This attitude was not popular in all circles (2007:35).

It would appear that President Mugabe's intentions to create a one party state have never faltered.

The *Gugurahundi* Genocide

When Mugabe's attempt did not succeed, ZANU (PF) went on a military and political drive to destroy ZAPU. This led to the formation of a North Korean trained fifth brigade called *Gugurahundi* that reported directly to then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe. They slaughtered more than 20000 innocent Ndebele speaking Zimbabwean citizens who were supporters of Joshua Nkomo, the leader of ZAPU (Zimbabwe Human Rights in Crisis 2008). ZAPU was allegedly sponsoring a dissident menace in Matabeleland. Dr. Mulalo Nemavhandu seems to defend the killings of innocent civilians in his book *Mugabe's Crimes Exposed*. He says,

> Centring primarily in Matabeleland, home of the Ndebeles, who were PF-ZAPU's main followers, this dissidence continued through 1987 and involved attacks on government personnel and installations, armed banditry aimed at disrupting security and economic life in the rural areas, and harassment of ZANU-PF members (2008:41).

Nemavhandu enters a debate that has never been substantiated and does not even go on to say why this fifth brigade concentrated on killing innocent civilians. Holland explains what Professor Jonathan Moyo had to say about the massacres,

> Mugabe could have dealt with it differently, explains Moyo, but Gugurahundi came at a time when South Africa was dedicated to destabilising Zimbabwe under its new black leader, and he panicked (2008:185).

It would seem that in his panic, President Mugabe went on to kill innocent Ndebele people without fully investigating the cause of the dissident menace. Todd records this,

> Then Henry Karlen, the Catholic Bishop of Matabeleland, telephoned my father to inform him that the state was perpetrating atrocities. People were being terrorised, starved and butchered and the property destroyed (2007:49).

The country has not had closure on this experience and all Mugabe has done is admit that it was a regrettable event in the history of Zimbabwe and a moment of madness (Nkomo 2001, Todd 2007)

Tribalism

These acts divided Zimbabweans on tribal lines as this was viewed more as the Shona targeting Ndebele people when in actual fact it was Mugabe and the ZANU (PF) army meaning to militarily decimate ZAPU. Joshua Nkomo, the leader of ZAPU bemoaned the results of that scheme:

> Nkomo was reported in the Sunday Mail of July 7 1985 as saying that the election results have been a tragedy and indicate that ZANU (PF) rule over the past 5 years has divided the country into tribal and racial groupings with, as things stand now, the Coloureds and Indians finding it difficult to fit in anywhere (Todd 2007:95).

It would seem this becomes part of the plan to divide and rule and one can see the beginning of the trajectory of the divide and rule policy of ZANU (PF).

The False Unity Accord

The most disturbing development that was to follow this tribal dimension to the divide and rule scheme was the giving in of Joshua Nkomo and the subsequent collapse of any serious opposition to ZANU (PF). Mugabe later used Canaan Banana, the former president of Zimbabwe to invite Joshua Nkomo to State House to discuss the unification of ZAPU and

ZANU (PF). Nkomo must have felt that Mugabe had succeeded in dividing the country on tribal lines and there was no going back. I suspect he must also have made that decision to stop the killings of the Ndebele people by the fifth brigade which continued unabated.

The International Community's 'Splendid Isolation'

While all this was happening, the international community together with the white community in Zimbabwe did not do anything. They felt that it was Mugabe versus the Ndebele. Holland has this to say about the silence of everyone else during this slaughter of the Ndebele people,

> Conflicting hopes survived for 15 years after independence despite the slaughter by Mugabe's personal militia of thousands of people loyal to the opposition leader Joshua Nkomo in the early 80s. Virtually everyone who should have cried foul looked the other way; whites because they were grateful to be out of the range of fire; the British government because it had to stand by its man up north while trying to bring majority rule to apartheid South Africa; and the international media because it had backed Mugabe to the hilt and could not contemplate its flawed judgement (2008: xiv).

One gets the feeling that this silence led to Mugabe believing that he was invincible and could continue with arbitrary decisions unabated.

The Beginnings of Racism

Within this context, Mugabe found it easy to direct his schemes against the white community when he was angered by their voting for Ian Smith's parliamentary candidates in 1985. He was enraged and panicked, making one of the most irrational political decisions ever when he dismissed an innocent white minister he had appointed by merit simply because whites had voted against him. One gets the feeling that the white community felt that Mugabe wanted to indeed turn the country into a one party state and so acted against him by voting for Ian Smith's candidates. This was to begin the bad blood between ZANU (PF) and the white community that culminated in farm invasions and the killing of some white farmers in the year 2000.

The Hypocrisy of the West

This time the international community was quick to intervene and thus began the economic meltdown of Zimbabwe through sanctions and other measures. This was of course a case of double standards for Britain and Holland takes a swipe at Britain and her allies when she says,

> It is one of the grim ironies of Robert Mugabe's rule and misrule that he- an entirely inappropriate messenger- has accurately exposed the hypocrisy of Western powers, earning opprobrium abroad but kudos in Africa as a result (2008:209).

Zimbabweans are suffering economically today as a result of the conflict between Mugabe and Britain. Their arguments have become spurious lacking in seriousness from both parties and tantamount to being nefarious in that a lot of people are dying due to starvation and disease because of this impasse.

Mugabe's Special Group of Cronies called Super-ZANU

Mugabe has never been alone in his nefarious schemes to destroy and divide and rule. His rule started with a threesome which, together with Mugabe formed the formidable foursome then known as Super-ZANU. This constituted Enos Nkala, Morris Nyagumbo and the former ZANU (PF) Secretary General, Edgar Zivanai Tekere. Mugabe did not spare these from manipulation and abuse. After using them to climb the political ladder, he went on to ditch them later and Edgar Zivanai Tekere had this to say about the whole issue,

> When you criticise or threaten him, he gets rid of you. The threesome of what was called Super-ZANU- myself, Maurice Nyagumbo and Enos Nkala- who should have been Mugabe's lifelong friends because we went through detention together and we deposed Sithole together, were nothing but a threat to him. We had to go (Holland 2007:50).

One of them, Morris Nyagumbo failed to stomach the fall out and committed suicide. Todd has this to say about Nyagumbo's suicide,

> Then, as the Sandura Commission's hearings proceeded unimpeded into the relatively small area of Willogate, Nyagumbo had recognised that as with Tekere and then later Nkala, Mugabe had decided to dispense with him. He had found this fact unbearable and impossible to live with (2007:292).

The disgrace of the Super-ZANU group is another example of a group that helped Mugabe accomplish his objectives but later lost out on the gravy train. They are guilty of working with him in the name of cronyism and losing out in the long run just like any other group that has been manipulated by Robert Mugabe.

A legacy of Betrayal

My opinion is that that they got what they deserved just like anyone else who works with Robert Mugabe today will get a fair share of his legacy of betrayal. Mugabe has made it clear that he is a man without permanent friends but with permanent interests. What is disturbing is the fact that we do not seem to learn from these clear lessons from history. The American President Barack Obama expresses the same scepticism when he says in his book *The Audacity of Hope*,

> I wonder, sometimes, whether men and women in fact are capable of learning from history- whether we progress from one stage to the next in an upward course or whether we just ride the cycles of boom and bust, war and peace, ascent and decline (2007: 322).

This study seeks to interrogate that kind of pain that progressive minds feel that may degenerate into despair if left unchecked. It is critical that activists fully bring to openness the vicissitudes of history and how it can be used to create better futures. This research seeks to do that through Theatre as Activism, focusing specifically on the plight of the gay Zimbabwean community.

The Escalation of the Problem of the Politics Tribalism

The group that Mugabe seems to have manipulated more than any other is the Shona ethnic group. There is the feeling amongst some quarters of the country that Mugabe has managed to establish Shona supremacy somehow. No one ever imagines ZANU (PF) having

a Ndebele, Kalanga or Tonga president. The most disturbing development in this is the influence this has had on opposition parties. It would seem that Morgan Tsvangirai, one of the leaders of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) factions has always sought security from having a Ndebele deputy. Before the (MDC) split, he had Gibson Sibanda as deputy. When Gibson Sibanda left the party to form a splinter party, Morgan Tsvangirai immediately replaced him with the little known lady called Thokozani Khuphe just as a cosmetic placement to appease the Ndebele electorate whose votes are critical in the overall picture of the Zimbabwean politics. The MDC-Tsvangirai splinter group dealt a big blow to the hopes of reversing this trend when they went out to look for a Shona leader to be deputised by the same Gibson Sibanda. This shows that they have now internalised their position as second class citizens. That leader came in the form of Auther Mutambara. With this kind of scenario one would see the Shona ethnic group as strong and undivided but when push came to shove in 2008 Mugabe did not hesitate to turn against the same group and slaughter close to 300 innocent Shona speaking civilians who supported the MDC-Tsvangirai (Zimbabwe Human Rights in Crisis 2008). My opinion is that Mugabe will stop at nothing to get what he wants and that he has no sacred cows when it comes to taking punitive measures against those who resist him.

The Homophobic Mugabe and his African Homosexuality

Robert Mugabe has made his hatred for gay people known to the whole world. In *Unspoken Facts, a history of homosexualities* in Africa, Marc Epprecht says,

> President Robert Mugabe has encouraged this anti-homosexual or homophobic attitude. Among other names, he has called homosexuals 'worse than dogs and pigs' 'gangsters' and an 'abomination, rottenness.' He even suggested that Britain's supposedly 'gay government' was attempting to impose homosexuality upon Africans as part of their wider programme of Western imperialism (2008:3).

I suspect this was Mugabe's stunt to get the sympathy of especially the Christian community in Zimbabwe which has rallied behind him in denying gay people their sexual rights. It would seem that Mugabe then has a whole group of Christians believing that he is sent by God to defend Christian morality. Clearly Mugabe's African homosexuality as a

creation of the West as part of imperialism is a construct that comes out of a conflict between the West and himself as well as those who support him. It appears that contradictions emanate from the fact that Mugabe has not come up with an African Christianity since Christianity was brought by the same Britain that he attacks for bringing homosexuality (Epprecht 2008).

The Religious and Traditional Blend

Mugabe and his supporters have created a disturbing blend of religion and traditionalism that is doubly oppressive. The blend, however, leaks like a sieve. Holland observes that,

> If under pressure while justifying their own view, they will call on God. How does anyone argue with tactic in a nation of deeply spiritual people who do not question the basis of organised religion? The Catholic Church becomes an alliance to the president; an enormously powerful ally that can silence a whole country for a time (2008:126).

The American President Barack Obama provides an antithesis to the Zimbabwean fiasco. He has a whole chapter about faith in his book, *The Audacity of Hope*. He has this to say,

> The Founders may have trusted God, but true to the Enlightenment spirit, they also trusted in the minds and senses that God had given them (2007:93).

Mugabe's argument was given impetus by his attempted arrest by a gay rights activist in 1999 in England where he took the opportunity to rubbish the whole Blair government. Holland follows this argument well when says,

> Relations with Britain declined further in the wake of the 'arrest' by a gay rights campaigner of homophobic Mugabe while he was on his way to shop at Harrods in London in 1999. Describing Blair's government as 'little men' who used 'gay gangsters' against him, he hurled insults at 'B-liar' as he called the British prime minister (2007:93).

Former President Canaan Sodindo Banana and Jephta Dube

Mugabe's homophobic stance also came out strongly when the late former president of Zimbabwe Canaan Banana faced allegations of sodomy. He was imprisoned and later disgraced when he died. He was denied the honour of being buried at the heroes' acre where politicians of his calibre were buried. There is a feeling among some Zimbabweans that Mugabe viewed Banana as a political threat and picked his main victim Jephta Dube to allege rape. This could have an element of truth as Mugabe went on to use a similar way of disgracing another human rights Roman Catholic priest called Pius Ncube (Holland 2008). Mugabe exposed his sexual scandal to discredit him as a genuine priest and hence a human rights activist.

The Homophobic People of Zimbabwe

Apart from the Robert Mugabe African homosexuality construct, the Zimbabwean people are generally a homophobic people. The issue of homosexuality is surrounded by so much silence with people refusing to admit that this silence is as a result of the fact that they lack orientation in that direction. Most Zimbabweans would rather not talk about the subject. They would rather deny the existence of gay people. In *Heterosexual Africa* Marc Epprecht bemoans the denialism in relation to HIV/AIDS,

> The problem resides in the notion that a singular African sexuality exists and that it exacerbates the risks of HIV transmissions (2008:1).

The Revelation of Same-Sex Relationships

This is despite overwhelming evidence that gay people have always existed in Africa and that same sex relationships have been a part of the African sexual reality. It is known that people sometimes and sometimes even predominantly, have sex with people of the same sex. Stories of spirit mediums are also beset with stories of ancestral wives. Interesting stories of ancestral wives are chronicled in detail in *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives. Female same-sex practices in Africa.* Nkunzi Nkabinde recites her own story so vividly,

> The heterosexual male sangomas who control our oral history and the information that is passed down from generation to generation have insisted that we keep same-sex relationships a secret. People know it has existed for a long time, but no one is supposed to talk about this. When pressed our elders acknowledge that it has always existed secretly among sangomas (Morgan and Wieringa 2005:232).

Male Masculinities and Homophobia

The issue is also viewed from a male masculinities point of view preferring to dismiss the whole thing as an attempt to distort set boundaries and structures separating men from women. This too has a traditional and religious dimension to it. *In Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, the editors define masculinity in their introduction by saying,

> We use the term masculinity to refer to a cluster of norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others (Lindsay and Miescher 2003:4).

According to traditionalists no man can have sex with another man as this will amount to reducing another man to a woman. The Canaan Banana case provides an interesting example. Epprecht has this to say,

> For many Africans, therefore, any associations with hungochani (homosexuality) can spark violent reaction and shameful or angry denials. A case in point was the Zimbabwean police officer Jephta Dube shooting and killing a fellow officer in 1996 after the deceased had called him 'ngochani mukadzi'(Homosexual woman)(2008:4).

One can argue that Jephta killed the other officer for calling him a woman. This goes to show how masculinity feeds homophobia in Zimbabwe. What gives hope is that this masculinity is itself a social construct and interventions can be constructed to go around it and create new realities (Burr 1995). In The *Language and Sexuality Reader* edited by Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, they argue in their introduction that,

> It cannot be assumed, therefore that either the 'hetero/homo' distinction or the kind of identity associated with it in contemporary Western societies will be found or accorded the same significance in every society and historical period. These concepts

> are not simply given by the nature of sex itself but are cultural constructs that arise in particular times, places and circumstances (2006:3).

The fact that these concepts are social constructs means that attempts can be made to reconstruct them (Burr 1995). Conscious effort to influence and change attitudes is the thrust of this study. In *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner treats the subject of social construction when he says,

> Every consciously performed action is an instance of restored behaviour. Restored behaviour enacted not on stage but in 'real life' is what poststructuralists call a 'performative'. It is their contention that all social identities, gender, for example, are performatives (2002:167).

Schechner goes on to argue that although social scripts vary from culture to culture and epoch to epoch, there are no cultures or historical periods bereft of social scripts. This is critical to this research as it seeks to contribute to the turn of these performances into performatives. The Zimbabwean situation requires new scripts in the area of masculinity because the current situation sadly contributes negatively to the growth and sustenance of homophobia.

The Zimbabwean Community and its challenges

My opinion is that the Zimbabwean story is that of a country that has been involved in the politics of oppression and exclusion. If the story of South Africa was about putting people in Bantustans and dividing them in order to rule them through apartheid, then that of Zimbabwe has been the story of pulling people together to oppress them in a false unity called sovereignty in the name of culture and tradition. The tragedy is that this sovereignty serves only a few. In this false unity the leader has not allowed people to unite truly as this would mark his demise. He has kept people together but made sure that they do not unite. This has been made possible by a number of realities in the country that include tribalism, racism, traditional forms of masculinity, traditionalism, religion, cronyism and homophobia. In my opinion, Mugabe sits at the centre of this well orchestrated oppressive machine manipulating different groups and turning them against each other at any given moment for self gain. Perhaps if the tactic has been about manipulating groups, the solution or the

beginning of the solution lies in positively exploiting this group reality and reconstructing the Zimbabwean community through a genuine unity that appreciates difference and diversity. This has become the heart of the research. It is not to mean that being one means being the same. *In Performing Democracy* Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus, correctly observe in their introduction that,

> Diversity and differences of opinion can weaken a community, but they can also provide it with great strength- if a way can be found for its members to "put their heads together" (2001:19).

Perhaps the process of gaining true independence and freedom will begin with the realisation that no one is free in the country until all are free. This will mean that the different groups that are working so disjointedly to liberate themselves will begin to be concerned about the freedom of other groups and the country will come to a point where discrimination is exposed for what it is.

The Rights of Gay People

This study looks at the liberation of gay people in particular but does not single out the group and deal with it in a vacuum. It proposes that the group's challenges are addressed not outside difference but in difference and the acceptance of difference. Liberating this group will mean the liberation of all.

It would appear that while the aphorism that 'the culture of an organisation is a true reflection of the character of its leader' applies to Zimbabwe and speaks about the president and how his character has been conveniently used to create and cultivate the culture of his country, the other one that 'an electorate gets the leader it deserves' is also true to Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans have fallen victim to Mugabe's machinations because of their own oppressive natures which are influenced by religion, traditionalism, masculinity, tribalism, homophobia and other influences. Mugabe does not have to create these but sees them and magnifies them and makes them work for him. I believe that Mugabe did not have to make the large Christian community manipulate the Bible and use it to bully gay people. He saw it in them and appealed to it and they took his side to oppress one of their number.

The purpose of this study was to explore through Theatre as Activism, how I could create a piece of theatre that addresses the depth of oppression epitomised by Mugabe's homophobia. *The Trial of the Senior Citizen* takes a Mugabe figure through a historical trial that exposes the different facets of oppression with particular emphasis on gay rights violations in Zimbabwe. The study aimed to achieve this through a piece of theatre that engages the audience intellectually and emotionally and exploits the distancing and mirroring effects that theatre based on real life stories has.

Chapter 3

Theatre as Activism

This chapter focuses in detail on the tenets of Theatre as Activism that form an integral part of this research. I discuss the theory of subalternity as propounded by Gramsci and later developed by Spivak. I explore the weaknesses of emotional dependence in some forms of theatre and attempt to show how failure to strike a balance between emotionalism and intellectualism makes some forms of theatre fail to achieve the thinking and feeling that Theatre as Activism requires. I discuss the strengths of theatre based on real life stories which I call theatre as documentation and show how I exploited this to create ethnographic performance. Comparisons are made with *The Laramie Project(2000)*. The chapter shows how the story of Simon Nkoli of South Africa influenced the creation of this concept that led to the writing and performance of *The Trial of the Senior Citizen* for Zimbabweans based in South Africa. The type of theatre discussed in this chapter looks at the theory of distancing and mirroring, the use of contradictions and rhetorical questions in creating dialogue, casting choices, and the choice of realism as a performance style, the element of play in theatre, and audience participation.

This research centres on the creation, analysis and evaluation of the play; *The Trial of the Senior Citizen.* The play is evaluated both from the point of view of effectiveness, meaning whether it works or not and efficiency, meaning whether the creation process works or not.

The Trial of the Senior Citizen

The play is based on the trial of a much respected figure of the president. It starts with the prosecutor putting forward the crimes committed by the Senior Citizen against different groups that include the Ndebele ethnic group, white farmers and Shona speaking supporters of opposition parties. The Senior Citizen also faces crimes of denying gay people HIV/AIDS treatment, care and support and denying them their sexual rights. Witnesses are brought forward both for and against the Senior Citizen during the trial. The witnesses include an old African traditionalist who is not willing to divulge anything to do with homosexuality in the history of the Ndebele people. A priest comes to support the Senior Citizen. A lesbian and a

human rights activist also come in as witnesses. The play ends with the audiences coming in as the jury to deliberate upon the case and pass a verdict which is, however, not announced.

This study employs Theatre as Activism blended with documentation from within the vast field of applied theatre. It falls within the Theatre of the Oppressed school of thinking in so far as it seeks to contribute to the transformation of society through the liberation of the oppressed (Boal 2006). The focus is not just on some product to be shown to a passive audience or that of a conventional director giving directions from some corner. Boal summarises it well when he talks about the Theatre of the Oppressed. In *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed* he says

> It is both action in itself, and a preparation for future actions. As we all know, it is not enough to interpret reality: it is necessary to transform it (2006: 6).

The theatre that this study employs views the whole process as critical to the results of the study both on the actors as well as the audiences at the end.

The theory of Subalternity

The Trial of the Senior Citizen does not view the oppressed and the oppressor as simple binary opposites but looks at the complexity of oppression from the point of view of subalternity as propounded by Antonio Gramsci (1967), the Italian philosopher, writer and politician and later elucidated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987), an Indian literary critic and theorist. The theory of subalternity postulates that oppression is not about binary oppositions but a complicated web whereby even some oppressors are at some point the oppressed themselves. The situation during colonialism in Zimbabwe gives a good example in this regard. A black woman was a double subaltern in that she suffered as a black person in a colonial state and as a woman in a country driven by paternalism. A white woman suffered as a result of paternalism only and yet enjoyed the popular role when it came to race relations. When one traces the trajectory of subalternity in the post colonial Zimbabwe, what comes out is a complicated case of citizens entangled in this vice as groups that are manipulated by politicians at different times. For instance when Zimbabwe gained independence, the first subalterns were the Ndebele ethnic group with Robert Mugabe and ZANU (PF) going on an agenda to politically and militarily destroy their political party called

ZAPU. This changed later when ZANU (PF) had problems with the white community in the country and all anger and violence was directed at them. The worst subaltern has been gay people in Zimbabwe as they have been reduced to perennial subalternity.

This study places itself within this background and brings together these different groups that have faced oppression in its different colours. In seeking to contribute to the liberation of gay people in Zimbabwe, the study does not focus on the Zimbabwean gay community in a vacuum. They are viewed as a big part of a web of oppression that has many victims some of whom are racial, ethnic and political affiliation victims. The theory of mirroring assists in getting the different groups of subalterns to view themselves as both the oppressed and the oppressor. The study does not claim to exhaust all tenets of this process but contributes to the wheel of change that should take place in Zimbabwe. Rogers best summarises this point,

> If, as part of this process, we can help to make connections between people and ideas, that's one thing; if we can clarify issues along the way, that's something else; if we can boost morale and help develop solidarity and mutual support as well, then we are really getting somewhere. We don't pretend to provide cog wheels for the great machinery of progressive change, merely a few drops of lubrication oil (Kuppers 2007:1).

Theatre as Activism

This research aims to engage the audience and provoke thinking, feeling and action. It seeks to do so by placing itself within the Theatre as Activism school of thought. Theatre as Activism attempts to create a learning environment focused on change. It is not dissimilar to the principles inherent in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The focus is on the audience member as a whole person engaged both intellectually and emotionally. In the *Community Performance Reader*, edited by P Kuppers and G Robertson, Paulo Frere has this to say about such experiences in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

> The discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection; only then will it be praxis (Kuppers and Robertson 2007: 24).

This research is based on an understanding of Theatre as Activism as developed by Warren Nebe and taught by the University of the Witwatersrand. Theatre as Activism attempts to draw from a complex relationship of theatre forms, including Theatre of the Oppressed and Documentary Theatre. The aim of Theatre as Activism is to integrate cognitive-behavioural and experiential effective modes of being in the theatre process and form. It is a form of theatre, both as process and product, which is informed by critical pedagogy.

Emotional Dependence

The focus of The *Trial of the Senior Citizen* is based on negotiating beliefs and contributing to change of mindsets. The type of theatre that this study employs is not sensationalist or propagandist that just whips up emotions but rather Theatre as Activism that seeks to get the audience thinking and reconsidering what they believe about homosexuality and what could have influenced them to believe so. The focus is pedagogical. Freire goes on to say that,

> Those who work for liberation must not take advantage of the emotional dependence of the oppressed- dependence that is the fruit of the concrete situation of domination which surrounds them which engendered their unauthentic view of the world (Kuppers and Robertson 2007: 25).

This research moves away from the weakness of emotionalism and takes into consideration the type of performance Augusto Boal talks about in *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed.*

> The Aesthetics of the Oppressed- which I want to become an inseparable part of the Theatre of the Oppressed- is essential, in so far as it produces a new form of understanding, helping the subject to feel and through senses and not just the intelligence, to understand social reality (2006: 36).

He goes on to observe that,

> It seeks to produce emotional and intellectual stimuli, encapsulating the symbolic language of the word and the signaletique language of senses (2006: 36).

In *The Trial of the Senior Citizen,* Mavis, the lesbian tells the prosecutor that her homophobic mother finds it easy to relate with a transgender neighbour girl but is not comfortable with her coming out about her sexual orientation. Emotions of sympathy are aroused for the lesbian but if any mother is in that relationship with her daughter she begins to reflect and interrogate her own assumptions and it won't be easy for her to ignore this confrontation with her own reality. In this case the play aims to engage those in the position of the mother both emotionally and intellectually.

Theatre as Documentation

The study draws largely from theatre as documentation. The stories turned into theatre are drawn from the very community they are enacted to. Using this method helps the study to move away from sloganeering and instruction and gets people listening to their own slogans and instructions and thinking. It gets them to reflect about them. This is something along the lines of *The Laramie Project (2000)*. *The Laramie Project* is a play directed by Moses Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theatre Project in America. It relates the story of the killing of a young gay man, Mathew Sheppard, a University of Wyoming student. The project makers got their stories through interviews and published news reports and made theatre as documentation (Kuppers 2007). When the Priest likens homosexuals to kleptomaniacs in *The Trial of the Senior Citizen*, he chants a common slogan amongst homophobes but does not realise that there is a difference between the two because gay people do not steal from anyone. This is meant to get the sloganeers thinking too.

Theatre that would not work

Theatre works in Zimbabwe that may focus on the oppression and discrimination of gay people and do so solely on gay people would not receive any serious attention. The type of theatre is likely to be viewed as a group of gay people trying to convince all and sundry that they should be allowed to practise their sexual orientation. Protest theatre might work only as an awareness and rude awakening technique but not as a way of changing mindsets. Protest theatre in this research refers to that type of theatre that condemns homophobes and protests that homophobia is wrong. Agitprop, if used as the sole theatre form for an issue like the issue of homosexuality can only achieve what military wars achieve, which is

shooting people into submission and never changing their minds. Agitation Propaganda as the name implies would fall under Freire's definition of emotional theatre that takes advantage of the emotional dependence of the audience.

Ethnographic Performance

Achille Mbembe makes a telling observation about attempts to understand the African situation when he says in his book, *On the Postcolony,*

> Ethnographic description, distinguishing between causes and effects, asking the subjective meaning of actions, determining the genesis of practices and their interconnections; all this is abandoned for instant judgement, often factually wrong, always encumbered with off-the-cuff representations (2001: 9).

It is imperative to understand that it takes long processes for mindsets to form and that the process of change has to take into consideration the many threads of these critical and complex variables of this jigsaw puzzle. The Senior Citizen is presented more plausibly as a normal character that has gone through certain experiences for him to have acted so wrongly towards others. It is these experiences gotten from his real life that are then exploited in the play and used to achieve the mirroring effect that is expected to trigger change. African political Liberators failed to understand their own journeys of liberation and ended up creating a vicious cycle of oppression. Holland tells the story of the mistakes of Robert Mugabe during the early days of his rule in Zimbabwe. Lord Soames arranged a meeting for him to meet investors from the United Kingdom to enable him to lure them to invest in his young nation. Mugabe went on to give a speech marred by communist ideologies to capitalists.

> It was as if Mugabe did not have the emotional capacity to understand the complexity of the situation he was in (2008: 72).

Any theatre seeking to contribute to the problem of oppression in post colonial Africa can learn a thing or two from Mbembe's above observation as this places one in a more critical position. Theatres that ignore the complexity of the issue of oppression risk gaining superficial conversions to the cause of liberation. *The Trial of the Senior Citizen* avoids

simply singling out gay Zimbabweans and focusing on them and oversimplifying their problem reducing it to an issue of binary oppositions. The Senior Citizen as an epitome of oppression is tried for oppression in general to show where the root of homophobia lies.

The Simon Nkoli Inspiration

The type of theatre dealt with in this study draws a lot of inspiration from the prison story of the South African HIV/AIDS and gay rights activist, Simon Nkoli. Edwin Cameron has this to say about Nkoli in *Witness to AIDS*,

> His courageous openness about being gay while he was in a prison cell with other ANC leaders during the 1980s helped to ensure that gay and lesbian equality was included as a cornerstone of non-discrimination under the democratic constitution (2005: 54).

It was at the moment of reading about Nkoli that I decided to create this type of theatre where the oppressor is imprisoned with the oppressed. Homophobes were found in the same prison cell with a homosexual who suffered the double stigma of being gay and black. He spoke to them at a time when they sought freedom and the reality of real non discrimination hit them in the face like a wet fish. I began to view the Zimbabwean situation as the prison situation where those that might have contributed to the oppression of others now found themselves seeking freedom together with those they oppressed.

The composition of the audience is expected to be a hybrid audience with Zimbabweans coming from the different groups that this study has discussed. Some have been complicit to the oppression of others. White farmers supported Mugabe and ZANU (PF) when they killed the Ndebele people during the Gugurahundi genocide. In this play concept the same white farmers find themselves facing a common enemy with the same Ndebele people they did not defend in 1983. Homophobic Zimbabweans in the audience find themselves facing the same enemy with gay Zimbabweans and in this case no one is free just like in the case of Simon Nkoli and the prison revelation.

Theatre for Zimbabwean Exiles in South Africa

This study focuses on different groups of people that have been complicit one way or the other in the oppression of others. South Africa has given refuge to all these groups and the decision to develop *The Trial of the Senior Citizen* first for Zimbabweans living in South Africa was to take advantage of their vulnerability as refugees and asylum seekers who must be looking back and wondering what went wrong in Zimbabwe and what can be done to correct it. That sobering moment of the prison scene in the 1980s in South Africa becomes a metaphor of the Zimbabwean situation now. The problem of homosexuals is discussed strategically hoping that discrimination will be viewed from a holistic position. The issue that the study then raises is; if this is how my fellow subaltern who is gay feels about how I treat him and this makes it a double portion of suffering for him, then why should I seek freedom and deny it to my fellow? The Simon Nkoli prison experience that inspired this creative project fits well into Boal's description of what necessity does to reality. He says,

> That's how things happen; necessity creates a new reality (2006: 41).

The new reality that dawned on the other ANC leaders who were prisoners with Nkoli is expected to dawn on Zimbabwean exiles in South Africa as they take part in and experience *The Trial of the Senior Citizen.* The experience of the Senior Citizen hopes to enjoy the advantage of reaching the ordinary citizen of Zimbabwe and not just the leadership.

The Theory of Distancing and Mirroring

The Trial of the Senior Citizen is not just about the trial of a much respected figure or leader of the country but the figure is a metaphor for all Zimbabweans to see their oppressive side. This aims to provide distancing that is critical for thinking and reflecting. Richard Schechner makes an important observation about distancing. In *Performance Studies: An* I*ntroduction,* he says,

> Taking a critical distance from the objects of study and self invites revision, the recognition that social circumstances-including knowledge itself- are not fixed, but subject to the 'rehearsal process' of testing and revising (2002: 2).

The complex situation in Zimbabwe requires distancing in that a dismal swamp of oppression has emerged where the oppressed may not know that he is contributing to the bigger web of oppression. Todd correctly observes that,

> All these high-level Zimbabweans undoubtedly loathed Mugabe for his destruction of the country and their integrity, but willy-nilly participated in economic and political crimes against the nation. They thus became complicit, guilty and fearful, bound hand and foot to their corruptor (2007: 423).

The use of the presidential figure distances them from their own actions and gives them room to view their own actions embodied in the Senior Citizen as a character. The guilty verdict is not just for the Senior Citizen but for some of his country men too who are guilty of the same crimes that he is guilty of. When the audience deliberates on the beliefs of the Senior Citizen and discuss his attitudes, they are in the process, negotiating their own beliefs and attitudes. When the defence objects to the prosecutor's addressing the defendant as the Senior Citizen, the judge overrules the objection and says that the Senior Citizen is being tried both in his personal and official capacity. She says that he stands for himself and his countrymen. Using Boal's words one would say,

> We cannot see the real if our noses are glued to it-some aesthetic distance is necessary (2006: 40).

The power of mirroring is exploited through the use of real life stories to make the audience view their own stories from a distance.

Contradictions and Rhetorical Questions

Contradictions and rhetorical questions are the main tool this practise led research uses to provoke thinking and revision in the minds of the audiences. The Senior Citizen presents himself as the father of the nation who does not discriminate against anyone as this would violate the very fibre of his values. The same father of the nation will, however, watch HIV positive gay men and lesbian women die without medication. This contradiction is further augmented by African proverbial wisdom that the prosecutor puts to the defendant. The

Senior Citizen unwittingly falls for the tricks of the prosecutor when he embraces proverbs without question but is found wanting in behaviour.

In *The Trial of the Senior Citizen,* the mother of the lesbian is said to like a transgender neighbour girl but is homophobic towards her daughter. This contradiction exposes the mother and is expected to get her thinking and revising her stance. The Senior Citizen, as a metaphor of the homophobic and discriminatory Zimbabwean general populace is exposed for his contradictory disposition by Holland,

> Though substantially truthful, he was often contradictory. But he did not see the contradictions because, like the seemingly respectable married man who makes his living as a drug lord, Mugabe holds parallel positions and talks about one as if the other does not exist (2008: 220).

This is something I attempt to bring to life through the writing of *The Trial of the Senior Citizen.* The presidential figure metaphor is beset with contradictions in his conduct and to a large extent in his public speeches he has made. These contradictions have been exploited by this research to reflect on the general contradictions associated with homophobia, tribalism, racism, cronyism and other vices associated with discrimination.

Casting

The play is cast in an anti-hierarchy style with women taking roles one would stereotypically associate with men. The judge is a woman and is in charge of the court. The Senior Citizen is defended by a woman lawyer.

The human rights activist is a white woman. When she is called to take the witness stand the Senior Citizen exclaims that they are calling in a white person. There is always an attempt by those who perpetrate oppression to reduce it to a binary opposition matter. In this case the Senior Citizen would like the problem of gay people to be viewed as a problem between whites and blacks. This is the African homosexuality that Mugabe has constructed over the years. This also raises issues of citizenship as Zimbabweans grapple with creating a new post colonial identity. The question that the moment raises is whether white Zimbabweans have the right to take part in the reconstruction of Zimbabwe?

The Senior Citizen as Realism

The Senior Citizen is presented as realism in style (Stanislavski 1950, Merlin 2003, Bogard 2001, Chamberlain 2004). The lure of the jury court system is based on the fact that unlike the criminal court system that countries like Zimbabwe use, the jury involves ordinary people and they get involved emotionally and factually in the judgement. This augured well with the needs of the theatrical style that this research employs which is theatre that leads to feeling, thinking and reflecting. The ordinary person participates at the end after listening to the facts of the matter and the audience in the play who are enrolled as the jury take the same role. It is the dramatic nature of the jury system that attracted me to this style as said by Schechner,

> Other performances in everyday life are very like stage dramas. The actions of prosecutor, defence, judge, and the jury at a high-visibility criminal trial... All are inherently dramatic because the stakes are high and the behaviour of the participants is so well established that it is as if a script is being enacted (2002: 207).

The challenge becomes to craft the drama in such a manner that the audience can follow the proceedings clearly without losing the exchange of the emotional thread. There is of course the challenge of wanting to just focus on the criminality and technicality of the matter and losing track of the emotional element given the fact that the Zimbabwean court system is purely technical and ordinary people are only welcome to watch the proceedings. There lies the need to take the realism route as it puts the challenge on the actor to present a real court scene but at the same time convince the audience that it is drama since they are also part of it. There is need for the acting and presentation to be so good that the audience has to focus on the issues of the matter and not on the fact that this might not be court like.

The Element of Play

The presentation of the play, however, maintains play in the structure of the performance. For example the jury foreperson has to make the jury give themselves acting names. This aims to remind the participants that while it is a court scene, it is still a safe playing space.

The play relies mainly on presentation and the power of text. The aim is for there to be a seamless fusion of thought and emotion so that the decision made at the end of the day is not based on one and not the other. Playing around with contradictions and rhetorical questions, coupled with good and convincing acting, are critical elements of the aesthetics of this drama.

Realism augurs well with theatre as documentation and the fact that the Zimbabwean people do secretly wish for the trial of the Senior Citizen makes the trial attract multiple audiences who want to hear the matter. To have used a purely stylised theatre could have lost the momentum and the hype of the issue at hand and diverted attention to form instead of content.

The costume option is realistic and portrays actors as they are in real life. It was influenced by the decision to present a realism piece that is appealing more on content than scenery and style. The Senior Citizen dress code was presented as it is in real life for purposes of bringing real life stories on stage. To dress him as a clown would have robbed the play of its documentary nature and this would have led to tension in attention. I would use Heidi Holland's words to justify the costuming and design decisions reached at.

> Humanising the monster, finding the three dimensional Mugabe instead of a cartoon villain, is a process of understanding rather than exonerating (Holland. 2008: xv).

The focus has to be on the issues, hence the decision to go along with a simple set that does not compete with the issues and does not divert the attention of the audience to anything else save the issues of the matter.

Audience/Jury Participation

While participation permeates the whole performance, it takes centre stage at the end when the audience is brought to the fray as the jury. The jury foreperson has been sitting with the audience and the witnesses also come from the audience as they take turns to take the witness stand. This establishes the play as a drama without walls. Care is taken to still keep that seamless interweaving of efficacy and entertainment.

The jury foreperson admonishes the audiences to give themselves a theatrical name if they decide to participate and this aims to set the tone for play. The audience is enrolled and as Schechner would put it,

> Play gives people a chance to temporarily experience the taboo, the excessive, and the risky (2002: 52).

The audience puts aside witnessing and becomes active participants and the play atmosphere established at the beginning is carried on as they take part without compromising the efficacy of the presentation. This draws on Boal's principles of the Theatre of the Oppressed that allowed an interaction between audience and actor and blurs the boundaries between the two. This is achieved especially through forum theatre. He has this to say about the spectator in *The Poetics of the Oppressed*,

> The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation; the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is Action! (Kuppers P and Robertson G. 2007: 23).

It was my intention to give the Zimbabweans based in South Africa the opportunity to be free to speak about a subject they would find taboo in their own country.

Most homophobes in Zimbabwe do not discuss matters of homophobia openly especially when there are people who are close to them in the vicinity. The subject is surrounded with so much silence and misunderstanding. This creative project does create that space through dialogical performance which is described by Dwight Conqurergood in his essay, *Performing a moral act. Ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance,*

> Dialogical performance celebrates the paradox of 'how the deeply different can be known without being any less different' (Kuppers P and Robertson G. 2007: 67).

Different groups are brought together to create dialogue about their differences and their oppression and are expected to get to understand each other.

This play making concept aims to achieve a two phase play making process which puts equal emphasis on the first phase of working with the actors to rehearse the play and create it to a certain point. It is then handed over to the audience who are an integral part of the play making process in the second phase. To put it in Boal's words, the play is performed to a point of crisis. The end is left to the discretion and judgement of the audience.

Chapter 4

The Research Element and the Process

This chapter looks at the process and the methodology of this research. The researcher-practitioner's journey is chronicled with an attempt to show how the research was not purely theoretical but was also an experience for me. I discuss my religious background, my sexual orientation, the paper I presented in Zimbabwe in 2009, the process of forming the drama group I worked with, the democratic process of the making of *The Trial of the Senior Citizen,* and the enlightening and life changing conversations within the playmaking process.

This research was mooted after hearing for the first time in my life, a gay person speak about how he had contracted HIV and how society had made it worse for him as a gay person by the double stigma that HIV positive gay people suffer. Coming from Zimbabwe I had never come across someone proudly gay. The silence surrounding the issue in Zimbabwe meant that gay people are only spoken about in a derogatory manner. There is no room for them to speak out for themselves. One gets to hear people speaking about them. So that was my first encounter with Justice Edwin Cameron. At the end of his speech at the Drama for Life launch of 2009 he implored students and all who had attended to go back to their countries and change attitudes. It was not easy for me to let this pass just like any other issue. Personally I had been confused about the whole issue. It was one of those things I found confusing in life. At the back of my mind I did not agree with President Robert Mugabe on arbitrarily condemning and insulting gay people. I guess that also came from the fact that I did not agree with his conduct and policies as a leader and from the fact that I came from the Ndebele ethnic group that had to bear the brunt of the President's discriminatory leadership. The fact that he had no right to decide for gay people on how to conduct themselves sexually had always lingered in me. I was not sure though what to do with that hunch. The speech by Justice Edwin Cameron was a rude awakening.

My Religious Background

I had viewed the issue of gay people from the perspective of my view of President Mugabe but my strict religious background seemed to disallow me any ground to manoeuvre. The feeling that my religion agreed with Robert Mugabe made me very uncomfortable. I desired to be on the other side of this issue and take the other stance. Yet the tentacles of my religious upbringing did hold fast.

Coincidentally when I went to church two weeks later, the pastor of that church took a swipe at the South African government for allowing gay marriages. This did not go down well with me. The conflict and discomfort in me was growing. I wanted to ask questions and I felt that there was need to hear gay people themselves speak about this so that a more informed stance could be taken. It was at this point that I decided to do a project that would at least make me delve further into the issue and learn more from gay people and interrogate my own assumptions. It was at this point that I put aside my love for workplace issues and decided to take up this more critical social issue. The feeling that no one in life had a right to choose for another was strong in me. That is the level at which I wanted to engage the issue. I wanted to look at it from a human rights point of view.

The concept of practise as research was open enough for me to get into this kind of research and be actively involved not just as an individual but together with those I was going to work with in the process. I did not want to carry out a purely theoretical study of this. I wanted to jump in and feel what I was doing. I was ready to be affected by what I would go through. I was ready to do what Dwight Conquergood speaks about when he says,

> Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard wrote that fieldwork 'requires a certain kind of character and temperament... To succeed in it a man must be able to abandon himself to native life without reverse' (Kuppers 2007: 58).

It was never easy to take this dive. At the age of thirty seven, I had made up my mind about a lot of issues in life and was not quite ready to start revising my position now. The moments of discomfort would not easily leave me and indeed this study touched on my personal beliefs and feelings. Conquergood goes on to capture it so well when he says that,

> This kind of research 'involves direct, intimate and more or less disturbing encounters with the immediate details of contemporary life' (Kuppers 2007: 58).

During the course of my study I was confronted by a number of people who came up with all sorts of accusations. Somebody accused me of commodifying gay people and reducing them to a subject of study. This was quite uncomfortable for me. I derived solace from the fact that I was convinced that I was contributing to the integration of gay people. I was also a subject of my own study because I was not looking at this whole issue from a distance but right from inside. I was accused by my Christian colleagues directly and indirectly. Some wanted to know why I was making myself the champion of gay rights. My conviction was that as Christians we did not know what to do with the issue. It was disturbing that Christians rallied behind dictators like Robert Mugabe in oppressing gay people and giving them no room to speak out and tell us their own stories. I am now convinced that this stance is wrong and I now disagree with any Christian who takes that stance and feel that they do not care to understand. For example, Christians condemn alcoholism and I often wonder why they do not lobby for the slaughter and banning of alcoholics in countries like Zimbabwe and Uganda. I am all the more convinced that their stance is driven by sheer homophobia and their refusal to dig deeper into the issue and seek understanding. We become fundamentalists when we take such stances. President Barrack Obama, within the context of a growing global village, rightfully notes about religion when he says,

> Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation, we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of non believers (2007. 218).

My Sexual Orientation

There were issues to do with my sexual orientation. Being a straight man meant that some people felt that I had nothing to do with the oppression of gay people. This was another source of discomfort. But as I proceeded and discovered that discrimination is one vice that manifests in different ways, I felt comfortable taking part in this research. I also come from an oppressed background and I see no reason why I cannot take part in a study that seeks to expose discrimination for what it is. I got a lot of inspiration from reading Judith Todd and

Justice Edwin Cameron's books. Their stories are not just about fighting for their own rights but for fighting for the rights of others. Justice Cameron represented black people as a lawyer during the apartheid era in South Africa. Judith Todd, the daughter of Garfield Todd, a former prime minister of the then Rhodesia stood against the Smith Regime leading to her arrest and incarceration. She went on to fight the Robert Mugabe regime and lost her citizenship in the process. I see no reason why we should compartmentalise the fight for human rights.

Methodology: Practice led Research and Narrative Inquiry.

The methodological framework was qualitative research with particular reference to narrative inquiry. This was the basis of gathering stories from different sources. Narrative inquiry sits within this practice led research and is ethnographic in nature in that it bases its thrust on real life stories collected from real people and their experiences. The suppression of gay people in Zimbabwe and the many problems they face are real life problems. This research found that the attitudes that drive the majority of Zimbabweans to hate gay people come from certain experiences in their lives. These attitudes are constructed and it is within the stories of their lives that one can dictate the sources of these problems. It is through critical listening that this project gathered the critical events from these stories and created mirror dramas. Participants were made aware of the fact that as I spoke to them I took notes for purposes of recollecting. In creating the script, some lines were taken as they were from the interviews and dialogue was created using them. Those who contributed these stories were made aware of the fact that their stories might be used in the play making processes and they consented as long as their names were not mentioned.

Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova in *Using Narrative Inquiry as a research method* look at narrative inquiry as a method of the people getting stories from the people. They contend that

> Narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experiences. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways human beings experience the world depicted through their stories (2007: 1).

They do say also that this research method works well with complicated human issues. This research contends that the issue being investigated deserves the kind of attention narrative inquiry gives to complicated subjects. I noted that most people volunteered their ideas believing them to be true.

My Paper Presentation in Zimbabwe

As part of my story gathering process I presented a paper under the auspices of a Zimbabwean organisation called Savannah Arts entitled an *Agenda for Protest Theatre in Zimbabwe* where I outlined my belief that a holistic view of oppression would give more meaning to the theatre thrust in the area of protest theatre. I argued that ignoring the rights of gay people meant that we had not come to an understanding of the real nature of oppression and discrimination. There was deafening silence after my presentation. Only one person responded and I was only able to gather data after the presentation on a one on one basis.

Forming a Drama Group and Beginning the Process of Performance

I first attempted to form a drama group with some gay Zimbabweans I knew. The feedback I got was that they would want to be paid for it. I was only able to get a positive response from gay people after approaching a gay person I had done some acting with in Zimbabwe. He said that he was a proud gay person and would like to be part of the project.

When the rehearsals started I announced to the cast that we had come together in a process of discovery and understanding and that during the process we would affect each other one way or the other. I got permission from the gay participants for us to be free to ask questions and make enquires. We entered into a verbal contract to be free to talk and contribute. We got a lot of personal stories from gay participants which changed our original script to a large extent. We were also able to get rid of politically sensitive issues in gay circles. For instance the original line for the human rights activist was 'What's wrong with two consenting adults having sex...' This was found to be sensitive in that there were some gay circles that would do threesomes and would find that discriminatory. My morality was of course affected by this but I said to myself: 'Who am I to want to impose it on others?'

The whole purpose of this research was for there to be discussion and debate around the subject and to create an anti-homophobia atmosphere.

The Democratic Process

I tried to avoid being prescriptive during the process of rehearsing. I found that some students found it unusual and difficult to be expected to take part in their own directing. Some came from a background of conventional directing. My other passion and training is human resources management and during my tenure of office as a human resources practitioner, I was fascinated by the idea of human potential and the concept of empowerment of employees which tended towards giving employees ownership of their job portfolios. This is a value I believe in and my joy when I work in a group as supervisor is to help them find their way and take part in decision making and moving forward. The making of *The Trial of the Senior Citizen* was a process of becoming for all of us and we had to use the performance space to interrogate our assumptions and redefine them. If I were to be prescriptive in this regard this would have defied and negated the logic of disrupting the banking methods of learning that are responsible for most of the rigidity many of us reflect in our day to day interactions with fellow men and women.

The process took this a step further when the audience was enrolled at the end. The facilitator was reminded to continuously allow the audience to take charge of the discussions and take it in the direction they wanted to take it.

We had the opportunity to take the non Zimbabwean actors through the history and situation of Zimbabwe. This acted as a springboard for character creation as actors became more enthusiastic and empathetic.

Conversations within the Process

I had a long conversation with one of the gay members of the group and the feeling I got from the conversation was that listening to gay people speak made me more empathetic. I got to the human side of the story and went down to the heart of the person to know that indeed insulting and stigmatizing gay people had far reaching repercussions on the self

esteem of gay people. Indeed being gay is not just about sex but about the person too and their self esteem. That was my biggest discovery in this research. I felt the desire to belong in this person. I understood when he told me that some gay people commit suicide when they fail to fit into society. This whole problem is about their lives and to dismiss it as sheer sexual perversion and attach derogatory names to it amounts to denying human beings attributes of humanity to do with belonging, self worth and dignity. I noted that talking directly with a gay person and listening without judging made me hear him beyond my own prejudices. I agree with David Diamond in his article in *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism.* He points out that,

> The richest and most productive way to work with oppressed groups is to help them find their own voice, not to speak for them (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994: 35).

I discovered that some gay people wanted to be Christians but were finding it difficult to do so because of the attitude of some Christians. This had led to the formation of the Metropolitan Community Church in some countries, including South Africa. I was also introduced to Rembert Truluck, the gay man who argues vehemently against those who condemn gay people through the bible and argues that they misinterpret it (Truluck 2000). All this showed me that there was an attempt by some gay people to belong to some religion and be part of larger society. Of course my engagement with this issue was from a human rights point of view but I would be happy to investigate such dimensions as that of Truluck which are purely from a religious point of view.

It was my hope as I presented this play to the audience to get to them as human beings and evoke empathy. Real life stories had displayed a lot of power through mirroring and I believed that this would have the same effect on the audience. The performance was presented to the audience as an unfinished story for them to complete by deliberating and passing a verdict. The performance would be viewed with the idea of reflecting upon it and observing what worked and did not quite work and developing the play based on the findings of the evaluation process.

Chapter 5

Performance Reflections

This chapter aims to carry out a critical analysis of the performances of *The Trial of the Senior Citizen.* I look at what did not quite work and what I believe needs to be done to redirect the performance and make it work. I also look at what worked. I discuss the need for tension that seemed to be lacking in the performance. It turned out that the vulnerability of the Senior Citizen robbed the play of tension that would engage the audience. On reflecting, the following aspects of the performance need rethinking and refocusing. There is need for more human issues that focus on micro matters to do with the person and how they feel and act, theatrical devices, set and costume design and a more engaging way of enrolling the audience right from the beginning. Audience deliberations are evaluated at the end of the chapter.

The super objective of this project was to contribute to the process of talking about the process of creating an anti-homophobia attitude. The performance was to intervene in a situation where a certain group of people is oppressed and silenced. The audience was not viewed as viewers but as participants who come together to talk about the issue after being confronted with the arguments, rhetorical questions and contradictions in the play. The play is meant to make them discuss the prejudices of the Senior Citizen who is so much an embodiment of themselves. In trying the Senior Citizen, they tried themselves and passed judgement on themselves. Some tried to avoid the mirror effect of the Senior Citizen while some defended him consciously or unconsciously.

It was refreshing to see the audience in all the four performances grappling with a subject they would not normally grapple with in Zimbabwe. There were challenges though that would make this an even more effective process of breaking the silence around the issue of gay people and contributing to the addressing of homophobia. I address the specific issues needing attention below.

Length, Rhythm and Pace

There were mixed feelings about length. On some days the temperatures in the theatre space were high and this led to a lot of distraction and discomfort for the audience. Based on the comments of some people who attended the performance, length would not be an issue if the room conditions were corrected as people would focus on the performance. I would also need to work carefully with the script to edit any repetitions, or unnecessary information.

Pace and rhythm do need fixing. There were times when the play slowed down and needed to move faster. This will be addressed by a more meticulous way of building up emotions and pacing the interactions and arguments faster and more decisively.

More Human issues: Domestic versus Macro Issues.

The performance would indeed benefit from creating a clearer thread of individual issues that touch people not just as a big Zimbabwe group but that go to the depth of the individual prompting them to question their long held views. For instance the story of the mother of the lesbian girl being close to the transgender neighbour was cited twice as a touching story and was obviously a moment of personal complication for anyone in that kind of situation.

The story of the Senior Citizen and his relationship with Joshua Nkomo, the leader of the ZAPU whom he persecuted will benefit from further complication. The Senior Citizen's argument can be given more water by his lawyer making him agree to the fact that he takes flowers to Joshua Nkomo's grave at Heroes' Acre every year. This is a fact recorded in Heidi Holland's book; *Dinner with Mugabe.* This would have the effect of conflicting and confusing the audience more and making them come to a well thought out verdict at the end.

There was the feeling amongst some audience members that the Senior Citizen was too vulnerable and lacked depth in his defence. The issue of the *gugurahundi* genocide would also benefit from further complication by making Mugabe admit to having killed some people but for security reasons as there was indeed a dissident menace during the time. Critics like Jonathan Moyo have said that these dissidents were part of South Africa's

attempts to destabilise Mugabe's new government (Todd 2007, Moyo 1992, Nkomo 2001). There is general agreement that there were dissidents. Critics like Jonathan Moyo and Joshua Nkomo say that Mugabe went on to kill innocent people because of the panic triggered by this destabilisation by the South Africa apartheid regime. Mugabe will defend himself by saying that his government was threatened and he needed to do something. He could end his answer by saying; 'What would you have done if you were in my position faced by a hostile Apartheid Government?'

On his hatred for white supremacy and his attempt to protect the welfare of the same white people who jailed him for eleven years, his lawyer will give depth to the argument by making him speak about how he tried to integrate whites by giving them ministerial positions at independence and even announcing the reconciliation policy. The Defence lawyer will now take Mugabe through questions that show that Mugabe has always attempted to be British in lifestyle and language and that his attempts have not been reciprocated by the West. This should expose Mugabe's dilemma of a double consciousness. Some critics argue that part of Mugabe's anger towards Britain is as a result of their refusal to accommodate him and make him an integral part of their culture (Holland 2008).

The cross examination of the Senior Citizen around fatherhood and HIV positive gay people will gain momentum by pursuing the pain he got from being denied permission to bury his son when he was imprisoned by the Ian Smith Regime. The dialogue would go like this;

> **Prosecutor**: Confirm you were denied permission to bury your son as a prisoner during the liberation struggle?
>
> **Senior Citizen**: Yes, I was.
>
> **Prosecutor**: How did that make you feel?
>
> **Senior Citizen**: How else could it have made me feel? How can someone be so callous and deny another human being the right to bury his own son?(With a sad countenance) Surely we may differ about things but when it comes to life and death issues and our beloved children it is only humane to have a heart? At three years I didn't know what my son looked like and I will never know.

Prosecutor: That is sad indeed.

This would then be followed by the questions in the script about whether he believes himself to be the father of Zimbabwe as a nation. This evokes sympathy for him but at the same time exposes his callousness as well which becomes another moment of complication for the audience. It removes the issue from being a black and white issue where the colonialist wronged Mugabe and makes it 'two wrongs do not make a right' issue.

The lesbian girl will allege that her mother tells her that they are related to the Senior Citizen through the father of the Senior Citizen who came to Tsholotsho and married the mother of the lesbian girl. This should bring a moment of chaos as the Senior Citizen denies this vehemently. Most people who are homophobic never imagine that some people close to them could be gay. This is likely to arouse laughter in the audience and a sobering realisation that this could be true to them also. As the lesbian girl leaves she will look at him sharply in disbelief.

The old man story will gain from further exploitation of his personal life. The Prosecutor will ask if he was ever married. For example,

Old man: (Getting agitated) Why do you ask me such a question? What has my being married or not have to do with this issue?

Prosecutor: I don't know. You tell me why all your life you never married? Was it a matter of choice?

Defence Lawyer: Objection your honour. Marriage is a matter of choice. I don't see why prosecution should put that question to Sibanda.

Judge: Sustained. That question is too personal.

Prosecutor: I have no further questions for the witness your honour.

In the Ndebele culture, there is talk that those who never got married had sexuality problems. These 'problems' are never defined: homosexuality is one of those 'problems.' These stories came from interviews I held with interviewees. This is expected to further buttress the claim that homosexuality did exist and explore the myth of sexuality and the

silence surrounding it. This is expected to create questions in the audience as to why the prosecutor is asking such a question and perhaps make them to begin to go in the direction of homosexuality.

The Priest story will shift slightly and add that he is the uncle of a gay public figure who is now based in the United States of America.

> **Prosecutor**: Father Mlauzi, confirm you are the father of Moses who fled to the United States of America after it was discovered that he was gay and was facing arrest?
>
> **Priest** (Looks down embarrassed) What does that have to do with this trial?
>
> **Prosecutor**: Are you saying therefore that you have a nephew as good as a kleptomaniac and a murderer father. What should happen to him? How would you feel if he lived in Uganda? Would you support his killing? Is he worse than 'pigs and dogs', father? (Silence) Is it true that you bought his plane ticket for him to travel to the United States? (Silence) I have no further questions your honour.

This is expected to shift it away from being religion on trial to being a personal issue for the Priest and consequentially for the audience also.

As a way of further engaging the audience in terms of their part in the crimes committed by the Senior Citizen, there will be two instances where the Senior Citizen will answer the prosecutor by saying that if he committed the crime, how come no one did anything. For example,

> **Prosecutor**: Mr Senior Citizen, didn't you go on to slaughter *20,000* innocent Ndebele speaking citizens of Zimbabwe?
>
> **Senior Citizen**: What are you talking about? If I committed such a crime how come no one did anything about it? Up to today no one has done anything.

This should create dramatic tension in the audience as they are likely to reflect on that question and perhaps add a rejoinder to that question to say 'why has no one done anything

about it? Why have I done nothing? Does this mean that the Senior Citizen is innocent or that I have not acted responsibly?'

Television Reporter

A television news scene will now be added at the end of the jury deliberations where a reporter will interview people who are supposed to be in Zimbabwe and were watching the trial from home on television. A social scientist will be interviewed about his views on the likelihood of the verdict since it is not announced and what he thinks are the likely effects on the whole social landscape of gay people in future. A crying mother of a gay young man who is sick and has been denied medical attention will be interviewed pleading with the jury to make a good judgement as her son is dying. The verdict is not passed by the jury and the research does this so that the audience continues to engage with the issue even outside the performance. Watching the mother plead with them as they leave with their unresolved verdicts is expected to add to their further engagement with the issue.

Theatrical Devices

The play does have challenges in the area of dramatic devices more so given the fact that it is performed as realism. The play will benefit from accentuating certain actions with a dose of stylisation and quickly going back to the focus on the subject. For instance when the lesbian says that she is related to the Senior Citizen there will be chaos and denial on his part as he advances toward the girl who is now scared to death. He advances in anger but when he gets to her he looks at her in total surprise before hugging her. This should create total silence with everyone waiting to see what will happen next. The Senior Citizen will suddenly go back and take his seat still denying. The Senior Citizen in this case enacts confusion as a result of the sudden realisation that it is possible that someone close to him could be gay. The enacting of this confusion is expected to have the same effects on the audience where confusion becomes an asset.

There will be intervals of recitations of the Senior Citizen's famous speeches. For instance when he talks about Blair and Bush being contradictory, all actors on stage will get up and say, 'So Blair, you keep your England and I will keep my Zimbabwe.' After this they will quickly pull themselves together and continue as if nothing happened. They will also utter

the statement about him having spent eleven years in jail at the same time in a choral manner. This is expected to break the realism and form part of the characterisation of the Senior Citizen who in this case is an epitome of the homophobic Zimbabwean citizens.

Set and Costume Design

This shifts to add character ambivalence and absurdity to buttress the theme of contradictions. Instead of going purely realist in costume, the Senior Citizen will wear his contradiction by mixing African and Western garb. He will keep his moustache for identification. The judge will keep her gown but now wear a Zulu woman's heart or *isicholo.* This shift aims to communicate contradiction and at the same time set the tone for disturbing revelations and expositions that the play carries.

Set will now be designed in such a manner that some chairs are African design while some are Western. This is for the same purpose as costume design. Most homophobes consider the issue of sexual orientation a decided and sealed matter. The staging of such a theme is unexpected and is in itself disturbing. That feeling of disturbance is critical in the performance. In this type of performance some confusion and disturbance is actually important.

Reflections on Audience/Jury Deliberations

1. Cultural dimension.

In all the four performances the issue of homosexuality being foreign to African culture was raised and it was interesting to note that people spoke about African culture without defining it. On the last day of performance somebody asked what African culture was and never got a response from those who raised the issue. There is a tendency therefore for people to want to argue for cultural purity without paying due regard to the reality of cultural hybridity which cannot be ignored in this day. Mbembe correctly observes that,

> Conflict arises from the fact that the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic, and that it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images, and markers current in the postcolony; that is why they are constantly

being shaped and reshaped, as much by the rulers as by the ruled, in an attempt to rewrite the mythologies of power (Mbembe 2001: 108).

It became interesting when a proudly gay person confronted one cultural pundit and told him that if that is African culture then he doesn't need it because he did not wake up one morning and decide to be gay. This was a sobering moment in the discussion and the project will now plant some gay people to bring this dimension to the argument if it does not come up organically. Bhabha raises this point of difficulty when he says,

> How does strategy of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflicted and even incommensurate (1994:2).

This performance revealed this kind of situation and the deliberations amounted to negotiations by people belonging to one big community of oppressed charting a way forward.

2. The White Human Rights activist.

Some members of the audience/jury felt that the activist should have been black. This again showed the refusal by some Zimbabweans to accept that the population of Zimbabwe is now cosmopolitan and if a new Zimbabwe is going to be built, it should be done with everyone taking part. President Mugabe is on record as having claimed that white Zimbabweans are citizens by colonisation. If Zimbabwe was to take this stance it would mean a complete overhaul of the meaning of citizenship. Right now Robert Mugabe and ZANU (Pf) are refusing to change citizenship laws so that Zimbabweans who have become citizens of other countries can enjoy dual citizenship. This contradicts their stance that white Zimbabweans are not citizens. If that is the case then all these countries who accepted Zimbabweans would also withdraw their offers and history will go back in time. The casting of the human rights activist as white was a means to raise issues of citizenship and the fate of white Zimbabweans. It would have been interesting to hear how a white Zimbabwean would have responded to the allegation that by making the activist white, we were playing

to the tricks of the Senior Citizen who alleges that the battle for Zimbabwe is about whites and blacks. Bringing in the issue of Canaan Banana was also viewed by one member as having the same effect of justifying the Senior Citizen since Banana was a criminal. What the member did not consider was that he died a free man who had served his prison sentence and deserved to be treated as such. His case is a case of ex convicts' rights and it does not matter whether gay or straight. It will bring another interesting dimension to the arguments if a white person and an ex convict is planted to bring this variable to the argument.

3. Complicit Groups.

A member of the audience/jury raised the issue of the killings of the people of Matabeleland and how former Rhodesians watched and did nothing about it because it didn't affect them then. The play raises this through the prosecutor's final submission and it was interesting to see it being taken up as an issue in the deliberations and more so by a white person.

4. Technical Criminal Issues

This was of course a disturbing development in one of the performances that some members of the audience/jury insisted on real court procedures and real evidence. My feeling is that this came from the influence of the criminal law system in Zimbabwe and most African countries which do not use the jury system. I believe that adding more theatrical devices and breaking the realism by highly stylised moments will draw the attention of the audience to critical issues and make the audience see that while the play treats critical issues, it is doing so through play. Pure realism does have a way of making audiences expect 'reality' all round.

5. The question of selective justice

This was raised as the doing of the West to have Africans only being sighted as criminals who commit crimes against humanity. The feeling was that people like Bush and Blair were equally guilty. The deafening question in response to this was whether Africa should wait for the West to punish their own before they punish theirs. This might come as a genuine concern but one wonders if that person sees that by so doing, Africa puts herself behind the West and wants the West to always lead the way. These are some of the tentacles of

colonialism that Africa still grapples with and has to take a position on. But it is clear that Blair and Bush's guilt does not make the Senior Citizen innocent.

6. Good governance versus Sexual rights

There was an attempt to present human rights as divisible so that one right takes precedent over the other. That would mean Africa continuing to violate certain rights but pursue others. Some circles have argued that good governance is not an issue for Africa at the moment as she grapples with survival issues like food. That stance is problematic and it was important that the facilitator kept on raising these contradictions and throwing them back at the contributors. It was not always a matter of finding the Senior Citizen guilty. Some members of the audience/jury insisted that he was not guilty as was expected and argued vociferously especially in the case of his stance against homosexuality. I am not worried about that. What was beneficial to the researcher were the arguments and exchanges and challenging of views and stances that took place during the deliberations. If the deliberations had all castigated the Senior Citizen, the mirror effect would have failed as the audiences/jurors would have been castigating themselves. I have made the same observations as Dwight Conquregood when he says,

> Most researchers who have extended ethnographic fieldwork into public performance will experience resistance and hostility from audiences from time to time. This disquieting antagonism, however, more than the audience approval, signals most clearly that ethnographic performance is a form of conduct deeply enmeshed in moral matters (Kuppers 2007: 59).

What would have been disturbing would have been to get no arguments. The exposure of the issues underlying homophobia and the discussions and arguments coming out of those are the crux of this research.

7. The Facilitator's Reflections

The facilitator's task was to playfully regulate the jury deliberations. The facilitator achieved this by listening and asking questions to provoke contributors to further thinking. She noted that,

> Questions such as: Are Human Rights a western construct being imposed on Africa? Is homosexuality European by nature, and not African, and if one thinks that, then how does one understand African gay people? Is there a hierarchy of rights, such that civil and political rights (which have mostly been defended in the west, also freedom of expression, the rights of political prisoners, etc, which dominated during the cold war era) less "important" than economic and social rights, (which during the cold war is how Communist countries countered the debate with the west) (Betsi Pendry Appendix 2).

These are some of the questions that the facilitator felt came out of the discussions. She had a way of making the audience members consider these questions. She had this to say about that role,

> I think the dialogues gave people an opportunity to ask questions, to wonder, to express opinions, (both positive and negative) and to listen to others, for me, I was trying to ask philosophical questions to help people see not only that they think , but how they have come to think what they think, and how they can shape their own thinking/belief processes (Betsi Pendry Appendix 2).

The fact people could ask questions, wonder, express opinions and listen to others is critical to this research as one of the intentions was to create a democratic and safe theatre space for people to express themselves and get to hear others speaking. The gay member of the audience who was able to express himself safely is a case in point.

8. The Senior Citizen actor's reflections

The process of making *The Trial of the Senior Citizen* was not just a means to an end but was of equal value to the research. Actors experienced the process and had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. The actor who took the role of the Senior Citizen had this to say about his experience,

> With playing the character came a lot of growth both in my performance ability and as a person. I also realized that when it came to my knowledge of the state of the true state of affairs in my country of origin, I knew very little. This realisation I owe to the research I did in order to bring a semblance of authenticity to the character at hand (Senior Citizen Actor Appendix 3).

He got deeply involved in the process and took time to research his role and his country. This allowed him to relate with the Senior Citizen and get a fair understanding of him. He observes that,

> Playing this role made me realize how easy, when one has the power to do anything they please, it is for them to impulsively act from a place of anger and ignorance. In a way we all are guilty of that (Senior Citizen Actor Appendix 3).

He did not only look at this as Mugabe versus himself or Mugabe versus gay people but as something about humanity that needed people to reflect and consider what could be done about this.

9. Zimbabwean Audience Member's Reflections

An audience member from Zimbabwe vividly described how she experienced the performance and how she found herself confronted by many questions when she began to interact with others during discussions. She had this to say,

> The play progressed well and all evidence pointed to the fact that the Senior Citizen was guilty. However, a twist came along. The trial which was of the Senior Citizen's abuse of human rights suddenly zeroed in on gay rights. (Audience Member from Zimbabwe Appendix 4)

She describes how the performance engaged her and shows how it came as a shock to her that instead of continuing on the first crimes against humanity, the play went on to accuse the Senior Citizen of gay rights violations. Her thought system progressed as she continued in the play and she concludes by saying,

> But at the end of the day I gathered something new from the discussion. Do we have to compartmentalise or give other rights priority over others? (Audience Member from Zimbabwe Appendix 4)

It would seem this development came from the facilitator's ability to raise questions of the indivisibility of human rights and most likely the gay person's contribution that he did not choose to be gay. This audience member's reflection typifies the kind of thought development that this project would like to see in those that engage the issue from the perspective that gay rights are not human rights.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore a theatre that is an anti-homophobia intervention amongst Zimbabweans currently living in South Africa. The study took advantage of the current influx of Zimbabweans to South Africa due to economic and political problems bedevilling the country. The study is within the realm of Theatre as Activism and so sought to engage audiences and bring about communication that would contribute to the understanding of discrimination in general with particular emphasis on gay rights and homophobia. This meant that the research did not single out gay people and the question of sexual rights but dealt with it as an aspect of the larger problem of discrimination and oppression.

The Zimbabwean historical background was treated from the perspective of oppression and discrimination placing gay rights within that background. The background analysis stretched back to pre colonial times tracing the challenge of discrimination and oppression to the current times. The case study of gay oppression and denial was found in this thread.

A theatre concept based on the jury system was developed that put homophobic and oppressive Zimbabweans on trial using a senior citizen on trial. The Senior Citizen who happened to be a presidential figure epitomised the prejudicial and discriminatory ones in Zimbabwe.

This Senior Citizen metaphor created the distancing effect allowing the audience to view their own issues and stories from a distance. While the trial was done by actors, the judgement was left to the audience who were enrolled right from the beginning as the jury. This created a theatre without walls where the audience did not come to watch but to take part in, and experience the performance.

The original script came from real life stories derived from interviews carried out by the researcher amongst Zimbabweans in and outside Zimbabwe through face to face interviews and email interviews. These were done within the spectrum of the narrative inquiry method which allows for deeper questioning and telling of stories and not necessarily closed yes and no questions.

The script was changed during rehearsal by actors as they brought in their own stories and experiences. The cast had both gay and straight actors who were willing to share their real life stories for this project as well as take part as actors. The acting and directing adopted a democratic style allowing the actors to find their trajectory and create characters based on the script and prompting of the director. The actors were taken through a talk on the historical background of Zimbabwe as well as the current situation. This was helpful in character internalisation and empathising since some actors were not Zimbabweans.

I allowed myself to be affected by this process exposing my faith in the Christian God and interrogating my personal views on the matter. My speed and willingness started at a low pace with certain misgivings as to how far I could go in terms of engaging my own assumptions. I was not at ease at first when confronted by fellow Christians about my involvement in this study but as I continued I found myself reaching a point of no return and willing to engage this subject fully from a human rights perspective. The priest character in the play was a later addition as I found my feet and took a stance that is non theocratic in this matter. I became convinced that even religion had no right to impose theocracy on human rights. Zimbabwe is a democracy and in a democracy human rights are fundamental. I am convinced that for religious people to rally behind dictatorial governments in oppressing gay people is not only undemocratic but ungodly too.

The creative project was able to get people talking and arguing about this difficult subject of homosexuality and other forms of discrimination. What remains a challenge is for it to be able to engage the audience to the extent of negotiating beliefs and changing mindsets. The general observation was that there is need to take it more to the domestic side of the matter and make it about the individual so that the thinking and reflection is not just at a communal or social level but at a personal level too. This would be achieved by bringing more scenes that provoke the individual to disturb their assumptions. The lesbian girl scene was sighted as one of the scenes as a moment of complication. The play has been shifted both in characterisation and in design to confront the individual more. The old man's story has been modified to be more personal than just him representing the past. The Priest's story was felt to be more like religion on trial and in the process lost the Senior Citizen. The individual religious person does not get touched as the dialogue does not get to the depth

of his psychological make up. The project has brought in some personal matters to the issue by throwing in the family of the religious man. It is not as touching to confront the bible and the religious man's faith but to go to the roots of his whole person and to bring in those he loves and cherishes. This shifts his focus and that of the audiences and gets them talking about themselves more than just about religion.

Set design now brings in a small appendage to the realism style and takes away the simplicity that makes the audience relax and say this is the Senior Citizen and that is the judge and so what. The audience now comes in and says; 'What is this and what is going on here? Simplifying a complicated matter is what has led to the silence about and by gay people and I believe that complicating the performance through set and costume design sets the tone for engaging in a complicated matter that requires a more inquisitive attitude and approach.

While the subject of homosexuality is a difficult one to handle with a society in denial, combining it with other pertinent issues and making it a part of a bigger human rights problem, society cannot ignore makes it possible for people to begin to talk about it although with much resistance. The fact that this is done within the safe space of theatre, in a place like South Africa, where gay people are relatively safe, means that even gay people are able to voice their concerns and disturb the comfort of the silence that homophobes enjoy in Zimbabwe.

There is a disturbing upsurge in the harassment, incarcerations and even killings of gay people in Africa currently. There have been media reports of these from Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland, Malawi, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe (*Mail & Guardian* February 26 to March 4 2010, Sunday News 7 February, Chronicle 16 March 2010). This play comes at that time when people need to talk about these issues and create a more harmonious society allowing freedom of choice and all human rights no matter how few the proponents of those rights. The project should contribute to the fight against this upsurge and perhaps be a part of the many attempts the world over against homophobia.

My involvement in this project has led me to ask questions just like some members of the audience. I have gained some internal security system that puts me in a position where I am

not afraid of revising my long held knowledge system. I can now expose myself to being questioned and to questioning myself without feeling insecure and defensive. This has amounted to a reawakening of my knowledge acquisition system that to some extent had the tendency to call it a wrap at times when I needed to carry on asking and questioning. My involvement has whetted my appetite for addressing issues of human rights, democracy and culture.

Bibliography

Bhabha, H. 1994. *The location of Culture*. New York. Routledge.

Bial, H. 2004. *The Performance Studies Reader*. London. Routledge.

Boal, A. 2006. *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed.* London. Routledge.

Boal, A. 1979. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London. Pluto Press.

Bogard, A. 2001. *A Director Prepares. Seven Essays on Art and Theatre.* New York. Routlegde.

Bolt, B and Barrett, E. 2007. *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry.* London. I.B Tauris.

Burr, V. 1995. An Introduction to Social Constructionism. New York. Routledge.

Cameron, D and Kulick, D. 2006. *The Language and Sexuality Reader*. New York. Routledge.

Cameron, E. 2005. *Witness to AIDS*. Cape Town. Tafelberg Publishers.

Chamberlain, F. 2004. *Michael Checkov.* New York. Routledge.

Cruz, JC and Schutzman, M. 1994. *Theatre, Therapy, Activism*. New York. Routledge.

Epprecht, M. 2008. *Heterosexual Africa? The history of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS.* Johannesburg. University of KwaZulu Natal Press.

Epprecht, M. 2008. *Unspoken Facts. A history of homosexualities in Africa*. Harare. GALZ.

Fischer-Lichte, E. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance.* London. Routledge.

Fox, J. 1994. *Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment, Tradition in the Nonscripted Theatre*. New York. Tusitala Publishing

Gay, Pd, Evans, J and Redman, P. 2000.*identity: A Reader*. London. GAGE Publications.

Haedicke, SC and Nellbaus, T. 2001. *Performing Democracy. International Perspectives on Urban Community based Performance*. New York. The University of Michigan Press.

Holland, H. 2008. *Dinner with Mugabe. The untold Story of a freedom fighter who became a tyrant*. Johannesburg. Penguin Books.

Jones, P. 2005. *The Arts Therapies. A Revolution in Healthcare.* New York. Routledge.

Kaufman, M. 2000. *The Laramie Project.* New York. Paperback.

Kuppers, P. 2007. *Community Performance. An Introduction.* New York. Routledge.

Kuppers, P and Robertson, G. 2007. *The Community Performance Reader*. New York. Routledge.

Landy, RJ. 2001. *New Essays on Drama Therapy. Unfinished Business.* Illinois. Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd.

Lindsay, LA. And Miescher, SF. 2003. *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa. Social History of Africa.* Portsmouth. Heinemann.

Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the Postcolony.* London. University of Carlifornia Press.

Merlin, B. 2003. *Konstantin Stanislavsky* New York. Routledge.

Morgan, R and Wieringa, S. 2005. *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives. Same-sex practices in Africa*. 2005. Cape Town. Pinetown Printers.

Moyo, J. 1992. *Voting for Democracy: A Study of Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe.* Harare. University of Zimbabwe Publications.

Nemavhandu, L. 2008. *Mugabe's War Crimes Exposed.* New York. Paperback.

Nkomo, JM. 2001. *The Story of My Life.* Harare. SAPES Books. New York. Canongate.

Obama, B. 2007. *The Audacity of Hope. Thoughts on reclaiming the American Dream.* New York. Canongate

Schechner, R. 2002. *Performance Studies: An Introduction.* 2nd Edition. New York. Routledge.

Schechner, R.1934. *Between theatre and anthropology*. New York. University of Pennysylvania Press.

Schechner, R. 1977. *Performance Theory*. London. Routledge.

Spivak, GC. 1987. *In other Worlds*. New York. Methuen.

Spivak, GC. 1996. *The Spivak Reader*. New York. Routledge.

Stanislavski, C. 1950. *Building a Character.* London. Methuen.

Tekere, EZ. 2007. *A lifetime of Struggle.* Harare. SAPES Books.

Todd, JG. 2007. *Through the Darkness. A Life in Zimbabwe*. Cape Town. Zebra Books.

Truluck, R. 2000. Steps to Recovery from Bible Abuse. New York. Chi Rho.

Webster, L and Mertova, P. 2007. *Using Narrative Inquiry as a research method*. New York Routledge.

Newspaper and Reports Bibliography

Chronicle Newspaper. 16 March 2010. Bulawayo. Zimbabwe.

Mail & Guardian. 26 February to 4 March 2010. Johannesburg. South Africa.

Sunday News. 7 February 2010. Bulawayo. Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe Human Rights in Crisis Report. 2008. Harare. Zimbabwe