

Explorations in Southern African Drama, Theatre and Performance

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By

Patrick J. Ebewo

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9869-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9869-0

For Professor Chris Dunton – The Pathfinder!

&

In Memory:

Professor Dapo Adelugba, the Theatre Person *Par Excellence*

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FOREWORD

The tendency among most critics of African drama, theatre and performance has been to adopt the positivist tradition of creating binary divisions between text and performance, literacy and orality, theatre and ritual, entertainment and utilitarianism. This has resulted in the use of critical lenses that are totally divorced from the context in which African drama, theatre and performance have been, and continue to be produced. Not only that, a general misreading has also emerged in which western trained critics have been inclined to view African modes of performance in terms of “alien” forms, structures, content and meanings. Not surprisingly, such critics have ended up drawing conclusions that have little or no relevance to the actual context of African cultural production.

One feels a refreshing sense of newness while reading this new contribution from Prof. Patrick Ebewo, whom I undoubtedly regard as one of Africa’s most seasoned scholars. His book marks an innovative departure from the purely western grand narrative tradition that has conditioned other African scholars to identify with the positivist bandwagon. On the contrary, Ebewo draws his critical lenses from a montage of artistic conventions, theories, methodologies and techniques that are either rooted in the African soil or have consciously been synthesised with other relevant materials. Thus, instead of subscribing to what Temple Hauptfleisch (2011) describes as “the ways in which the western academic system has conditioned us,” Ebewo’s book delves into the uncharted waters of what one might call “Afrocentric syncretism.” It’s no wonder, then, that we hear him making the bold declaration that “To an African whose understanding has not been adulterated with foreign concepts, a (ritual) festival is as theatrical an event as going to the theatre is to the European” (p. 17).

In spite of the multidisciplinary range of topics that are explored in this book, which include the Swazi *Incwala* ritual ceremony, the satiric parodies of Loyiso Gola, industrial theatre interventions in Botswana and participatory theatre-for-development practices in Lesotho, Ebewo manages to traverse this broad academic terrain with relative ease and scholarly acumen. For those students, researchers, academics, practitioners and other stakeholders with an interest in African drama, theatre and performance,

they will find fulfilment in the refreshing manner in which Ebewo handles the aesthetic discourses inherent in the varied fields of study.

I was particularly impressed to learn that the theatre of reconciliation in South Africa needs to take a leaf from the *simunye* spirit of oneness in order to realise the dream of the “rainbow nation.” Far from being a mere spectacle for the male gaze, the Swazi *Incwala* ceremony is depicted as a ritual of communal cleansing and the celebration of national fertility, purity and pride. Indeed, one yearns to see more and more writers from the Southern African region who can adopt the prophetic mould and multi-talented nature of Zakes Mda, an icon who could bestride the two different worlds of Lesotho and South Africa at once. Even hitherto unacknowledged luminaries like Lesotho’s Masitha Hoeane have been given credit for their revolutionary approaches to syncretism, metaphor and symbolism. Industrial theatre comes through as not only a matter for performers, facilitators and practitioners, but also for captains of industry who are in charge of the workplace.

Perhaps the chapter on “Mandela’s funeral as community performance” proved to be the most touching yet thought-provoking of them all. Ebewo regards the South African icon’s funeral as having created a communal rhythm that flowed through everyone and resulted in a cultural melting pot of performances. Lastly, but by no means least, Ebewo pauses to analyse the satiric and parodic performances of the popular South African comedian Loyiso Gola, before concluding with encouragement for creative artists to be at the forefront of the rapidly expanding global knowledge economy.

The depth of empirical research, the weaving of ethnographic materials, the level of analytical rigour, the breadth of thematic coverage and the application of Afrocentric syncretism should make Prof. Ebewo’s book a compelling read for those who really want to understand the nature of African drama, theatre and performance.

Kennedy C. Chinyowa (PhD, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia)
Research Professor and Director, Centre for Creative Industries, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa.

PREFACE

The geographical coverage of this study is four countries within the Southern African sub-region: Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa. This choice is informed by my having had opportunities to live, work, do research and participate actively in the theatrical endeavours of these countries since 1993. Also, these countries have intractable connections in a geo-political sense and they share a common bond and “entangled histories.” With the very close relationships between these countries, what affects the eye, affects the nose. Because of the relationships between the different racial groups in some of these countries, I wish to state from the outset that most of the studies documented in this volume are on black African theatre, drama and performance traditions. The publication deals in the main with critical analyses of play texts, rituals and performances. In comparison to the quality and quantity of theatrical outpouring, performances, and festivals in the Southern African sub-region, the number of academic and scholarly publications in existence are mere drops in the ocean. Of the 26 South African universities, 10 offer drama and performance as academic disciplines. While two (Durban University of Technology and Tshwane University of Technology) are urged by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to concentrate on vocational training, others, including the traditional universities, are given a free hand to function as academic theatres, which supposedly should not only concentrate on practice, but also on play analysis and the documentation of theatrical activities (scholarship). As in South Africa, each of the other three countries that form the locus of this study has at least one university offering drama studies as an academic discipline. Yet, these institutions seem to pay little attention to scholarly writings and research output in the areas of drama and performance. This robs the discipline of archival resources in the region.

That research activities and documentation in the areas of drama, performance and theatre are notoriously few may be ascribed to certain historical factors, in that the apartheid government of the past promoted technical education for oppressed groups, at the expense of liberal education. Research and documentation were the exclusive preserves of a few academic disciplines. In fact, in the post-apartheid dispensation, many

academics and students still frown at research in the arts, because they believe that the performing arts have little to do with research but a lot to do with practice. This belief is inimical to academic development, as the proponents of this school of thought seem to forget that research nourishes practice. The South African Department of Education has invested a lot in research and has urged all tertiary institutions in the country to engage in research and innovation for sustainable development and enhancement of the people's welfare. Academic institutions organise annual "Excellence Award Ceremonies" to honour outstanding researchers and the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF) recognises "Rated Researchers" in higher institutions through annual incentive funding. The Department of Education pays a handsome subsidy of about R115,000 (about 7,000 pounds) per article to any researcher who publishes in an accredited journal. Academic supervisors who mentor masters theses to completion earn the same, while mentoring a doctorate earns three times the article subsidy. It is doubtful if any other country in the world indulges in this level of encouragement for its researchers.

In spite of these incentives, few books or sizeable collections of articles are available which deal with drama, theatre and performance. While there are few collections of plays, there are fewer collections of scholarly writings. While a couple of books on African drama and theatre concentrate on East and West African drama, very few concentrate on drama of the Southern African region. For example, in 2002 Frances Harding edited a volume, *The Performance Arts in Africa: a Reader* and only one (Chapter 19) out of 24 chapters deals with South Africa. There is simply nothing written about the other countries – Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. The *South African Theatre Journal* is dedicated to the publication of theatre-related articles, but its emphasis seems to be on South Africa, with the other countries on the periphery. Volumes that speak to the South African theatre environment are David Coplan's *In Township Tonight! Three Centuries of South African Black City Music and Theatre* (1985), Loren Kruger's *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics Since 1910* (1999), Liz Gunner's *Politics and Performance: Theatre, Poetry and Song in Southern Africa* (1994), Anne Fuch's *Theatre and Change in South Africa* and Temple Hauptfleisch's *Theatre and Society: Reflections on a Fractured Mirror* (1997). In 2015, Greg Homann and Marc Maufort edited *New Territories*, a collection of essays on post-apartheid South African theatre and drama. Though a very good compendium, other Southern African countries are left out, as usual. Also in 2015, Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer and Greg Homann edited *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary South African*

Theatre, and as pointed out by some South African observers during the launch of the book on 17 February 2016 at the Market Theatre, Newtown, the book does not give adequate coverage to black theatrical experience, also leaving out Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (of course, this was intentional, since the book concentrated on South Africa only). Chapters in the Methuen Drama Guide concentrate on published contemporary South African plays and the career histories of some theatre practitioners. Considering that there are 10 universities teaching drama as a discipline, not to mention private colleges, it is evident that available materials on the subject are pathetically inadequate compared to other university disciplines. The claim that theatre practitioners are artists and therefore should not be compelled to engage in academic writings is a murky conversation, which poses a serious threat to theatre studies in the region. Thus, this publication is intended to pique interest in theatre and performance scholarship. The narrative journey embarked upon in this collection of chapters traverses both familiar and unfamiliar ground, and I hope it will contribute to a fresh, wider approach to intellectual discourse in the sphere of drama, theatre and performance in Southern Africa. The collection is a pot-pourri of the ideas and thoughts that have engulfed the discourse and practice of theatre and drama in Southern Africa, offering varied and critical insights into the continued relevance of theatre practice in Africa generally, and Southern Africa in particular. The focus is intra-disciplinary, involving drama, theatre and performance.

The premise of this venture is that articles in specialised journals are often stored in the sanctuaries of the accredited disciplines and are often not accessible to general readers. Unlike journals, published books are more accessible to general readers as well as to specialists. It is hoped that the areas covered in the book will add to the aggregate knowledge economy of Southern Africa, promote research and publication, and provide reading materials for both undergraduate and postgraduate students specialising in the area of the performing arts in Africa.

The 13 chapters of this book are not arranged thematically, but rather each serves the contextual purpose of a particular country, text or project. Chapter one gives an overview, without deliberating on the details of the theatre, drama and performance activities of the Southern African region, notably Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa. Its coverage spans indigenous pre-colonial practices, colonial heritage and the post-colonial era. Discussions are based on black African theatre practices, thus excluding English, Afrikaner and Indian theatre practices. Later chapters concentrate on plays, performances, rituals and applied theatre practices as they exist in the countries under study.

It is hoped that the publication will attract readership from academia, theatre scholars, university students, cultural workers/arts administrators, arts practitioners and entrepreneurs, the tourism industry, arts educators, scholar-artists and development communication experts.

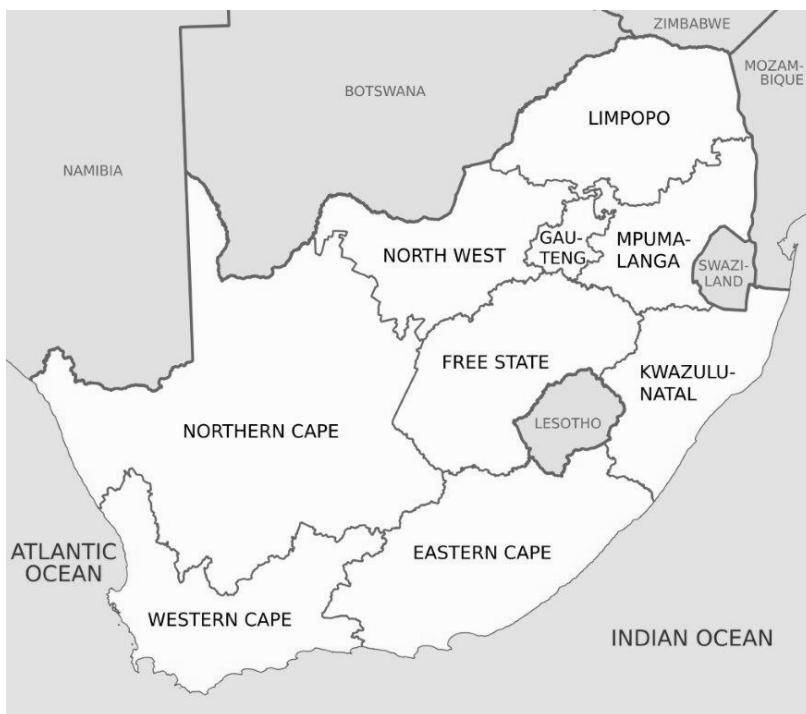
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book project has become a reality because of the contributions of certain individuals and organisations to the realisation of my dream. To these individuals and organisations, I owe a huge debt. Firstly, I wish to express my gratitude to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for believing in the book project and willingly accepting to publish the manuscript after a rigorous review process (internal and external) in order to ascertain the quality of the materials in the manuscript. I wish to thank Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa; University of Botswana, University of Swaziland, and the National University of Lesotho for exposing me to the rich and ebullient drama and performance traditions of Southern Africa. I am grateful to the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa for its financial support through Incentive Funding, which assisted with research trips for the gathering of data for the project. I thank Professor Kennedy Chinyowa for agreeing to write the Foreword. I acknowledge with profound gratitude the contributions of Professors Femi Abodunrin, George Mugovhani; and Doctors John Mugubi and Owen Seda for critical reading and peer-reviewing of the chapters and supplying invaluable suggestions that have gone on to shape the contents of the book. My sincere thanks also go to Professor Mzo Sirayi, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of the Arts, Tshwane University of Technology for encouraging academic staff members to engage in research and for supporting this project in many ways. I acknowledge Dr Rita Raseleka, Tshwane University of Technology's Director of Research and Innovation for her support and assistance.

I acknowledge with special thanks the sources listed below for permission to reprint four of my articles that have previously been published: "Theatre and Socio-Political Consciousness in Lesotho: A Study of Selected Plays by Zakes Mda." *NUL Journal of Research*, Vol. 9, 2001: 121-142; "Theatre and Reconciliation in South Africa: Past and Present Assumptions, Future Possibilities." *National Association for Drama in Education Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1999: 23-36; "Swazi Incwala: the Performative and Radical Poetics in a Ritual Practice." *South African Theatre Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2011: 1-12; and "Mandela's Funeral as Performance." *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2015: 243-255. I would also like to thank the following research assistants

for their various contributions to the making of this book: Ifiok P. Ebewo, Ebong P. Ebewo, Bonno Tatedi, Puleng Tale, Nokhutula Mashaba; and in particular, Jonathan Jackson (Jay) and Lloyd Barton for language editing and commitment to the project.

And lastly, I thank my wonderful wife Agnes - the lady who has mastered the art of "Waiting for Godot."



Map of Southern Africa

CHAPTER ONE

DRAMA, THEATRE, AND PERFORMANCE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

This introductory section to the book *Explorations: Drama, Theatre and Performance in Southern Africa* is an overview and account of my enthralling theatre experiences in Southern Africa through the auto-prism of performance. I must confess that I knew very little about the theatrical and performance traditions of the Southern African people until 1993, when I arrived in Lesotho to take up a lecturing appointment at the National University of Lesotho, Roma Campus. Before then, I could not boast of any sound knowledge of the geography or performance traditions of the region beyond the common knowledge of the suffering of the South African people under the yoke of colonialism and apartheid. I remember watching a South African musical performance, *Ipi Tombi*, which toured Nigeria during the apartheid era. Though I thought this was a typical gyrating South African performance, I later learnt that it was packaged to give an impression of a good life as enjoyed by the South Africans under apartheid, in direct contradiction with the reality on the ground. I learnt that, though adored by white middle class South Africans, *Ipi Tombi* was abhorred at home by black South Africans. I can still recall reading a chapter in Oyin Ogunba's *Theatre in Africa* (1978), "Black South African Theatre," written by B. L. Leshoai. I was exposed to "Black Theatre in Soweto" and Fugard's *The Island* in Michael Etherton's *The Development of African Drama* (1982). I watched a production of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* at the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan in 1979, featuring veteran Nigerian actors such as Jimi Solanke and the late Wale Ogunyemi. I attempted an amateur production of the same play during the Convocation Ceremony of the University of Sokoto in 1981. Beyond these, I could claim very little knowledge about this region, particularly in terms of performance.

Like other regions of the continent, Southern Africa boasts of a wealth of performance traditions ranging from the indigenous to the modern. As with many observers, I have found differentiating what is theatre from drama and performance to be a perennial challenge in the context of the African experience. While the three terms may be distinguished in the West, they are alien to African indigenous languages and culture. Until African studies scholars and activists invent authentic “indigenous aesthetic terms” and agree on them at a Pan-African level, the global, or rather the western epistemological way of understanding these terms must be maintained (see Kerr, 1995: 1-2). In that understanding, “drama” deals with literary work, fiction, or the raw play text, while “theatre” is the sum total of the realised production of a dramatic form. In essence, while an individual, in the comfort of his/her private engagement, can savour the experience of the dramatic text in reading, theatre, on the other hand, involves the text (written form, devised or improvised), players (actors and actresses), a production crew and an audience. Hence, while drama may be regarded as a solitary enterprise, theatre involves participatory output; in other words, team work. While theatre and drama may be easily distinguished in this way, the situation becomes a lot more harrowing when it comes to defining “performance.” So far, I doubt if practitioners have been able to emerge with a one-size-fits-all definition of performance. The matter is very contentious. What is generally agreed upon is that performance involves a distinct action and embodied skill used in the construction of socio-cultural realities as they affect communities. Performance is a site for generating knowledge and philosophies that affect human beings within a cultural environment. In my experience, there is not much difference between theatre and performance in the construction of meaning in Africa. Take away the use of play text, and performance is a show, a display, the exhibition of an action which involves the presence of an audience. Unlike theatre, with its mandate to involve imitation, a performance may exist solely for its own sake. In Africa, acrobatic displays, juggling, miming, dancing, and singing may each constitute a performance in its own right. African rituals, ceremonies, festivals or even political rallies may also qualify as performances. Music and dancing in front of shops to create an advertorial may very well become a performance when customers surge forward to watch the performers. The staging of the performance willy-nilly becomes an invitation for the public to view the items on sale in the shops while being entertained by the dance. While drama and theatre involve “representation,” performance is a “presentation.” Let us briefly discuss elements of performance and theatre in pre-colonial, colonial and post-

colonial Southern Africa. I must state that some portions of the contents of the discourse in these sections appeared originally in my chapter in a publication edited by Wolfgang Schneider and Daniel Gad, *Good Governance for Cultural Policy: An African-European Research about Arts and Development* (2014).

Pre-Colonial Performances

Before the colonial incursion, Southern Africa supported numerous tribes that, through migration from other parts of Africa, settled together as a community sharing a common vision and cultural markers. Besides the “neglected” Khoisan (Basarwa) culture, the traditional Bantu people included groups such as Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, Ndebele, Venda, Tsonga, Northern Sotho, Swazi and Zulu, each of which had their own identified language and cherished their indigenous performances, characterising them as a particular human group with a shared destiny. Hauptfleisch (1997: 73) holds the view that one of the oldest known performances in the country was the shamanic dance of the San, recorded on rock art paintings dating to about 25,000 years ago. Sirayi (2012) discussed many different performance cultures in pre-colonial South Africa, including wedding celebrations (*umduto*), oral narratives, trance and healing celebrations (shamanism), initiation ceremonies, installation ceremonies, *umemulo* celebrations and dance, and music performances.

Most Southern Ntu-speaking peoples produce music from animal horns of one sort or another, or from wood or reeds that are blown from the side; only the Zulu used a mouthpiece at the end of the horn. They also developed a simple flute with a two-note scale, and an unusual rattle, which is shaken by hand or worn on the ankles, and often made from the hard cocoon of insect pupae and filled with small stones (Joyce, 2010: 65).

In the indigenous culture of the Basotho, *mohobelo*, men’s ceremonial dance, and *mokhibo*, women’s dance, are pervasive. *Monyanyako* (songs), *lipina-tsa-mokopu* (maidens’ song), *lebollo* (initiation song) and *mangae* (sacred songs associated with circumcision) are often heard within the communities. The same holds true of the Tswana culture with its abundance of indigenous performances such as *setapa* (dance), *phatsi* (men’s dance) and *tsutsube*, a traditional dance of the Basarwa people. The Tswana, like most of the tribes in Southern Africa, revere their folktales (*mainane*) and riddles (*diane-dithamalakane*). The Swazi boast a rich culture which thrives in the oral literature of the people – songs and dances – *Ingabisa* (maiden songs), *tingoma tekutsamba* (women’s dance songs) and *tingoma*

temtsimba (wedding songs); riddles (*Tiphicwaphicwane*) and folktales constitute great performances.

Storytelling (*tsomo* or *intsomi*), including mime, were also distinct performances of the indigenous people. Being essentially an oral community in those days, the different tribes in Southern Africa enjoyed their popular tradition of storytelling, sometimes known as “oral narrative.” Adams (1990) and Obiechina (1967) have noted that generally stories (in every culture) have sustained their presence for centuries because they are amusing, interesting and instructive. The most popular belief among Africans is that these stories, beyond their entertainment value, are also didactic instruments in the society. Using a distinctly African motif, the stories are useful tools of socialisation, and they help in the celebration of the communal ethos and pathos. While the setting for some of these stories is in the human world, many of them on the other hand, revolve around the animal world with its ever-accommodating fleet of animals – Mouse, Hare, Tortoise, Spider, Lion, Monkey, Jackal, etc. These animals are indeed mirror images of our human society. While writing on the folk tradition of the Ila people of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Smith and Dale (1920: 342) state: “In sketching these animals, not *Sulwe* and *Fulwe* (Hare and Tortoise) only, but all the animals in these tales, the Ba-Ila are sketching themselves. The virtues they esteem, the vices they condemn, the follies they ridicule – all are here in the animals.”

In many Southern African countries, young people usually gather in the evening to listen to fictional stories narrated by women while men narrate war and historical stories, and those that promote indigenous knowledge systems. Though there are numerous storytellers in Southern Africa, I would like to discuss briefly the performance profile of Gcina Mhlope, a Durban-based multilingual storyteller and dramatist. In her interview with Tyrone August (2001: 273-284), Mhlope had these to say about storytelling in Africa and her career in this sphere of endeavour:

There was a time in African culture when the setting of the sun announced that it was time for story-telling. . . . There's wisdom in folk tales. Folk tales are educational. They have lessons to be learnt – whether it's to do with people telling lies, being untrustworthy or being selfish. Another thing: with television today you don't use your imagination. If they talk about a dinosaur, they show you a dinosaur. That kills something of the child's imagination. And it's probably the only time we have free imaginations – without any prejudices or confines of society. And there's the aspect of human contact. Story-telling should not conform to theatre rules. People should be able to sit in a circle and participate in the chants, in the songs. . . . And some of the things we talk about in folk tales. They are not just out of the blues; they happened and people chose to tell stories

about them. So these stories are very realistic. They don't always have to end 'happily ever after.' There are stories that end sadly. There's a Xhosa expression that says a wheel goes round and round in everybody's life. And sometimes the wheel turns on the wrong side (pp. 274-275).

On the question of performing multiple characters in storytelling and the cloud surrounding the art, she said:

The fact that you have to be all those different characters in one, and not use any sound effect or musical instruments, is a very important skill in story-telling. That's what makes *you* a story-teller. It comes from inside; it's not something that people are appointed to do. As an individual, you are very mobile. You can tell stories virtually anywhere. It's inexpensive entertainment. It's one of the natural advantages of story-telling. All you need is one person and people's imaginations, but now that we live in the kind of times that we do, we should really work towards putting them on paper. We should put the stories on video if we can. It's important to do that so they don't die. They belong to a certain culture; they are worth retaining. Not only the story of Noddy or Pinnocchio or Snow White. Those stories have lived for ever. Our stories are being repressed because they are supposedly from a barbaric culture. This generation should make sure – with all the skills and facilities we have – to tape them, to record them. Why can't we do that? And our stories are fresh because they've been suppressed for so long (p. 275).

When enquired why she "shifted" from theatre performance to storytelling, she explained:

There has been a certain kind of shift. First of all, I got into story-telling thinking it would be a part-time thing. But when I got inside, I saw how vast it was. The fact that I am who I am, and having the skills of theatre, I found my audience was ripe. Then the phone wouldn't stop ringing. I performed in schools, youth centres, art galleries, universities and conferences. For nursery schools, primary schools, high schools and for adults who come from different walks of life. The first thing that excited me was that people of different political persuasions could share in story-telling. And children of different financial standing could be reached very cheaply. That's important. It's very cost-effective. No props, no major costumes and lights and set changes. That meant I could perform anywhere. One of the frustrations in theatre is that the bright lights can make you unable to see your audience. And I love to see my audience, I gain strength from that. That is just one of the little attractions (of story-telling). But something else was happening in South Africa. I was feeling the glaring demand to do specific kinds of theatre. And I don't know if I was in the minority, but I felt that political messages could also be put across through story-telling, without being party political. . . . A story well

told is enjoyable to people of that culture as well as to any other listeners. .
.. (pp. 280-281).

Of all the performance art forms of the Southern African people, praise poetry (*dithoko* or *izibongo* or *maboko*) stands out. Besides the *Lifela*, Basotho praise poems composed by miners detailing their travails on the journey to the mines or Swazi *Tinanatelo*, which are family/clan praises of the *emaSwati* (Kamera, 1999), praise poetry's manifold social significance is indeed obvious in African culture.

Praise poetry stresses accepted values: the Hausa praise their rulers in terms of descent and birth, the Zulu emphasize military exploits, and the Nupe voice their admiration for modern achievements in their praises of the rulers' new car (Nadel, 1942:140-1).

Ruth Finnegan (1970: 120-121) lends her voice to the social significance of praise poetry in Africa:

This kind of poetry can also act as a medium of public opinion, for up to a point praisers can withhold praise or include implicit or explicit derogatory allusions as a kind of negative sanction on the ruler's acts. Further social functions are publicizing new status or achievements in a non-literate culture, flattering those in power or drawing attention to one's own achievements, preserving accepted versions of history (particularly the exploits of earlier rulers), serving as an encouragement to emulation or achievement, and, not least, providing an economically profitable activity for many of those who engage in it.

What stands out in Finnegan's observation is that the praise poet is not only committed to singing the praises of kings and rulers, but he also uses the poems as the medium to censor and castigate the negative activities of some rulers. This is done with a view to helping the culprits amend their lives and rule their subjects well. In this regard, praise poetry can be regarded as a watchdog in non-literate (indigenous) societies.

The praise poem is often regarded as Southern Africa's most characteristic and highest form of indigenous literary expression. It has been speculated that its existence was first recorded in the seventeenth century at the court of the Shona kings (Chiwome, 1975: 104-9). Today, praise singers are used during important celebrations including state functions. In South Africa, for example, all black state presidents - Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma - had or have praise singers, who, amongst other functions, announce their arrival at state functions.

Studies have revealed the praise poems of the Bantu peoples of Southern Africa as one of the most specialised and complex forms of poetry to be found in Africa (Finnegan, p. 121). Some are so grandiose in composition that they can easily be considered epic. They involve narration, declamation, and descriptions of heroes and their war exploits. The practice flourishes among the Nguni speaking people – Zulu, Xhosa, and the Swazi - and also among the Sotho groups, such as the Lovedu and Tswana. The Venda and Tsonga-speaking groups also use praise poems (Finnegan, p. 122).

As hinted earlier, praise poems are often associated with the great deeds and achievements of important individuals, particularly kings and chiefs. They have been composed in honour of famous kings such as Dingana (Zulu King), Mzilikazi (Ndebele), Moshoeshe (Sotho), Sobhuza (Swazi) and Ngwane (Ngoni), to mention but a few. Typically these kings and rulers are praised by the poets because of their military might and expansionist policy.

Many South African kingdoms, like the ancient Greek city states, fought and rebelled against each other in struggles for power, recognition and amalgamation. The *Mfecane* wars of the 1820s are the best known examples. History records that King Shaka, the Zulu king, was an indomitable “lion,” a very popular king who fought and destroyed many tribes in the hinterland. Remnants of those who survived the mighty hands of Shaka fled the land and took refuge in the mountain kingdom of Lesotho under the leadership of King Moshoeshe. The protection which Moshoeshe gave the people against Shaka’s aggression led to the great reverence accorded to him by the Basotho people and many praise poems have been composed to pay homage to him for his messianic prowess. Also, King Shaka has attracted many praise poems composed and recited in his honour as a fierce fighter. During Shaka’s reign, Ndlela kaSompisi who was not of Zulu origin was appointed General in the army. He was such a fearless fighter that many praises have been composed in his name. One of such traditional Zulu poems (*izibongo*) is recorded below:

“Ndlela, Son of Sompisi.”

Rattler of spears!

He who is unable to lie down, one side being red with wounds,

He whose wounds are as numerous as the huts of a large kraal.

Hornbill that is reluctant to set out,

Long-tailed leaper like a leopard,

Redbuck that escapes again and again.

Daily they stab the Rattler but he retaliates;

How many of them come back again?

Who come back again when a person acts so deliberately?
 He who crosses over to the other side,
 Who crosses and the whole Ntolela regiment crosses,
 Stout stick that points to the Ngwane people
 He who attacks people with fury, he of the Rattlers.
 At day-break Ndela was left
 When the army returned,
 At dawn Ndela remained,
 Feeble I remain behind,
 Paltry strength equal to that of a child.
 Body of which the Nkayiya regiment sits,
 The Nkaiyas of Zwile,
 He who is always wounded in the face like a prince
 Great branch, turn back the Ntolela regiment;
 News that came first to Shaka at the Mbelebele kraal.
 Have you a piece of gut long enough
 To sew up Ndlela's wounds?
 He who crosses over to the other side,
 He who is embroiled across the Thukela (Soyinka, 1975: 324-325).

Others who were afflicted by the military tendencies and annexation programme of the Zulu king escaped to other places and new settlements with their own accredited leaders emerged. Mzilikazi, the leader of the Ndebele people, was once a good and cherished friend of Shaka. But with Shaka's unrelenting effort to conquer other tribes, he broke his fraternity with Shaka and moved with the Ndebele people into the interior. In the course of their journey, Mzilikazi, ironically but through need, also raided the Pedi and Tswana kingdoms and advanced into what is known today as Zimbabwe. Mzilikazi's military effort and liberating spirit is recorded in a praise poem entitled "The Praises of Mzilikazi, Son of Matshobane."

Besides the initiation rituals, *bogwera* (boys) and *bogale* (girls), and the Basotho *pitiki* ritual observed after the birth of a new baby, Ebewo (2011) discussed indigenous rituals as forms of traditional performance of the Southern African people, with particular emphasis on the *Incwala* ritual. I pointed out there that, though mostly regarded as a ritual, many researchers, notably Hilda Kuper (1947), have viewed the Swazi *Incwala* ritual practice as the high drama of kingship. Study of the *Incwala* sequences shows this ritual to be a great performance, as discussed fully in chapter three.

The festival is the lifeblood of the African people and there are as many indigenous festivals in Southern Africa as days in the year. Many African festivals constitute performances in the African contextual usage of the word. People who are unfamiliar with the rhythm and flavour of

what constitutes performance in Africa may easily dismiss African festivals as primitive pre-occupations with the frivolous. To an African whose understanding has not been adulterated with foreign concepts, a festival is as theatrical an event in Africa as going to the theatre is to the European. "A festival is an integral, dynamic part of the culture of an unalienated African, an occasion to which he responds spontaneously" (Ogunba and Irele, 1978: 4). African festivals are very like the Greek theatre of the fourth century B.C. in their demand for communal attendance as civic duty. A festival brings people together under one umbrella to share a common interest. Ogunba and Irele also averred that the festival constitutes a prime artistic institution in traditional African society because it can "coordinate virtually all the art forms of a community." In the African cosmology, a festival

tends to have a story or myth to perform and each makes use of its own peculiar style in the dramatic realization of the story. In the process the arts of costuming, masking, drumming, chanting, dancing, and several others are utilized in a manner not totally dissimilar to their usage in other dramatic traditions. Thus, each year there is a cycle of performances which evokes much of the history of the community and also brings to light all the artistic forms in the community. It is this total presentation that is properly to be regarded as traditional *African festival drama* (Ogunba and Irele, p. 5) [emphasis mine].

As with the interesting *Kuru* festival of the Basarwa tribe in Botswana, the annual Reed Dance festival (*Umhlanga*) of the emaSwati is one of the most popular festivals in Southern Africa, attracting tourists from all over the world to the Swazi Kingdom. The origin of the Reed Dance festival can be traced to the 1940s, during the reign of King Sobhuza II, who adapted the indigenous *Umcwasho* chastity ceremony, transforming it into the form relished today as the *Umhlanga* festival. Every year, during late August or early September, "the flowers of the nation" - young unmarried maidens - or *Imbali* move from their various chiefdoms in a form of pilgrimage to the Queen's Royal Residence in Ludzidzini to pay homage to the queen (*Indlovukazi*), the mother of the nation. Each year, a festival maiden-captain (*Induna*) who is at home with royal protocol is appointed to work closely with one of the daughters of the king (a princess) in preparation for the annual festival. The *Induna* announces the dates for the festival and custom demands that girls from all the chiefdoms must attend the festival as a mark and display of loyalty towards the royalty. Usually, four men chosen by the chiefs from each of the more than 200 chiefdoms accompany the girls in order to give them protection. Even today, it is

considered a shameful and sad experience for a family not to be able to sponsor their daughters to attend the Reed Dance festival. The composition of the participants goes beyond illiterate village girls to include primary, secondary and university students. Usually, the festival lasts for eight days.

On the first day of their arrival in the Queen's Palace, the girls are provided accommodation in school halls and households around the royal residence. They are sorted into two groups – the younger ones and the older ones. The young ones are as young as five years old while the older ones may be between 15 and 21. After the first day's rest, they travel out of the royal premises to far and near places to cut reeds from the reed beds for the refurbishment of the queen's surroundings (reed fence). While the young girls are encouraged to travel to nearby places, the older ones travel to as faraway places as Mphisi Farms. After cutting the tall reeds and wrapping them in bundles, they are deposited in the queen's royal residence amidst great celebration, pomp and pageantry. For spectators who are conversant with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, watching the thousands of girls move along the street with their bundles of tall reeds amidst song and dance conjures the movement of "Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill." It must be noted that traditionally only girls who are virgins are allowed to deliver reeds to the queen.

On the seventh day of the festival, the public is allowed to watch the maidens' outing and displays in the Ludzidzini Royal Residence arena. Visitors start pouring in as early as 10 o'clock in the morning. In my five years' research into this festival, the large expanse of land reserved for parking was usually full to capacity. Some tourists come to watch the festival in helicopters parked on the fields. Later in the afternoon, a bevy of young maidens, arranged in groups according to the chiefdoms they belong to, troops into the arena. This is the grand finale and the day the nation and tourists have been waiting for. The arena reserved for this festival is on the outskirts of the Royal Residence located on the old road between Mbabane and Matsapha/Manzini. It is a space the size of about five football fields and heavily guarded for security reasons. Outside the arena are business people and hawkers selling cultural goods and memorabilia. Everyone is free to watch the festival and no fees are charged. Colourfully and elegantly dressed in their traditional costumes incorporating bead necklaces (*ligcebesha*) of colours that range from red, yellow to blue, whistles (*imfengwane*), head decorations (*ligwalagwala*), ankle adornments made from dried cocoons (*emafahlawane*), sashes and exceptional crowns of purple feathers worn by the daughters of the king, they enter the arena in grand style. Some of the maidens who are still

virgins display with pride their woollen chastity tassels, known as *Umcwasho*. The greatest attraction for some spectators is the fact that, generally, the maidens' dress is tantalising, with maximum exposure of their feminine curvature and beauty, including the exposure of uncovered breasts. The loin-skirts decorated with beads (*indlamu*) that they wear are so short that sometimes their mesmerising buttocks are tantalisingly exposed. All the maidens hold knives (*umukhwa*) in one hand with the sharp edges turned towards their faces and shields (*lihawu*) in the other. With thunderous songs that rend the air, they dance in unison in a leaping style, with the left leg pumping the ground while the right is slightly moved upwards. There is more leg-work gyration, with leaps and jerks and sensuous moves. In their different regiments they are displayed before the spectators, the king, the queen, several world dignitaries, the media and press.

A special addition in recent years has been the participation of female officers from the police, prison, navy and armed forces. In 2014, the officers' displays of expertise sent the crowd wild with excitement, and of course, it was a big cultural lesson for the younger girls in the arena to emulate. At a certain point during the maidens' display, King Mswati III and members of his cabinet galloped like horses into the field. This was another grand performance, with a battery of microphones and cameras surging forward to catch a glimpse of the "Master of Ceremonies." The marching steps of the girls came to an abrupt stop. The king and his retinue galloped around, paying homage to all the groups with a symbolic gesture of respect for womanhood, kneeling before each group in turn.

To the gullible and the uninitiated, the Reed Dance is nothing but a free display of the females' physical features and an opportunity for the king to pick another wife. Much more than these superficial elements of the festival is the fact that it is an opportunity for the nation to show their continual loyalty and support to the queen and those in power. It brokers national unity and family pride. It shows women's solidarity through communal labour, and finally, the Reed Dance emphasises the culture of chastity and morality in the society. This is why HIV/AIDS theme was incorporated in the 2001 festival celebration. Swaziland is not alone in the celebration of this festival: South Africa, notably the KwaZulu-Natal province, celebrates its own version of not only the Reed Dance but the *Incwala* ritual as well.

Colonial and Anti-Colonial Era

During the colonial era, indigenous performances were relegated to the background. In Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana, the missionaries emphasised play productions that added value to the spread of the gospel thus, morality and church-based dramas were promoted. Plays by European dramatists were also produced. The colonial influence was worst in South Africa. With the arrival of the Dutch in the Cape Province in 1652 and later French and English and then Indian settlement, the performing arts playing field in South Africa changed considerably. Indigenous performances were subdued, while formalised theatre in the European fashion emerged with productions of plays by Shakespeare, Molière, Chekhov, Bernard Shaw, Goldsmith, etc. Afrikaans plays highlighting the Afrikaners' culture featured prominently too. This development influenced the native artists, who started composing plays using Euro-American frames of reference – Herbert Dhlomo and Fatime Dike, Maishe Maponya, Matsemela Manaka, and Gibson Kente being some examples (see Orkin, 1991; Kavanagh, 1985 and Sirayi, 2012). As the apartheid system was enforced and unleashed havoc on the indigenous people, protest theatre became the order of the day. In the late 1980s the African National Congress (ANC) used theatre productions as weapons of struggle against the apartheid system. Musicians such as Hughes Masekela and Miriam Makeba (Mama Africa) employed the power of music to denounce apartheid. Mbongeni Ngema's *Woza Albert* and the Serpent Players – *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, *Blood Knot* and *The Island* - stand out in their expression of resistance against the oppressive forces of apartheid. Other politically committed theatre groups, such as Cape Flat Players, Gamakhulu Diniso's Busang-Takaneng, Nyanga Theatre Group and Sabata Sesi, all produced plays that denounced the apartheid regime (see Mda, 1996: 203 and Thamm, 1989: 25).

Post-Colonial Era

With the coming to an end of the apartheid system in 1994, resistance drama gave way to the theatre of reconciliation exemplified in Athol Fugard's *My Children, My Africa* and *Playland*, and John Kani's *Nothing but the Truth*. Before these targeted post-apartheid plays of reconciliation, many playwrights had already gone this route with Khumalo's *Themba* and Lewis Nkosi's *The Rhythm of Violence*. The transformation strategy put in place by the ANC government to right the wrongs or simply address the imbalances of the past did not go down well with the non-black