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# THEATRE: A CULTURAL TOOL FOR THE PROPAGATION OF PEACE IN AFRICA

PATRICK EBEWO

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## Abstract

*In many parts of the world, theatre has been used to educate, socialise, indoctrinate and raise consciousness. In contemporary Africa, theatre practitioners have lamented the fragmentation of human life and the erosion of peace as a result of human rights abuses, income inequality, poverty, lack of access to services, crime and wars. The aim of this paper is to examine how African theatre practitioners have used theatre as a cultural tool to create awareness and educate their audiences about the need for peaceful co-existence in their communities. The discussions examine selected plays and applied theatre projects from West and southern Africa. They conclude in the finding that the applied theatre form is more effective than conventional literary theatre in promoting peace education and local development initiatives in Africa.*

## Introduction

The field of theatre performance is one of the most exciting areas of cultural analysis (Hauptfleisch 1997) and an indication of the importance that performance has in the life of a people and a community. From the inception of the Minoan culture of Crete – and the ancient civilisations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the classical Helladic culture of the Greeks, Romans and the Byzantines – to the advent of space travel and the computer age, theatre has always found a space in society (Nicoll 1966; Esslin 1977; Arnott 1981; Hatlen 1992). There is a profitable and symbiotic relationship between theatre and society. Theatre as a social institution is fed with ideas and nourished by the complex interactions in society, which is why a theatrical performance is usually regarded as a mirror that reflects society.

Theatre has been used in many varied ways in the history of mankind: in ancient Greece, the dithyramb was a sacred hymn performed in honour of Dionysos, the god of wine and fertility; in ancient Rome, theatre satisfied the Romans' religious and carnival urge; in medieval times, it was used for the propagation of Christian faith; and in the modern world, theatre has featured as propaganda, therapy and intervention (Balfour & Somers 2006; Epskamp 1989). This paper examines the role of performance theatre in its literary and applied states in raising awareness about issues of peacebuilding in Africa. It focuses on how theatre in West and southern Africa functions in the propagation of peace education.

The place of theatre in society can be seen in its role within a culture, not only in terms of its contribution to the entertainment industry, but also in the way it analyses and interrogates moral, economic, political and social issues. Traditionally in Africa, gatherings of households at storytelling and oral poetry sessions not only entertain but also encourage players and audiences to cultivate a taste for traditional performance and an understanding of Africa's cultures and philosophies.

Most of the African stories, beyond their entertainment value, are didactic instruments of socialisation (Finnegan 1970; Abraham 1983; Okpewho 1992). Some stories revolve around ever-accommodating hordes of animals. The trickster ('wily', 'outrageous' and 'unscrupulous') is often the central character in these stories, and they often reflect human society and behaviour – the virtues we esteem and the vices we condemn. For example, *Anansem* is the Akan people's storytelling tradition that features Ananse, a spider and a trickster. The most representative of stories about Ananse is about his vain accumulation of wealth that will not last. By constantly overreaching himself, he ruins his schemes and ends up impoverished, thereby showing that cheating does not profit (Sutherland 1975:v). In a different but related vein the Mandinka legend of Sunjata is the story of a powerful and fearless warrior who rescued his people from the tyranny of a usurper, Sumanguru, and built the kingdom of Mali into a peaceful empire by forcefully subduing his enemy (Okpewho 1992:115). Contemporary Gambian griots such as Banna Kanute, who compose poems of praise in honour of Sunjata, decry the waste caused by wanton war; they use their performances to persuade Gambians to regard work as a cherished tradition because 'Life consists of doing something/Not of doing everything/For there is no end to that, and failure wins no support' (Innes 1974:269; Okpewho 1992:117). Hard work is seen to be essential to create success and happiness; indolence is discouraged as it leads to poverty, which does not augur well for peace and development. When examined critically, these traditional performance genres are the building blocks of peace in the community. Traditional tales are not told for merely scintillating effect, but are instruments of education for the promotion of wellbeing, cherished values and cordial relations among people.

The aim of this article is to explore the role of African theatre in development and peacebuilding. It examines how theatre workers in Africa have used the cultural tools of conventional literary theatre and applied non-conventional theatre to create awareness and educate their audiences about the need for peaceful co-existence in their communities.

The role of drama in education is often misconstrued, or at best seen as a tool for the development of the emotions. Nor is it concerned only with the process of reading and writing; it takes a more fundamental and utilitarian approach to literacy. Experts in the field of adult education, notably Paulo Freire, describe this approach as 'functional literacy', which deals with the awakening of people's critical awareness. Thus, the mission of this kind of education is to 'lead forth' and 'cause to develop' the good that is latent in everyone. Its goal is to achieve adaptability and changes in human behaviour. It is education for 'social transformation' (Asagba 1996:69) and peaceful co-existence.

## Conventional Literary Theatre and Peace Education

This section concentrates on written plays produced by playwrights and presented on stage through the efforts of other collaborators – directors, actors and actresses, set designers, costumiers, lighting engineers and stage managers. Audience involvement in this theatre experience is passive, as is demonstrated in the discussions on the principles of applied theatre practice.

In comparison with the traditional setting involving storytelling, oral poetry and song, literary theatre, like the English medieval morality plays, entertains and educates its audiences. The artist is an important part of the community because he or she sometimes creates a communal culture or acts as historian or witness to the evolution and decline of the society (Hauptfleisch 1997:2). Playwrights compose works that focus on violent passions such as anger, revenge and treachery, or on forms of love, hate, pride, fate or over-ambition.

Written plays are often performed before audiences who will savour their relevance. The theatre event is a collaborative affair that promotes discipline, teamwork, mutual respect and friendship. Play production – commercial or non-commercial – cannot succeed without cooperation and understanding among the practitioners. Although jealousy and squabbles occur occasionally among players and directors, the theatre experience brings together diverse individuals, including members of the audience, in ways that promote community life, friendship and sharing. And these, indeed, are ingredients of peace. Cooperation on stage may be translated into cooperation in the society because man, according to Aristotle,

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is an imitative animal: what transpires on stage may be transformed into real-life situations (Brockett & Hildy 2003:5). Most theatre performances go beyond mundane entertainment and profane preoccupations. Even commercial theatre, known for its emphasis on profit, has on many occasions

produced plays that address serious issues confronting humanity. Scholars generally agree that drama and theatre productions have the potential to transform individuals and society. The Australian drama educator, O'Toole (1992:223), describes transformational learning as that which is capable of being applied to other contexts, and he places drama in this category. One of the most outstanding practitioners in Brazilian theatre, Augusto Boal (1995), argues that the 'image of reality' can be translated into the 'reality of the image'.

In the fifth century, Aristophanes, the father of the old Attic comedy, used the power of theatre to promote peace. Greek city-states were always at war with each other. Most wanted power over the seas and the major trade routes in order to accumulate wealth and power. Consequently, rivalries for dominance motivated them to form leagues or to wage war with each other or with non-Greek states (Brockett & Hildy 2003:12). The wars that ensued (the Persians' defeat at Marathon in 490 BC and the Athenians' defeat during the Peloponnesian War in 404 BC are notorious examples) have contributed to volumes of historical record and dramatic treatises. Aristophanes constantly ridiculed Cleon, an uncompromising warmonger, in his plays. In one of his comedies, *Lysistrata* (411 BC), the women of Athens are frustrated with the 'madness' which has engulfed Greece because of war and solicit the cooperation of women from other parts of Greece to bring the war to an end. Led by the iron-willed Lysistrata, all the young women resolve not to sleep with their men until they put down their arms. The older women seize the seat of government, the Acropolis. The strategy of using the 'erotic weapon' produces a significant result: the men are subdued and agree to negotiate to end the war. When the play ends, the war is quelled and male violence subdued; peace returns and life stabilises. In matters concerning peace and the welfare of the people, Aristophanes was outspoken and ready even to challenge the gods. In another daring comedy, appropriately titled *Peace* (421 BC), Aristophanes questions the gods for abandoning mankind and denying the Greeks peace on earth. Though cast in an allegorical-fantasy mode, the play speaks eloquently in favour of peace.

The didactic essence of the classical plays seems to have had a measure of influence on some Western playwrights. Morality plays were popular in Europe in the Middle Ages. They emphasise the triumph of good over evil; their central concern is the salvation of mankind through good deeds. Good deeds can indeed be regarded as peace routes. A few of Shakespeare's plays, particularly the romantic comedies, *The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice*, are concerned with reunions and reconciliations and the theme of the competing demands of love and friendship. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock, the Jewish usurer, is the comic butt who epitomises 'anti-love'. Venice is depicted as a harsh and morally

bankrupt city in contrast to Belmont, a beautiful, harmonious city that flourishes in peace and happiness. The legal pressure on Shylock to drop his demand for a pound of flesh from a creditor (Bassanio) who could not repay his loan is a lesson in showing mercy, which is likely to produce goodwill and peaceful co-existence instead of rancour. The German playwright, Bertolt Brecht, is noted for his crusade against injustice, oppression and exploitation. In the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944), Brecht's ethical convictions come to the fore as the judge (Azdaci) rules in a dispute between a governor's wife and a poor peasant lady, Grusha. The governor's wife abandoned her son, Michael, but Grusha adopted and raised the child. The governor's wife wants her son back only because Michael has inherited his father's fortune. To decide the case, the judge orders a circle to be drawn in chalk on the ground. The child is placed in the centre and the women are asked to pull the child out of the circle. The governor's wife uses force and violence; Grusha handles the child with the utmost care in order not to inflict injuries and pain, and is declared the true mother because her act is a demonstration of true love. In this play, Brecht demonstrates that social ties are more important than biological ones (Rosenbauer 1969:117). Some African playwrights, including Wole Soyinka, have followed in the footsteps of Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Brecht in their propagation of peace in Africa.

### ***Soyinka and peace education in Africa***

Wole Soyinka is one of the foremost playwrights in Africa and the first African to win the Nobel Prize for literature. The Swedish Academy, announcing the award on 16 October 1986, described Soyinka as 'a writer who, in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones, fashions the drama of existence' (Obi 1986:9). Soyinka's preoccupation is with degeneracy in public life and private morality, and with greed, perfidy, human rights abuse, exploitation and massive corruption. He loathes the crime and the alienation that have penetrated Nigerian society, and the isolated individuals and their materialistic, bourgeois values. He cries out against these evils because they do not augur well for peace and calm. He uses satire as a weapon to expose these vulgarities and the suffering of his countrymen (Ebewo 2002:7-8). A frontline fighter for humanity, he is perennially obsessed with what he calls 'the recurrent cycle of human stupidity'. His cry is for fairness in society in order for peace to prevail and brotherhood to thrive.

Soyinka uses satirical drama to ridicule wrongdoings, emphasising justice, peace and fair play. Political corruption in Africa and Nigeria is captured in his satirical plays in *Before the Blackout* (1971), *A Play of Giants* (1984) and *Kongi's Harvest* (1967); religious hypocrisy, gullibility and charlatanism are exposed in *The Jero Plays* (1969), *The Swamp Dwellers* (1969) and *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985). He castigates tyranny and military

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**In *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka stigmatises war as evil and calls on his audiences to embrace peace.**

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dictatorship – aberrations in a democratic society – in plays such as *Opera Wonyosi* (1981), *From Zia, With Love* (1999), *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1999) and *King Baabu* (2001). More importantly, the calamities that accompany war are derided in *Madmen and*

*Specialists* (1971). This is a play that speaks eloquently against the atrocities that human beings commit irrationally in war – notably the Biafran war of 1967-1970, when thousands of Nigerians, mainly people of Ibo origin, lost their lives. The play portrays the survivors as disillusioned cannibals, people who are spiritually and physically devastated; they are poor, deformed by dissociated personalities and they exist in a society devoid of social justice, a society where professionals (such as Dr Bero) become seduced by the illusion of power. In *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka stigmatises war as evil and calls on his audiences to embrace peace.

As a concerned citizen and an advocate of peace, Soyinka called on the United Nations to ban the sale of arms to Nigeria during the civil war and condemned the federal government's action against the secessionists. The government mistook his mission for sabotage and detained him without trial for 27 months. To Wole Soyinka, dramatist and activist, justice is the first condition of humanity because the prevalence of justice breeds peace.

### ***Osofisan and the Theatre of Reconciliation***

Femi Osofisan, a radical Nigerian playwright of Marxist persuasion, has used theatre as a tool for peace education. In *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* (1986), the narrator strikes a chord of peace: 'Narrator: Alright, I am the loser this evening. I accept to tell you a story. Let me see ... Yes, I know the story I'll tell. It's one of reconciliation.' The theme is the triumph of true love. Akanbi and Olabisi are lovers who live in the city and decide to go to the village to tell their parents that they intend to marry. Their plan is thwarted because, unknown to them, their parents became sworn enemies and killed each other. The survivors of the feud are determined to keep the lovers apart because of the 'barrier of hate'. The antagonism can be broken only by the strong bond of love between Akanbi and Olabisi. Olabisi declares

Our happiness is here and now  
Where you stand, where I can reach you  
Nothing can take that away.

Osofisan offers the play as a healing balm to the Nigerian citizens who suffered persecution during a civil war fuelled by ethnicity and mistrust, dedicating it 'to the memory of Biafra/ for those who survived'. Though other echoes may reverberate through the play, 'Osofisan employs his material convincingly to provide a metaphor for the engineering of conflict' (Dunton 1998:203). The play demonstrates that for a people who are entangled in a web of hatred and desire for revenge, the solution lies in forgiveness. As Udo states

Osofisan's drama is largely a testimony to his personal belief in reconciliation. As part of his profound study and understanding of the life of his country, he sees the need to reconcile our present with the history of violence and hatred (2003:150).

Theatre can teach that it is necessary to denounce an ugly past, reconcile our differences and embrace a vision of peace. It is necessary to cultivate love and understanding to replace hatred and mistrust if a nation is to make progress in the realms of peace and development (Udo 2003:150). *Farewell* is but one of many Nigerian plays that address the problem of war and the need for reconciliation and social harmony (Dunton 1998:280).

### ***South African dramatists and peace education***

In southern Africa, particularly South Africa, theatre for empowerment, reconciliation and peace education abounds. During the apartheid era, black theatre in particular championed confrontation and hatred. In South Africa today, reconciliation is the watchword. The demise of apartheid has terminated centuries of brutal colonialism and, for the black population, disfranchisement, oppression and poverty. In the interest of lasting peace and peaceful co-existence among the different races, President Nelson Mandela and his government adopted a policy of national reconciliation and established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in February 1996. The policy was in consonance with the traditional practice of the *indaba*, in which communities are encouraged to meet and democratically discuss and solve problems for the sake of peace and tranquility. The policy is also in line with the international practice of promoting dialogue and finding amicable solutions to problems that can lead to conflict.

Recently, many South African theatre practitioners have turned away from radical and confrontational theatre to embrace theatre for reconciliation. Athol Fugard's *My Children, My Africa!* (Gray 1990) condemns apartheid and puts in place a peace plan and instruments for reconciliation. *My Children* is a metaphor for peaceful co-existence between blacks and whites in South Africa. What is interesting is that high school students are cast as the characters, implying that the adults have failed at reunification. The black principal, Anela Myalatya (Mr M), is not simply another embittered African, but a character modelled on Nelson Mandela. A philosopher of the Confucius school, Mr M is poor and he knows all about black impoverishment and humiliation, but he preaches peace and conciliation. An excellent teacher, he gives the black students of Zolile High School knowledge and hope of a better life. He condemns violence and attempts to bring the young blacks and whites together in a spirit of love. For an inter-school debate, Isabel, a girl from a privileged white school (Camdeboo Girls' High), travels with her team to Zolile High, symbolising a step towards reconciliation. The debate pits Isabel against Thami, a popular student from Zolile High. It teaches that fighting each other is a waste; fighting together is desirable. In a portrayal of non-discrimination, Isabel is adjudged the winner by a black audience. Like the journalist Donald Woods in the film *Cry Freedom*, Isabel takes the opportunity to travel

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**Athol Fugard's *My Children, My Africa!* is a metaphor for peaceful co-existence between blacks and whites in South Africa.**

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and see what obtains in a black neighbourhood. Though the contrast is appalling, Isabel cannot help but admire the impartial principal, Mr M, and Thami, an activist and born leader. She finds the atmosphere at Zolile 'free and easy' in contrast to the 'stuffy' air of her sophisticated but boring school. Her first-hand knowledge about a black location has banished her fear. Mr M's effort to team up Thami and Isabel for the Grahamstown School Festival is a symbolic gesture of reconciliation.

Although the idea of reconciliation in artistic works seems to have been premature in the heyday of apartheid, it is very pertinent now. And in no other piece do we experience the dramaturgy of reconciliation at its best than in Fugard's *Playland* (Ebewo 1999:31-33). From the opening of the play to its resolution, there is a conscious effort on Fugard's stage to propagate the gospel of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. The play focuses directly on the need to confess, repent and to forgive in order to achieve true reconciliation. Manim (1992) states that

With *Playland*, Athol has fashioned a tale about repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation at a time when our country and the world desperately need to consider these things. He gives us another of his parables about people finding a new understanding and appreciation of each other in a world that holds more than just our individual catastrophes, hurts, regrets and sadness ... a world where God is alive (xiii-xiv).

The allegory in the title, *Playland*, which distantly alludes to South Africa as a colonial plaything, is not difficult to uncover in the play. As the old year (1989) yields to the new (1990), apartheid is ended and a new democracy dawns. In the play, Martinus, a black park attendant, has misgivings about Gideon, a white man, but the misgivings dissolve as Gideon admits his crimes, repents and asks for forgiveness. Their fraternity becomes obvious at the end as they walk off together and vow to repair the past for the good of the future. The symbolic seal on the vow is the push that Martinus gives to Gideon's troublesome lorry.

The works of drama discussed above create awareness of our need to be at peace with one another for the benefit of mankind. The quest to translate the written play into activism for peacebuilding has led to a paradigm shift in theatrical practice, particularly in Asia

and Africa. Growing pressure for community participation and greater relevance has challenged the theatre of the day to become more utilitarian and applied. In response to this challenge and other developmental aspirations, applied theatre has emerged as a pragmatic experiment that explores the relationship between theatre practice, social efficacy and community building.

## Applied Theatre and Peace Education

Applied theatre stands squarely in opposition to conventional theatre. Many performances on the conventional stage are considered elitist because they are pre-packaged, with no contribution from the audience. Applied theatre, on the other hand, advances the principles of democracy. It advocates that play production should be a community project and village-specific. It is an outcome-based, participatory and popular theatre practice. It has also become a field of study, addressing the theory and practice of applying the arts of the theatre in non-conventional settings with a mandate that emphasises education, development, therapy and social change. In a paper presented at an Arizona State University Department of Theatre symposium in February 2003, Phillip Taylor stated that

Applied theatre teaches community members to teach others, and helps communities process issues which directly impact them. It can also raise awareness of issues, pose alternatives, heal, challenge contemporary discourses, and voice the views of the silent or marginal ... In applied theatre work, artists generate scenarios and create opportunities for the community to respond to their pain through theatre work.

Applied theatre is not location-specific – its apparatuses can operate in rehabilitation centres, village squares, refugee camps, industrial sites and wherever there are organisations that need intervention. Since the late 1980s, the applied theatre movement has gained ground in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. Although its practice is not alien to developed countries, it is in the development of developing countries that its relevance is most profound. Although applied theatre is variously described as ‘theatre for development’, ‘forum theatre’, ‘participatory theatre’, ‘community theatre’, ‘theatre for education’ etc., the objectives of the practitioners coalesce around the need to encourage human and societal development (Desai 1991:8).

There is growing interest in the relationship between applied theatre and community development. What type of development is applied theatre concerned with? Its major concern is the role of culture as an agency for the development of people’s minds (Pradervand 1989:xvii). Applied theatre is theatre for education:

There is little point in introducing high technology to improve the efficiency of developing economies if one does not stimulate the minds of the people to take creative control of their destinies (Van Erven 1992:1).

Many organisations have found it expedient to enlist applied theatre in peacebuilding projects. The United Nations/Hague Appeal for Peace project in Albania has a component, ‘Peace and Disarmament Education’, in which theatre is used to raise with youths issues of non-violence, tolerance, rights and responsibilities (Skendaj 2004). Other local campaigns for peace education that make use of applied drama are Jordan’s Empower Peace, Canada’s TheatrePeace and the African Centre for Peace Education and Training initiative, which has a mandate to eliminate violence and conflict (TheatrePeace 2007; Adenekan 2007). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, demobilised soldiers and returning refugees are informed about social integration through the use of radio drama and visiting theatre

troupes. Participatory theatre troupes reached an estimated 9,000 returnees and residents in more than 25 performances, and gave them a forum to propose non-violent solutions to conflicts (DR Congo Update 2007). Congolese refugees from the Tanzanian refugee camps who actually participated in this drama of social integration attest to their impact. A member of a local human rights organisation, Arche d'Alliance, said

You [Search for Common Ground] have left your trace everywhere. If someone comes to us to report their case, they always refer to your theatre performance, saying 'Centre Lokole said that we should try and resolve our problem peacefully. I don't want to use violence to take it to the courts, so can you help us?' (DR Congo Update 2007).

Another returnee, Sele Apendi, testified:

I am a witness to this conflict resolution. I watched the Jirani ni Ndugu theatre of Centre Lokole, in which the people said we shouldn't use violence to resolve our problems. I then went to see Arch d'Alliance, who helped me and the person that had bought my house. Today, as I speak to you, I have recovered my house and I say thanks to Centre Lokole and Arche d'Alliance (DR Congo Update 2007).

In 2006, I coordinated applied theatre initiatives on diamond mines in Botswana. The human resources department of Jwaneng Mine approached the University of Botswana Travelling Theatre, where I served as director, requesting it to use our play model in communicating job evaluation messages to the employees. The mine had enjoyed good labour relations until 2005 when a new work grading and evaluation system was introduced. Many semi-skilled and unskilled workers did not understand why they had not been promoted after many years of service, unlike their counterparts in other jobs. The job grading system was translated into stage language with the involvement of the mine employees. The project yielded positive results instead of grievances (Ebewo 2008). The success of the industrial theatre intervention in Jwaneng prompted a sister mine at Orapa to enlist the theatre in a project to raise the morale of its workers. Relations between

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**Two industrial theatre interventions helped to restore considerable peace in an industry that is the mainstay of Botswana's economy.**

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Orapa miners and management became strained when a strike resulted in the dismissal of some employees. After various other methods were tried, unsuccessfully, the travelling theatre was drafted in to complement the mine's project, *Letsema*, aimed at restoring confidence among the workers. Although an impact assessment has not been done to determine the impact of the performance, the workers who participated had a rare opportunity to engage in issues affecting them without fear of repercussions. These two industrial theatre interventions helped to restore considerable peace in an industry that is the mainstay of Botswana's economy.

In 1988, the German Food Security Assistance Programme sponsored women in a village in Lesotho to engage in communal farming. The men became angry, alleging that the women were engaged with the farms all day and neglecting their families. Some of the men and certain lazy women insinuated that the Germans were using the local women for selfish ends. The situation disrupted peace in the village. The farming had helped most of the women to procure fresh vegetables for their families. Sales of the vegetables had earned money that was kept in a communal savings account. For a peaceful resolution, an applied theatre project involving Zakes Mda and the Marotholi Theatre was commissioned by Deutsche Welthungerhilfe/German Agro-Action, a non-governmental welfare organisation.

Mda and his group devised the following performance. A drunk, lazy and wicked husband (Size), whose wife is a member of a farmers' group, steals vegetables from the farm and even drives his horse to graze on it. The wife rebukes him and he engages her in an unjust fight. Size is summoned before the village council and although he denies all the allegations against him, he is found guilty. All the other characters in the performance decided that he should pay for the stolen and damaged vegetables. Then an elderly man from the audience stood up and said, 'No, that won't help, he will do it again.' After a series of engagements with the audience, it was resolved that Size should be persuaded that the farm is for the good of everyone in the village and that it does not belong to the Germans. Size is finally convinced and agrees to work in the garden (Mda 1993). This enlightening piece brought understanding between the men and women in the village, and peace was subsequently restored. This is another instance where theatre is used to settle misunderstanding amicably and resorting to violence is avoided.

## Conclusion

These examples illustrate the utility of theatre, far beyond its entertainment value, as a tool for education and empowerment, for the realisation of greater peace and social justice. Throughout the ages, theatre has featured prominently in the realm of peace education. What is often contentious is the influence these performances have on their audiences. The impact of arts-based initiatives in human development is not quantifiable because it lacks evidential weight when judged by conventional standards (Ebewo 2004, 2006a). Conventional scholars and critics have raised doubts about the efficacy and potential of theatre as a contributor to community development because its contribution is not translated into immediate and tangible gains. This view is not only limiting in scope, but it is also one that should be discouraged given the commitment and risk some playwrights and theatre practitioners devote to acting as a social conscience in their communities. A play may not perform the magic of transforming words into food for the body among Africa's poorest, but it is capable of transforming words into food for thought. Often thought becomes an ingredient that nourishes the body. It would be foolhardy to expect a revolution to occur immediately after watching a dramatic presentation: the effect is slow and psychologically challenging. As with the growth of a human being or a tree, it is difficult to pinpoint when physical transformation occurs. Art on its own may not change the world, but it contributes to changing the world by acting on the consciousness and will of the men and women who would change the world.

It is not uncommon to hear reports of positive impacts of theatrical productions on their audiences. In their study, 'Do Community-based Arts Projects Result in Social Gains?', Newman, Curtis & Stephens (2003) and their team of researchers find that arts projects have become an important part of community development strategies. Accounts of positive change – personal, social, economic and educational – were common in the majority of studies in the literature they reviewed. For a community arts project evaluation in Colorado, the state arts agency commissioned a pilot study to establish whether community arts result in the development of community activities (Jones 1988). Four outcome areas were examined: enhancement of awareness and appreciation of cultural heritage and symbols; increase in sense of community; identification with the community; and participation in community affairs. Investigations showed that the resident artists developed strong personal relationships and artistic techniques. The arts council in southeastern Colorado increased and changed capacities, learnt about community and raised its stature. Collective action enhanced the sense of community among diverse groups that worked in teams. Locality was seen as important, with local artists doing the work and employing local themes for their local audiences (Newman *et al* 2003:314).

In debates about contemporary theatre practice, the view is strongly expressed that conventional theatre creates a barrier between the performers and the audience; that 'pre-packaged plays' communicate through a 'top-down' strategy; and that instead of encouraging participation, they may alienate the intended beneficiaries – their audiences. In theatre of the applied form, everybody is involved because they all go through the experience of the production.

While literary theatre has contributed to peacebuilding and development through the use of conventional stage plays, applied theatre is a more effective theatrical tool for peace education in Africa. Applied theatre is preferred particularly because participation by beneficiaries in development projects is actively encouraged in today's community development efforts. This active participatory model is known to be proactive in local development initiatives (Paul 1987; Chekki 1980; Korten 1980). Participation enhances commitment, effectiveness, understanding and a sense of ownership; it promotes sustainability of the projects, capacity building and empowerment as well as providing a learning environment. Involving audiences in peace plays brings participants closer to the heart of the production process and encourages them to look to themselves in their attempts to grapple with their condition.

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