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6th September

Dear Ms. Yung

Many thanks for putting me on the mailing list for the Project Support Communications Newsletter.

Could you change my address to the above.

Please find enclosed a set of articles for the PSC/UNICEF library.

Sincerely

Ross Kidd

FROM PEOPLE'S THEATRE FOR REVOLUTION TO POPULAR THEATRE FOR RECONSTRUCTION:

DIARY OF A ZIMBABWEAN WORKSHOP

Ross Kidd
International Popular Theatre Alliance
414 - 35 Charles Street West
Toronto M4Y 1R6, CANADA

In August 1983 Zimbabwe organized a three-week workshop to orient their development cadres to the use of theatre as a tool for conscientization and mobilization of the masses. It turned out to be more than a training exercise - it also revealed the rich experience of people's theatre which activated, politicized and raised the morale of peasants and freedom fighters during the liberation struggle.

This is one account of that workshop - a detailed description and critical analysis of the process followed by one of the workshop groups. An introduction sets out the historical experience of theatre-for-development in Africa and people's theatre during Zimbabwe's liberation war.

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TWO NEW PUBLICATIONS ON POPULAR CULTURE

TRADITION FOR DEVELOPMENT: INDIGENOUS STRUCTURES AND FOLK MEDIA IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

(edited by Ross Kidd and Nat Colletta)

This is the report on and papers from an international seminar organized by the German Foundation for International Development and the International Council for Adult Education, and held in Berlin, November 1980.

The bulk of the text are case studies on non-formal education and development programmes that have adopted a 'cultural approach'; these include programmes based on an indigenous structure (e.g. a traditional organization or an indigenous process of collective work) and programmes using the performing arts as a communication tool or alternating as an educational process.

The report at the end of the text summarizes the debate between those at the Seminar who viewed the 'indigenous culture' approach as a means of revitalizing conventional development work and those who were critical of the manipulative tendencies of this approach and who advocated as an alternative a popular culture controlled by popular organizations.

Dr. Josef Müller

Order from: German Foundation for International Development,
Education and Science Division,
Hans-Bockler 5, 5300 Bonn 3,
Federal Republic of Germany

THE PERFORMING ARTS, NON-FORMAL EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE THIRD WORLD: A Bibliography and Introductory Essay, by Ross Kidd

The bibliography includes 1,800 items on the use of the performing arts as a medium for education and social action in the Third World. It is introduced by a 'state of the art' review of the varying contexts in which the performing arts are used (e.g. mass educational campaigns, local extension work, conscientization, popular organizing, etc.) and the methods adopted in each context.

The aim is to bring together in one volume a range of relatively fugitive material (mainly from Third World sources) on this newly emerging field.

Dr. Kees Epskamp

Order from: Centre for Study of Education in Developing Countries,
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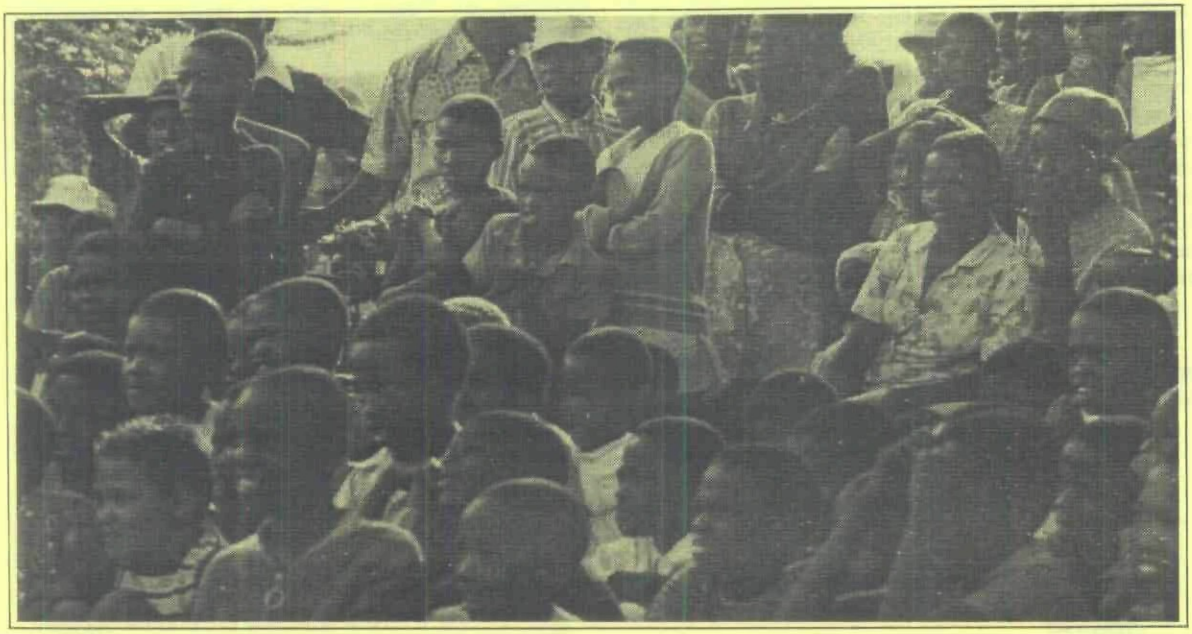
March 1, 1982

Liberation or domestication

Popular theatre and non-formal education in Africa



ROSS KIDD

Ross Kidd is co-founder of the popular theatre movement in Botswana. He is currently writing a doctoral dissertation on theatre and non-formal education in the Third World at the University of Toronto.

There is no such thing as a 'neutral' education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

(Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1972)

Theatre and non-formal education: the concept

Theatre is currently attracting a lot of attention as a vehicle for non-formal education in the Third World. Unesco and IPPF are promoting its use as an *indigenous* medium in development communication projects, particularly in relation to family planning. This interest is an outgrowth of uses of rural theatre in the fundamental education campaigns of the 40's and 50's (for example in India[1], Ghana[2], Jamaica[3], Mexico[4] and Indonesia[5]) and the search for ways of supplementing the mass media which have been shown to be incapable of effecting change on their own without some intermediary process. 'Folk theatre' or 'folk media' are seen as an interpersonal communication channel, bridging the gap between the individual learners and the modern impersonal mass media.

Theatre can be an effective tool for non-formal education—

a) as *entertainment* it can engage and hold the interest of large numbers of people, many of whom have been alienated by traditional approaches to adult education and development;

b) as *an oral medium in local languages* it can involve many people who are left out of development activities because of their illiteracy or lack of understanding of the official national language (eg English or French or Portuguese);

c) as *a means of cultural expression* which everyone in the community is capable of it can be kept within the control and use of the local people;

d) as *a public or social activity* it brings a community together and creates the context for co-operative thinking and action.

The need for a critique

In spite of its popularity—or perhaps because of it—it is necessary to re-examine critically the use of theatre in non-formal education. Folk media or theatre is promoted as a more persuasive means than modern media for putting across development messages. It is 'more culturally functional for performing educative tasks'[6]. But whom are we persuading? About what messages? And in whose interests?

Popular theatre must be seen as more than simply a persuasive technique. By placing more emphasis on the technique than on the social purposes for which it is used, the sponsors suggest that popular theatre programmes can somehow be neutral. They abdicate their responsibility to make value judgements on the social and political context into which popular theatre is to be introduced. Effectively, this means

reinforcing non-formal education as a domesticating instrument, suited to those forms of development which continue to benefit foreign and domestic elites.

Popular theatre programmes attract large audiences by using techniques and cultural symbols which people understand. But the techniques cannot be separated from the content or purpose of the programme nor from the social and educational context in which theatre is used. It is the latter which determine whether the programme is serving the interests of elite groups or those of the oppressed. Theatre as pure technique is neutral—it can be used for domestication or for liberation. But once it is applied to a social or educational context, it is no longer neutral. It functions—consciously or unconsciously—as a means to persuade people to accept their situation or as a device for challenging them to become engaged in changing it.

In looking at the various ways popular theatre has been used for nonformal education in Africa, it is important to consider the following issues:

a) Whose side is the programme on—the elites or the oppressed?
b) Who sets the goals and controls the programme?
c) What are the underlying assumptions on which the programme is based?
d) What is the educational method involved in the programme—a form of 'banking' or authentic dialogue?
e) What is the effect of the programme—conditioning people to accept their situation (domestication) or challenging them to 'deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (liberation)[7]?

Theatre and mobile information campaigns

One of the earliest uses of theatre in Africa as a means of nonformal education was in the Ghanaian mobile information campaigns.[8] These campaigns were mounted by the colonial government after the second World War as a major part of their mass education programme. Drama was used as 'the most truly Ghanaian audio-visual aid, depending as it does upon a nation-wide aptitude and liking for drama and by its intimate relation to local customs and tradition.

Inter-agency teams of field workers travelled from village to village, organizing programmes of drama, discussion, and demonstration. The technical departments—agriculture and health—chose and shaped the messages; the community development department provided the team leadership and skills in mass extension work. Campaign topics included cocoa disease eradication, local government taxation, sanitation, child care, literacy and family planning. Lines were improvised around an agreed script and stage-craft was kept simple.

In the beginning group discussion was a major aspect of the programme and the campaigns were, to a certain extent, responsive to local concerns and demands. For example, discussion with audiences during one campaign on local government revealed a belief that those responsible for tax collection and disbursement were free from controls. This issue was subsequently woven into the existing plot to demonstrate that tax-collectors were bonded, council meetings were open to the public, and that illegal council expenditure could be recovered from the councillors themselves.

This same campaign demonstrated that drama could be very effective in dealing with sensitive issues. The actors could give out advice about controversial subjects—such as local taxation and birth control methods—in a way that was not possible in a straight speech. Used in a difficult situation, the humour and liveliness of drama helped to 'break the ice' and create the conditions for a reasoned discussion of the issues.

What is the overall effect of these campaigns and other campaigns influenced by them[9]? In spite of the lively and entertaining medium used, it would seem to be one of domestication. Control and goal-setting are kept out of the hands of those for whom the programme is run. The programme is planned, messages chosen, and scripts prepared by headquarters staff with a minimum of consultation with rural people about the choice or shaping of the messages.

The programme operates in one-way banking fashion with the organizers imposing their views of what the people need. Freire has described this approach to extension work as 'cultural invasion'. The villagers are treated as depositories for propaganda from an alien cultural world, containing the things which the development agencies feel the villagers ought to know in order to become 'modern'. This banking process of education creates human beings who are passive recipients (objects) instead of creating persons who are capable of perceiving their situation in the world and acting on that perception.

The underlying assumption behind this programme is characteristic of much development work: the view that development problems can be overcome simply by modifying the behaviour of the poor, by giving them the knowledge that development agencies feel they need. This *development* strategy is based on a *deprivation* view of disadvantage: that poverty is self-inflicted, that the poor are poor because they have certain deficiencies or inadequacies. The strategy then is to teach the poor new skills—this is reflected in the programme's highly technical content. The purpose is to give information rather than to develop critical awareness, challenge vested interests, or generate commitment for collective action. The social problems that condition their oppression—low wages, unequal access to land, water, education, and other basic needs and services, etc.,—need not be altered; only the oppressed need to change. Thus the interests of the dominant class are safeguarded.

But how is the behaviour of the poor modified? This programme tends to offer pre-packaged solutions which:

a) deal with problems which are of low priority to the poor
b) fail to 'enter the cultural universe of the poor' or,
c) respond to the symptoms only, rather than the root causes.

It is important to treat symptoms as well as to attack basic causes, but the basic causes are much more crucial. For example, teaching the poor to treat diarrhoea with 'sugar-water' may be a necessary ameliorative step but it does not deal with what is often the real cause of the problem: the underlying malnutrition which makes the poor susceptible to all kinds of disease and which in turn is caused by structural inequality. Introducing new agricultural techniques is often inappropriate when the vast majority of rural people do not have the land, credit, or access to government services (extension advice, subsidized

inputs, etc) which are necessary for them to take advantage of the new information. The health of the people is far more influenced by politics and power groups, by distribution of land and wealth, than it is by treatment or prevention of disease. The key constraint to progressive social change is not lack of skills and information about farming, nutrition, family planning, health, etc. It is structural inequity: inequity of wealth, of government services, of educational and employment opportunities, of wages, of power and of basic human rights. This inequity undermines the capacity and confidence of the poor to control their lives; it conditions them to accommodate themselves to the norms of the dominant groups, rather than to struggle against them. As a result the dominant groups assume an increasingly paternalistic stand, under which the rural poor become the politically voiceless recipients of the ideas of the dominant classes and of further exploitation.

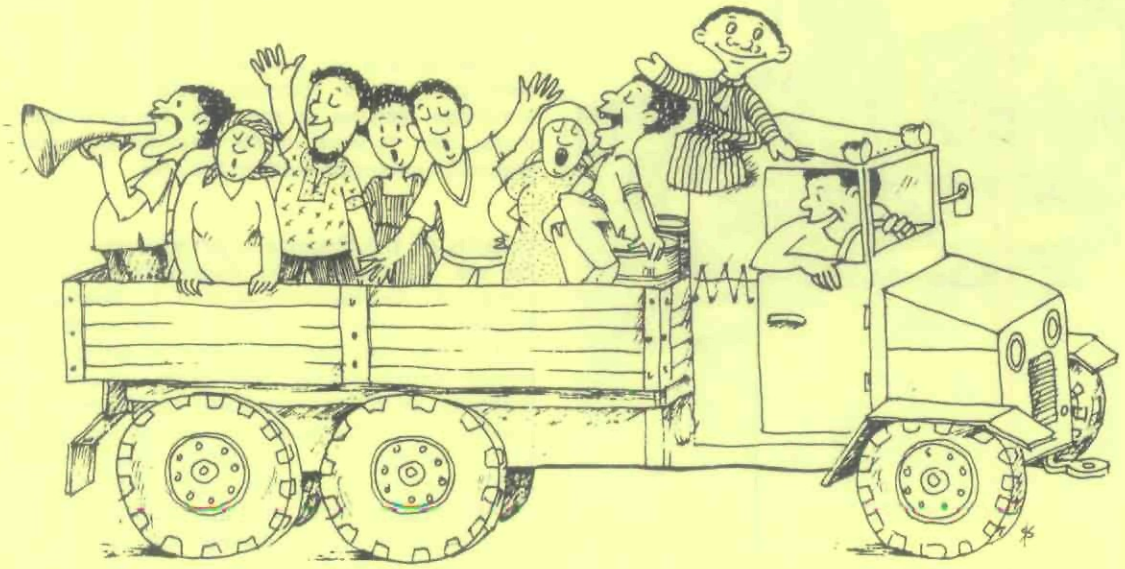
The programme is conceived primarily as a way of putting across information in a one-way fashion about topics chosen by central decision-makers rather than as a way of engaging the villagers in authentic dialogue about their own priority problems. Although on paper post-performance discussion is an aspect of many of these programmes, in practice this is given much less attention. It occurs rarely and when it happens it takes the form of a brief question-and-answer session before the team rushes to its next performance.

The irony is that this type of theatre is publicized as a bottom-up alternative to the mass media and yet it is used just like the mass media with centralized production of messages and limited local participation and dialogue. The theatre forms do 'humanize' technical messages by putting them in the context of everyday family and community life, but the imposition of centrally determined information and the lack of engagement in critical analysis and collective action produce more passivity and dependence and a feeling of technical and cultural inferiority. Even though popular theatre in this case has a progressive image, its effect is one of social control and domestication.

Theatre as a two-way process: *Laedza Batanani*

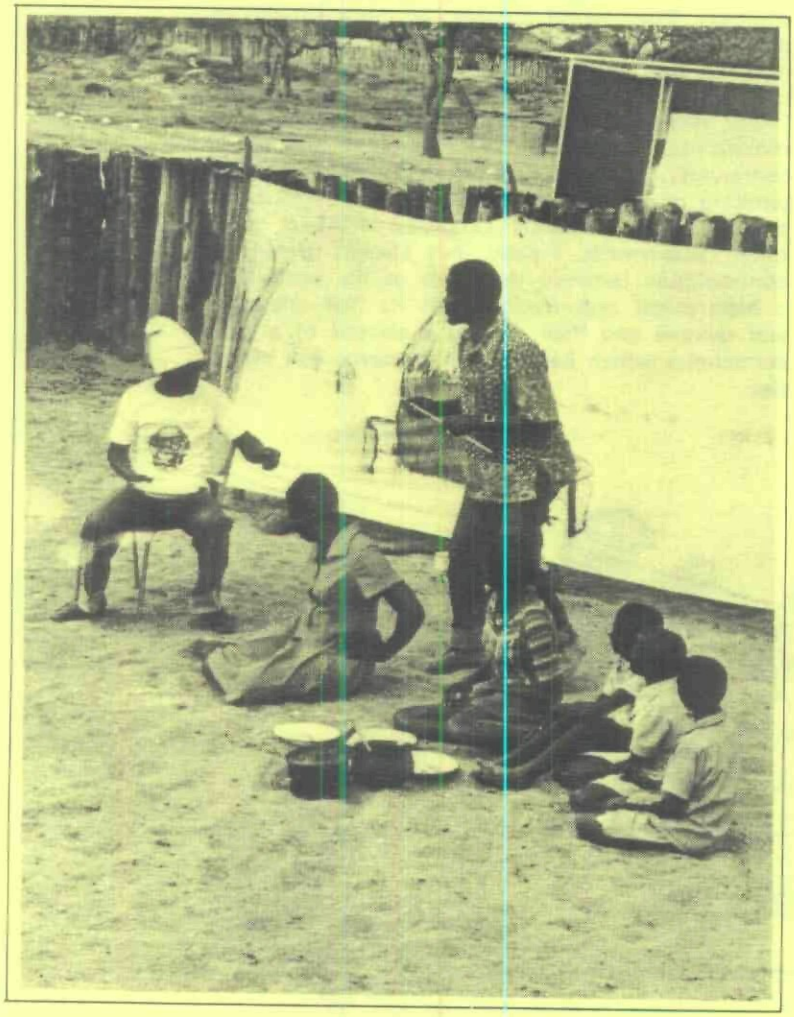
Over the last five years there has been an increasing use of theatre as part of a two-way communication process in which performance is the catalyst for discussion. The purpose is no longer simply to put across information; it is to make people more aware of their situation and committed to doing something about it. People are encouraged to look at their own problems, work out solutions, and take action themselves. The media do not prescribe the solutions; their job is to present the problems in a way which challenges people to take a fresh look at them and try to do something about them. The spectator is no longer a passive recipient of government messages; he is provoked by the performance and the educational programme to respond in an active way.

One of the first experiments of this kind - *Laedza Batanani*[10] - was started by a group of adult educators and extension workers in northern Botswana in 1974. It developed out of their frustrations with their work, their feelings of inadequacy in dealing with the severe problems faced by the rural poor - poverty, unemployment, poor health, community and family disintegration, etc. They realized that they could make very little impact on agriculture or health or community development without starting to analyse the larger social forces controlling their situation. They found it more and more difficult to accept the elitist nature of their work - for example, servicing the needs of wealthier farmers or exploiting the labour of poor people in self-reliance projects - and recognized that real solutions required the mobilization and active participation of the whole community. They felt isolated and largely ineffective working on their own and saw the importance of combining forces with extension workers from other departments. Finally they started to see the contradiction between their role at the bottom of a hierarchical organization with its own messages and services and their role as a servant of a local community which had its own concerns and priorities.



Cartoon: Petra Röhr–Rouendaal

Part of a drama about VD, a problem intensified in Botswana by the system under which men work in South Africa away from their families for long periods



Laedza Batanani: in this scene a family is debating the real causes of malnutrition (Photo: Martin Byram)

Socio-dra[illegible] mixed with discussion and collective action seemed to provide the beginnings of an answer. At the least the drama dealt with the initial problem of getting people to come to meetings. Its liveliness attracted people and held their attention and this made it possible for other things to happen. It provided a means for expression of feelings and analysis about major problems in the community. It also produced a mirror of the community as the focus for discussion and a stimulus to take a more critical look at the situation.

This popular theatre programme has become an annual festival, called *Laedza Batanani.* "Laedza" means 'The sun is up. Wake-up - it's time to get moving', "Batanani" means 'Let's come together and work together'. The idea of *Laedza Batanani*, then, is to provide an occasion where the community is drawn together, is 'woken up' to their situation, and discusses what might be done about it.

Each year all the community leaders and extension workers in the area come together in a workshop to plan the festival and choose the issues. (In the first five years of *Laedza Batanani* the issues have included the destructive effect on community and family life of migrant labour, cattle theft, health problems, inflation and unemployment, exploitation of women, agricultural production and nutrition). Then a smaller group is selected to prepare a performance of drama, puppetry, dances, and songs and to take this on tour through the five major villages in the area. After each performance the actors and other local extension workers divide the audience into groups and organize discussion of the problems presented. In a report back session the chairperson tries to get agreement on decisions for action. Then it is up to the extension workers to provide the organizational support and technical information for any follow-up action.

The involvement of local performers - extension workers and community leaders - ensures that there is a better chance of discussion and follow-up. This is not an outside group putting on a performance and then leaving the community. The performers live in the area, understand and identify with the issues, and therefore take an interest in stimulating and supporting positive results from the festival.

The community workshop which is used to plan the festival has two important effects. It provides a clear mandate from the community on the priority problems they want to focus their energy on during the festival and for the balance of the year. This in turn produces a common focus for the various extension agencies as the basis for joint action - a major step forward in the co-ordination and integration of extension work in the area.

Results of the Botswana programme

On the basis of *Laedza Batanani's* success, other groups of development workers in Botswana have started to experiment with this approach. Popular theatre has been used in developing group solidarity among cattle-workers and other groups (eg the Basarwa); as Freirian discussion 'codes' acted out by members of literacy groups; as catalysts for small group discussion in community health workshops and agricultural campaigns. The approach has remained decentralized with each village, district, or town extension team deciding how popular theatre might be used in its work. The national network of groups is serviced by the University's Institute of

Adult Education which provides train[illegible]nd organizes exchanges of experience among the g[illegible]oups through publications, workshops, etc.[11]

What is the overall effect of the popular theatre programme in Botswana? The programme is becoming increasingly committed to liberation. In the beginning it was uncritical about its allegiances and the nature of class divisions. The issue of social class tended to be mystified by the concept of community control. In practice a good deal of the earlier effort represented the interests of a wealthier, cattle-owning section of the community who take most of the leadership positions in community life. This explains why a dominant class issue such as cattle theft was acceptable in the first year as a major focus for the popular theatre programme.[12] However, since then issues have been more carefully selected to represent the concerns of the rural poor and a much clearer critical perspective has been applied.

In this case critical analysis involves looking beneath the apparent causes for the real constraints that condition the life of the poor. For example, the agricultural slogan 'Plough early' has been examined in terms of the interests it is meant to serve. In the case of poor families who have no livestock this slogan victimizes them, makes them feel inadequate in a situation where they need to work for richer cattle-owners for a few months in order to borrow oxen and by then it is too late to get the full advantage of the rains. Nutrition needs to be understood not only as a matter of eating a balanced diet, but also in relation to production and to the social implications of the mode of production - low rural wages, structural dependence on jobs in South Africa, etc.

The critical perspective in the drama challenges people to evaluate the forces conditioning their lives and to respond in an active way. It has led people to question openly the practices of specific individuals and institutions - eg theft by the treasurer of a village development committee, indecision by government regarding assistance to a flooded village, corruption by a headman who had been imposed on a minority tribal group, exploitation of cattle-workers etc. Poorer villagers, women and others who had been unable to express their opinions in village meetings have started to become more vocal about various forms of oppression - eg bad treatment by clinic staff, the heavy workload of women, and so on.

The educational method used is problem-posing discussion, rather than 'banking' or indoctrination. Instead of imposing packaged solutions in a direct and mechanical way, the organizers present the problems as viewed by local people and engage the audience in looking for solutions themselves. The programme does not end with performance - the performance is really only the beginning for a major programme of community discussion and collective action.

There is an attempt to involve local people in defining the issues and goals of the programme. In *Laedza Batanani* this takes the form of a community workshop in which extension workers talk with community leaders about the major concerns of the community. In other programmes it involves informal interviews with groups of men and women in different parts of the community (eg at the well, clinic, shebeens, individual homes) to discover the real concerns of the people.

What are the weakness[illegible] Increasing critical social consciousness on its own can have little effect if no action results. A popular theatre programme works when there is an organization which can take the momentum - the motivation and heightened awareness - created by the drama and build on it. In Botswana's popular theatre programme the organizational strategy for moving people to action has been unclear. Most community organizations are weak and only represent elite interests in the community. Organizations with a more popular base need to be developed to provide the leadership for organizing both the popular theatre programme and follow-up action. At present the programme is built around the involvement of government extension workers as actor-animateurs. These workers are becoming more committed to progressive social change but they are still influenced by traditional development issues - those concerned with modifying the deficiencies of the poor - and are constrained from getting too deeply involved in sensitive political issues. The organizational base now needs to be broadened.

Chikwakwa Theatre and Wason Manoma

Following on the success of the Makerere Travelling Theatre in 1966, each of the university theatre departments in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi set up annual tours by their drama students through the rural areas as a challenge to the elitist urban theatre dominated by expatriates and as a way of animating critical awareness, communication, and cultural activity among the rural poor. Chikwakwa Theatre in Zambia was the most closely identified with adult education and development. From the beginning it was a collaborative effort by the adult education and theatre departments of the University of Zambia. Initially it involved a tour by the students only, but soon local workshops were added so that theatre skills and activity could be decentralized. The plays presented such problems as the new role of women in modern society, conflicts between upper and lower classes, the need for self-reliance and organization of the people, conflicts between urban and rural values. During its last three years it has started to relate its work more closely to local development projects, such as co-operatives, blood donation campaigns, agricultural projects, etc., and to discuss the themes of the plays with the audiences after the performance.

Michael Etherton, the founder of Chikwakwa Theatre, was instrumental in developing *Wason Manoma* (Plays for Farmers) when he moved to Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. This represented one of the first occasions when theatre people have used their art to generate critical reflection and community action around the problems of specific communities. In its first year (1977) *Wason Manoma* focussed its attention on the national food production campaign, 'Operation Feed the Nation'. As in *Laedza Batanani* the group started by holding informal discussions with farmers in order to 'establish first the farmers' own view of OFN so that the plays themselves start from the peasants' perspectives and the *de facto* situation vis-a-vis OFN in the area:[13] This research identified instances of local officials and traders selling fertilizer above the controlled price and discrimination against poorer farmers:

> The students explained that they were not bringing fertilizer but plays about fertilizer. The farmers replied that they would prefer

the fertilizer; but if the plays were the only thing on offer then at least let them be about the farmers not getting the fertilizer which they were promised. The students perceived a sharp discrepancy between the rhetoric of agricultural development and actual practice; and a latent antagonism between farmers and rural officialdom.[14]

Back on campus the students improvised four plays dealing with the issues they had discovered. The structural and institutional context in which the poorer farmers were discriminated against was not evaded; the oppressive nature of their stratified society was presented as the major deterrent to their active participation in the OFN project. Before going on the road the plays were tested out on an audience of extension workers - a form of action research - and then amended.

The group of university students performed the plays in the villages in which they had conducted the research. Most of those who attended were the poorer farmers in the area. In the discussions they commented on the relevance of the performances to their own situation, described other problems in getting fertilizer, and asked for advice in setting up an effective organization to serve their interests. This demonstrated the major weakness of the programme: the students were not adequately briefed to provide this sort of information nor were they in a position to return with it. Once they left each community a lot of the interest and momentum they had stimulated was dissipated. Without leadership and training in organizational skills the farmers were unable to act on their heightened awareness. As in *Laedza Batanani*, this indicates the critical need for a local organizational base for this work. As an experiment the organizers of *Wason Manoma* have started to work through the development agencies in the area to try to provide continuity and follow-up.

Ngaahika Ndenda

The most successful use of people's theatre in developing critical consciousness and mobilizing people for collective action has been in Kenya.[15] This experiment started with a village community near Nairobi - where land is such a desperate issue that many people are forced to build their homes on footpaths and are often arrested. As part of a Freirian literacy programme the literacy groups held discussions on landlessness, poverty, unemployment, housing and other controversial issues.

Kenya's foremost author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o,

A performance of *Wason Manoma* outside a village school in Northern Nigeria (Photo: Michael Etherton)

worked with them in producing a play around some of the themes they had discussed. Ngugi and their literacy teacher wrote a play *Ngaahika Ndenda* and the script was discussed and amended in discussions with the literacy groups. For several months public rehearsals were held in which the whole community participated, taking various roles (there were over 150 parts), working out the songs and dances, improving the performance through collective criticism, and discussing the meaning of the play for their own lives. They built an open-air theatre using local materials and seating over 2,000 people. The play was staged every weekend for two months and attracted over 30,000 people from all over Kenya.

Ngaahika Ndenda demonstrates that 'when the people themselves participate as actors in their own development and in their own folk culture expressions, tension lessens between the manipulative possibilities of development'. It is authentic people's theatre, growing out of a popular organization that is controlled and managed by the community. They plan, organize, and run every aspect of it. Organizational skills are developed and participation maximized through work on a number of committees dealing with education, culture, production, etc. This programme demonstrates clearly that the village community has the ability to make its own decisions and run its own organizations effectively.

Participation in the programme is high because it speaks to the concerns and hopes of the peasants and villagers, heightens their understanding of the structural factors responsible for their condition, and demonstrates their capacity to change that condition through collective efforts. The perspective they have developed is a critical one, not a mystified one. Their analysis of social inequality and dependence exposes the root causes of poverty, landlessness, unemployment, illiteracy, etc. The play reflects the class divisions in society; conflict is not between individuals, but between social classes which are represented by characters in the play.

Conclusion

Experience in Africa has shown that popular theatre *can* play a progressive role in non-formal education, expanding participation and providing a mirror for critical analysis and a catalyst for discussion and action. However, its 'policies, programmes, and projects must be analysed in terms of who benefits, how, when, where, and why. To avoid doing so will not free [theatre in non-formal education] from political constraints but simply make it doomed to irrelevance, open to co-optation or ripe for repression'.[16]

As a tool for *persuading* people about development information it is largely ineffective. Putting across information cannot achieve social change when the structural and institutional context in which the receiver exists is opposed to his development. And, as Freire has shown, the 'banking' concept of one-way communication is bankrupt.

In order to avoid being marginal, co-opted, or reactionary, popular theatre workers must make a deliberate commitment to reverse the social, economic, political, and cultural oppression of the poor. Theatre workers and adult educators must engage themselves in the struggle of the oppressed, using theatre as an aid in articulating their concerns and demands; in clarifying the nature of poverty; and in working out organizational strategies for challenging those forces which create or reinforce poverty.

Theatre is a powerful catalyst, but on its own it cannot achieve significant social change. It must be integrated with the organizational capacity for action. Otherwise it will never be anything more than an interesting and exciting spectacle. Linking theatre with popular organizations and developing the necessary organizational skills is perhaps the hardest task but it should be given priority attention. Control of the organizations must be put firmly into the hands of the peasants and workers.

With a clearer commitment and strategy popular theatre is anything but a palliative for the deprived groups of Africa. It comes to bring not an opiate for the oppressed, but struggle for equality and liberation.

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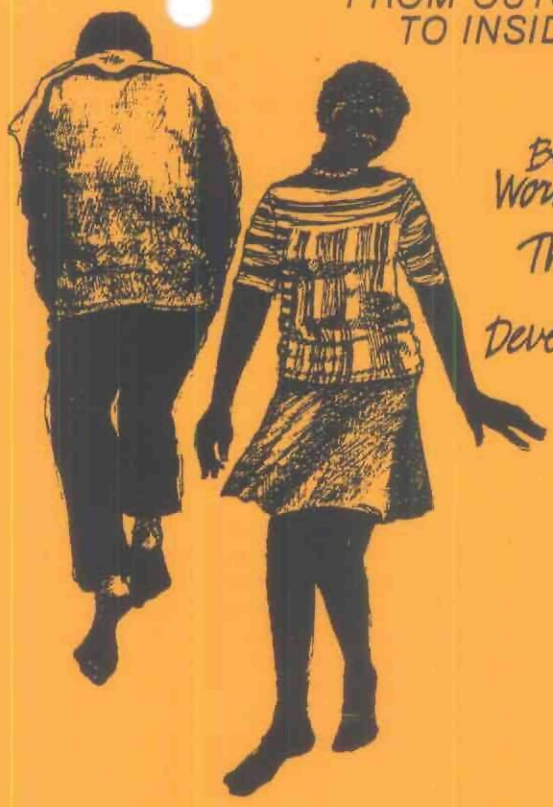
FROM OUTSIDE IN
TO INSIDE OUT:

The Benue Workshop on Theatre for Development



DIDACTIC THEATRE

In this important article ROSS KIDD, of the International Council for Adult Education in Toronto, describes the Benue State Workshop which represented a new initiative in community development by the drama collective of Ahmadu Bello University.

The history of didactic theatre in Africa has largely been one of various experiments in 'development communication' theatre – attempts by extension workers, and in some cases, theatre workers, to put across development messages to villagers through theatre. While the more recent experiments have shown a genuine desire to break out of the extension work or development communication framework and adopt a Freirian methodology, the practice has failed to live up to these ambitions.

The theatre projects have remained outside-in or theatre *for* the people – plays initiated and organized essentially by outsiders putting across narrowly circumscribed messages and analysis with a minimum of villager participation in the process. The performances have drawn large audiences and raised village problems in a lively and entertaining way but it would be a misrepresentation to say they stimulated a process of critical thinking or created sufficient momentum for an organized and collective response to the problems.

A recent workshop in Benue State, Nigeria, has demonstrated a more positive direction for this work. While it was limited by its own time-constraints, it did show that

- drama can be produced in a way which involves the villagers in the drama-making process
- the drama-making process can become a process of *conscientization* – of unveiling deeper and deeper layers of reality of examining the implications of various courses of action
- the development workers themselves can be 'conscientized' through this process, losing some of their technocratic blinkers and developmentalist assumptions
- the organizational and social action implications of this work can be more clearly defined through this process.

Antecedents

The Benue State Workshop was not the first workshop of this kind. It has its antecedents and was influenced by earlier workshops in Africa. The first was in Botswana in 1978 and represented the culmination of four years of experimental work in theatre for development. It was organized to pass the experience and skills gained from the experimental work on to development workers from other regions in the country. Participants were invited from the three major extension agencies: agriculture, health and community development.

The basic principle of the 'theatre-for-development' workshops was established at this first workshop. It argued that 'theatre-for-development' is a process and the best way to learn the process is to go through it. Participants learned the skills (village research, problem analysis, drama-making, theatre skills, performance organization, discussion leadership, and evaluation) not in isolation from but in relation to a practical, 'operational' context ie carrying out a small, community-based 'theatre-for-development' project.

This was not an academic forum happening in a vacuum sanitized and screened from the reality of social problems. It was meant to be an *engaged* experience in which skills were learned and ideas shared in dealing with real problems. It was not an exercise in swapping methods or talking about problems in the abstract. The workshop started with and worked with

the concrete problems of those in the environment in which the workshop was taking place.

A number of working groups or teams were established, each with an experienced resource person. Each team spent a day in its assigned village interviewing villagers. Then each team returned to the workshop centre and spent the next 3-4 days analysing the information collected and developing a play on the major problems identified. On the second last day of the workshop each team returned to its village to perform the play and organize discussion of the issues. On the final day participants evaluated the process and discussed the potential implications of their future work.

This workshop was successful within its own terms: the extension workers learned the skills and the process and became sufficiently enthusiastic to begin to use drama and the 'theatre-for-development' process in their regular work. As a result of this event and further workshops, theatre-for-development has spread to all the towns and districts in Botswana. It has also attracted interest in other African countries – such as Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia – in which workshops using the same basic principle have been run.

Weaknesses

While interest and experience in popular theatre has spread, the workshop process as a whole has remained static and has not overcome some of its fundamental weaknesses which can be summarized as follows.

- The villagers are not involved in the process of analysing the information, scripting the dramas, and performing the plays. The extension workers collect the villagers' information and then retreat from the villages to analyse the data and work out a performance on their own. This lack of participation severely limits the analysis of the issues and disengages the villagers from the crucial aspects of the process so they have limited commitment to it.
- Without the villagers' involvement in the analysis and drama-making process, the extension workers are forced to fall back on their own stereotyped thinking and analysis, which often reduces complex social problems to a matter of villagers' ignorance, apathy, or bad habits.
- While the day of village research is meant to open up field workers' eyes, to challenge their assumption, to force them to listen to the villagers, often it serves to reinforce their prejudices and without a continuing engagement with the villagers and the village reality, there is little room for challenging these prejudices.
- The discussion at the end of the performance is too brief to get anything more than a superficial analysis of the problem, let alone strategies for action. It is more of a ritual tacked on at the end of the performance than a key aspect in the process. After passively watching the play, the villagers are suddenly expected to discuss the problems and take action.

In summary the workshop process remains a top-down activity controlled by extension workers with only token participation from the villagers.

A new direction

A breakthrough, however, has been made in northern Nigeria by the drama collective at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU). Starting with a more critical perspective and influenced by the Latin American popular theatre experiments of Augusto Boal they have restructured the popular theatre process. They have shown that the villagers can become the actors and drama the medium through which the villagers analyse their situation, the possibilities for action, and the implications of each course of action.

For example in examining the appropriation of their land by outside agencies the farmers on one workshop role-played various ways they could question and resist these practices. After each rehearsal the farmers analysed their 'action' – its limitations and potential obstacles – and then redramatized a fresh course of action. This clarified for them, for example, the importance of working collectively in making demands on the bureaucrats; if they sent individual respresentatives, they would be bought off.

Acting out the situation brings out in a natural way some of the underlying contradictions, motivations, or rationalizations which help to explain the problem or the reason why it remains unsolved. The subsequent discussion draws out these underlying structures and contradictions and makes them clearer. Further dramatization makes the analysis concrete and at the same time throws up new perspectives which are then discussed.

Another genuine breakthrough has been in Kenya where a popular community movement has developed its own theatre as a form of popular education and popular protest against the land grab, exploitative labour policies, and other major issues in rural Kenya.

The Benue State Workshop

The Benue State Workshop represented a new initiative by the ABU group in a new area. They had been invited to run the workshop by the Benue State Arts Council who had been impressed by the ABU work. The policy of the Arts Council seemed progressive: the Council has resisted the practice of using up all its funds on a few prestigious performing groups and was actively supporting village-organized cultural activities. So the ABU team decided to help.

At the same time they had no expectations of making great gains or even achieving the radical cutting edge of the ABU workshops. The potential participants were to be middle class bureaucrats and theatre workers. The main question was: could the process also work with this group of people? Would they accept the process and be open to challenges to their thinking and attitudes?

The process seemed rocky at the start. Half of the participants turned out to be Arts Council employees (far more than expected), many of the experienced theatre workers seemed bored and none of the development workers came from the 'frontline' rural development agencies, ie agriculture, co-ops, community development, health. (The non-Arts Council participants were drawn from the Social Welfare department, formal education, the media, etc, none of which have continuing direct contact with the villages).

And we – the outside 'guest' organizers – made a tactical mistake. We agreed to accept the invitation to stay in the air-conditioned state guest house (tempted by the nearby bar) rather than with the rest of the participants in spartan conditions at the Agricultural College. This not only contradicted some of the democratic anti-hierarchical values we were trying to build into the work but it also slowed down the process of getting to know the trainees. (It also left us stranded for transport – so we often missed breakfast.)

The first two days warmed people up and introduced the skills of drama and dance. These sessions worked well but there was still a mood of 'wait and see'. The real discovery during this period came from the all-night Kwagh-hir competition organized to coincide with the first two days of the workshop. It demonstrated the tremendous love the Tiv have for Kwagh-hir (a unique form of indigenous puppetry started in the 60s as an outlet for protest against political victimization); the high level of cultural organization already in the villages (each Kwagh-hir troupe consists of a large choir, several dancers, a few men to light the performance with burning grass, and a number of puppeteers); and the democratic spirit characteristic of Tivland.

People in the standing-room-only area gave short shrift to the opening speech by a dignitary, fought and pushed back with good humour when they were harassed by whip-wielding policemen,

and poked fun at a rich businessman who arrived late in the proceedings and tried to get the crowd to move out of his way so that he and his retinue could have a favoured position in the stadium.

Village research: the process begins

The process really got started on the third day when we went to the villages. We had briefed the participants the evening before – dividing into three working groups and going over the whole workshop process and the role within it of village research. With respect to the day of research we emphasized the importance of

- establishing a relationship in which real dialogue could take place;
- using follow-up, probing questions to get at some of the underlying factors involved in each problem;
- interviewing a cross-section of the village – older and younger people, men and women, richer and poorer farmers, village leaders and ordinary villagers (in order to understand the different perspectives of the different age groups, sexes, social classes);
- looking for ways of engaging the villagers in analysing the problems themselves (ie conducting the 'research' as a form of open-ended dialogue on the problems rather than on a narrowly structured interrogation);
- trying to be aware of and self-critical about our own behaviour as outsiders in the village.

Three villages had been selected – one a peri-urban settlement on the outskirts of Gboko and two others much further out from the town.

All of them had a primary school, a market, and one or two shops. Only one of them had a clinic, and two were faced with a severe water shortage. The peri-urban settlement was being overtaken by urban development, with government buying up much of the land (and compensating some but not all of the villagers). Maize, rice and yams were the chief crops, cultivated for subsistence and the market; the villagers also sold a lot of firewood. A large proportion of the labour force worked in the nearby town of Gboko.

Our team went to Igyura – a small village 8 miles outside Gboko. We knew beforehand that it was 'a family village' – a settlement of people all related to the original settler – so we expected it to be well-knit in organizational terms. We also knew that it was highly developed in terms of cultural organization: it had won first prize in the Kwagh-hir competition held a few days before our visit. The organizer who had selected Igyura as one of the workshop villages had been particularly impressed by the market area – a clearing in the middle of the village marked out by huge stately trees. The market was easily accessible for everyone in the village and offered a cool quiet place for the discussions and dramatization.

Meeting the Headman and Village Elders

The villagers were told beforehand that we were coming. When we arrived we went to see the headman. He was resting at home, recovering from a recent illness, and was surrounded by a group of older men who had been waiting for us.

We asked the headman to start the discussion about problems in the village. He had no hesitation – his major preoccupation was the desertion of his wives and he pointed to a circle of eight wives' huts – all empty – to emphasize his point. The other men said this was a general problem. It had all started with the civil war when many wives ran off to join the soldiers whose barracks was at the time only half a mile from the village.

The current 'enemy', according to the villagers, was the Gboko Cement Factory. Their wives went to town, saying they were going to the market or catechism classes, and never returned – they 'worked the night shift' in the bars near the cement factory, especially around pay day. (Later, when the villagers got to know us better, they also blamed the civil servants in Gboko for stealing their spouses.)

The village men felt powerless to stop the desertion and bitterly resented the new laws protecting women from beating; they felt the laws prevented them from 'controlling' their wives. When questioned whether their treatment of their wives might have affected the situation, they replied that many women were running away from the hard work on the farms (to find easier work in the towns); and they had 'traditionally' beaten their wives as a form of control – they didn't understand why this was now being challenged.

When we felt we had exhausted discussion on the 'wife desertion' problem, we asked them to talk about other problems. They immediately raised the issue of fertilizer. They described how co-op representatives went day after day to the government fertilizer store in Gboko but came back empty-handed. The traders, on the other hand, always managed to get the fertilizer, through bribery, and brought it to the villages where they sold it at four times the government-established price. The villages were forced to buy from the traders – their soil was so impoverished and they had no other choice. When we asked them why they didn't resort to bribery too, a co-op leader replied: 'The money was not given to us to bribe people, only to buy fertilizer'.

The same man went on to describe how he had been in the government store one day when a trader was issued a large number of bags of fertilizer. When it came to his turn, he was told that there were no more bags. This infuriated him and he protested loudly. The storekeeper, fearing that the agricultural officer (his supervisor) might overhear the argument, gave him a few bags to keep him quiet. The man knew that the bags were totally insufficient for the needs of the co-op members but he didn't press the case, worried that he would be 'marked' by the storekeeper and victimized in the future.

The fertilizer issue was the main issue facing the Igyura co-op. They had taken the problem to the area co-op

The women gained a victory in being allowed to discuss their interpretation of this scene (Photo: courtesy K.P. Epskamp)

union whose member co-ops were all experiencing the same problem. The chairman of the co-op union took the matter to Makurdi (the district capital) where he obtained on their behalf several bags from the Makurdi fertilizer store. But this was only a temporary solution – the co-op still faced the same problem with the Gboko fertilizer store and many members were losing interest in the co-op.

A number of other problems were revealed in the first discussion – eg the lack of health facilities (villagers had to go ten miles into town for medical treatment and the clinics were often short of drugs) and the shortage of water (many of the village wells had dried up and it was a two mile walk to the nearest stream). It was decided in later discussions, however, to concentrate on the 'wife desertion' and fertilizer issues. During this initial meeting the whole team took part in the questioning and note-taking.

Interviewing the villagers

After the meeting with the headman and elders, the team broke into prearranged pairs (one Tiv speaker in each pair) and each pair went off in a different direction to meet with and interview families, informal groups, and individuals in various parts of the village. The villagers were very open about expressing their views and, in most cases, frank conversations developed. These additional interviews served to reinforce and extend what had been learned in the initial large group meeting. It also added some fresh perspectives, particularly those of women:

- there is an interest in the 'easier' life of the town – yet many women abandon their husbands primarily because of ill-treatment (the hard work, inadequate provision of clothing, and the beatings);
- many women are married off at an early age when they have no choice in the matter – when they are older and have a more independent spirit they run off to town for a new life;
- the soil is becoming increasingly infertile, production is declining, and because less labour is available people are switching from yam production to less labour-intensive rice cultivation; women are blamed when the harvest is low;
- fertilizer arrives late in the village and as a result doesn't receive enough rainfall in order to dissolve on the plants; often one type of fertilizer is used interchangably for rice and yams (when the correct fertilizer is unavailable);
- agricultural extension staff rarely come to the village – farmers are expected to go to the agricultural office for advice.

Assessing our progress

At the end of the first day we seemed to have covered a lot of ground. We had established a good relationship with the villagers. (They invited us to attend a victory-celebration performance by their Kwagh-hir troupe the following evening). We had identified two major problems and had started a process of analysing them. In retrospect, however, we had only just started to understand the underlying factors, let alone the various options for action.

If we had stopped the data-gathering and analysis process at that stage and worked on our own to develop the drama (the approach of the Botswana workshop) we would have left out some important basic data and analysis; as for solutions we would have had no sense of what would work and what was within the organizational capacity of the villagers. In addition the villagers would have been left out of the analysis process. They would have simply been hauled in at the end as a passive audience for our interpretation of their world.

In terms of our own learning we would not have been able to overcome some of the conventional thinking among members of our own group. In our discussions at that point some people were still saying that the real problem was the villagers' laziness or ignorance or backwardness or apathy. Few, for example, were willing at that point to look at the issues in terms of labour shortage, gender relations, or other power relations. All of these assumptions were challenged when we returned to the villages.

Starting the drama-making process

On our second visit to Igyura (two days later) we didn't go naked: we took along a first rough attempt at a drama – a few improvised scenes thrown together in a two-hour session the day before our visit (New Year's Day!). We wanted to project back to the villagers what we had learned about their problems and we wanted a vehicle to draw out further analysis by the villagers and to get them involved in the process of making and performing the drama. In retrospect we could have developed even this first-stage drama with the villagers, but at the time we were all new to the process and wanted to have a bit of structure to get the process rolling. Figure 1 shows the first scenes we produced.

When we arrived we established a large meeting circle in the market area and soon were joined by about 40 men. (The women were busy in the fields!)

FERTILIZER PROBLEM

1. **Government Store**
   Village co-op leader attempts to get fertilizer, but is kept waiting. Trader arrives and makes a deal with government storekeeper. Co-op leader discovers the bribery and protests. Co-op leader leaves without fertilizer.

2. **Village Market**
   Trader arrives and starts selling fertilizer at N8 a bag (four times the goverment rate). A few farmers buy, grumbling about the price. Co-op leader quarrels with the trader.

3. **Village Co-op Meeting**
   Co-op leader calls a meeting to discuss the difficulties of getting fertilizer. What to do?

WIFE DESERTION

4. **Family Scene in the Village**
   Husband (Co-op leader) talking with neighbour about fertilizer problem. Wife returns from fields tired and complains about lack of fertilizer. Quarrel. Husband threatens to beat wife. She runs off and starts cooking. Neighbour advises him not to beat wife.

   A women who had previously lived in the village comes for a visit, shows off new clothes, and convinces wife to leave husband and join her for a life of prostitution in town.

   Wife packs and hides her suitcase near the main road and tells her husband she is going to town for catechism classes.

5. **Bar Scene in Town**
   Wife and girlfriend serving drinks in a bar. Quarrel between 2 men and a fight.

Figure 1 The First Improvised Scenes

We performed the first three fertilizer scenes and encouraged the villagers to join in the action. Each scene required villager participation: our own team members played the bureaucrats but all the other roles were assigned to the villagers. They took up their roles easily and added much more depth to the discussion of the issues in the play.

For example in the village co-op meeting scene one of the villagers spontaneously raised the issue of bribing the government store official (as a possible strategy) and another expressed his disgruntlement with the co-op and demanded his membership fee back – both proposals were defeated in the dramatized meeting but these issues were incorporated into the storyline. Another village in this meeting accused the co-op representative of 'chopping' (misappropriating) the members' money – this issue as well was added to the drama.

At the end of the fertilizer scenes we stopped and asked for their reaction. One man said that we had not shown how people wait for days in the queue outside the government store. So we replayed the government store scene under his direction: creating a huge line-up (made up of the villagers), lots of shoving and jockeying for positiion within the line, the storekeeper ignoring people in the line and keeping everyone waiting, the trader being challenged by the farmers when he tried to jump their queue, the whole line bursting into the storekeepers' office when they overheard the trader bribing the storekeeper, and the storekeeper and agricultural officer eventually driving the farmers out of the store.

The villagers then said that we had shown the problem clearly enough – so we asked them what might be done to solve the problem. There was a long discussion about which government department to turn to – finally they settled on the agricultural office at Makurdi. When we asked who should go, they immediately proposed a delegation. They said they couldn't rely on one person – he would be too weak to deal with the government officials or might be bribed himself. So we developed a new scene showing the farmers' trip to the Chief Agricultural Officer (CAO) in Makurdi.

At their suggestion we created a role of an obstructive secretary in the CAO's office in order to bring out the experience of dealing with bureaucracy – she ignored the farmers for a while, insulted them and finally told them the CAO was out. They kept saying 'All we want is fertilizer' and eventually pushed past her into the inner office where they confronted the CAO. Their simple but firm insistence – 'We're not telling you how to do your job.

The villagers acted out alternative solutions to their difficulty in obtaining fertilizer (Photo: courtesy K.P. Epskamp)

All we want is fertilizer. Government promised us fertilizer over the radio', – seemed to undercut all his arguments. He gave in and wrote them a letter instructing the Gboko store to issue them with fertilizer.

At this point the villagers insisted on continuing the process, showing their triumphant return to the Gboko store to get their fertilizer. We performed it but in the discussion afterwards we agreed that this scene should show a mixed result – the government store officials would be incensed by the farmers going to their supervisors and while following the instructions in the CAO's letter, would be more difficult and unhelpful in the future. In short the problem still remained unsolved. We decided to leave it at that stage and switched to the other problems.

Scape-goating the women

We then performed our wife-desertion sketch. The villagers' reaction was ecstatic:

> It is exactly what is happening in this village. We want our wives to see the drama. Once they see it, they'll stop running away from us.

They repeated their points about the enticement of the soldiers and the Cement Factory workers and their resentment at being prevented from beating their wives as a form of preventative action.

We then got into a good discussion on the relationship between Igyura and the neighbouring town (Gboko) – the exodus of young people to work in factories like the Cement Factory and the resulting loss of labour in the village; the effect on village production; the loss of child labour due to the introduction of Universal Primary Education; desertion of their wives for better economic prospects and more freedom in town; the low prices for firewood and crops; the interest by government in taking over some of their land to set up a game reserve (which they had successfully resisted), etc. However we failed to get the men to look at male-female relations in the village as having an effect on the women's decision to run away.

There was little response to this line of questioning and with only one Tiv-speaking woman in the group, which by that stage had grown to about 80 men, there seemed little movement in this more positive direction. Everyone – members of our team and the male villagers – insisted that a final melodramatic scene be added showing the wife returning to the village for a visit and finding her child very sick. The wife accuses the husband of mistreating her child and this prompts an angry response from the husband about her 'loose behaviour', thus reinforcing the moralistic approach to the issue.

This final scene did however leave scope for exposing the exploitative market relations: the same trader, who had earlier sold the fertilizer at high prices, came to buy yams from the

villagers – the father of the sick child was forced by circumstances to sell the yams at very low prices.

At this stage we broke for lunch. Many villagers decided to remain with us, waiting for the afternoon session to begin. A few team members showed amazing insensitivity – opening up their packed lunch and starting to gobble up the food, completely indifferent to the villagers sitting with us. Two team members made up for this lapse, taking the food and distributing it to everyone present.

The villagers take over

After lunch we started as agreed to work on the songs. The villagers turned the tables on us and took over the session. The village choir appeared and sang six songs, two of which we decided to use in the play. One of the songs, all of which were written by the villagers, was a politically astute song of protest. It starts by praising the ruling political party – for the roads, electricity, hospitals, and other things – but then goes on to say that there are no medicines in the hospitals because many of the government-purchased drugs are disappearing and being sold on the black market. The song ends with a proverb underlining the censure: 'When the maize is harvested and ready for eating, those who have done the work are left out'.

When we questioned them about this song the villagers claimed that it had spread all over the area, had been broadcast over the radio, and had embarrassed government into putting special labels on the medicines so they couldn't be stolen. We discussed how this type of song might be used to get some action on the fertilizer issue – but this idea was never followed up.

When the songs finished, the concert didn't end. A range of musical instruments appeared – including an 8-foot long 'trumpet' – and the village orchestra swung into a number of tunes. A dancing group joined in and the whole performance continued for about two hours. This spontaneous and varied performance for our benefit was another indication of the high level of cultural organization in the village – a good base for our own experiment.

Deepening our own analysis

The following day was market day in Igyura so we gave the villagers a break and spent the time on our own trying to deepen our own understanding of the issues. We concentrated on the relationships between Igyura and the nearby town Gboko. For many of us it was becoming increasingly clear that Igyura's main problems were not of its own making. Gboko lured away Igyura's labour force (through the incentives offered by government development policies which tended to favour town-dwellers) yet depended on Igyura and other villages to produce the food and firewood needed in Gboko.

Igyura's 'underdevelopment' therefore was not because of its isolation and 'backwardness' in relation to Gboko but because of its relationship to Gboko, its integration into the system. The economic system controlled by certain classes in Gboko seriously affected the economic possibilities of those in Igyura.

Continuing drama-making and analysis

We then returned to the village to see how the play and the analysis could be taken further. This day went extremely well. The two groups – our team and the villagers – by this time were used to each other and everyone was familiar with the dramatization-analysis process. We started with the fertilizer scenes, again involving the villagers as actors. In the subsequent discussion the villagers talked about how their fertilizer problem was destroying people's interest in the co-op. Many villagers were dropping their membership and less than half of the villagers remained as members of the co-op. We decided to explore this further. We re-enacted the village meeting scene, drawing on the discussion betweeen those who were fed up with the co-op's failure to get the fertilizer and those who continued to support the co-op.

This opened up a wide-ranging discussion on the co-op movement. The villagers complained they never saw the government co-operative officers. In probing a bit further we discovered that there are two government departments involved – the agriculture department (which issues the fertilizer) and the co-operative department – and that they belong to different Ministries.

One of our team members brought out the contradiction in government practice: the co-op department is trying to build up the co-operative movement in order to protect the farmers against the traders, while the agriculture department is furthering the interests of the traders and sabotaging the farmers' efforts. This was reinforced with an image of a man putting an umbrella over a farmer while another is hammering holes in the umbrella.

After a long discussion we agreed that we couldn't go much further without getting more information. Several team members volunteered to visit the co-op department the following day.

The discussion then moved to talk about possibilities for action. Someone suggested referring the fertilizer problem to the local MP, but this was rejected on grounds that the MP would only deal with the issue if it was around election time; others added that the MPs often represented the interests of the traders. People insisted on staying with the existing scenario – ie going in a group to the government offices and making their demands directly to the officials. They felt that their demand – 'We've been promised fertilizer at N2 a bag over the radio. Where is it?' – could not be denied.

One person suggested they might meet with the co-ops from other villages in the area to talk about the problem. There was also some discussion initiated by us, on how their cultural activities – eg song, puppetry performances – could be used to expose injustice as in their protest song about the drug shortage in the hospitals.

The women get their chance

Then we performed the 'wife desertion' scenes. In this discussion the villagers admitted that the problem of urban drift was not just a women's issue – both men and women were deserting the village for better economic prospects in town. We discussed how this affected farming – the shortage of labour, the shift from yam to rice production, the increasing pressure on women, etc. The discussion got translated into the dialogue of some of the action of the play.

The village men, however, continued to request that we show the 'wife desertion' sketch to their wives, when they returned from the fields, as a form of moral corrective. We agreed but called their bluff by insisting that the women be given the chance to meet among themselves after the performance, without their husbands present, to discuss the issues raised in the play. They agreed. This was to be the first meeting ever of all the women in the village. Eighty men, 40 women, and about 100 children turned up for the performance.

After the performance our Tiv-speaking actress held a discussion with the women for about an hour (while the men worked on their songs for the performance). As expected the women had a totally different reaction to the play:

> We work very hard. Many of us do most of the work in the fields but when the crops are sold we get nothing. So how can you blame us when we leave for a better life in Gboko? Here we get nothing – little money for ourselves. We never get a new dress, only these rags.
>
> What drives us away is the poverty – and sometimes the beating.
>
> We now know our rights. We'll no longer allow them to beat us.

The yam harvest was bad .... and there is no improvement.

If the men treated us better we wouldn't run off to town.

As a result of this discussion we decided to show female oppression as a much stronger factor in the wife's desertion.

During the women's discussion a small but significant incident occurred which again highlighted our relationship as outsiders to the village. The driver of our vehicle – who had not been involved in the workshop process – came roaring through the village, into the market area and right up to a few feet from where the women were sitting, slammed on the brakes, leaned out of the window of the cab, revved up the engine and honked the horn to indicate it was time to go. This of course totally disturbed the discussion – and again underlined the problematic relationship between government and the villagers.

Getting government's side of the story

The next day we went to see the co-operative officer. Five team members volunteered for this visit. We presented the fertilizer problem in as neutral and unemotional terms as possible and attempted to win the co-op officer's support for dealing with the problem. But instead of a sympathetic response, which we had somehow expected from a co-op official whose job it is to support the farmers, he was totally negative, blaming the farmers for their slowness to respond to the availability of fertilizer and evading the issue of corruption by the agricultural department,

Our team members' response seemed like magic! Seven days earlier they might have agreed with him and similarly condemned the farmers. Now that they knew the situation in a much more intimate way and had begun to identify to a certain extent with the farmers, they no longer accepted the conventional 'blaming-the-victim' put-down. They sprang to the farmers' defence and began to question the arguments and rationalizations of the bureaucrat.

He explained that the situation had been solved, that a new arrangement had been agreed on by the agriculture and co-operative departments. The co-ops would be expected to bring their fertilizer orders directly to the co-op department. The co-op department would determine who were bona fide co-op representatives and then authorize the agricultural department to hand out the fertilizer.

We could have accepted this explanation in good faith and left the office, persuaded that the agricultural department had mended its ways

Rehearsal in the conference centre (Photo: courtesy K.P. Epskamp)

and was now committed to serving the co-ops rather than the traders. But a new critical attitude had grown among the team members and they weren't prepared to drop the issue without further questioning.

Additional questions revealed that there was no unequivocal policy to serve the co-ops exclusively. If co-ops failed to send in their orders in time, the agriculture officials would be forced to give the fertilizer to the traders. The co-op officer added that fertilizer had already arrived in the store for the 1982 season but no co-ops had come in to pick it up. He repeated his accusation that the co-ops delayed too long in coming for the fertilizer.

One team member challenged him about the problem of storing the fertilizer several months before it was needed (as it had been explained to us by the villagers):

> Where would you store, if you were a villager?
> Most villagers can only afford to store it in their huts ... it's so corrosive it erodes the walls and it is a bad health risk for children.

The co-op officer was only able to reply – 'People need more education on how to build storage facilities'.

Then a team member asked him how government had communicated the new policy to the co-ops. He replied that the State Governor had announced it in his New Year's speech over television and that it had also been mentioned in the newspapers. This was greeted with derision by our team members since both media barely penetrate the villages and use English, and there is still a high level of illiteracy in the villages. The co-op officer responded by explaining that he had announced the new policy himself in a number of village meetings.

We questioned him further about his own department's extension network and discovered that the co-op field staff are expected to cover a huge area – without transport – and instead of making regular visits to co-ops they only go when they have been invited and the co-op agrees to pay their transport. (This explains why Igyura has not seen a co-op official for years.) The co-op officer added, in self-justification, that even he, the most senior member of the department, could not claim expenses for use of his own vehicle in making field trips.

Corruption

Then we cornered him on the corruption issue, putting it to him directly. He defended his fellow officers in the agriculture department and went back on the attack against the farmers. The problem was not that the co-op were being deprived of the fertilizer but that they were lazy about getting organized and placing their orders.

We then tried a fresh tack; 'Okay, let's assume that the co-ops don't place their orders early enough and the traders end up with the fertilizer. What can the farmers do if the traders sell it above the government-controlled price?' His response; 'They can complain to the police'. When questioned further he admitted that the police were slow to respond and were often in the pay of the traders. He also mentioned an incident in which the police, when they came to investigate, could only find a six-year old selling the fertilizer. (The trader had been tipped off and had disappeared, leaving his son in charge. The police couldn't do a thing.)

Evaluating our interview

After the meeting we reported back to our team and evaluated our interview with the co-operative official. We decided that while the policy (of getting the co-op department to vet the fertilizer orders) seemed to be progressive, in practice it seemed to be a means of fending off criticism while at the same time preserving the status quo. If the co-ops don't have the information on the 'new deal' how can they act on it? And anyway there didn't seem to be a hard-and-fast rule about excluding traders. The co-op officer still described the new arrangement as one of supply and demand: if only the traders turned up to request the fertilizer, the agriculture department would be forced to give it to them.

This discussion, we felt, also demonstrated the huge information gap between government and the villages. The farmers have very little access to information on government programmes. If a department which is supposed to be working closely with the villagers is so cut off from their concerns and thinking, what about the communication impact of other government departments without any extension network? Relying on the television and newspapers seemed totally inadequate.

This experience showed that a straightforward information programme on the new policy could contribute towards 'empowering' the farmers – ie showing them how they could circumvent the traders' monopoly. In this situation knowledge is power. A theatre-for-development programme which simply got the information to the farmer about the new system would, in this case, go a long way towards solving the immediate problem.

The policy itself indicates the top-down nature of government decision-making. New policies are established without any consultation with those affected by the policies. The new fertilizer policy fails to take account of several of the farmers' legitimate concerns: eg the problem of storing the fertilizer for long periods of time; the additional bureaucratic steps involved in getting the fertilizer; the loophole which seems large enough for all the traders in Gboko; the lack of technical guidance on fertilizer application (farmers are somehow expected to know the number of bags required for various acreages of various crops).

We also agreed that we should have gone to the government office with some of the villagers. They had been involved in every aspect of the process up until that point and it was wrong to have excluded them from what turned out to be an important learning experience and a genuine effort to solve the problem. They might have been a bit reserved but would have benefited from the direct exchange with government.

It would have been an opportunity to try out in practice – in a less risky situation and with a measure of protection from us – how a direct meeting with government (rather than relying on one high-ranking individual to represent them) could be used to resolve a conflict. It would have been a practical orientation in dealing with government ..... and would have made the process even more concrete.

In order to compensate for this lapse in the participatory process, we planned to reconstruct the discussion and take it a bit further in our final visit to the village (two days later). But this was never satisfactorily achieved – the workshop got in the way!

The workshop obstructs the process

The original idea was to copy the Botswana working format but to extend it with some of the ideas from the ABU farmers' workshops. In the Botswana workshop the participants worked on their own to prepare a performance which was presented to the villagers as the final step of the workshop. The new format called for a *continuing* process of dramatization-and-analysis involving both workshops participants and villagers. Each time the analysis and strategizing deepened, the drama had to be changed to accommodate the new thinking. The idea of a 'final', 'polished' performance then was contradictory to the process (but it had been built into the workshop timetable and inevitably took on more importance as the workshop drew to an end).

The objectives subtly shifted and more attention became focused on the entertainment aspect and less on the educational and social action aspect. As a result we spent the next day back in the workshop centre polishing up our drama. (For our team this was difficult because we had built villagers'

participation into the drama in a major way.) We should have spent this time in the village taking back what we had learned from the co-op department and deciding on what action should be taken.

The final two days were spent giving performances to the three villages. Two of these performances were given in the evening: the night-time setting converted what up until then had been an educational process into an entertainment event with little scope for post-performance discussion. In one case the audience was so noisy that it was impossible to hear what the actors were saying.

In our own village we insisted that the performance be given in the afternoon. We made a special effort to get the co-op officer to come with us so he could meet with the villagers afterwards. The whole village turned out for the performance. Many of them had seen the earlier drama-making sessions but the interest was still high. The post-performance discussion worked well and the villagers threw a lot of questions at the co-op official, refusing to let him make a long speech and forcing him to listen to their questions. But the discussion had to be cut short because of the rush to get ready for the evening performance in another village.

Just as we were about to break up, the women, who were having their second meeting on their own, demanded that they be given some time with the co-op official. They insisted that they were the ones who did the work on the land and they didn't trust the story they'd get from their husbands about the fertilizer – it was their problem too! The co-op officer was persuaded to spend another half-hour talking with the women.

Just before we left the villagers asked us when we would return to continue the drama. We told them not to count on us but to go ahead and continue the work on their own. They were enthusiastic about the idea and said they'd give it a go. With their strong organizational base and experience in cultural activity it seemed very clear that they could organize their own drama with very little outside assistance. This was an unexpected yet significant outcome of the workshop.

Evaluating the experience

The following day we met to evaluate our group's experience. (Again we noted that the evaluation should have been done together with the villagers.) We made the following points.

- We were fortunate to have worked with a village which had already done some extensive thinking of its own (eg the protest song about the theft of drugs from the hospital) and had a strong organizational base (eg the village co-op, Kwagh-hir troupe, choir, etc).
- We felt we had achieved a reasonably participatory process, drawing out not only the villagers' acting talents but also their ideas and analysis. We felt we had been reasonably successful in listening to the villagers and avoiding imposing a lot of our own ideas.
- There was some evidence that by the end of the workshop both the workshop participants and the villagers had understood the process sufficiently to continue it on their own.
- The process had generated not only a fresh discussion on the fertilizer problem but also a clearer understanding of the vested interests involved in the trader's fertilizer monopoly (and the collusion between the bureaucracy and the traders) and a number of real possibilities for action.
- The workshop had resulted in the co-op official visiting the village and briefing the villagers on the new policy on fertilizer distribution.
- Out of the discussion process the village had accepted the validity of women meeting on their own to discuss their concerns.
- The workshop participants discovered that drama could be used not only as a means of conveying information to the villagers but also, and more effectively, as a process of analysis through which villagers began to get a more critical understanding of their problems and strategies for action.

We also recognized that the process had really just begun. We had reached the stage where the women were starting to feel more confident and determined to participate in the village meetings without being dominated by the men; more time could be spent examining the organization of the village co-op itself (up until that point we had assumed that the co-op organization was satisfactory and there was no significant conflicts within the village); the villagers were ready to try out some of the ideas in practice (eg sending a delegation to meet with the co-op and agriculture department officials).

Further analysis and further dramatization would have deepened people's understanding of the production and market relations, the structural reasons for women's desertion, other possibilities for action on the fertilizer issue, the importance of strengthening the co-op and building stronger links with the co-ops in the neighbouring villages.

Enactments tend to become realistic (Photo: courtesy K.P. Epskamp)

What was gained?

The workshop was too short to make great gains in terms of villagers' and the workshop participants awareness. But it did demonstrate the amazing potential of this process and its clear superiority to the Botswana model. The villages took part in a *sustained* process of analysis going far beyond what had been achieved in the way of discussion and analysis in the earlier workshops. Their concerns were not 'ripped off' as the subject matter for outsiders' study and play-making. They were involved not only in generating data but also in processing it: through dramatization and analysis they were able to explore why the problems existed and how they might organize

	THEATRE AS PRODUCT	THEATRE AS PROCESS
Objective	To create a polished, 'finished' play which can be presented to villagers	To facilitate a process of critical analysis through the villagers themselves making and remaking the play
Analysis	static, fixed, shallow	dynamic: continually deepening
Discussion	a single event in the process, a ritual tacked on at the end of a performance in which villagers are suddenly expected to take an active part (after remaining passive throughout the performance)	Discussion is a continuing part of a process of improvisation – analysis – improvisation. The discussion, the thinking takes place both within the improvisation and and in analysing it afterwards
Villagers Participation/ Control	Manipulated and orchestrated: limited control over the process. Villagers are expected to fulfill certain roles at certain stages of the process (eg information-giving at the beginning; taking part in the post-performance discussion)	More control over the process: participation in *all* stages of the process (information-giving, *and analysis*: improvisation and subsequent discussion)

to bring about change.

The workshop showed that by going to the villages and *staying* there – not retreating to the isolation of the workshop centre – that the analysis could be deepened, the villagers could be drawn into the entire process, and a much clearer idea of the organizational direction and the implications of various strategies could be achieved. The workshop demonstrated in a powerful way that participation in the process is not only the villagers' right; it is crucial to the success of this exercise.

In the Botswana workshop the analysis was locked into place in a superficial way at an early stage and didn't go any further because of the limited data available and the lack of access to the source of the data – the villagers themselves. The workshop became an exercise in polishing a drama representing a limited understanding of the village situation.

The Nigerian workshop, on the other hand, represented a continuing analysis because of the villagers' involvement in and the nature of the process itself. The analysis continued throughout the workshop and the drama kept changing to reflect the deeper and deeper understanding of the issues.

The Benue State workshop also showed that some of the blinkers placed on development workers could be removed through encouraging them to work with rather than for the villagers and challenging some of their technocratic conditioning. The workshop participants were genuinely surprised to discover the villagers' capacity for analysis. They found the villagers willing to engage in a discussion with them and even challenge them when they knew they would not be victimized for speaking their minds.

The workshop confirmed once again that the main obstacle to development is not the villagers' ignorance or apathy or bad habits but the policies and structures which limit the villagers' access to resources, information and power. The farmers don't need a lecture on the value of fertilizer – what they need is the fertilizer! The workshop challenged the conventional stereotype of farmer conservatism and showed that it is the traders and bureaucrats who are far more resistant to change, especially change which disturbs the status quo.

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Theatre by the People, for the People and of the People: People's Theatre and Landless Organizing in Bangladesh

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by Ross Kidd and Mamunur Rashid

People's theatre as a tool for popular education and popular organizing has emerged out of social interventionist practice rather than any specific academic discourse. It has evolved out of the direct experience of theatre workers and popular educators working in the field who have attempted to refine and shape their practice so that it serves the needs of a popular transformation. Through critiquing their work, attempting to overcome contradictions, trying out new approaches and subjecting each new experience to analysis they have successively transformed the nature of their work.

Crow and Etherton[1] have shown the evolution of popular theatre in Africa and traced its development of popular theatre through six stages:

1. Urban-based theatre groups tour villages with "well-made plays" on middle-class themes.
2. Development workers put on didactic plays for villagers.
3. Theatre workers help villagers make their own plays.
4. Development workers research the problems in a village, develop and put on an open-ended drama and discuss its resolution with the audience.
5. Development and/or theatre workers facilitate a process of problem-analysis and drama-making by the villagers.
6. The process in step 5 is used within the context of a popular organization.

In this paper we will look at the development of people's theatre in Asia, focusing on the history and experience of one Asian country and one organization—Aranyak of Bangladesh. The case study will describe and analyze the changes in Aranyak's work over a ten-year period (1972–1982) as they attempted to find the most suitable way of supporting popular struggle in Bangladesh. Through constantly evaluating its work, Aranyak recognized its limitations and began to change its strategy. Each new approach gave rise to a fresh contradiction which required a further transformation. Eventually Aranyak abandoned its role as a performing group and began to do cultural animation in the villages, facilitating a process of drama-making and analysis by landless laborers and building a movement of village-based people's theatre. The paper will begin with a brief description of international experience in people's theatre and then situate Aranyak's work within the broader context and history of theatre in Bangladesh.

People's Theatre in the Third World

All over the Third World peasants, workers, women, indigenous (tribal) groups, and other oppressed groups are rediscovering the potential of people's theatre as a weapon in struggles for land, better working and living conditions, women's rights, and other basic rights. Landless laborers and poor peasants in Bangladesh,[2] Kenya,[3] Nicaragua,[4] and the Philippines,[5] women's groups in Botswana,[6] Jamaica,[7] and

1. B. Crowe and M. Etherton, "Popular Drama and Popular Analysis in Africa," in R. Kidd and N. Colletta, (eds.), *Tradition for Development: Indigenous Structure and Folk Media in Non-Formal Education* (Bonn: German Foundation for International Development, 1982).

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3. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1981); Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, "People's Theatre and Popular Education: A Case Study of Kamĩrĩithu Village in Kenya," chapter for a forthcoming book on *Popular Theatre and Popular Action in the Third World* (Toronto: International Popular Theatre Alliance, 1982).

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6. Martin Byram, "Oodi Weavers: Material Culture, Workers Organizations

India,[8] native communities in Peru,[9] Bolivia,[10] Ecuador,[11] and Guatemala,[12] tribal[13] and Harijan[14] movements in India, sugar workers, domestic workers, prisoners, etc. in Jamaica,[15] urban slum-dwellers in Latin America,[16] and freedom-fighters in southern Africa[17]—all are turning to "theatre by the people for the people and of the people" as a means of building class and/or women's consciousness, mobilizing people for action, engaging in struggle, and reflecting on the struggle.

For these popular groups and movements, people's theatre refers to theatre of the people (that is, dealing with the issues and concerns of the popular classes—the peasants and workers) created and performed by the people for popular audiences of peasants and workers. "Of the people" conveys the Brechtian sense of advancing the interests of the popular classes. People's theatre represents:

People's theatre has been one of the battlegrounds in the struggle between the dominant and subordinate classes in Bengal for centuries.

- a medium controlled by the people for expressing their ideas, concerns, and analysis at a time when other forms of expression and media are outside their control;
- a means of resisting the ideas propagated by the dominant class, institutions and media;
- a way of recovering, reviving, validating, and advancing the people's own culture and history;
- an experience of participation, interaction and self-expression through which people overcome their fears and develop a sense of their own identity, self-confidence, and class consciousness through showing people can "act," can change things, both on stage and in real life;
- a people's curriculum, reflecting popular ideas, concerns, and aspirations rather than the externally imposed textbooks of conventional education;
- a forum for popular education, bringing people together and building a spirit of solidarity;
- a codification or objectification of reality for purposes of discussion, a means of mirroring reality in order to stand back and study it critically;
- a process of popular education—drama as a tool of analysis, of testing out through role-playing the limits and possibilities for action and unveiling the contradictions and structures underlying everyday reality;
- an organizing medium, politicizing people and drawing them into popular organizations and struggle;
- a means of preparing for struggle—clarifying the target, working out strategies and tactics, and testing out through role-playing various forms of confrontation;
- a means of protesting against oppression and a means of stirring up people's anger to do something about it;
- a form of confrontation and struggle;
- a morale-booster during periods of struggle—poking fun at the oppressors, celebrating victories, and building up people's spirit.

One must, of course, not over-exaggerate the transformative potential of theatre. Organizing struggle on the stage is different from doing it in real life and the distinction must not be blurred. Theatre must be linked with organizing and struggle. Where these conditions are met, the performance itself can become a form of struggle. For example some of the organizations of landless laborers in Bangladesh have sufficient organizational strength to openly challenge the landlords. The means they've chosen to do this is to dramatize in a public forum the landlords' acts of injustice and corruption. One group found after a while that it was enough to *threaten* to "put the landlords on the stage" in order to rein in the landlords' manipulative and exploitative tendencies.

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Popular Theatre on the Advance

This groundswell of popular theatre in the Third World represents a resurgence after a temporary set-back in the sixties. Popular theatre was a major force in the forties and fifties when it served as the cultural arm of nationalist struggles all over the Third World, inspired by experiences such as the Communist Chinese "resistance theatre" of the thirties.[18]

Nationalist movements in Egypt,[19] India,[20] Indonesia,[21] Jamaica,[22] Kenya,[23] Nigeria,[24] Vietnam,[25] Zambia,[26] and many other colonial territories used theatre to expose colonial injustice, develop a nationalist consciousness, and mobilize support for the national liberation movement. The colonial rulers monopolized the modern mass media (radio and newspapers) so the nationalists had to rely on their own "media"—the dance-dramas, songs, poetry, puppetry, and drumming out of their own traditions.

Moving from village to village behind the lines out of reach of the colonial forces, cultural workers helped to counter colonial propaganda, clarify issues and information, prepare people for new situations, and build up morale and commitment.

Theatre was such a powerful weapon in nationalist hands that, wherever they could, colonial forces tried to suppress it. For example in Indonesia in the forties the Dutch jailed hundreds of *dalangs* (puppeteers) and burned their puppets;[27] in Nigeria during the same period the British banned several anti-colonial plays by a popular traveling troupe.[28] In Malaysia the colonial security forces were so impressed by nationalist-inspired theatre that they organized their own troupes for counter-insurgency propaganda.[29] The Japanese also recognized the power of theatre and in their occupation of Southeast Asia (1940–45) imposed strict controls on theatre and deployed hundreds of local troupes to explain their Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity propaganda. This scheme had its double-edge: for example, in the Philippines many of the troupes used the cover of local languages and historical symbolism to advance Filipino nationalism.[30]

Once the "de-colonizing era" was over, however, there was a temporary setback. The nationalists who came to power attempted to contain, control, or co-opt the cultural movements which had grown out of the nationalist struggle and other struggles like the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles. Hundreds of cultural workers belonging to the Indonesian popular culture movement LEKRA were killed in the anti-Communist pogrom in 1965;[31] the Indian People's Theatre Association fell apart through external manipulation and its own internal splits;[32] the mass movement of Popular Culture Centers in Brazil was suppressed after the 1964 coup;[33] bourgeois nationalism and neo-colonial (settlers') theatre monopolized the cultural field in Africa;[34] and the colonial censorship laws were not only reintroduced but strongly enforced by many of the new Third World governments.[35] In South Africa, brutal suppression forced the liberation movement underground and adversely affected black cultural expression which had bolstered the struggle.

By the end of the sixties, the increasing penetration of multinational capital into the Third World and the growing class divisions, landlessness, and unemployment led to struggles by peasants and workers to defend themselves against the pressures of surplus appropriation and other forms of victimization and to fight for land, better working conditions, and structural changes. Popular theatre re-emerged as a weapon in these struggles.

In Thailand[36] and Chile[37] in the early seventies theatre

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played a key role in making peasants and fishermen aware of their political rights and promoting the formation of peasant and fishermen unions. After the right-wing coups in both countries the farmers' and fishermen's movements and the cultural work which supported it were repressed. In the Philippines a broad-based movement of people's theatre supported struggles by peasants, fishermen, plantation workers, and slum-dwellers against the land-grabbing and corruption of the Filipino ruling class and the exploitative practices of the multinationals.[38] In India the Chipko movement mobilized its support among the tribal peoples for their campaigns against deforestation through songs telling about their innovative tactic of mass "hugging" (*chipko*) of trees to prevent contractors from cutting them down.[39] In Jamaica[40] and India[41] the women's movement made special use of theatre in voicing women's concerns and grievances, challenging the prejudices and oppression against women, and building their movement. In Bangladesh,[42] India[43] and Sri Lanka[44] movements of landless laborers, Harijans, plantation workers, tribal groups and other oppressed groups developed a vital form of participatory theatre as a core educational and organizing activity within the movement.

In Latin America rural peasants, native communities, urban workers and slum-dwellers reappropriated theatre, which had been monopolized by the middle class, and began to create their own forms of theatre closely linked to popular education, organizing, and struggle.[45] In post-revolutionary Cuba[46] and Nicaragua[47] popular theatre groups helped in mobilizing participation in the mass reconstruction campaigns and at the same time provided a critique of post-revolutionary practices.

In independent Africa new forms of theatre began to challenge the dominant bourgeois mode. In Zambia[48] a national theatre movement developed out of the touring and workshops of a university traveling theatre group; in Botswana,[49] Ghana,[50] Malawi,[51] Sierra Leone,[52] Swaziland,[53] Tanzania[54] and Zambia[55] development workers and adult educators put on didactic plays based on village-level research and discussions with villagers; and in northern Nigeria a university theatre group developed a village workshop process in which farmers created their own plays and through this began to analyze the structures of rural exploitation.[56] In Kenya a community organization of peasants and workers created their own plays as a form of popular education and popular protest against the land grab, unemployment, exploitative labor practices, foreign domination of the economy, and other major issues in Kenya.[57]

In Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe drama played an educational and morale-building role in the liberated areas[58] and in South Africa a consciousness-raising role in the students' movement which shook South Africa in the seventies.[59]

In Europe[60] and North America[61] migrant workers from the Third World turned to theatre as a tool of education and organizing within their own communities and a voice for their movement.

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40. Ford-Smith, op. cit.

41. Omvedt, op. cit.; Mies, op. cit.; and Kanhare, op. cit.

42. Proshika, op. cit.; and Rashid, op. cit.

43. Footnotes 13 and 14.

44. Yohan Devananda, "Theatre and Conscientization in Sri Lanka," *Asian Action* (Asian Cultural Forum on Development) 7: 1977, 45-47.

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53. Martin Byram, et al., *The Report of the Workshop on Theatre for Integrated Development (Swaziland)*(Swaziland: Department of Extra-Mural Services, University of Swaziland, 1981).

54. P. Mlama, "Theatre for Social Development: The Malaya Project in Tanzania," *Third World Popular Theatre* (Toronto: International Popular Theatre Alliance, 1984).

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59. See footnote 17 and F.M. Redford, "Plays from the Proletariat," *Theatrework* 2(5): 1982, 45-48.

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From Outsiders' Theatre as Product to Insiders' Theatre as Process

The resurgence of people's theatre in the seventies and eighties represented not only a quantitative advance but also a *qualitative* one. Up until the seventies social action theatre took the form of "theatre *for* the people"—theatre performed by middle-class activists, often touring from community to community, for audiences of peasants and workers.

While this "taking theatre to the people" approach did encourage cultural democratization by giving the popular classes access to a theatre tradition which had been appropriated by the dominant class, it often failed to achieve its educational and organizing goals. As an externally induced theatre it reinforced dependence on creative resources outside the community and failed to recognize the cultural strengths of the community which had not only survived colonialism but stiffened resistance against the colonial occupation.

It also represented an imposition of outsiders' agendas and analysis. The peasants were left out of the action, forced into their conventional role of watching someone else's culture, of reproducing their "culture of silence." They remained the passive recipients of ideas and analysis from the outside, robbed of an opportunity to voice their own concerns and to do their own thinking. As Freire would put it, cultural liberation is not "a gift" or mere access to culture but "the conquered right of the popular classes to express themselves."[62] The finished form of the theatre—finalized pieces of thinking with no room for audience contributions—and the tokenistic approach to post-performance discussion which was tacked on at the end as an empty ritual reinforced this "banking" orientation.

Another problem was the lack of an organizational base. Many of the groups had no links to a movement or organizing process. They came into the community, put on their play, held a discussion and hit the road. Their performance may have created some interest but once they left there was no one to do the follow-up education and organizing. Without an organizational base the performances had a limited effect. The above is a general picture. There are, of course, other groups doing "theatre for the people" who are working within or closely connected to popular movements, are sensitive to local issues, and perform open-ended dramas permitting audience involvement and discussion.

"Theatre *by* the people,for the people and *of* the people" attempts to overcome the above limitations by

- making the peasants the performers, thereby giving them the opportunity to express their own concerns, do their own thinking, and control their own learning process;
- grounding the theatre experience in the community, group, or movement and in an ongoing educational and organizing process;
- changing the *form* of the theatre activity so that it no longer represents a finished product or static piece of thinking but takes the form of an open-ended or unfinished play—a process of collective play-making in which everyone in the audience participates as actor, director, and critic and through it analyzes their situation and tries out various possibilities for action.

This new mode reflects Freire's and Brecht's emphasis on *active* approaches to learning—of peasants becoming the subjects of their transformation, questioning and challenging the ruling class ideas rather than remaining the objects of a propaganda exercise.[63] It also reflects their notion of linking drama (or literacy learning in the case of Freire) to critical discussion of the social reality. Further, it exhibits some of the more recent insights of Augusto Boal who adapted Freire's ideas to the field of theatre.[64] He showed how the oppressed could create their own codes, thus breaking the division between actors and audience and the dependence on externally created codes, and also how they could use a continuous, process of codification (dramatization) and decodification (analysis) to explore reality, their own conditioning and ways of overcoming oppression. Through this process of changing and rechanging the drama the peasants could not only see that reality could be changed but also experience a process of transformation which might give them the self-confidence to make changes in their real (rather than dramatized) lives. Restoring the confidence of the peasants in their own cultural production might help to extend their confidence into the political and economic spheres by, as Thom Cross puts it—"Acting to act."

A Brief History of People's Theatre and Struggle in Bangladesh

People's theatre has been one of the battlegrounds in the struggle between the dominant and subordinate classes in Bengal for centuries. In its long history of foreign domination and of hierarchical structural relationships, people's theatre has not only reflected the struggles between the dominant castes (Brahmins and Khotriyas) and classes (feudal overlords, foreign invaders, bourgeoisie) and the subordinate castes (Boishyas and Shudras) and classes (middlemen, peasants, artisans, landless laborers) but also has served as a weapon in this struggle—as a means of reinforcing the domination of the ruling classes or as a tool of challenging their exploitation and rallying popular struggle against oppression.

In pre-thirteenth century Bengal the mythological dramas which had their origins in the *puranic* epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) tended to reinforce the feudal status quo and the Brahmanic hegemony. While they were extremely popular with their rural audiences, they functioned primarily as a means of accommodation—of adjusting people to their situation—and as a mechanism of escape from the hard labor. Through showing the importance and heroism of the gods they taught deference to the feudal overlords and acceptance of the overlord's right to the surplus from the peasants' labor. They also reinforced belief in a supernatural order which controlled the world, inducing acceptance of a fatalistic and submissive approach to the world. The dramas rarely challenged the feudal power structure and where they did this was a type of "overturning" necessary for the preservation of the system (as in, for example, Carnival in mediaeval Europe).

62. Paulo Freire, "Cultural Freedom in Latin America," in L.M. Colonese, *Human Rights and the Liberation of Man in the Americas* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1970).

63. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (translated by John Willett, London: Eyre Methuen, 1964); Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

64. Boal, op. cit.

In the thirteenth century during the short rule of the South Indian Vaisnava Sena kings, a new form of people's resistance "theatre" emerged to challenge the caste hierarchy of Brahmanical law. Bhakti, fervent devotionalism in song and dance, represented the upsurge of popular classes against the social discrimination and economic exploitation of the Brahmanic system. The songs condemned the hypocrisy and decadence of the system and advocated a new more egalitarian order.

In the fourteenth century, with the coming of the Moslems, mass conversions took place, the language of the courts changed to Persian, and taxes were increased. In spite of this the Bhakti movement continued to grow and gain influence among the popular classes. The songs and dances flourished in the villages as part of this movement and expressed both defiance against the foreign rulers and resistance against the Brahmanic order. The performances did, however, absorb a number of Islamic influences.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century with the arrival of the British and the introduction of education there was a brief period of "cultural renaissance." Once the Bengali educated elite began to see that their interests could not be accommodated by colonialism, they began to resist colonial rule. The new forms of urban theatre learned from the colonizers became a powerful tool for protest.

When the British brutally enforced cultivation of indigo in Bengal in the mid-nineteenth century, *Nildarpan* (literally the "Indigo Mirror") was produced in 1870 to expose the atrocities committed against farmers who refused to plant their fields with indigo. This play was immediately banned. The nationalist feeling that it aroused provoked the censorship law of 1876 by which the British attempted to suppress anti-colonial cultural expression in the Indian sub-continent.[65] *Nildarpan* was later followed by a number of other "mirror" plays dealing with struggles against the Zamindars (large landowners), tea-plantation owners, bureaucrats, police, and others.

In the 1900s these spontaneous outbursts of anti-colonial protest culminated in a more sustained nationalist struggle. The "traditional" theatre of the villages became a symbol for the struggle and the Bengali elite who had previously ignored or denigrated traditional theatre began to revalue it. Tagore and others appropriated these arts and advocated their use in programs of cultural revival and anti-colonial protest within the context of rural fairs and festivals.

In the 1920s the playwright Mukunda Das transformed the rural folk form of *jatra*, which had traditionally dealt with historical or mythological themes, and created a new form *Swadeshi (Nationalist) jatra* which dealt with the contemporary themes of colonial injustice, caste oppression, feudal exploitation, and tactics for anti-colonial struggle. The colonial government "rewarded" him for this innovation by sending him to prison.

65. Theatre was such a powerful instrument for arousing anti-colonial sentiment that it was the first cultural form to be gagged with a censorship law (1876), followed by the vernacular press (1877) and the right to carry arms (1878). The law remains in force today in India and Bangladesh, requiring all playscripts to be cleared by the authorities before a performance license is issued. One group after India's Independence (1947) wanted to perform *Nildarpan* which was written in 1870. When they sent the script to the police for approval, the police wrote back asking them to get the playwright to come to the police station.

Performing *for* the people represented the old politics—urban-based left-wing groups preaching revolt to the masses, a kind of political pamphleteering, of manipulating people with slogans and lectures. It had little effect.

In the 1940s all this activity culminated in the creation of a national popular theatre movement, the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). This operated all over India but its strongest contingent was in Bengal. Its initial work was to alert people to the possibility of Japanese invasion and to promote temporary support for Britain's war effort. In 1943 during the Bengal famine in which five million peasants starved to death, the Bengal IPTA troupe performed all over India with a play exposing the native hoarders and black marketeers, raising over 200,000 rupees and launching a campaign to "Save People's Food."

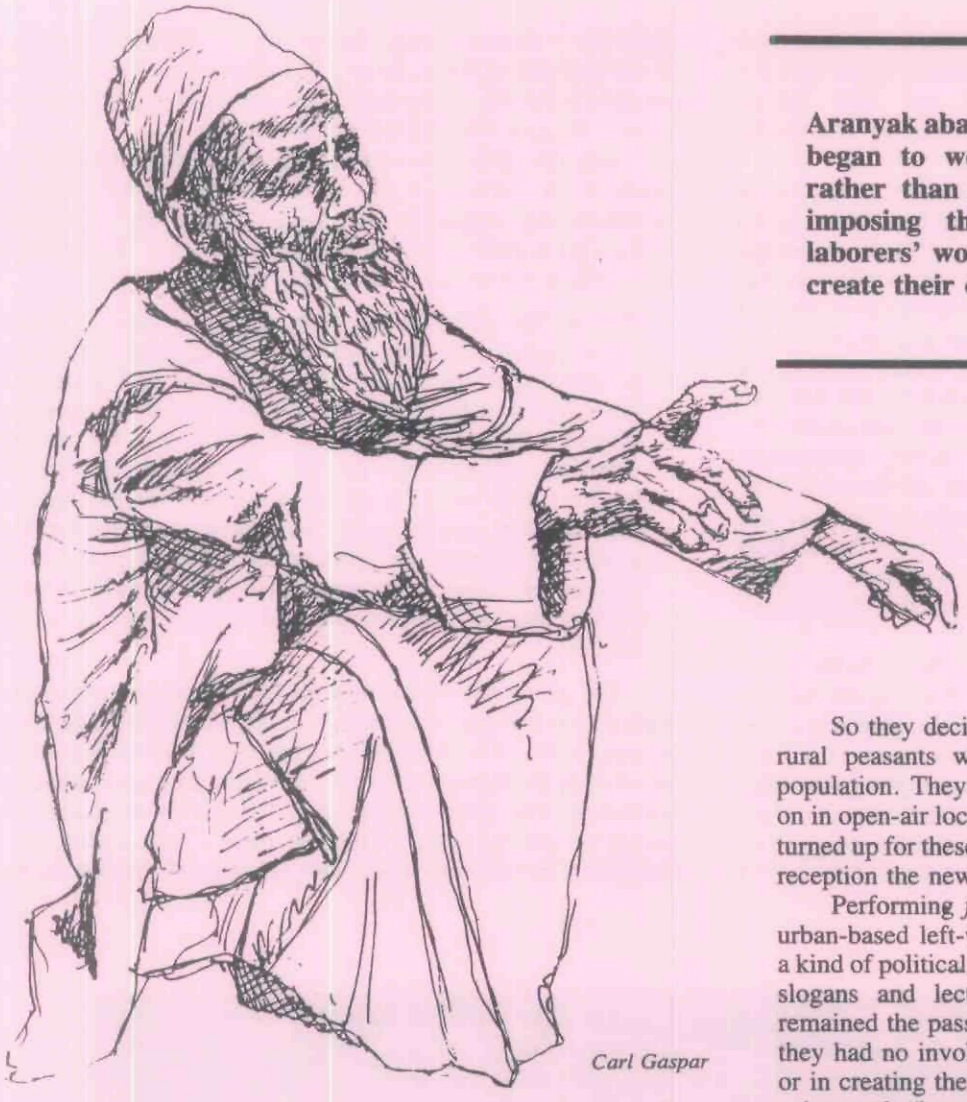
In 1947 with the departure of the British, the Indian subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan. East Bengal, whose population is primarily Moslem, became part of Pakistan, and their links with IPTA dissolved. When the Punjabi bureaucracy and military of West Pakistan became the dominant force in the new state and imposed Urdu as the national language, a bitter revolt erupted. This took the form of a "language movement" in which songs and dramas played a primary role in stirring up nationalist feelings. The cultural work was so effective that many of the playwrights and actors were arrested. One of the playwrights, Munir Chowdhury, wrote his most famous play, *Kabor* (Graveyard), while he was in prison. Along with other prisoners he performed it right in jail.

The nationalist struggle of the fifties and sixties and continuing victimization by Pakistan's military rulers culminated in the War of Liberation in 1971 in which songs and drama again played a mobilizing role.

During this period (1950–1970) in the villages the peripatetic theatre—the *jatra*, *kobigan*, *jarigan* and other "traditional" theatres—began to undergo a transformation. As capital increasingly penetrated the villages, theatre became more of a commodity. Traditional performers who formerly combined work in the fields with part-time work as performers stopped performing altogether or became employed on a full-time commercial basis. *Jatra* groups which formerly operated under the sponsorship of a *zamindar* or plantation owner began to do their tours on a commercial basis, working out contracts with the landlords in each village.

Aranyak—Performing for the People

Aranyak was founded soon after Bangladesh's Independence (December 1971) by a group of middle-class youth who had been deeply affected by their experience in the liberation war. Along with the peasants and workers they had hoped that the liberation war would lead to a true revolution, one in which land would be redistributed, other feudal structures transformed, and Bangladesh's econmy taken over by the people



Carl Gaspar

Aranyak abandoned their role as performers and began to work as animateurs, working *with* rather than *for* the rural poor. They stopped imposing their own image of the landless laborers' world and encouraged the laborers to create their own dramas.

of Bangladesh. When they saw their hopes were futile, that the rural structures remained intact, the economy still under foreign control, and a small comprador class monopolizing the benefits of Independence, they decided to do something about this betrayal of the people's hopes and to fight for change.

The vehicle they chose for their political challenge was theatre and they initially looked to Calcutta's group theatre for their ideas and inspiration. They formed an amateur group made up of about thirty people, most of whom worked in other jobs during the day in school-teaching, banks, offices, and factories. They came together each evening or on the weekends to rehearse or to give performances.

During the seventies they concentrated on producing one major theatrical work a year, all of them on political themes and performed in urban areas. While these performances succeeded in theatrical terms, they failed to have the desired political impact. Their audiences, which largely consisted of urban, middle-class people, reacted emotionally to the plays, but once they were over, their commitment to social action died. The praise of theatre critics, the publication of scripts, the invitation to do TV work were no measure of success. In fact, the lack of resistance to their work by the ruling class was a clear indication of its limited effectiveness. Their work was becoming, they felt, absorbed by the system and their protest muted.

So they decided to change their audience and turn to the rural peasants who make up 90 percent of Bangladesh's population. They took their plays out of Dakha and put them on in open-air locations in the rural areas. Thousands of people turned up for these performances, but in spite of the enthusiastic reception the new approach seemed equally problematic.

Performing *for* the people represented the old politics—urban-based left-wing groups preaching revolt to the masses, a kind of political pamphleteering, of manipulating people with slogans and lectures. It had little effect. The spectators remained the passive consumers of someone else's revolution; they had no involvement in shaping and discussing the issues or in creating the play. Consequently the performance was an ephemeral "here-today-gone-tomorrow" experience in their lives. It represented the same top-down structures, of outside groups telling the peasants what to do. In short it had no mobilizing potential in building a self-reliant and critically conscious popular movement.

Making a Change: Getting the People to Do the Acting and the Thinking

Around this time Aranyak made contact with Proshika, a Bangladeshi rural animation organization. Proshika's animateurs, who are permanently based in the villages, work with the landless laborers in a process of popular education and organizing. In each village they form groups of 15-20 landless laborers who meet regularly, build up trust in each other, eliminate conflicts among themselves, overcome dependence on the moneylender (through collective savings), talk about their problems of exploitation and victimization, and along with other groups organize struggles to confront injustice and corruption by the landlords and to demand better working conditions.

In their residential training programs which support the animation work in the field, Proshika regularly uses role-playing and socio-drama. In a training workshop held in 1978 the participants got so excited by an experience of making a socio-drama that, upon returning to their village, they performed the play to their fellow laborers and later to landless

laborers in other villages. Proshika immediately recognized the potential of this educational and organizational tool which the landless themselves had demonstrated and after further experimentation organized a national workshop to promote the new activity.

The Proshika workshop brought together twenty rural organizers (animateurs), twenty landless group leaders, and a few middle-class cultural workers. It adapted a training approach developed in Botswana whose basic notion was that theatre for social animation should be learned not as an abstract concept but as a practical process grounded in a specific social context. In the Bangladesh situation this meant sending the workshop participants in teams to villages where they met with the group of landless laborers which Proshika had organized. For three successive evenings the workshop participants listened to and asked questions about the landless laborers' problems and histories—both as individuals and as a group. Then each team, along with a few members from the landless group, worked for four days back at the workshop center to develop a play which was then presented back to the landless group and discussed.

One of the real discoveries of the workshop was the power of the landless laborers' own stories. There was no need to fictionalize, to create new stories out of the imagination of the landless. Most of the plays were drawn from their *real* experiences—for example, their experience of going into debt, losing land or being tricked out of their land; victimization, exploitation and manipulation as laborers; and the struggles of their groups to defend themselves against oppression and to fight for a decent living. Sometimes a collective story was developed out of the stories of a number of landless laborers; in other cases one of the more vital stories of a single landless laborer became the plot-line for the drama.

Another discovery was the amazing acting ability of the landless. In one village, the local group of landless laborers spontaneously decided to develop their own play in response to the visit to their village of the workshop team. The play told the story of one of their successful struggles:

> One of their members had been unfairly accused of stealing water from an irrigation scheme and forcibly prevented from harvesting his crop. (He had a very small plot adjacent to the irrigation scheme but was too poor to join the irrigation scheme.) When the group helped him to reap the crop (in order to protect him from the threatened beating) the landlord who was causing all the trouble (as chairman of the irrigation scheme) used his influence to get the man arrested. The group members rallied the other groups in the area and marched to the police station. The show of force worked and his release represented a major victory for the landless.

The group put on this play for the workshop participants, with almost minimal preparation, on the second evening of the village visits. (On the first evening they had simply talked about their problems and stories, but once they understood the workshop was about theatre they offered to dramatize the irrigation scheme story.) The first time it was performed it dragged a lot with too much dialogue and not enough action.

Rummelt Hummelen, ©1984

Rummelt Hummelen, ©1984

Two of the group members were invited to join in the day-time sessions at the workshop center. They came along the following day and participated in a session on such basic dramatic techniques as showing not telling and limiting the dialogue. At the end of the day they decided to abandon the workshop: they thanked the workshop organizers but said they preferred to work with their own group. They said that the other workshop participants would leave at the end of the workshop and they would be left with a play but no performers. So they went back to the village and worked on the play on their own. When they returned a few days later to put on the play it was totally transformed—lots of action, lots of miming (*showing* their work in the fields and other actions rather than talking about them) and much less dialogue.[66]

The middle-class cultural workers who had been invited to the workshop felt totally overwhelmed by this and other performances by the landless. They had come thinking they had something to teach the landless; by the end of the workshop they felt totally the opposite, that if anything it was they who had learned. The improvisational and acting skills of the landless were prodigious: there was no way they could match this lively, vital improvised theatre with a scripted, highly rehearsed, urban-produced facsimile.

For Proshika the organizing potential was clear. Their own work was undergoing a transformation in which theatre could play an important role. Up until 1979 a lot of their work had gone into developing individual groups, supporting economic projects like fish farming and crop production undertaken by these groups, and helping to break the dependence on the moneylender through the groups' collective savings.

By 1980 a new strategy was emerging. Some of the groups began to recognize the limitations of the project work and to challenge the oppression and victimization they faced in the villages—beatings by landlords, exploitative working conditions, feudal obligations to landlords, loss of their land through cheating, and unjust court decisions. In response, a number of groups organized together to confront oppressive landlords on specific issues.

This new type of activity required a new organizing strategy—one group on its own was too weak to confront the local power structure. Groups had to work in concert if they were to present a strong enough challenge. A wage strike, for instance, could only be successful if all of the laborers in the area supported it.

This meant that more and more landless had to be brought into the "movement," more groups had to be formed in each

66. This group is continuing to do drama on its own, performing in its own village, in other villages and occasionally at large rallies as a way of encouraging other landless laborers to form their own groups, to build inter-group solidarity, and to fight for their rights. Within their own village drama has become publicly recognized as a powerful weapon against injustice. Having successfully exposed the landlords' corruption, manipulation and brutality, on a number of occasions, they have reached the stage where they feel they no longer need to *perform* the drama. Simply threatening to "put the landlords on the stage again" is enough to caution the landlords and make them think twice about continuing their corrupt or manipulative practices.

village, and links had to be built among groups in the same area. This shift from "project" to "movement" demanded far more organizers than Proshika could provide—it meant that the landless themselves had to become the organizers for building the movement.

For this new work of mobilizing and solidarity-building theatre was extremely well-suited. It worked much better than speeches, was not dependent on literacy skill, could be performed by the landless, and touched an emotional core—an important factor in overcoming the landless laborers' initial fear of doing something, of getting organized, of fighting for their rights.

Theatre also suited the new perspective. By simply presenting the every-day stories of the landless, theatre showed that

- little could be achieved by economic projects within the existing unequal power structure;
- real change required addressing and confronting incidents of harassment, exploitation, and corruption;
- oppression at the village level involved a complex system of collusion among the rural landed class, the bureaucracy, and the police.

From Performing to Animation

Aranyak was equally impressed by the workshop and when a second workshop was held in 1981 one of Aranyak's members helped to organize it. They immediately recognized this new approach as the breakthrough they were looking for.

The landless laborers clearly had an amazing knack for drama. All that was needed was some encouragement, to help them gain some confidence and to show them they could do it. Moreover, getting the landless laborers to do the dramas transformed the whole process: the laborers doing the "acting" were taking the first awareness-raising and confidence-building step toward *real action*. The activity of drama-making could become a group-building experience in which participants deepened their understanding, bolstered their morale, and developed the courage and organizational unity to fight for their rights.

So Aranyak abandoned their role as performers and began to work as animateurs, working *with* rather than *for* the rural poor. They stopped imposing their own image of the landless laborers' world and encouraged the laborers to create their own dramas. They saw their work, in the way Augusto Boal does, as encouraging the peasants to re-appropriate the theatre which had been stolen from them. Historically the peasants had made art: art and labor had been united. But with the change of society art had been alienated from the peasants and appropriated by the middle class. Aranyak's role was no longer to sing the songs for the people and keep them quiet. Their task was to show the peasants that they could act, that they could express themselves and enjoy themselves through making drama, that they could analyze their life-situation through this medium, and that it could be used as a weapon in their struggle against oppression and victimization.

The Aranyak Workshops: Moving Back to the Villages

Aranyak's animation work has taken a different direction than Proshika's. Since they have no funding they have been unable to put their workers into the villages on a full-time basis. Each member can only do theatre in his/her spare time—they all have full-time jobs in teaching or the bureaucracy or the private sector. Instead they run short, 10-12 day workshops in various areas of Bangladesh, trying to build up interest in cultural work among the landless and where possible promote the formation of landless drama groups. Their short-term aim is to get these groups going and operating on their own without an over-dependence on Aranyak. Their long-term aim is to facilitate the development of a national movement of landless drama groups.

The Aranyak "workshop" is not a workshop in the conventional sense of formally organized learning in a residential setting on a sustained day-long basis. It is more of an engaged experience working with the landless laborers in their own communities and fitting into their own patterns of living and the constraints on them. Instead of bringing the landless laborers out of their own environment, the Aranyak animateur moves into the village and works with the landless in their own social situation—staying with them, joining them in their periods of leisure, and eating with them.

One implication is that workshop sessions cannot be held throughout the day, as is possible in a residential workshop. The animateur can only meet with the landless on an intensive basis in the evenings because during the day the landless are at work. Another implication is that the "workshop" sessions are not in an isolated and protected environment like a residential training center. They take place within the village and are exposed to the same intimidation and pressures that the landless face every day from the landlords.

The workshops are held in villages with no previous experience of landless organizing. This differs from the Proshika cultural work in which drama is being introduced as an "add-on" activity to groups which are already organized. The basic objective is to use each workshop as an organizing tool, to build a landless group through bringing people together for a drama-making experience. Since there has been no previous animation in the village a good deal of the time is spent in building trust and developing a relationship with the landless laborers.

The Aranyak team normally consists of five members—four animateurs and a coordinator. Each animateur is assigned to a different village, all within the same area, and the coordinator provides back-up support, and informs team members about what is happening in the other villages. He also brings the team together from time to time to share experiences and to advise one another.

Each workshop goes through the following stages which will be taken up below.

1. establishing a base in the village
2. winning the landless' confidence
3. listening to the landless' problems
4. analyzing these problems and making a scenario
5. improvising, analyzing, making changes
6. community performance
7. post-performance discussions
8. follow-up and evaluation

Setting Up a Base

The initial obstacle is the landlords. They know it immediately when an outsider enters the village. They come to find out what is going on and to offer hospitality. When

they discover the animateur's intentions, they at first cannot understand, and ask: "Why are you going to work with those poor people? What do they know? We know many stories, we can provide you with actors. Why don't you stay with us?"

But the animateur resists all offers of hospitality from the landlords. Being associated with them would increase the doubts of the landless and jeopardize the work. The let-out is the local school: it provides a non-controversial base for the work, a place that the landless feel comfortable about visiting and better than the home of a landless family which would be too exposed, inviting immediate suspicion and possible intimidation.

The animateur sleeps on the floor at the school and prepares food there. Once the landless get to know the animateur, they come to visit there. Often some of the initial research (listening to the landless talk about their lives) is conducted there. The local schoolteachers, although better off than many of the villagers, are often very supportive. Other allies from the middle class are often the traditional doctors who are popular among the poor villagers. Having their support helps to break down some of the suspicion.

Carl Gaspar

Winning Their Trust

With the school as a base the animateur starts to get to know the landless laborers. He works through a local contact person—a landless laborer who has been identified by others as a potential leader. Sometimes the person suggested is unsuitable but usually the references are correct. The designated person tends to be vocal, militant, and less fearful of the local landed class. The animateur starts by winning this person's confidence and over time persuades him or her to call a number of landless people together to a common place. If the process of going through a potential local leader fails, the animateur has to develop other contacts and encourage people to come together.

Courtesy of Ross Kidd

At the same time the animateur starts to get to know other landless laborers, visiting them in their fields during the day and meeting them at their homes at night. These encounters are informal—sometimes one-to-one, sometimes with a small informal group. A brief encounter in the fields during the day might turn into an invitation to come for a visit at night.

The object at this stage is to gain the trust of the landless. They are initially suspicious. They have seen other outsiders come to their village to talk with the "big men." "Why are you coming to talk to *us?*" they say. "Are you here to help us or to spy on us?"

The animateur explains that, far from being a policeman or a spy or a researcher, "I've come to make drama, so I'm here to collect stories from you. We want to make dramas with you based on your own stories." When this fails to strike a chord, the animateur gets them talking about various cultural forms—radio, television, cinema. "Do these media serve your purpose?" They respond, "No." "Well, why not?" They explain, after a bit, that none of these media talk about their lives—they only deal with the lives of the rich people. Eventually they begin to see that drama can be an alternative, a means of reflecting their own lives. The animateur suggests to them that they can make the drama themselves. Their reaction is uncertain; "Can we do it? Is it possible?" The animateur coaxes them to try it out, to put on a short skit about a real incident in their lives. After a bit of hesitation and some prompting they put on a highly entertaining skit. This breaks the ice, gives them some confidence, and catches their interest. The animateur then gets them to talk about the major events in their lives. By remaining quiet and merely listening, showing genuine interest in what they are saying, the animateur encourages them to tell their life-stories in great detail. Through this process interest grows and the landless begin to say, "This person has come to listen to us, not to talk. He wants to hear our stories, rather than giving us speeches or sermons. We can work with him." Once this basic trust is established, the animateur encourages them to come together and hold regular meetings.

At this initial stage when talking to the landless about their problems, often the landless are reluctant to admit they have problems. When specific questions are asked—such as "Do you have sufficient food?" "Can you afford to send your child to school?" or "Do you get adequate medical care?"—the landless give a clear response—"No." The animateur follows this up by questioning them about the food, education, and medical treatment that the rich people get, and, when they comment on the difference, asking them why. Often the explanation is simply "It's Allah's will." When they respond in this way, the animateur then asks, "Why does Allah patronize these people who've been stealing your land and remain silent when you're dying of starvation?" Often this challenge confuses them, but starts them thinking. This process continues in the second phase when the landless come together as a group.

Listening to People's Stories

The local contact person calls people together, organizes the meetings and gets people to come. The group normally consists of 30-50 people, the majority landless but a few are marginal farmers, schoolteachers, traditional doctors, hawkers, and the like. The meetings are held in the evenings—the only time the landless are not working, for landless laborers work seven days a week. Meetings go on until midnight, with people arriving at different times throughout the evening, depending on their work and other commitments. During this phase, the animateur continues to make rounds of visits during the day, building trust, learning more background information, and continuing to research the problems together with the landless.

The initial meetings are taken up with story-telling. Each person stands up and tells his or her story. Many of these stories the animateur has heard already—through various informal encounters in the first phase—but this collective story-telling is important. It is only through telling each other their stories that people begin to recognize the *commonality* of their experience—that they have all lost their land in a similar way and that they are facing the same forms of victimization, manipulation and exploitation by the landed classes.

Almost all of the stories are about money-lending—how a moneylender gives money, takes back an exorbitant interest, and eventually grabs the debtor's land. This is the common experience of every landless person.

These stories are recorded—on paper and/or a tape recorder—so they can be referred back to from time to time. Often the recording is done during the informal encounters in the initial phase when, it is felt, a more accurate account is given. Once people come together as a group, formalities come in and some people are too shy to expose their whole life story in front of their fellow villagers.

Making the Scenario

But this is not always the case. In some groups every person wants to tell a story and in great detail. Then the problem comes of which story to select as the basis for the play. Usually the animateur encourages the group members to make one story out of the common elements of different stories—losing land to a moneylender, the economic demands of marriage with its dowry, being cheated on paper contracts because of illiteracy. The more lively and unique experiences also get woven into the play. The group itself works out the story-line, arguing about the focus, basis of conflict, and the climax.

The animateur attempts to be as non-directive as possible, leaving the scenario-making to the group members. Sometimes they get so emotionally involved that the drama becomes a six-hour production. Then the animateur intervenes and asks how they might make the story more concise: "Suppose you only have one hour to tell this story to a man who will leave this place in one hour's time. How would you narrate your life's experience of fifty years in one hour? What would be the main elements?" After that the animateur gets them to list the major events in the main character's life much as follows: "My father died, his land was fragmented, I received half of a *biga* of land, my mother came to live with me, I got married and we had six kids, our debts grew, I borrowed from the moneylender, my land was taken away from me, I started to work as a landless laborer, my child fell sick and died. . . ." The group then makes these major incidents the story-line of the drama, and all the minor happenings get chopped out.

Theatre by the people

Deepening the Analysis

In the course of developing the play, the animateur encourages the landless to develop their own thinking, to analyze why they are poor and downtrodden, to make the connections among moneylenders, the local courts, the village council, and the bureaucracy.

The analysis is important. As Bappa and Etherton[67] have shown:

> *Those who are oppressed already know of their oppression: and a play which delineates this oppression superficially tells them nothing which they do not know already. They know too that there never is a simple solution to their problems: and a play which claims to have the answers is not really to be trusted.*

The animateur stimulates the landless to analyze their experiences through questions, through insistently challenging assumptions and conventional explanations of reality to get at the underlying structures and contradictions, to highlight the discrepancy between their expressed views about reality and their daily experience of it. If one of the stories is on the issue of dowry, the animateur might ask them who benefits from this practice. When they analyze it, they discover that marriage has become a business and women a mere commodity. The whole enterprise primarily benefits the moneylenders who loan people money to pay the dowry.

The animateur does not preach or impose pre-digested analyses or use big words like imperialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and class struggle, but lets them discover the meaning of these words and concepts in trying to understand their own reality. One group wanted to make a play about the deep tube-wells that were being introduced into their village. Instead of branding this "an imperialist scheme devised by the multinationals to control Third World production," the animateur simply asked a few questions: "Who controls this new technology? Why do they control it? Why is it being introduced? Who benefits?" This was enough to stimulate the group's own thinking. They discovered that control over this new factor of production had been monopolized by the richer farmers in the area and that the introduction of this new technology had in fact precipitated a new power structure within the village. What could have been a new means of livelihood controlled by the landless had become, once again, the monopoly of the local elite. They also began to recognize who ultimately benefitted from the tube-wells, the multinational who produces them. The landless laborers began to understand "imperialism" not as a Marxist slogan manufactured in Dakha, but as a specific relationship connecting production in their village to a specific multinational corporation.

Another play showed, through a simple but real story, how Japanese imperialism was impoverishing and killing people in Bangladesh. The story was about "2-in-1," a Japanese radio/tape recorder which has been imported into Bangladesh in huge quantities and which has become a status symbol in the rural areas. (Bangladesh has a free-port, import-oriented economy which is linked with businesses in Hong Kong and Singapore.)

In the story a man threatened to divorce his wife unless his father-in-law gave him a 2-in-1. To buy the 2-in-1 the father-in-law sold his remaining piece of land, thus becoming landless. In spite of the gift the man divorced his wife, . . . and soon after the woman committed suicide.

Improvising and Rehearsing the Drama

Once a story-line is agreed on, the group starts to improvise the drama. There is need for very little direction and the animateur limits advice to a few points on theatrical technique—how to stand on the stage, how to project one's voice, "showing" actions rather than talking about them.

Once the landless see they can do it, they get on with the work and the animateur sits back and becomes an appreciative audience. The landless have a wealth of stories and experiences to draw on and they work these into their roles and dialogues with great skill. What is lacking in "artistic polish" is far outweighed by the exuberance and wit of their acting, their obvious joy in performing, the genuineness of their expression, and their commitment to the ideas and experiences they are communicating. They love playing the oppressor and have a great insight into his character and motivation. Once they get over the initial fear of being victimized, they portray him with great satire, bringing out all his mannerisms and idiosyncracies.

The problem, if anything, is not how to get them going but how to contain their enthusiasm once they get started. The animateur's job is to help them to be more selective, to decide on the essential points for each scene and to cut out some of the extraneous detail.

By this stage the group has become very interested and involved and the initial reserve has gone. The group members take on the responsibility of finding a place to hold rehearsals and to light them. Everyone begins coming at the right time for rehearsals and the morale is high.

Organizing the Performance and Follow-Up

Once the play is ready, the group publicizes it through word-of-mouth and performs it in front of the whole village in a public place. A day or two later all the groups (from the four villages) come together to a common place to present their plays to each other. By this stage so much interest has been

67. S. Bappa and M. Ehterton, "Third World Popular Theatre: Voice of the Oppressed," *Commonwealth* 25(4): 126-30.

generated that people from each village come with their troupe to the final performance.

After the final performance each animateur spends two or three days doing "follow-up," discussing the issues of the play with the landless, evaluating the whole experience with them, and recording their views. After encouraging them to continue with the drama work on their own and to form their own organization, the animateur stresses the importance of building unity, of overcoming the petty conflicts and quarrels among themselves, and forming an organization to defend their interests.

Finally, the animateur exchanges addresses with them and leaves. Often the animateurs receive letters from the village, giving their feedback on the workshop and describing what has subsequently happened in the village. The animateur maintains contact with the village group, through correspondence and occasional visits, but tries on the whole to stimulate their independence and self-reliance. For this purpose groups in the same area are encouraged to maintain contact and support each other.

The Landlords Retaliate

Changes in the village or even talked-about changes do not take place without disturbing the status quo. Once the landless start meeting together as a group there is immediate suspicion. Once it becomes clear that this is not some whimsical diversion but a serious examination of what is happening in the village the landlords intervene.

Even at the initial stage some of the landlords spread rumors and try to sway the landless against the animateur. When the process reaches the rehearsal state this opposition becomes even stronger. In a number of cases the landlords have sent thugs to break up the rehearsals and threaten the group members.

In one case the group had developed a story on a local moneylender who was so influential that he could manipulate local politicians on the village council and local officials of the bureaucracy. When he heard about the play, he sent his pawns to stop it. The village council chairman came to the rehearsal and accused the group of manufacturing lies. The group defended the authenticity of the story and refused to be brow-beaten. Later the chairman sent some *goondas* (thugs) to break up the rehearsal. The *goondas* threatened to beat the performers and most of the performers went home without finishing the rehearsal.

The animateur and a few of the performers stayed behind to confront the *goondas*. In the end the animateur had to use his class position to fight back:

> *Look, we come from Dakha [The goondas: 'We don't care. We'll not even spare you!'] We know many things and if you touch us you'll be in trouble. You may be running this local show but we know bigger people—for example the inspector-general. If you bring in your local big-shots, we'll call in our big-shots.*

This counter-threat seemed to work and the confrontation ended without violence.

The next day the group had to find another rehearsal space. They appealed to other people in the area who were opposed to the moneylender and council chairman. A meeting place was provided and the rehearsals continued. The council chairman and moneylender were angry but could do nothing. The rehearsals continued—with a new scene being added to show the collusion between the moneylender and the local officials—and the group gave its performance without being stopped.

In another case the local power elite tried to sabotage the final performance of a play. The play in this case was about the local bank manager who had been taking 40 percent of the loans given for agriculture as a bribe. When the bank manager heard about the play, he paid some *goondas* to stop it. They went to the performers' houses and threatened the actors, saying: "If you put on this play we'll not spare you. Why are you wasting your time with these people from Dakha? They'll leave tomorrow and where will you be? This play won't give you food to live, . . . so why all this nuisance?"

In spite of these threats the landless were determined to go ahead with it. They said, "This is our chance to speak our own truth." So they continued the rehearsals and told everyone in the area to come to the final performance which was to be held at the school. The bank manager then pressured the headmaster to stop the group from using the school field for the performance, but by this time it was too late. All of the villagers from the surrounding area had gathered. When they heard that the performance was being prevented, a huge discussion developed and the actors explained everything. The discussion itself raised the major points of the play—the bribery, corruption, use of *goondas* to threaten people, collusion among local officials, the various attempts to stop the play. In a way there was no need for a play, for the discussion had served the purpose, making people aware of the bank manager's corruption and manipulations and the need to do something about it.

The crowd was so incensed that they insisted that the play be given and demanded that the headteacher provide the school's electricity to light the performance. People kept coming and eventually over 3,000 people had gathered. The headmaster grew afraid and at 8 p.m. he finally gave in. The light connection was provided, a stage was quickly erected, and the performance was given without further opposition.

During the arguments between the group and the bank manager in the school headmaster's office, the animateur surreptitiously taped the conversation. When the bank manager discovered that all of his threats had been recorded on tape, he became afraid and tried to bribe the animateur, first offering 1,000 rupees, then 2,000, then 5,000, and finally 10,000. This further case of attempted bribery convinced the group to go ahead with the performance.

Immediate Impact of the Workshop

What has been the effect of the workshops? The most significant impact has been the change in people's consciousness. Before the workshops many of the landless were resigned to their situation, explaining their impoverishment as the result of bad luck or the will of Allah. They saw no contradiction in their society. They were on the whole passive and skeptical about making any change in their lives.

Once they produced a play and found their lives portrayed in these plays, they became much more conscious of the exploitation and victimization which was keeping them down. More than that, they began to recognize that they could do something about the exploitation and manipulation if they could get organized. Part of this growing awareness was a heightened self-confidence, an awareness that they could do something—

they could make a play and they could also organize to make demands and fight against oppression.

In a few cases the workshop resulted in some immediate action. For instance, one workshop was held in a fishing community whose livelihood had been destroyed by the damming of a river further upstream. The fishermen decided to make their play about the land created by the silting of the river. This land had been grabbed by the larger landowners in the area, even though there is a policy in Bangladesh that this kind of land should be given to fishermen. The play inspired the fishermen to get organized and to occupy the land. There was lots of resistance from the landlords but in the end the fishermen prevailed and some of the large landowners had to leave the area.

The Landlords Try to Co-Opt the Process

Instant action, however, is rare. The workshop is only two weeks long and this is only enough time to get organization-building started. While the experience does open their eyes to the possibility of change and the importance of organizing, it is too short to solidify a group. Once the animateur leaves there is a power vacuum which the landlords attempt to occupy. The landless remain heavily dependent on them—for jobs and loans—and this dependence can be manipulated.

In a few cases, the same landlords who have fought against the workshops become the groups' new patrons once the animateurs go. They offer to pay the groups and because many of the landless are unemployed or have little income, it is difficult to refuse these offers. In this way the landlords gain control over the landless' weapon and turn it around to serve their interests. The groups stop performing plays on their own stories and put on plays commissioned by and paid for by the landlords, plays on themes of romance or on projects which fail "because the workers are lazy" or having other victim-blaming themes.

In other cases landless drama groups have been hired by government agencies for short-term contract work as propaganda agents for government. These plays exhort peasants to "plan their families" and "build latrines" (as if these victim-blaming measures will on their own without structural changes transform the livelihood of landless laborers) and to "participate in self-help projects on canal building" (the landless laborers do the work and the landlords, who can make use of the irrigation canals, get the benefits).

What Comes Next?

Over the past year Aranyak has run twenty-five workshops along these lines in over 100 villages. This experience has demonstrated both the potential and the limitations of the new approach. The shift from performing to animation has not only magnified the impact of their work, reaching out to much larger numbers, but it has also transformed the quality of the interaction.

Up until a year ago Aranyak put on political plays *for* the people—imposing their own understanding or perspective of the world, relating to people in a didactic or "banking" way, and limiting their encounter to one-off performances. Now they are working *with* the people, building up the people's capacity to put on plays and do their own analysis of their situation, and starting a more sustained process of conscientization and organizing.

The limitations are those of a process which is still being developed. A single workshop is too short to build a self-reliant landless organization. It needs follow-up. Aranyak is now working on a follow-up program for these fledgling groups:

- encouraging groups in the same area to come together on a regular basis to exchange experiences, skills, and ideas among themselves;
- organizing regional and national festivals and workshops in which landless groups can come together and plan the development of a people's theatre movement;
- building contacts with other teams of animateurs working in the villages like Proshika.

One of Aranyak's main concerns is to mobilize the landless without building a dependence on Aranyak. As a middle-class, urban-based group they recognize the limitations of their organization and the vacillating potential of their team members who may lose interest and drop out. They are also aware of the possibility of their taking a leadership position within the landless movement and later, because of their class position, working against the interests of the movement. By promoting horizontal contacts and mutual support among the landless groups and by encouraging the development of landless animateurs drawn from the groups they hope to avoid this dependence. As MECATE (the Nicaraguan peasant theatre movement) is doing, they hope eventually to have the bulk of animation work carried out by landless laborers.

In a sense their work is just starting. They now realize that to make any significant impact they need to sustain an animation program for ten years or more. At the same time they recognize the real dangers and obstacles that lie ahead, including the victimization and repression of cultural groups. Finally, the links between the village-based work and the bigger social and political events of the country remain to be worked out. ★

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ROSS KIDD

Popular theatre and popular struggle in Kenya: the story of Kamiriithu

Popular theatre in the Third World often claims to be a tool of protest and struggle and a means of social transformation, but rarely does it challenge the status quo in a significant way. Too often it becomes as marginalised as the peasants and workers it represents, with little real impact on the society as a whole.

One significant exception has been the popular theatre work of the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre (KCECC), a peasant and worker-controlled organisation in rural Kenya. Its voicing of protest against injustice and corruption and its championing of workers' rights and popular expression have made it a major target for official repression.

In 1977 the performance of its first drama, a community production in which over 200 villagers participated, was stopped and one of the organisers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, imprisoned. Early in 1982 its second drama was stopped, its licence as a community organisation withdrawn, and the community-built 2,000-seat theatre smashed to the ground.

Why would peasant-produced dramas call down the wrath of the Kenyan government? Why has a programme which has significantly reduced illiteracy and alcoholism, increased employment opportunities, fostered a people's culture, and raised the awareness and participation of villagers been suppressed? Why has Kamiriithu made such

Ross Kidd is a doctoral student at the University of Toronto, who is making a study of popular theatre and social movements in the Third World.

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a powerful effect on Kenyan society, whereas popular theatre in other parts of Africa has remained ephemeral and insignificant? In order to understand this we must take a look at its history.

Domination and resistance

KCECC was formed in 1976, but it is an outgrowth of the continuing resistance by peasants and workers against foreign domination which has gone on for the last five centuries. It is an extension of their struggle against invasion, slavery, forced labour, alienation of their land, heavy taxation with only token representation, exploitative working conditions and cultural genocide.

This struggle started back in the 1500s with the invasions of Arab slave traders and later Portuguese colonisers. Each of these invasions was beaten back, and it took four centuries of fighting before colonialism – under the British – prevailed. One of the last hold-outs were the Kalenjin, who under Koitalel put up a fierce struggle from 1895 to 1905 before going down to defeat.

Once the military conquest was complete, the colonial authorities seized 8½m acres of the most fertile land in the Central Highlands of Kenya, turned it over to white settlers, and herded the displaced Africans on to reserves. Then, through forced labour (initially), taxation and a ban on African production of certain cash crops, they forced the Africans to work (and squat) on the European estates. They also introduced a labour control system requiring every African to carry a pass.

Coralled in the reserves, deprived of their land, forced into working for the settlers and humiliated through racial discrimination, the Africans fought back. They formed nationalist organisations to pressure for reforms through petitions, marches, demonstrations, etc. Each of these challenges was suppressed, often brutally. (For example, the 1922 demonstration protesting the arrest of nationalist leader Harry Thuku was put down through gunfire, killing over 150 demonstrators.) The organisations were banned and the leaders detained, but new movements arose to take their place. In the 1930s and 1940s much of the nationalist energy went into supporting direct lobbying by Jomo Kenyatta in Britain. Resistance also took a cultural form. As a defence against the colonial conditioning and cultural repression of the mission schools, Kenyans developed out of their own resources a whole movement of independent schools in which their own history and cultural heritage was taught. (In the 1950s the school population numbered as many as 62,000 students.) As a vehicle of protest and a means of organising, songs, dances, drama and poetry were developed on nationalist themes.[1] While the Europeans created an escapist, enclave culture in the segregated theatre-houses of Nairobi, the young

Dedan Kimathi, later to become the leader of the liberation struggle, started the open-air Gichamu theatre movement as a means of rallying support for the nationalist cause.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s it became increasingly clear that the reformist option was closed. For a while, educational work and strikes replaced petitions and appeals, but even these challenges were suppressed and the leaders imprisoned. A militant group of workers and peasants – the Forty Group, which later came to be known as Mau Mau – took over the nationalist initiative. Eschewing the reformist or constitutional approach of the middle-class nationalists, they developed a broad-based mass organisation and launched an armed struggle with revolutionary aims. Through an oath of commitment and dedication they bound each freedom fighter to the goals of driving the British out of Kenya and overturning the system of foreign domination and capitalist exploitation.[2]

The landless labourers, small farmers, squatters and urban workers who made up the ranks of the guerrilla army stood to gain the most from a real revolution – one which gave them back not only their country, but also their land, basic rights, decent working conditions and a greater say in their country's running. As the war developed, it took on the form of civil war with much of the fighting pitting the uneducated and landless peasants (the forest fighters) against the educated, land-owning classes (the 'home guards' and 'loyalists'), many of whom sided with the colonialists.

This landed class had developed through mission education and the colonial civil service, through the benefits derived by chiefs who collaborated with the colonial regime and through the economic opportunities which opened up in the 1940s and 1950s for a minority of the African population on the reserves. Once the colonial regime recognised the power of the peasants' and workers' movements, they moved quickly to strengthen the position of the landed middle class as a buffer against the radicalism of the popular movements. A major tool for this was a land consolidation and registration programme, carried out in the late 1950s (while the freedom fighters were in detention), which legitimised the occupation and ownership of large blocks of land by the richer African farmers, many of whom were colonial collaborators. As a result, over half of all Kikuyus became landless and more than half of the land was given to less than 2 per cent of the population.[3]

By the end of the 1950s, many of the forest fighters had been arrested and detained and their leaders (for example Kimathi) killed. However, their determined resistance had made an impact: the pressure forced the British to accept 'constitutional' or 'flag' independence. Working with the bourgeois nationalists who, under Kenyatta, returned to lead the constitutional process, the colonial

regime worked out a formula for independence which reassured foreign capital and the European settlers and betrayed the peasants and workers who had fought for revolutionary change.

So, on 12 December 1963, Kenya got its 'constitutional' independence. In spite of a decade of armed struggle and two centuries of militant resistance to colonial invasion and rule, the political settlement left the economy firmly under foreign control. The new ruling class entered into an alliance with foreign capital as the junior partner in a neo-colonial arrangement. Multinational capital moved into Kenya in a big way, taking the dominant economic position formerly occupied by the white settlers. Power and wealth became more and more concentrated in the hands of a small ruling clique of Kenyans. As a member of parliament, J.M. Kariuki, put it – Kenya became a country of ten millionaires and ten million beggars. (Soon after making this statement in March 1975, Kariuki was assassinated in the streets of Nairobi.)

The richer farmers, the only ones with access to credit, reaped the benefits of the schemes to buy back land from the European settlers. This landed middle class also used their newly acquired power to gain control over the agricultural sector, trade and small business.

The peasants and workers, who had done all the fighting in the forests, lost out. They remained on the whole landless, poor, subject to the same exploitative working conditions and without an effective means of political expression and participation. Trade unions lost their right to strike and their independence of state control. The opposition party was harassed and finally banned. Those who spoke out publicly against the ruling clique's unbridled corruption and concentration of wealth were detained or, in a few cases, assassinated. Ethnic loyalties were manipulated to build division among the working class. (The most cynical example of this was the reintroduction of oathing on an ethnic basis). Symbols of traditional culture such as *Harambee* (All pull together) were used to divert peasant energies into ethnic concerns, to diffuse class tensions, and to paper over the destruction of the peasants' and workers' movements.

This is the context in which the KCECC came into being.

Kamiriithu: a place of struggle

The Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre was started in a place with a long tradition of struggle. In fact, its existence as a village was a direct result of the liberation struggle.

Kamiriithu lay in the middle of the area of greatest conflict during the liberation war and many people from the area had joined the forest fighters. Because of its strategic location, the British decided to use the site as an 'emergency village' – one of the earliest uses of the 'protected

hamlet strategy' later employed in Vietnam and Rhodesia. The object of this mass incarceration was to instil a 'culture of fear' and to break the freedom fighters' base of support.[4] The villagers' own homes were burnt down and they were driven into Kamiriithu, which was a kind of fortified concentration camp in which all had to do forced labour. Later, in 1957, the village was made into a permanent settlement and while the forest fighters languished in colonial detention camps, land consolidation was carried out, ensuring that the land was mainly deeded to the richer farmers, many of whom were colonial collaborators ('home guards' or 'loyalists'). Kamiriithu became a labour reserve, supplying workers to the tea and coffee plantations in the nearby area (the former White Highlands) and to the industries in Limuru and Nairobi (32 kilometres away). Both plantations and industries are largely owned by multinationals, the most prominent being Brooke Bond (which runs the large tea estates) and Bata (which owns Limuru's largest industry, the shoe factory).

Today, Kamiriithu has a population of over 10,000 people. It is partly a 'dormitory village' with villagers commuting each day to their work-places. Some of the villagers live on the plantations or industrial estates, but once they are no longer productive or have been fired, they are forced to return to Kamiriithu.

Those who are not employed in the plantations or in the Limuru factories eke out a living through self-employment and/or casual labour, working for richer farmers, selling vegetables at the Limuru market, brewing and selling beer and, in some cases, engaging in petty crime or prostitution. There is no security of employment: each worker competes with many others for the few jobs available. Even when they get employment, the wages are kept very low because of the large pool of unemployed workers.

Many of the villagers are squatters who lost their land through white settlement or through the land consolidation of the late 1950s. Some have been forced to sell their small plots because of failure to repay bank loans without an adequate source of income. Those without their own land live in temporary structures built on footpaths and are constantly faced with the threat of eviction.

The village is not only a labour reserve, but also a 'rural slum'. Villagers have to cope on their own without basic services – water, medical facilities, sanitation, street lighting, and so on. In Swahili such rural slums were called '*Shauri Yako*', meaning 'It's up to you'. Thus, the slogan of self-reliance is used to blame the slum-dwellers for their poverty and landlessness, to absolve the state and the foreign corporations (which benefit from this cheap pool of labour) from the responsibility of providing adequate services and jobs, and to promote the ideology of competitive individualism, that 'getting ahead' is a matter of individual effort. Whenever peasants make demands for basic

services, they are told to organise their own self-help effort or *Harambee* – in effect, an exercise in collecting contributions from and praising Kenyan businessmen and rich farmers who have benefited from exploiting the peasants.

The only token service to this community of 10,000 people was a community centre – and even that had been built through community effort. During the liberation war the colonial authorities had set aside a four-acre plot of land for 'social purposes'. When no assistance from the colonial government materialised, the village youth built a shelter and used it to meet and talk and perform traditional dances. After independence in 1963, the centre was converted into a vocational training centre for young people. With the help of the Kiambu Area Council, the villagers built a three-roomed wooden building in which carpentry classes were held. This training programme was abandoned in 1973 when the Area Councils were abolished. Funds available for village-level social services dried up and the centre fell into disuse.

As bureaucratic neglect, unemployment and insecurity deepened, the villagers decided to revive the centre and use it to do something about their worsening situation. The initiative represented a convergence of interests. On one hand, there were the peasants and workers who had seen their hopes go up in smoke as the real meaning of 'Uhuru' became transparent. In spite of independence, their life remained the same – no land to cultivate or on which to build a house; insecurity of employment and exploitation in their workplaces; their own culture denigrated, tokenised and supplanted by the new foreign consumer culture.

On the other hand, there were a number of intellectuals (teachers, university staff and civil servants) who lived in the Kamiriithu area and who shared the feeling of betrayal about the nationalist struggle. Many of them had been involved in protests against foreign control of Kenya's economic, political and cultural life and had begun to recognise the importance of working with the peasants and workers in this struggle.

Foremost among them was novelist and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the head of the University of Nairobi's literature department. He had played a leading role in popularising Kenya's history of resistance and had organised a number of struggles against the monopoly position held by foreign culture in Kenya, for example, the domination of Broadway musicals and West End plays at the National Theatre and the pre-eminence given to English rather than African languages at the University of Nairobi. In his writings he had made a powerful case for developing a national culture out of the creative energies of peasants and workers.[5] When he took a university theatre group to Kamiriithu in 1976 (such tours of the travelling theatre programme were organised annually), he recognised the possibilities for

putting this into practice. For many of the villagers it was their first exposure to drama, and it sparked great interest.

Another to emerge as a key organiser and supporter of the KCECC was Ngugi wa Mirii, an adult educator and research worker employed by the University of Nairobi. He had become disillusioned with the subservient role played by adult education in the Kenyan social system and had developed a deep interest in the radical teaching methodology of Paulo Freire as a means of transforming Kenyan society.

At the initial community meeting to revive the centre the response was enthusiastic, and after a few more planning meetings a programme was agreed on and an organising structure established. A subcommittee was formed for each activity of the centre (fund-raising, adult education, cultural activity, and so on) and a central committee to which all the subcommittees reported. Ngugi wa Thiong'o was elected chairman of the cultural committee and Ngugi wa Mirii the chairman of the education committee.

The KCECC started with what seemed like conventional aims: to provide a meeting-place for the villagers and a programme of integrated rural development – adult education, study groups, cultural activity, economic production and health. What distinguished it, however, was its structure and process – the peasants and workers were in control (rather than government bureaucrats or the middle class) and it was run in a highly collective fashion. The villagers made the decisions and each decision was taken on the basis of extensive discussions among the membership. As one member put it: 'Nobody can make a decision without consulting the people, because every decision affects the people'.[6] Even academic writing on the Kamiriithu experience (by the two Ngugi's) had to be cleared first with the executive committee. As a result of this commitment to work collectively, agreements represented real commitments and the villagers regarded the centre as their own organisation – they had ultimate control.

The committee work itself represented an educational process: peasants and workers discussed their problems and aspirations and examined ways of working together to solve the problems. Each decision was discussed on the basis of frank criticism and self-criticism and in terms of its overall effect – whether it served the interests of the membership, whether it countered or reinforced negative aspects of Kenyan society. For example, during the rehearsals for the community drama, the issue of beer-drinking came up; after some discussion, a motion was passed demanding that people be sober when coming to the centre. Another issue which surfaced was outsiders taking photographs of the performance; members decided to ban photographs since they felt they had been exploited by camera-clicking tourists in the past.

Learning to read the world

The first activity taken up was adult literacy. Many of the peasants felt humiliated by their lack of literacy and regarded learning to read as a priority. Ngugi wa Mirii offered to teach one of the classes and to train others as teachers, using the Freirean literacy approach. Two hundred people came to participate in the classes, but due to the limited resources, it was only possible to accommodate fifty-six – in the first phase – those with no previous education at all. This was no conventional literacy programme! Unlike traditional literacy work, which conditions people to accept the structure of inequality and their compliant role in it, the Kamiriithu programme encouraged people to question what was happening to them, to overcome the rationalisations and myths provided by society, and to begin to understand why they were landless and poor. In Freire's term, they learned 'to read the world'.

Instead of depending on the teachers to plan and run the programme, the illiterates themselves took charge of it. They took all the decisions, including the recruitment of teachers and deciding on the rate of pay. They went out, talked to people in the community and identified a number of people who they felt could do the teaching. Where else in the world do the students recruit the teachers? They also designed their own study programme. The literacy committee, which was made up of peasants and workers, met for four months before the literacy programme started in order to decide on the content for the course. They analysed the situation in Kamiriithu – its problems and underlying causes – and examined the history of changes in Kenya. With this as a context, they looked at the curricula and primers of the development agencies. They found them wanting.

The 'functional literacy' primers provided technical information on such matters as agriculture, health, nutrition and family planning, but failed to address the key issues of the villagers. Knowing how to use modern methods of agriculture seemed pointless when the peasants had no land and could not afford the fertiliser and insecticides. Reading slogans about health and nutrition seemed equally futile when they had no land on which to grow food, nor access to water or sanitation facilities. These texts not only ignored the peasants' own knowledge and experience of surviving in a difficult environment, but blamed the peasants for their poverty, rather than exposing the political-economic structures which produced the inequality, landlessness and impoverishment.

What was needed was a totally new curriculum and materials, and whereas Freire's 'curriculum' approach depended on the skills of a team of professionals – including a linguist, educator and sociologist – to make the analysis and prepare the codifications, the Kamiriithu literacy curriculum was constructed by the peasants and workers themselves. They decided to base their curriculum on the fundamental

problems of the village – landlessness, unemployment, low wages, insecurity of tenure, lack of services, lack of access to firewood and water, high prices for food and transport, and the effects of poverty, such as heavy drinking, prostitution and crime. For each of these problems they prepared a 'code' – a picture, a story, a song, or a short skit which could be used to stimulate discussion on the problem.

The discussions made up the heart of the literacy sessions and provided the content for the reading and writing exercises which followed each discussion. People explored the roots of their problems and discovered the connections between problems. For example, in a discussion on alcoholism, people said that drinking is a source of income for Kenyan businessmen, yet for the squatters it is a way of dealing with the frustrations and insecurity of landlessness and unemployment. The peasants also began to recognise how their history of domination and struggle shaped their present set of circumstances.

The results of the programme were equally unconventional. Unlike most literacy programmes, in which there is a heavy drop-out and minimal growth in literacy skill, the Kamiriithu programme had no drop-outs and by the end of the six-month period the fifty-six participants could all read and write. Many of the students had even started to write their life histories.

With the interest created through the literacy programme, the Centre then debated what to do next. They wanted to continue with an adult education programme – but they wanted a medium which would involve everyone in the village. Drama suited the purpose: the new literates were familiar with it, having used it in the form of role-playing and short skits in the literacy classes and having seen the plays put on by the university travelling theatre group. Drama would keep the new literates involved and the script, which would focus on their lives and history, would be an excellent text for follow-on reading. Drama would also help to spread the analysis and thinking to the whole village and create a forum for community discussion. The process of creating the play would involve the whole community and, it was hoped, might provide a source of employment and a means of raising income for the Centre's programme.

The literacy committee and the cultural committee held several meetings to discuss the content for the play. Then the two Ngugi's were commissioned to write a draft playscript, drawing on the discussions of the two committees and the literacy classes, plus the autobiographies written by the new literates. The script was to 'reflect the people's experiences, concerns, aspirations, grievances, etc., and the problems and contradictions in the village, using the words and expressions of the people'.[7]

Once the draft was produced, it was reviewed and amended by the literacy students and the KCECC executive committee. Then it was

presented and discussed at a number of public readings. In these sessions, which went on for two months, the script was read out, discussed and criticised. Where the analysis was felt to be inadequate, the community suggested changes. In one case, for example, they demanded 'a more rigorous questioning of the acquisitive values which had come with western culture'.[8] In effect, it became the community's play. Everyone felt that he or she had contributed to it:

> This play was not a one-man's act. It was the result of co-operation among many people. For instance, the whole *Gitiiro* opera sequence in the play was written word for word at the dictation of an illiterate peasant woman at Kamiriithu.[9]

The script-finalising process was the means through which the villagers re-appropriated their own culture.

> People saw that the script or content of the play reflected their lives and history, and so they appropriated it – they added to it, altered it, until when they came to perform it, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was part of their lives.[10]

The play *'Ngaahika Ndeenda'* (I will marry when I want) talks about the people of Kamiriithu – their lives, history, struggles, songs, experiences, hopes and concerns. It exposes through satire the manipulation of religion, the greed and corruption of the ruling classes, the treachery of colonial collaborators ('loyalists' or 'home guards'), and the exploitative practices of the multinationals. The central character of the play (Kigunda) is a poor farm labourer employed by a rich farmer and former colonial collaborator (Kioi). Kigunda is swindled out of his small plot of land by Kioi, aided and abetted by the manipulations of religion. His daughter, impregnated by Kioi's son, is forced to drop out of school and to start working on a coffee plantation. She falls in love with a worker from the Bata Shoe Company and resists the men who come to seduce her, saying, 'I will marry when I want'. At the end of the play the worker organises a strike at the Bata Shoe Factory and the daughter leads a struggle against the multinational owner of the coffee plantation.

One of the play's particular strengths is its songs, resurrected from the Mau Mau struggle. They reinforce the central message: that the only option of the peasants and workers is to work together to transform their country and free it from foreign domination. The songs helped to bridge the generations in the community, providing a chance for the older people to teach the younger about the liberation struggle and the songs created during that struggle. Indeed, the process of collecting these songs was a form of oral history research – not the usual one-to-one encounters of interviewer and informant, but the whole community collectively rediscovering their past, each person

reinforcing or correcting the views of others.

Once the script had been agreed on, a group of actors was selected – again the decision was taken by the community – and the rehearsals started. The interest was very high and everyone pitched up for the rehearsals, which took place in the evenings and weekends. Some times as many as 300 people came to the open clearing which served as the rehearsal space – to take part in the acting and singing, to join in the discussions, to suggest songs to reinforce the message, to direct the dance movements, to watch and enjoy. Working together on this ambitious production provided a powerful experience of 'community', of collective effort.

More and more villagers joined the production as new aspects were added. A women's choir was formed, led by the 50-year-old woman who had composed the opera sequence in the play. A group of young unemployed men and a few workers from the Bata shoe company, who had already shown an interest in instrumental music, were encouraged to form an orchestra to provide songs for the play and music for the interval. Another group took on the job of preparing costumes and props. A further group was formed to make food for the participants. Each of these groups worked separately on their own aspect of the production and reported regularly to the executive committee. Sessions were also held in which the different parts of the performance were integrated. Finally about 200 villagers took part in the production.

The theatre production became the central experience of the community. Outside the rehearsals people took on the identities of their characters in the play and referred to situations in the play in arguments and conversations. They rediscovered 'their collective strength – that they could accomplish anything – even transform the whole village and their lives without a single Harambee of charity'. Their self-confidence grew and there was a significant decline in drinking and crime:

> By the time we came to perform it was generally understood and accepted that drunkenness was not allowed at the centre. For a village which was known for drunken brawls, it was a remarkable achievement of our collective self-discipline that we never had a single incident of fighting or a single drunken disruption for all the six months of public rehearsals and performances.[11]

The whole effort unleashed a wealth of talent and demystified the creative process.

> Before the play was over we received three scripts of plays in the Gikuyu language, two written by a worker, and one by a primary school teacher. One unemployed youth, who had tried to commit suicide four times because he thought his life was useless, now suddenly discovered that he had a tremendous voice which, when raised in song, kept its listeners on dramatic tenterhooks.[12]

The Harambee of sweat: building the people's theatre

Perhaps the biggest achievement of the community was the construction of a huge open-air theatre. During the initial public readings of the play the idea of a village theatre was raised and the community decided to go ahead with it. Although expensive to build, it was seen as important to the presentation of the play and a way of making money for the KCECC.

The question then was: how to pay for it? This started one of the most important discussions of the KCECC. People spoke vehemently against the idea of holding a 'Harambee' rally in which 'big people' pledged contributions to the project. They felt this was a vulgarisation of the real Harambee – one in which the whole community joined in a collective physical effort. They said that the new Harambee was just a platform for self-praise, a chance for the *wabenzi** to show off their wealth, which had, anyway, been stolen from the peasants and workers. Having been exploited by the 'big people', the peasants and workers did not want to go begging them for funds to support their project. They also rejected the idea of applying for funds from an overseas donor, which they felt might compromise them and introduce another form of dependence.

They proposed instead a 'Harambee of sweat': every villager would contribute ideas and labour and materials to the building of the theatre. The main source of funding came from an advance payment for the playscript – a legitimate form of Harambee in the villagers' view, since they had all participated in the play's making. The weekends were set aside for this community project and a team of young men was selected to take the lead in designing and building the theatre. Working from a model based on matchsticks and using local materials, the community constructed a 2,000-seat theatre on the plot beside the community centre. When it was finished, it was favourably compared with the National Theatre in Nairobi and praised as the true national theatre of Kenya – a theatre built by the people, accessible to the people, dealing with their issues and speaking to them in their language and idiom.**

On 2 October 1977 the play opened. It attracted immediate attention. People came from neighbouring villages and, once the word

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* Literally, the Mercedes Benz tribe: a pejorative term for the Kenyan bourgeoisie.

** The use of Gikuyu rather than English represented a radical shift in Ngugi's writing and commitment from addressing a small, English-speaking audience to working with and being influenced by the peasants and workers.

spread, from all over the country. Peasants and workers sat alongside Nairobi businessmen and civil servants – but, according to one correspondent, it was the peasants and workers who laughed and enjoyed themselves the most. It was their lives, their story being enacted on the stage, the first time in Kenya's history that 'a play of the people [was] being acted for the people by the people'.[13] It ran to audiences of up to 2,000 each Saturday and Sunday. After seven weeks of extremely popular performances, the inevitable happened – it was banned.

The production was too threatening – the ruling class:

> were mortally scared of peasants and workers who showed no fear in their eyes; workers and peasants who showed no submissiveness in their bearing; workers and peasants who proclaimed their history with unashamed pride and who denounced its betrayal with courage.[14]

The District Commissioner in the area announced that he was withdrawing the licence for the play on grounds that it fomented strife between classes. The KCECC fought back, through their supporters in the press and in the Kenyan middle class who turned it into a national issue. People flooded the newspapers with protest letters and widened the debate, bringing out the issue of foreign control of Kenyan cultural institutions. When the government saw that the KCECC and its supporters were not backing down, they struck again. On 31 December 1977, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was detained.

The resulting tension and fear did have an effect. For a number of weeks villagers stopped coming to the centre and waited to see what would happen. But even though their spirits temporarily sagged, they remained convinced of the importance of what they were doing and proud of their achievement. The repression clarified the nature of class forces – i.e., those who supported the villagers' struggle (for survival, political rights and freedom of expression) and those who worked to undermine it – and increased their determination to continue.

The authorities underestimated the villagers' strength; they did not understand the broad-based nature of the villagers' organisation. They thought that by detaining Ngugi they would break the KCECC. But instead of falling apart, the Centre increased its activities, showing that it was not dependent on any single individual. Fresh literacy classes were started with new participants and the enrolment increased to 150 people. The orchestra and choir, which had been created for '*Ngaahika Ndeenda*', continued to meet regularly and produced two records – *Ndinguri na Murimi* (The rich man and the poor peasant) and *Mwiku Mwiku?* (Where are you people?). The women's group became very active, developing ways of working together for purposes of improving family incomes and supporting each other. It formed a production group and took on contract work, distributing the wages among the

members. This collective approach made the women stronger; earlier, when each woman on her own had struggled to find work they had been more easily exploited. Now, as a group, they demanded a fair wage.

The real effect of the repression was external to Kamiriithu. In Kamiriithu the people and the KCECC were strong enough to continue despite the harassment. What the banning and detention did was to stop a groundswell of peasant-initiated cultural activity in other villages which had been inspired by the Kamiriithu experience. As one committee member put it: 'If our efforts had not been clubbed down so suddenly, there is no telling how many other centres of its kind would now be in existence.'[15] These villages had taken an interest in Kamiriithu's work and had just started to organise a cultural programme with advice from Kamiriithu. When the KCECC was repressed, they gave up out of fear.

A year after Ngugi's detention Kenyatta died. The new regime released Ngugi along with other political prisoners. He returned home to Kamiriithu where he received a hero's welcome from the villagers. During his detention he had been fired by the University at the urging of the Kenya government. (Ngugi wa Mirii had been similarly victimised.)

After recovering from his rough treatment in detention, Ngugi started to work with the villagers on a new play '*Maitu Njugira*' (Mother, sing to me). The play this time was historical, rather than contemporary, and it was assumed it would avoid provoking the authorities. The play focuses on the colonial system of control, including brutal suppression and apartheid-type legislation. It also shows the determined resistance by Kenyans against colonial rule and exploitation by the settlers. When the rehearsals started, 400 people auditioned for the fifty parts! Ngugi was thrilled by the turn-out. 'After the problems we had over the first play I thought people might be scared off, but this time they came knowing exactly what the problems might be – very conscious.'[16]

This time the KCECC proposed to perform the play in the National Theatre in Nairobi – partly as a challenge to its neocolonial practices. For while African theatre groups are discouraged from using it by its policies and high rental fees, it continues to serve a small, largely foreign elite, with a repertory including 'Oklahoma', 'The King and I', 'Carmen', 'Boeing Boeing', etc. So, in the autumn of 1981, KCECC wrote to the government asking for permission to perform the play. They never received a reply. The government used 'ping-pong tactics' to avoid responding, passing the letter from department to department. In February 1982, when they showed up at the National Theatre for rehearsals, the doors were locked and they were prevented from entering by armed policemen. They switched their rehearsals to the

University, where they performed for ten nights to a packed theatre of over 1,000 people each night. Then the University closed them down, under pressure from government.

A few days later KCECC's licence was withdrawn and the executive committee sacked. The theatre group was told it could no longer use the Centre and the government announced it was taking it over as an adult education study centre. To reinforce the message a squad of police invaded the Centre and smashed the theatre to the ground.

Assessing the work of Kamiriithu

What is unique about the Kamiriithu experience? To begin with, Kamiriithu theatre is 'theatre *by* the people'. It emerged organically from the masses. The peasants and workers were involved in analysing their reality and acting out their understanding of their situation, rather than responding passively to the thinking and analysis of others. The high level of participation helped to demystify 'theatre', to show that ordinary villagers can do it, can 'rise to heights hitherto unknown and undreamt of in the area of modern performing arts'.[17] It represents a reappropriation of culture by the people, of taking back what the ruling class has denigrated as 'traditional', or converted into a tourist commodity, a means of glorifying the political leadership, or a tool of partisan politics.

But it is more than mere participation. As Williams has shown, participation can be a sham, people can 'participate in their own domestication', i.e., be drawn into a process in which they take part but have no control, in which they are manipulated through their involvement to accept the status quo.[18] But Kamiriithu villagers were not just actors or participants or a cheap source of labour for a community project shaped by others. They started the KCECC, they made all the decisions, they controlled the finances and they determined the direction it should go in. Their meetings were full of frank discussion, criticism and self-criticism. Decisions were made collectively and no individual or group was allowed to dominate or appropriate the decision-making process. Their theatre work reflected a similar process. When a Ngugi got locked up, the work continued. No one is indispensable. As one villager put it: 'We cannot close the centre if the Ngugis are not here. If they stopped writing, we would come together and write something ... These two individuals are not the centre; the centre is the members.'[19] The two Ngugis were simply ordinary members of the KCECC. They chaired two of the committees but with no special status or privileges. They took part in the physical work and were held responsible by the villagers for their actions on behalf of the KCECC.

Having observed them in action, I can say that the Ngugis deferred

completely to the collective structure and consulted the committee on every decision. They were members of the community rather than outside animateurs sent in to organise the community – in effect, the 'organic intellectuals' whom Gramsci talked about. They lived in the community, with close long-term contacts with peasants and workers, and a deep commitment to the village and to their fellow villagers. (When Ngugi's daughter was born while he was in prison, the villagers named her 'Wamuingi', meaning 'belonging to the people'.) The relationship was not one-sided, an exercise in paternalism or charity. They learnt a great deal from the peasants – about 'music and dance and drama – and the meaning of sheer selfless dedication to a communal effort'.[20] They were 'insiders' and when things got rough they faced the same victimisation along with the villagers. In fact, they were singled out for rougher treatment, because, as Ngugi ironically puts it, 'detaining a whole village would severely drain a necessary reservoir of cheap labour. Who would now pick the tea leaves and coffee beans – for a pittance?'[21]

Kamiriithu's second distinguishing feature is its organisation. It is the organisation which has been the vehicle for popular control over the organising process. It is the organisation which gives the work continuity. Without it, the work would have stopped at the first sign of repression.

In other popular theatre experiences in Africa the problem has always been: what happens next? An individual performance may spark a lot of discussion, participation and critical insight, but once it is over there is no organisational vehicle to take it further. People's consciousness may have been raised, but without an organisational base for follow-up action all interest and momentum stops at the end of the performance. Kamiriithu has shown that people come to a critical class consciousness, not in an abstract intellectual exercise but in the process of building an organisation and struggling for their rights. The drama is part of a broader community effort, a struggle by the peasants and workers to transform Kamiriithu. In this context drama is not the primary mobilising agent for community action, nor the main source of learning: it is 'drama-within-a-process' – one of a number of interconnected activities which serve a broader aim of building a people's organisation and struggling against oppression.

Of course, this kind of work does not go on without a reaction from the dominant class. They can ignore the one-off, outside-in theatre experiments or the theatre of political rhetoric for the middle class. But a theatre which is rooted in and organised by the peasantry is more threatening. It is not just the play and the exposure of corruption which concerns them, it is the organisation and the organisational capacity which lies behind the play. What they fear most is the peasants' awareness that they can develop their own organisation and that this

kind of organisation and this kind of independent organising can spread to other areas. What if this organisational power begins to challenge the roots of the neocolonial structure?

Another strength of the Kamiriithu theatre is that it advances popular interests. It not only starts with people's experience of poverty, but it shows how they have been made poor and challenges the proverbial, victim-blaming rationalisations. It shows that poverty is created by the political-economic system rather than people's habits, knowledge, attitudes, and so on. Rather than 'banking' people with modernising information and techniques and reinforcing dependence on the outside expert, it encourages the growth of people's own analysis, self-confidence and fighting spirit. It makes people question the political-economic structures which shape their oppression and develop the will to transform these structures.

It is also critical in relation to tradition. While rooting itself in tradition and recognising the vital role tradition has played in the struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism, it does not accept tradition uncritically. It develops tradition in a progressive way, attempting to overcome the contradictions within traditional culture. It identifies and develops those aspects of traditional culture which strengthen their identity and resistance (e.g., the songs of struggle) while rooting out those elements which reinforce submission to domination. The best example is the traditional practice of *Harambee* – whose distortions by the ruling class have been exposed by the peasants and workers of Kamiriithu.

Kamiriithu has provided an alternative vision for developing national culture in Kenya – the notion of popular centres of culture in every village rather than elitist and neocolonial institutions of culture in the capital. The Kamiriithu community theatre has a significance far beyond its own village: it is a concrete example of what a people's national theatre should be – accessible to and controlled by the masses, performed in their languages, adopting their forms of cultural expression and addressing their issues. In this sense, it is a direct attack on and a clear alternative to Kenya's existing institutions of national culture – which are inaccessible to the masses, controlled by foreigners, and reflect foreign interests, themes and languages. It is an assertion of the peasants' and workers' right to 'creative efforts in their own backyards ... to a theatre which correctly reflects their lives, fears, hopes, dreams, and history of struggle'.[22]

And it has proved to them that:

> out of their own internal resources and the passions born of their unique experience of history, they can outshine the best that can be produced by parroting foreigners, and by following submissively the trodden paths of foreign education, foreign theatres, foreign cultures, foreign initiatives, foreign languages.[23]

The struggle by the peasants and workers of Kamiriithu will continue. They may have been silenced, their centre taken over, and their theatre destroyed, but their awareness, commitment and organisation will produce new struggles and new forms of protest. As one commentator put it: 'Kenya remains the land of Dedan Kimathi and the Land and Freedom Army (the Mau Mau). No constitutional engineers can wipe this fact from the consciousness of Kenyan workers and peasants.' Their culture of resistance, though 'repressed, persecuted and betrayed', will live on as Cabral has testified 'in the villages, in the forests and in the spirit of generations of victims of colonialism'.[24]

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Demystifying Pseudo Freirian Non Formal Education: A Case Description And Analysis Of Laedza Batanani

Ross Kidd

Department of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto

Martin Byram

Division of Extra-Mural Services
University College of Swaziland

ABSTRACT

The paper uses a specific example of non-formal education in Botswana to critique a more generalized phenomenon of misapplications of Paulo Freire's learning theory. It tries to show that highly "participatory", "engaging" and "entertaining" methods of education can be used not only to "liberate" but also to "domesticate".

The paper begins with a brief description of the programme — a regional community education and development programme based on problem-oriented drama and community discussion — and its influence on similar programmes operating on a national level. Then each of the three espoused principles of the programme — participation, critical awareness, and collective action — which are based on Freirian ideology are matched against the actual process and outcomes of the programme. What becomes apparent is a clear distortion of Freire's ideas in each case — the result of both inadequate understanding and structural limitations. The paper concludes with some specific suggestions for reshaping the programme.

RÉSUMÉ

Le document se fonde sur un cas précis d'éducation non formelle, étudié au Botswana, pour faire la critique du phénomène plus répandu, que constitue la mauvaise application de la théorie de l'apprentissage de Paulo Freire. On cherche à démontrer que les méthodes d'éducation faisant beaucoup appel à la «participation», à «l'engagement» et au «divertissement» peuvent mener aussi bien à la «domestication» qu'à la «libération» du sujet.

D'abord, on décrit brièvement le programme en question (programme communautaire régional d'enseignement et de développement utilisant comme méthodes la discussion collective et la mise en situation permettant d'étudier des problèmes) et ses répercussions sur d'autres programmes du genre, appliqués à l'échelle du pays. Ensuite, chacun des trois principes interreliés dans le programme (participation, esprit critique et action collective), qui ont pour base l'idéologie de Freire, sont mis en parallèle avec le processus réel et avec les résultats du programme. On observe alors, dans chacun des cas, une nette déformation des vues que défendait Freire, déformation découlant à la fois de l'incompréhension et des contraintes structurales. En terminant, les auteurs proposent quelques moyens précis de restructurer le programme.

INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire has become a household word over the last decade and many development workers have attempted to implement his ideas, often without an adequate understanding of the conscientization process and the Copernican shift it requires in educational practice.

This paper is a case study of a non-formal education project in Botswana which attempted to follow a Freirian model. The project name *Laedza Batanani* — loosely "Community Awakening" — indicates its espoused Freirian ideology. One of the key features of this programme is the use of popular theatre as the medium for encouraging participation, raising issues, fostering discussion, and promoting collective action.

The authors played an important role in the development of this programme and have written extensively on it, primarily within an advocacy position. Since leaving Botswana they have had the benefit of distance, hindsight and fresh understandings of the political economy of development to make a more critical assessment of their work.

This paper is an attempt to demystify much of the earlier writing which failed to portray some of the key contradictions in this work and tended to mystify the popular base of this activity. In particular it will focus on the pseudo-participatory nature of the programme — the involvement of villagers as actors, audience, and discussion members without allowing popular control over the process and direction of change. The *dual* potential of popular theatre will be clarified: its capacity for both

- authentic popular expression and raising critical class consciousness, on one hand, and
- disseminating dominant class ideas and inducing acceptance of the status quo, on the other.

The earlier writings on Laedza Batanani concentrated on its *media* aspects — the simplicity of popular theatre, its entertaining nature, its use of local languages, etc. The purpose of this paper is to show that highly "participatory", "engaging", "entertaining", locally understandable forms of communication can be used not only to "liberate" but also to "domesticate".

The paper will begin with a description of the programme and then analyze the methodology, content, and outcomes.

I. — PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Laedza Batanani was the first experiment in using popular theatre for non-formal education in Botswana. It was started in 1974 in the Bokalaka area of northern Botswana by a community leader and two expatriate adult educators working in the area. Laedza Batanani developed out of their concern to overcome problems of low community participation and indifference to government development efforts in the area. Their basic goal was to find a way of motivating people to participate in development, of mobilizing the community around important local issues. What was needed was a means of bringing people together to discuss their problems, to agree on changes and to take collective action. This process of people meeting and working together was codified in a rallying slogan and theme song *Laedza Batanani*: "The sun is already up. It's time to wake up and come together for a common effort". This slogan reflected the strong motivational orientation of the project; it assumed that a major constraint on development was people's apathy and indifference; what was needed was a means of "sparking" people's interest and involvement.

This mobilizational, educational and collective action process required a new approach to non-formal education. The organizers rejected the existing approach of merely providing services and information; they felt this reinforced dependence and individualism rather than encouraging self-reliant and collective action. They wanted to get away from the elitism of agricultural extension services, finding a means of involving all rural villagers and not just the wealthier farmers or cattle-owners.[1] They also saw this as an opportunity for a collaborative inter-agency approach — a positive move away from narrowly sectoral programming and lack of co-ordination and co-operation among extension workers.[2]

One of the organizers had previous experience with Freire's approach to literacy work and felt that this could be applied to community animation. Instead of using pictures as problem-posing "codes" for discussion, the organizers decided to use socio-drama. This seemed a much more lively medium for

- raising community issues *(mirror)*
- involving people in discussing the issues *(community forum)*
- mobilizing people to get organized and take action on the issues *(mobilizer)*.

In addition drama had the potential of being a good *crowd-puller* — an important asset in overcoming apathy towards community meetings.

Previous experiences with drama in workshops and conferences had shown the organizers that villagers were good at drama, took part in it

[1] These services have been broadened in the late 70's with the creation of farmers' associations but the majority of small subsistence farmers are still deprived of this form of advice and support.

[2] Since 1976 a mechanism has been instituted by government at village, district and national levels to increase the integration and co-ordination of these different sectors.

with little self-consciousness, and enjoyed doing it. So drama seemed a good medium for ensuring active participation of local people in the running of the programme — for once villagers could be involved in *presenting* the programme (through drama) and not just responding to it as an audience. Participation then was seen as both a *goal* of the programme (i.e. to mobilize a large number of villagers in discussing and taking action on important local issues) and an important aspect of the *methodology* (i.e. community members were expected to help in planning and running the education/animation programme).

The venue for this annual event was to be the *kgotla* — the village meeting. In the past, the *kgotla* was a powerful medium for community decision making and a major part of village life. It was a vehicle par excellence for educating a community as a community. Since Independence, with the declining role of traditional leaders, it had lost its influence and no longer drew large participation. Laedza Batanani chose to resurrect the *kgotla*'s community education function by providing:

- a stimulus for attending such a meeting;
- a medium for presenting community issues in a powerful way so that people would want to tak about them;
- a new, more participatory means of organizing discussion within the kgotla — i.e., small group discussions.

How does Laedza Batanani work? It is an annual one-week "campaign" in which a team of extension workers and community leaders tour the six major villages in the area with a programme of popular theatre performances and community discussion. The campaign is preceded by a participatory planning process involving two major events:

- a *community planning workshop* (attended by traditional leaders, village development committee members, extension workers, and leaders of other community organizations) in which the participants working in groups "brainstorm" a list of community problems, select one or two priority and solvable problems, and then improvise some short skits to reflect the problems
- an *actors' workshop* in which a smaller group of extension workers and community leaders take the priority problems and create a more polished performance (including puppet skits, songs, and dances) for touring through the villages.

For two of the campaigns (1975-1976) an organizing committee — with representatives from each village — was formed to co-ordinate the planning and running of the campaign. Committee members helped in the overall planning, publicized the campaign in their respective villages and organized logistical support (firewood, water, accommodation for the actors).

Once the planning and preparations have been made, the campaign is organized, normally in the period immediately before the ploughing season (September-October). During the one-week campaign the team of actors organizes an afternoon programme in each of six villages. Mornings are

spent travelling to the next village, meeting with local leaders, evaluating the previous day's performance and discussion and planning for appropriate changes based on this assessment, setting up a stage backdrop and puppet stage, and publicizing the community event to be held at the *kgotla* (the village meeting place).[3] In midafternoon the performance starts — a mixed programme of two or three drama sketches, a puppet show, and several songs. After the last song the actors move immediately into the audience inviting them to form discussion groups. Each actor sits down with one of the groups and leads a discussion on the problems presented in the performance, and possible solutions. Afterwards everyone reassembles in the full *kgotla* meeting and each group gives its report. The chairperson summarizes the major proposals and tries to get some consensus on action to be taken.[4]

Themes covered in the first three campaigns included:

1974 — family and marital conflict, the effect on community and family life of migrant labour and the drift to the towns, cattle theft, village development, youth problems

1975 — government land reform proposal, TB, youth problems, stray cattle

1976 — VD, nutrition, sanitation

Evaluation of the first two campaigns indicated that while there had been a lot of enthusiasm for the performances and interest in the issues there was little apparent follow-up action. One solution was to reduce the number of issues and to be more strategic in their selection. With a clearer and more realizable target, it was argued, extension workers and community leaders could more easily focus the post-performance discussion and lead the community in taking action on the problems.

The themes selected in the 1976 campaign and in subsequent campaigns were chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

- a modest target which groups can easily achieve
- problems which require a local response rather than government action e.g. not the issue of unpaid headmen since this can only be solved by government
- something *concrete, specific* (e.g. 'neglect of traditional practices' is too general)
- problems that individuals or individual families or groups can solve (e.g. large infrastructural projects which require the whole community should not be selected but left for Village Development Committees).
- problems whose solution can easily be supported by regular extension work.

[3] A few of the actors drive around the village singing the campaign songs and inviting people to the *kgotla* over a loud hailer.

[4] The performance is a community event with all ages in attendance. However, during the discussion, one or two of the actors organizes a "diversionary" event for the children — a participatory programme of songs, puppetry and traditional dancing. From experience this is preferable to involving the children in the discussion or sending them home.

Another development in the 1976 campaign was a more analytical approach to the drama scripting. Instead of creating the drama out of a common sense or "external expert" understanding of the problem, an intermediate step of problem analysis was introduced. This represented an attempt to get away from prescribing "text book" slogans (e.g. "Good nutrition means 3 balanced meals a day") and to take account of villagers' perceptions and the actual socio-economic situation. This took the form of a type of *constraint analysis*. This involves listing people's knowledge, attitudes and practice with respect to each problem; identifying from this list the key constraints (e.g. misbeliefs, lack of resources); and deciding which of these constraints might be successfully challenged and which current practices should be built on and supported. Through this analysis participants work out a clear set of objectives and problems to be presented as a preliminary step to 'scripting' the drama, puppet play, dance and song.

For example, in analysing the inter-related problems of nutrition, cookery, and vegetable production before scripting the drama, the following constraints were noted:

- Water is a major constraint on production.
- Vegetables are regarded as a relish (something to make maize meal tasty) and not an essential part of the diet.
- Vegetable growing is regarded as the exclusive activity of the 'civilized' — the educated English-speaking elite.
- 'Modern' vegetables (cabbages, tomatoes) are expensive and only available in Francistown (no local markets).
- People make little use of wild vegetables.
- The lack of variety in cooking makes husbands complain.
- Husbands often fail to give their wives money for food.
- Traditional methods of cooking wild vegetables have been lost and people are not used to cooking "modern' vegetables.
- Vegetables, when cooked are often over-cooked.
- Elders get the first choice of food.
- Children are fed only one meal a day which consists of maize meal only or 'maize' plus a watery relish. Many parents think that a diet of maize meal alone is adequate for their children. They are reluctant to give their children meat or other sources of protein and protective food.

In using the data from the analysis to formulate the content of the drama the final yardstick was realism. Important constraints were identified but only those that were considered to be amenable to change were introduced. For example, in the discussions on VD some felt the practice of traditional medicine should be discouraged. In the end the workshop decided this would not work, only antagonise people. (It was suggested as an alternative that the clinic staff and traditional doctors should be encouraged to meet in order to discuss how they might co-operate on the eradication of VD).[5] It was decided to aim at the fact that women

[5] One medical expert recommended that a collaborative solution might involve the traditional doctor continuing to deal with the psychological aspect of VD and referring the patient to the clinic for penicillin.

were more reluctant than men to go to the clinic for VD treatment and try to get the community to recognize that:

- VD is not a 'women's disease' (i.e. it is not caused by intercourse during menstruation; men and women can both transmit the disease)
- What is wrong is ignoring or hiding the VD symptoms and not getting treatment.
- Since VD is particularly difficult to detect in women, men should take the responsibility to tell their partners.

In the discussions on sanitation it was decided that the promotion of toilets at this stage would be unrealistic. Very few families have the resources or the motivation to build a toilet. As an alternative the festival promoted the digging of a trench by each family and the practice of taking a shovel to cover one's excreta — rather crudely sloganized in the puppet show as 'one family, one trench — one shit, one shovel'.

A third innovation in the 1976 campaign was a planned *follow-up programme* involving extension worker promotion of the major themes of the popular theatre campaign. In the 1974 and 1975 campaigns follow-up was left to the initiative of local field workers and groups and as a result very little happened. In 1976 the campaign organizers decided to do something about this; they negotiated with each extension department to allow its field staff to be involved not only in the popular theatre campaign but also in follow-up promotion work. Field workers received special training and support materials so that they could teach about and encourage new practices with regard to VD, nutrition, and vegetable production. Family welfare educators performed dramas on VD and gave talks and cooking demonstrations to women attending the clinic. Agricultural demonstrators ran a number of vegetable gardening courses and issued seeds to families who wanted to set up vegetable gardens.

II. — DEVELOPMENT OF POPULAR THEATRE IN BOTSWANA

Laedza Batanani provided the inspiration for other experiments in using popular theatre as a medium for non-formal education. Other districts, government departments, and community groups have taken up the idea and adapted it to their own situation and purposes:

- in 1978 family welfare educators and nurses in western Botswana (Ghanzi District) performed plays on health themes in a mobile campaign touring remote rural settlements;
- Basarwa (Bushman) participants in community workshops have been encouraged to use drama as a means of expressing their concerns and ideas about government's resettlement program;
- the Ministry of Agriculture mobile campaign unit and an appropriate technology centre have both introduced puppetry as their principal teaching medium in the field;
- improvised drama has become a standard technique for raising issues at district development conferences;

- self-help housing workers have found drama to be a useful tool for explaining issues to committees in urban squatter areas and to the residents themselves;
- workers at the Godi weaving factory have utilized drama not only as a means of challenging fellow villagers to deal with major problems but also as a medium for resolving misunderstandings and conflicts within their own factory;
- a few family welfare educators have started to experiment with puppet plays as part of their health education programme at the clinic;
- at recruitment meetings in each village for the pilot literacy programme the village extension team have used drama rather than speeches to underline the importance of the literacy effort.

Popular theatre activity is promoted and encouraged at the national level through a popular theatre committee made up of representatives from every district and town and the major national extension agencies. The University's Institute of Adult Education which provided a good deal of the leadership for the initial popular theatre work has provided the secretarial services for this committee. The national popular theatre committee is not a policy-making or planning committee; it operates primarily as a vehicle for exchanging experience and ideas among the different regions and agencies. There is no attempt to impose a common national approach nor a centralized programme. Programming initiatives are decentralized through a number of district and town committees which plan and organize their own popular theatre campaigns, community workshops, or other programmes in which popular theatre is one of the media used. Over half of the districts and towns are now active in this work.

In addition to these larger-scale, inter-agency initiatives, individual field workers who have experienced the potential of this medium, either through a campaign or a training workshop, use drama, puppetry, songs, and/or dances as appropriate in their regular work. For example a family welfare educator teaching nutrition might use songs or a puppet play; the village extension team might produce a drama to illustrate a problem to be discussed at the kgotla. In addition to these government initiatives, a few community groups have sponsored popular theatre programmes — for example the workers of the Oodi weaving factory have organized a number of popular theatre performances at the kgotla on village development issues.

Training in popular theatre has been done by the University's Institute of Adult Education (I.A.E.). Up until 1978 this was done on an informal basis; extension workers and community groups learned the skills in an organic and pragmatic way in the course of planning, researching, and preparing a performance and organizing a public presentation and discussion. In 1978 the Institute organized the first training course — a national workshop for field workers from every district — and hired a full-time popular theatre trainer. These two patterns of training have continued — a) organic, informal training carried out within the context of planning and running a real campaign and b) more formalized training workshops which often have an operational aspect (i.e. a performance is developed

with a specific community problem in mind) but which tend to give more emphasis to performance skills. While the Institute continues to provide training support for local workshops and campaigns on request, more and more of this consultation work is being done by experienced people within each region. Recently popular theatre has been added to the pre-service training of government extension workers.

III. — ASSESSMENT

The first section was a brief description of Laedza Batanani and other N.F.E programmes using popular theatre in Botswana. This section will attempt to analyze the work done so far and suggest some new directions which might bring this activity more in line with its original objectives.

Freire's ideas on education and social change influenced the original conception of the programme. It was meant to be a programme which

- increased participation of rural villagers
- deepened critical awareness
- mobilized community members for community action.

Its actual achievements can be measured against each of these original objectives. What will become apparent is a clear distortion of Freire's ideas in each case — the result of both inadequate understanding and structural limitations. While a genuine attempt was made to operationalize what Freire meant by "participation", "critical analysis" and "action", in practice these concepts have been given reformist interpretations.

A. Participation

Participation is both goal and methodology; the popular theatre programme attempts to increase participation of community members in development projects by involving them in the planning and running of the popular theatre programme. In the case of Laedza Batanani this means involving rural villagers in the community workshop, the organizing committee, the performing team and the community festival itself (joining in the songs and the post-performance discussion).

However, to throw all of these activities into a participation list mystifies the basic issue. Participation is not just "song and dance". A villager may join in the songs and participate actively in the discussion but this is a different form of participation than selecting the campaign issues and structuring how they are to be presented for discussion. The key question is: who *controls* the process? Popular theatre may be "participatory" in the sense that local people are involved in producing it, in acting out the dramas and singing the songs but unless they control the selection of content and the whole educational process they may become willing accomplices in their own domestication. (Williams, 1971). Participation as mere performance is no guarantee of progressive change; unless rural villagers control the popular theatre process they may be used as

mere mouthpieces for ideas produced by others which mystify their reality and condition them to accept a passive, dependent, uncritical role in an inequitable social structure.

In Laedza Batanani the whole process is controlled by the more powerful members of the community — the government workers and community leaders. They attend the pre-campaign community workshops and decide on the issues. While the additional involvement of community leaders in this process is better than government workers doing this on their own, it still represents a grouping of interests within the village which are not representative of those of the majority. This is demonstrated by the choice of issues — in 1974, for example, this group selected cattle theft as the major problem, an issue which is clearly not a high priority for the majority of rural families who own no cattle at all. In 1976 the choice of health issues — VD, nutrition, sanitation — was clearly influenced by the large and vocal participation of the government health staff. While Laedza Batanani has definitely attracted a lot of interest it continues to reflect the viewpoints and interests of these two dominant groups in Botswana — civil servants and the larger cattle owners — rather than providing a voice and an organizing tool for marginal groups.

In the other popular theatre programmes community participation tends to be token. Government extension staff plan and organize the whole activity with a minimum of participation from community leaders. They have the transport, the resources and the time and they are expected to get something done — so they usually run the programme on their own with little help from local villagers. Their views tend to influence not only the selection of issues but also the way in which the issues are raised. This is indicated, for example, by the negative stereotyping of the traditional doctor in several plays performed by health educators (Kraai et al, 1979). It is also evident in plays giving greater attention to technical solutions than to changes in social relations.

One recent innovation in popular theatre practice has attempted to overcome this problem. As an alternative to the community workshop as the source of issues, field workers have been trained to conduct informal interviews with people on a house-to-house basis. They walk around the village, meeting individuals and groups in their homes, at the borehole or clinic, at the shebeen or store, etc., trying to draw out the concerns and opinions of all sectors of the community, rich and poor, male and female, old and young. This practice of field interviewing, of listening to what the ordinary villages have to say is a step forward. It is a giant step ahead of conventional extension practice in which those with no cattle are virtually ignored. It helps in a small way to break down the pattern of problem diagnosis and solution prescription by external "experts" and to make field workers understand problems from the perspective of all sections of the rural community. Of course it is unrealistic "to expect a totally flexible response to the articulation of local viewpoints when extension agents are themselves as rigidly 'constructed' as technocrats" (Johnny and Richards 1980, p. 23).

Where field workers have used this approach of sounding out broad-based opinion or where initiatives have been taken by community groups themselves (e.g. the Oodi weavers) the issues chosen have been a clear expression of popular concerns rather than the more technicist predispositions of government field staff. For example, a recurring issue in a number of campaigns has been the domineering and bureaucratic treatment of patients by clinic nurses (the more visible civil servants operating at the village level); in a popular theatre campaign planned for the Kgalagadi District the Basarwa (Bushman) demanded that it deal with the harassment they face from government wildlife officers; other community-controlled campaigns have addressed the issues of negligence by the headman or village development committee members and conflicts between councillors, headmen and villagers.

In all of these cases popular theatre has proven to be an important tool for raising sensitive issues which might otherwise never be dealt with, provoking people to talk about them, and providing a forum to discuss them. It has provided a limited opportunity for oppressed groups to express their grievances. For example, women have praised Laedza Batanani for raising issues that they felt reluctant to talk about in normal situations:

> Laedza Batanani is a good way of getting people to talk about problems — easier than wives on their own trying to argue with their husbands. The drama helps to show men what women don't like.

It has given marginal groups in rural communities a certain assurance that they can argue back, that they can challenge being mistreated; and it has served as a — mild corrective to bureaucratic arrogance, local corruption, or inactive traditional leadership.[6] It may lead to increased consciousness of the class nature of rural development. It has also served to raise some of the contradictions in government development practices — a source of new understandings by extension staff.[7]

The problem, however, is that community-controlled popular theatre, in the progressive sense, is still in the minority. On the whole popular theatre is being used in the conventional mode of putting across extension messages rather than as a means of expressing popular concerns, a vehicle for challenging conventional practices or ways of thinking.

[6] Botswana has a tradition of using songs as an accepted vehicle for criticizing the misbehaviour of leaders.

[7] In the VD Campaign (Laedza Batanani 1976) the government practice of treating VD through three injections of penicillin over a 3-week period (since health services in the area are once-a-week mobile visits) was questioned by villagers and other methods of providing quicker treatment were suggested.

Popular theatre's role as a means of structuring popular evaluations of development programmes, of "generating alternative versions of development problems acceptable to disadvantaged groups" has received excellent treatment in an article by Johnny and Richards (1980). They argue that popular theatre should be used not as a tool for disseminating development messages but as a village-controlled medium for critiquing development policies and programmes — a source of evaluation and a means of educating field workers about the socio-political realities of development work.

Although it started as an attempt to develop popular education organized by rural villagers themselves, it has become on the whole just a new gimmick for top-down message-oriented campaigns run and controlled by government extension departments.

So far the discussion has been limited to participation as methodology. But what about *participation as a goal*? The organizers viewed this goal as one of overcoming low participation, of motivating people, of arousing them to take a more active part in development. They accepted the notion that the key constraint was apathy or indifference.[8] While this view seems Freirian — Freire advocates that the consciousness of the oppressed is one of the constraints on social transformation — in practice it represents a distortion.

Apathy in a Freirian sense can only be defined in dialectical terms — as a response to oppressive relations. Peasants are "apathetic" only in the sense that they have been forced to internalize the oppressor's ideology, to accept a subservient and passive role within an exploitative structure. Or as Huizer (1979) and Malik (1977) have explained, resistance to change is often the most rational strategy for peasants in an oppressive social structure.

In the case of Laedza Batanani (and the Śri Lankan and Tanzanian programmes) "apathy" is given a totally different meaning — it seems to be presented as a self-inflicted characteristic of rural villagers. No account is given of *why* villagers refuse to attend development meetings or take part in communal projects. "Apathy" is simply explained as a constraint on development — a condition out of which villagers need to be "aroused" or "shaken". Without a clear explanation of its historical and socio-political roots, apathy takes on the function of an explanatory cause of poverty/underdevelopment, rather than being understood as a symptom of or a response to an inequitable social structure. In this way the Freirian concept of a "culture of silence" is converted into the "blaming the victim" ideology of conventional development work.[9] Villagers are "underdeveloped" because they are "apathetic" and "resistant to change"; the role, then, of the development programme is "to shake them out of their lethargy". This different understanding than Freire's of the basic cause of underdevelopment helps to explain why the proposed solution — that of "consciousness-raising" — takes on a different meaning than Freirian conscientization. This will be discussed in detail in the following section.

The failure to analyze the real reasons for low participation also helps to explain why participation was adopted as a community-wide objective. Clearer analysis would have shown class differentiation in

[8] This programme goal is similar to that of the Sarvodaya movement of Sri Lanka which also emphasizes the motivational factor, the need to arouse people from apathy. The Tanzanian literacy programme has adopted a similar objective: "to shake peasants out of their lethargy".

[9] A more detailed description/analysis of this distortion process is given in Kidd/Kumar (1981).

participation (e.g. the domination of women's groups by elite women in the community) which in turn would have called for a more strategic use of Laedza Batanani as an organizing tool for the less privileged members of the community.

B. Critical awareness

Another espoused goal of Laedza Batanani is to facilitate critical thinking. This attempt to raise critical consciousness is evident in several aspects of the methodology —

- the initial stage of finding out the concerns of community members
- the use of analysis in the pre-campaign planning workshops
- the post-performance community "dialogue".

While each of these appears to be consistent with the Freirian method of problem-posing dialogue, in practice it is quite different.

The use of constraint analysis in the pre-campaign workshops is the clearest indication of a shift in approach. Instead of unveiling structural relationships, of identifying historical, economic and political factors to explain rural problems, "constraint analysis" has tended to focus on technical matters. For example, the analysis of VD is limited to an explication of its symptoms, causes, cure, and prevention. While it is important for people to have a scientific understanding of this disease, it is equally important for them to see how this disease is socially produced. VD is not a natural aspect of life in southern Africa; it is produced as a direct consequence of the intolerable conditions imposed on migrant labourers in the South African mines. Forced to live for long periods of time away from their wives, the miners turn to prostitutes and alcohol as a response to the alienating situation. VD is retransmitted to the countryside each time a new group of migrant labourers returns home. This disease, then, is socially produced by the political and economic structures in southern Africa; penicillin treatment at the clinic can only be a partial solution.

The analysis of VD in Laedza Batanani does deal with some of the social, non-technical aspects, for example the embarrassment of women as a major constraint to treatment, but the men tend to be blamed rather than the exploitative social system. They are left with a sense of guilt, that it is their "promiscuity" which is the ultimate problem and not the social system which destroys family life. They are expected to change *their* behaviour rather than the structures which reproduce this disease.

Secondly, there has been no attempt to analyze problems in terms of their different "versions" — the different ways they are perceived by different social classes (i.e. the different class interests they represent).[10] For example in the 1974 campaign some of the villagers produced their own folk song praising a local cattle thief; this song, of course, could

[10] This is related to the earlier point of failing to produce programme content which reflects the class position of the majority of community members.

not have been very popular among the larger cattle-owners. For the poor drinking is an outlet from the pressures of a fragmented existence; for the rich (who own the bottle stores and bars) drinking is both entertainment and a way of making money. These different versions could have been dialectically analyzed in order to bring out a version acceptable to the majority of villagers — e.g. non-stockholders, cattle-workers, etc.

Thirdly, the problems identified in pre-campaign workshops have been treated as discrete problems requiring separate solutions; there has been little or no analysis of their linkages or common roots in the political economic structure. The process of "brainstorming" problems may be a useful start but unless it is followed up with a study of the connections between problems, symptoms may be misdiagnosed as the real causes and the economic and political roots of problems mystified. For example, many of the problems listed have their origins in the migrant labour system — e.g. family conflicts, rural unemployment, alcoholism, etc. — yet they are treated as isolated problems and diagnosed in terms of morality or the behaviour of the "victims" rather than the social structures which underpin these problems.

Fourthly, the emphasis has been on *solving* individual problems rather than on understanding why these problems exist in the first place. This emphasis has been conditioned by the organizers' preoccupation with technical solutions and an inadequate understanding of what Freire means by problem-posing. By an unconscious sleight-of-hand problem-posing has been converted into problem-solving. "Problem-posing" makes one question the deeper structures; it is a process of challenging commonly accepted ideas, of posing more and more questions to dig beneath the conventional explanations of reality, of raising and analyzing contradictions; its object is understanding. "Problem-solving", on the other hand, is a more pragmatic concern with immediate relief, with symptomatic treatment, and therefore easily falls into the conventional extension exercise of looking for technically appropriate solutions. The post-performance dialogue adopts this problem-solving approach. Instead of focussing on the real causes, on analyzing the political economic and historical basis of material conditions, it concentrates on generating solutions which often represent short-term symptomatic treatment or unrealistic proposals for action which fail to consider the real constraints and possibilities within the power structure.

Fifthly, the analysis is limited to the village rather than the entire social formation of which it is a part. This is evident, for example, in the analysis of nutrition which does identify inequitable food distribution within the family (with the father getting a larger share) but fails to show the larger socio-political context (e.g. structural and class constraints on subsistence production) which conditions this inequity. A "victim-blaming" analysis is produced condemning the migrant labourers rather than the social structures which inhibit subsistence production and condition unequal distribution of income. Migrant labour is mentioned as one of the problems but there is no attempt to show how this institution and the policies behind it produce the "rural slum".

By looking at the village as if it is an autonomous unit independent of the larger social structures, attention is shifted away from what the dominant class in southern Africa is doing to what the villagers are "doing to themselves". This narrowly focussed analysis inevitably produces "victim-blaming" explanations of rural problems. We have seen earlier how poor attendance at village meetings was explained in terms of villagers' apathy rather than the way in which this rural malaise has been historically produced. Behavioural characteristics — illiteracy, low production, poor kgotla attendance, cattle-stealing, alcoholism, etc. — are interpreted as inherent defects, as a "culture of poverty", rather than the symptoms of exploitative social relations:

> Lacking structural perception, men attribute the sources of their situation to something within themselves rather than to something in objective reality (Freire, 1970, p. 36).

Critical consciousness, then, has been given a totally different meaning in the Botswana popular theatre work. For Freire emergent consciousness is characterized by historical understanding, a clear insight into essential cause-effect relationships, and an overcoming of false consciousness (i.e. of ahistorical thinking and misconstructions of cause and effect). In Laedza Batanani critical consciousness has been interpreted in an everyday sense of "being aware of local problems and information needed to solve the problems".

This diluted form of conscientization can be explained by the modernization framework in which it operates. It assumes a dualistic economy in which the modern sector is attempting to transform (read "modernize") the traditional sector. Within this framework the role of non-formal education is to teach "modernizing" behaviour. Over the last two decades this dualistic theory has been seriously challenged. Rural communities are not removed from the modern sector; they are conditioned by and play an important role within the modern sector:

> The marked 'traditionalism' of many contemporary African villages is not a product of isolation but of the over-strong relationship between the village as a supplier and multi-national company-dominated mining interests as employers of cheap labour (Johnny and Richards, 1980).

Rural villages in Botswana have the role of reproducing the labour force for South African industry, without any prospect of meeting their own labour requirements. The "apathy", "lack of unified effort", the "disorganization" of Botswana villages is not a self-induced phenomonon; it is a historical outcome of the social control policies of South African capitalism. Historically South Africa has needed a cheap labour supply and this has required the underdevelopment of rural villages in the countries surrounding South Africa — through taxation, commoditization, the closure of South African markets to Botswana agricultural products, etc. If the rural villages were thriving, well-organized, self-reliant communities villagers would not need to leave their homes to find work in South Africa. The marginalization, the destruction of Botswana's rural economy has been historically induced.

In implicitly adopting this modernization framework, the organizers of Laedza Batanani have accepted that the key constraint in rural development is knowledge or apathy rather than opportunity. They have fallen back into the conventional practice of putting across technical information or of trying to "spark" interest through an unconventional medium — rather than developing critical insight, organizing among the non-stock holders or challenging vested interests. By accepting the modernization framework they are forced to explain what is happening within the "traditional sector" as if it is internally produced, as if all the problems are locally created. Once they accept this view they are compelled to adopt the logical consequence, i.e. that change can only take place as a result of techniques and skills they can bring or prescribe from outside — the so-called "modernizing behaviours".

The key social problems — the migrant labour system, inequities in cattle ownership, insufficient draught power and labour power accessible to female-headed households, etc. — are not addressed; instead Laedza Batanani deals with the "deviant" behaviour of the poor — the bad habits, the attitudes they are expected to change. Freire, of course, also talks about a change in behaviour, but for Freire this means overcoming passivity — challenging inequity, questioning the social order rather than reaffirming it. Conscientization does not mean accepting new moral injunctions — e.g. stealing less cattle, attending village meetings, contributing labour to village development projects — which may simply further one's incorporation into the system. It is to question the exhortations and slogans of the dominant class, examining whose interests are actually being served.

C. Action

For Freire authentic dialogue must lead to action. In Laedza Batanani and the other popular theatre programmes the performances and discussion have lead to very little action. The popular theatre event tends to be a "one-off" activity in which people come together, talk about issues and go home. There is limited follow-up of a collective nature; the event is rarely used to organize people for action nor built into an on-going organizational process. Encalada (1979) has called this type of communication "convocatory" communication to differentiate communication which simply "calls people together" from more productive modes of communication which are used within a process of building an organization and taking action. The Botswana popular theatre programme to date falls within the first category.

In the first two years of Laedza Batanani there was a certain naive expectation that community action would somehow follow from the heightened interest generated by the popular theatre event. When this failed to materialize, the organizers planned a follow-up programme to encourage action. Instead of making this a community-controlled activity, the organizers built this programme around the regular work of government extension staff. This implied a lack of confidence in existing village institu-

tions but there was no effort to analyze why these institutions were failing.

Community inertia can only be understood in terms of the historical role Botswana villages have played in providing labour for the South African mines and the relationships between various classes in Botswana rural society. During the colonial era taxation, commoditization, and other measures forced large numbers of poorer peasants into oscillating labour migration. This has been reinforced before and after Independence by the increasing monopolization of agricultural resources (e.g. draught power) by the larger cattle-owners. The export of labour has produced a drain on rural production and has exacerbated the situation of rural women who have had to shoulder additional responsibilities for subsistence production and the burden of reproducing the labour force for South African mines and industry.

The migrant labour system and the undermining of traditional authority since Independence have disrupted traditional social organization. In the past a villager's participation on a communal project could be enforced by the power of the chief; age-regiments (*mephato*) were the organizational vehicle for a range of construction and other village projects. With the withdrawal of labour by the mines and the erosion of the power of traditional leaders there has been less labour available for self-help projects and no authority to compel participation in them. The new structures created since Independence, e.g. the village development committees, have not yet won wide-spread support. At the same time "there is a contradiction in advocating self-help when government policies such as giving food for work in drought periods and massive provision of physical facilities have encouraged a concept of development that regards government action as a source of change" (Kraai et al, 1979).

From this it is clear that Laedza Batanani started with an inadequate understanding of the power structures within which it was working and an unrealistic expectation of the power of popular theatre. It defined the key problem it was addressing as lack of community participation but failed to see the underlying roots of this inertia. It also assumed, as in most community development programmes, a community of interests, failing to recognize the differing class interests within rural society and the lack of homogeneity for purposes of organizing. Without an insight into the mechanisms of power it set out to "awaken community awareness and action" with no clear organizational strategy beyond that of bringing people together for a performance and discussion. It assumed that people would somehow mobilize for action as long as there was increased motivation and awareness. It therefore ran smack into the problem it was trying to overcome; nothing happened at the end of the performance and discussion because there was no organizational structure for making it happen. People remained inactive because there was no commonly accepted institutional framework in which initiative could be taken. The popular theatre aspect — no matter how effective in attracting a crowd or raising important issues — could not conjure up on its own the organizational

structure needed or provide itself the driving force for a programme of social action.[11]

This points to the need for a strategy which explicitly serves the more underprivileged groups in rural Botswana — making the resources of popular theatre more accessible to and within the control of these groups, addressing their problems and issues, and, most important, relating to an on-going process of *organizing* these groups. It also requires a reassessment of the role of popular theatre. Popular theatre can no longer be seen as the driving force for a programme of social action; it must be viewed as one element among others in a sustained organizing process.

IV. — CONCLUSION

Popular theatre in Botswana has taken a pseudo-Freirian course, shifting away from its espoused goals of authentic participation, critical awareness, and collective action. This has been produced by inadequate understanding of the power structures at village, national, and international levels and by the technocratic conditioning and modernization framework of the organizers.

A realignment with the original goals would require:

- a shift towards genuine popular participation, by moving away from an undifferentiated community-wide approach (in which the more powerful community members dominate) to a more strategic approach directed to the most oppressed sectors of the rural community (e.g. women, non-stockholders, etc.) and assuring participant control over the programme.
- a shift away from a popular-theatre oriented programme to a sustained programme of group organization, education, and action in which popular theatre is given a more narrowly defined, less prominent role
- a critical assessment of the social and political context and a more strategic sense of the possibilities and constraints for change.

This case study is one example of how Freire's ideas have been distorted and used in ways which potentially could intensify the oppression of powerless groups in the Third World. It shows how progressive-sounding development rhetoric can obscure the reality of class stratification and power structures and mystify the actual impact of development programmes. It points to the need on a much wider scale for political economic analysis of development programmes.

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