

Suzyika Nyimbili

**PERFORMING ARTS AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN POST  
COLONIAL ZAMBIA: A LOOK AT THEATRE AND TRADITIONAL  
DANCE**

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

Austria

June 2021

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by

Suzyika Nyimbili

(Zambia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Vienna, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy,  
Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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Examiner

Vienna  
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External Reader

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External Supervisor

Vienna  
June 2021

I, the undersigned, **Suzyika Nyimbili**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Signature

## Abstract

In this study, I collect memories of the development of Zambian theatre (including traditional dance) in post-colonial Zambia. I look at the role of theatre in nation building and the extent to which motifs of pre-colonial performance genres were incorporated into Zambian theatre. I mainly use oral interviews, desktop research, and social media observational research. For the oral interviews, I talked to former actors, writers, producers, researchers, and other individuals connected to theatre and performance in Zambia. I also interviewed ordinary members of the community. Through the oral interviews, I have collected memories of Zambian theatre in the years before and after independence. This collection will be packaged in a form that can be preserved, as it is an aspect of Zambian theatre heritage and cultural history. In this study, I discuss the introduction of Western theatre and the building of theatres known as “Little Theatres” which became “citadels” of European cultural expression. Although this type of theatre was also introduced to indigenous Zambians, what seems to have become more prominent were the indigenous forms of performance (local theatre forms), especially dances, which came to be known as township dances. In the years following independence, there were contestations between European theatre promoters and indigenous Zambians who wanted to make use of theatre, including performance spaces (like theatres) that were previously a preserve of Europeans settlers, as avenues of cultural expression. I argue that though theatre by indigenous Zambia’s may have played a central role in the national building agenda of the post-colonial Zambian government, it was traditional dance that most indigenous Zambians seem to have identified with more. Though there were experiments to fuse traditional forms of performance and western-style theatre, the two seem to have developed independently and continue to do so to this day.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BSAC	British South Africa Company
NATAAZ	National Theatre Arts Association
NRDA	Northern Rhodesia Drama Association
TAZ	Theatre Association of Zambia
TfD	Theatre for Development
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIP	United National Independence party
UNZADRAMS	University of Zambia Dramatic Society
ZANTAA	National Theatre Arts Association

# Introduction

## Short background on Zambian Theatre

Following Zambia's independence in 1964, President of Zambia Kenneth Kaunda and the United National Independence Party (UNIP) assumed the slogan "One Zambia, One Nation." The slogan was born out of the realization that being a heterogeneous state, with 73 ethnic groups, Zambia had to find a way of encouraging unity and ensure development. Coupled with "One Zambia, One Nation" was the national ideology, Humanism. Zambian Humanism "was a form of African Socialism, which combined traditional African values with Western socialist and Christian values."<sup>1</sup> Cultural activities were to play an essential role in shaping the ideology of humanism, of working together as a people, helping one another, and sharing what the community had.

Citizens were to be educated about the new state, unity, and the values of Zambian Humanism. From the onset, Cultural activities were acknowledged as a tool in the education process of the people and as a bridge between tradition and modernity. To operationalize this nationwide push to create a cultural identity in Zambia after independence, a cultural services department was set up. For the new government then, cultural consciousness was going to be central in helping people get rid of feelings of inferiority that were built in their minds due to colonialism. Performing arts, including theatre and dance, were to play a central role in championing the cause of Zambian humanism and promoting unity. The theatre took up the role of creating awareness among the people.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike traditional dance, theatre, as understood in the western sense, did not exist in pre-colonial Zambia until the arrival of Europeans. With colonization came the building of

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Kanu Anthony Ikechukwu, "Kenneth Kaunda and the Quest for an African Humanist Philosophy," *International Journal of Scientific Research* 3, no. 8 (June 1, 2012):375.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick E. Idoye, "Ideology and the Theater: The Case of Zambia," *Journal of Black Studies* 19, no. 1 (September 1, 1988): 73.

theatres which were called “Little Theatres”, especially on the Copperbelt where there were mining towns. While this “imported” theatre was developing, indigenous Zambians were also developing their own forms, based on traditional performances. They “developed protest dance songs contesting the legitimacy of their British rulers, and the theatre soon became a central force in the anti-colonial movement.”<sup>3</sup> Some years into Zambia’s independence, there was intensified calls to build a new form of theatre that would “... portray and reflect the life and experiences of the Zambian people... and support the utilization of Zambian folklore, myths, ritual, song and dance.”<sup>4</sup>

This thesis is a study of Zambian theatre in the years that followed independence. I investigated the different roles of theatre and performance played in Zambian in the years following independence in 1964 as well as the extent to which indigenous performances were merged with western-style theatre that was introduced before and after colonization. This study includes dance as a form of theatrical performance. I try to make use of the word theatre in its broadest sense though I am aware of the controversy surrounding its definition. I borrow Baker’s definition of theatrical phenomena:

theatrical phenomena ... is based on a definition of theatre that is much wider than that given in conventional terms of a differentiated actor/ audience relationship. It postulates a theatrical field or spectrum ranging from the festive, participatory phase, more properly called "drama" ... through a median phase or blurred area in which both participation and performance may occur; to the final theatrical phase where theatre as "a place for seeing," again reverting to the original Greek meaning of the word, implies performance by actors to an audience who watch "a thing done."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Caul, “From Northern Rhodesia to Zambia: Creating Culture in the Post-Colonial Nation-State” (American University, 2008), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Joel Chifunyise, "An Analysis of the Development of Theatre in Zambia (1950- 1975)" (MA thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1977), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Baker, “African Theatre and the West,” *Comparative Drama* 11, no. 3 (1977): 228.

## A note on Theatre, Performance, and Cultural Heritage

Theatre and performance are not only art, but they are also vehicles of ideas.<sup>6</sup> They are institutions that embody the way of life of people. UNESCO acknowledges the unique role of the performing arts which range from vocal and instrumental music, dance, and theatre to pantomime among other performing art forms.<sup>7</sup> They include numerous cultural expressions that reflect human creativity and that are also found, to some extent, in many other intangible cultural heritage domains. These arts are more than simply ‘performances’ for an audience; they may also play crucial roles in culture and society such as songs sung while carrying out agricultural work or music that is part of a ritual.<sup>8</sup> They may be part of the very fabric of communities and human interactions.

In the case of Zambia, theatre and performance are said to have played a critical role in building national and cultural identity in the years following independence. This new identity was to be performed and communicated to the people. For example, the Zambia National Dance Troupe was used to perform traditional dances and got people to learn to appreciate them. Some plays use performance to enact heritage aspects, for example re-enacting the way of life of a group of people from the past or even present that the audience might not have access to. However, aspects of heritage that are performed cannot fully represent heritage, there is more to heritage than what a performance can show.<sup>9</sup> Even when a performance of heritage cannot fully represent that aspect of heritage being portrayed, it remains a way of getting people have a glimpse of that heritage and performance that draws the imagination of people.

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<sup>6</sup> Stewart Crehan, “Patronage, the State and Ideology in Zambian Theatre,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 2 (1990): 290.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, “Performing Arts (Such as Traditional Music, Dance and Theatre),” accessed May 27, 2021, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/performing-arts-00054>.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO. Performing Arts.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Haldrup and Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt, “Heritage as Performance,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 58.

## **Justification for Study**

There is an acceptable amount of research on Zambian theatre history, particularly before 1985. However, for most of this research, there is no focus on cultural heritage. The voices of individuals who were active theatre-makers seem to be missing. My goal in this study was not only to gather information by researchers on Zambian theatre, but to also share the stories, memories, and views of people who were once active theatre-makers. That is the story that is missing. The second thing I focus on, which is missing in the current literature on Zambian theatre and performance, is the extent to which traditional forms of performances and European traditional theatre merged (if at all they did) to create a new form of “theatre” in post-independence Zambia. Through this study, I try to find the place of theatre, as was performed by western theatre standards, and traditional dance in the years following independence when there was a call to create a new identity for the new Zambian state. Through this research, I intend to contribute to preserving Zambian theatre history.

## **Research Questions**

In my study, I will analyze two main questions:

1. What were the roles of Zambian theatre post-independence, during the years of building a modern nation-state, and how have these roles changed over the years?
2. To what extent were motifs of pre-colonial performance genres (that is, indigenous cultural heritage) incorporated into Zambian theatre and how were they used and developed in the new setting?

In addition to the two research questions above, another aspect of my research was to collect memories of Zambian theatre from the early years of Zambia’s independence through oral interviews.



## Methodology

To narrow down the focus of my study, I analyzed the work of following theatres: *Chikwakwa* Theatre, The University of Zambia Dramatic Society, and *Tikwiza* Theatre and the National Dance Troupe. This study relied mainly on oral interviews and desk research. The third method was social media observational research.

### 1. Oral Interviews

For the interviews, I targeted individuals that were theatre markers in the years following Zambia's independence. These included actors, playwrights, producers, and theatre commenters, leaders of performing arts organizations, cultural services employees and individuals who were audience members. Some of the people I interviewed wore multiple hats, for examples, one could have been an actor, writer, leader of a theatre company, as well watched the National Dance Troupe perform. Others were individuals interviewed were not necessarily theatre-makers then or directly involved in performing arts but have been active researchers on Zambian theatre history. The interviews were limited to a few individuals that I was able to contact. In total, I did 12 in-depth interviews. Though the number may not be representative of all aspect of post-colonial Zambian theatre, I made sure to interview individuals that were affiliated with different organizations. I have a more detailed discussion of the interviews in Chapter Two of this Thesis.

In the interviews, I asked about their memories of how Zambian theatre was developed in the early years, what its aims were, how it differed from European style theatre and how it used elements of the indigenous culture. I also asked about their role in the performing arts companies they belonged to. For those who were audience members, or community members, the focus was whether they saw any performances, either on the streets or in performance halls

such as theatres. Being a theatre practitioner myself, I know a few prominent theatre practitioners including actors, writers, directors, and journalists. I took advantage of this network and started from there.

I used semi-structured one to one personal interviews. They were not restrictive, allowing the interviewee to share more information. The length of the interviews varied depending on how much information the interviewee wanted to share. As a method of research, personal interviews are recognized as one of the primary methods of pursuing research in the social sciences.<sup>10</sup> Interviews are a relevant option for this research because they are a good way to collect more details from people compared to what one would get from using other methods like questionnaires.<sup>11</sup> I recorded the interviews and later transcribed them.

## 2. Desk Research

Desk research made up a significant part of my thesis. This was a continuous process where I made use of available published work on Zambian theatre, African theatre, and traditional performances in Africa. Some of the sources were from the University of Zambia special collections where I found some limited copies of early-stage academic study on Zambia theatre and traditional dance. I made use of online resources including blogs and videos. For example, when I needed to see a traditional dance that I was not familiar with but was mentioned in an article I read, I would look it up on YouTube.

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<sup>10</sup> Jeanne M. Liedtka, "Exploring Ethical Issues Using Personal Interviews," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1992): 161.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Allmark et al., "Ethical Issues in the Use of In-Depth Interviews: Literature Review and Discussion," *Research Ethics* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 48.

### 3. Observational Social Media Research

Social media platforms or websites have become popular and valuable research tools.<sup>12</sup> In my research, I was using an observation method in a social media group on WhatsApp. I am part of a WhatsApp group of Zambian theatre-makers who are constantly discussing theatre in Zambia, including Zambian theatre history. It is called *Talking Theatre Zambia*. It has a membership of about 250 people. As members share information in the group, I observe and take note of what is relevant to my thesis. As a researcher in the group, I am no longer just a participant, I am observing and picking out data that is relevant for my research. This platform is not private, it is open for interested theatre-makers. I identified some of the people I interviewed from this platform.

### Limitations of the Study

In doing my interviews, it was much easier for me to find people who were, for example, actors or directors as compared to people who were part of the audience or community members. This was partly because there is a community and network of former theatre makers that I could reach out to and those I talked to could also recommend individuals they thought I needed to interview. Secondly, with restrictions in movement and not being able to do online interviews, I was not able to carry out more interviews. Access to some materials also proved difficult. To compensate for these challenges, I relied more on already published work on Zambian theatre.

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<sup>12</sup> Megan A. Moreno et al., "Ethics of Social Media Research: Common Concerns and Practical Considerations," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking* 16, no. 9 (September 2013): 708.

## Organization of Study

In Chapter One, I provide some context to theatre and performance in Africa reference to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Africa. Before moving to discussing specifics of theatre and indigenous performances in Zambia, I make use of Chapter Two discuss of the oral interviews I carried out during my research. I look at who I interviewed and what they talked about. Chapter Three looks at indigenous performances in Zambia. I give categories of performances and their reaction to colonization.

In Chapter Four and Five, I discuss my research findings using materials from my field and desk research. Chapter Four is dedicated to discussing the introduction of theatre by European settlers in Zambia and the development of Zambian theatre in post-colonial Zambia. In this chapter, I also write about the possible use of indigenous performances in post-independence Zambia theatre as well as the creation of alternative spaces for cultural expression through theatres such as *Chakwakwa* theatre, *Tikwiza* theatre and Zambian National Theatre Arts Association.

In Chapter Five, I turn my focus to traditional dance, which I consider as a theatrical form. It is my view that traditional dance became more widespread because more people identified with it as an indigenous performing art form. I share information on who I interviewed and what they talked about. Thereafter, I conclude.

# Chapter 1 - Theatre and performance in Africa

In this chapter, I briefly discuss theatre and performance in Africa with some examples from Sub-Sahara Africa. I limit myself to this part of Africa because I am more familiar with it. North Africa, though geographically part of Africa, and was also colonised by European countries, has a different cultural and historical background. Though African countries share many things in common, the continent also has diverse characteristics, posing a challenge for my task of describing theatre with the whole continent in mind. This is because there are different cultural traditions, and a variety of historical factors that have “shaped the function, form, and content of theatrical forms” in African countries that should be taken into consideration.<sup>13</sup>

In present day, African theatre is a mixture of foreign genres, largely European, and indigenous forms which include dances, storytelling, mimes, and recitations. The area of theatre in Africa has not been without controversy, academic theory has debated the existence and nature of African theatre. Some scholars deny the existence of theatre in Africa in pre-colonial times, while others have restricted African theatre only to those forms that are identical with European dramatic genre.<sup>14</sup> There are often diverse, complex, and contradictory connotations of theatre in Africa.<sup>15</sup> What may mean “theatre” in one country may mean something in another country. Though what constitutes theatre, especially in Africa, is still a matter of debate, I agree with the argument that Africa has “a distinct theatre based on her own

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<sup>13</sup> Penina Muhando Mlama, *Culture and Development: The Popular Theatre Approach in Africa* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1991). 55

<sup>14</sup> Mlama, 1991. 55.

<sup>15</sup> Ousmane Diakhaté and Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, “The Roots of African Theatre Ritual and Orality in the Pre-Colonial Period,” May 2017, <https://www.critical-stages.org/15/the-roots-of-african-theatre-ritual-and-orality-in-the-pre-colonial-period/>.

cultural traditions.”<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that all forms of theatre performed in Africa is based on its cultural traditions as there are many performances, some of which I have watched, with no connection to African cultural or performance traditions. Let me now turn to theatre and performance in pre-colonial Africa to give a bit of context and background.

## 1. 1 Pre-colonial Performances in Africa

Though there are no written records by Africans from the pre-colonial period about the forms of performances that existed, indigenous performances such as dances which are performed in present-day, at events such as annual traditional ceremonies and festivals, give us a picture of performances in pre-colonial Africa since these performances have been passed down from generation to generation. There are also written sources before colonisation that were recorded by external people such as missionaries and explorers that are relevant for this discussion.

In pre-colonial societies in Africa, Performances tended to be communal and oral-based.<sup>17</sup> They tended to make use of artistic forms such as mime, song, dance, movement, music, poetic rhythm, costume, gesture, dialogue, role-playing, and direct audience participation.<sup>18</sup> This is also evident from the characteristics of some present-day performances that have been passed down from generation to generation, though they might not have had a generic term designated to them. These ancient traditions of performance were part of everyday life in public places and homes.

One prominent feature of performances in pre-colonial societies in Africa, especially in dance, was the use of masks. The use of these masks has continued to this day in traditional

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<sup>16</sup> Mlama, *Culture and Development*. 55.

<sup>17</sup> Lokangaka Losambe and Devi Sarinjeive, *Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa* (New Africa Books, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Losambe and Sarinjeive, *Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Drama and Theatre*.

ceremonies or performances where the mask is used, it is considered as the material representation of a spiritual presence. The mask can represent both animals and humans. It is a sign that both erase the personality of the wearer and identifies the wearer with an ancestor or a supernatural being.<sup>19</sup> The wearer of the mask often covers more than just the face. The rest of the body is also usually covered, and the individual engages in dance while others may sing.



*Figure 1 Chokwe Mask Exhibition. Lusaka National Museum (Zambia), December 2020. Picture by Nambisa Chibuye*

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<sup>19</sup> Diakhaté and Eyoh, “The Roots of African Theatre Ritual and Orality in the Pre-Colonial Period.” <https://www.critical-stages.org/15/the-roots-of-african-theatre-ritual-and-orality-in-the-pre-colonial-period/>

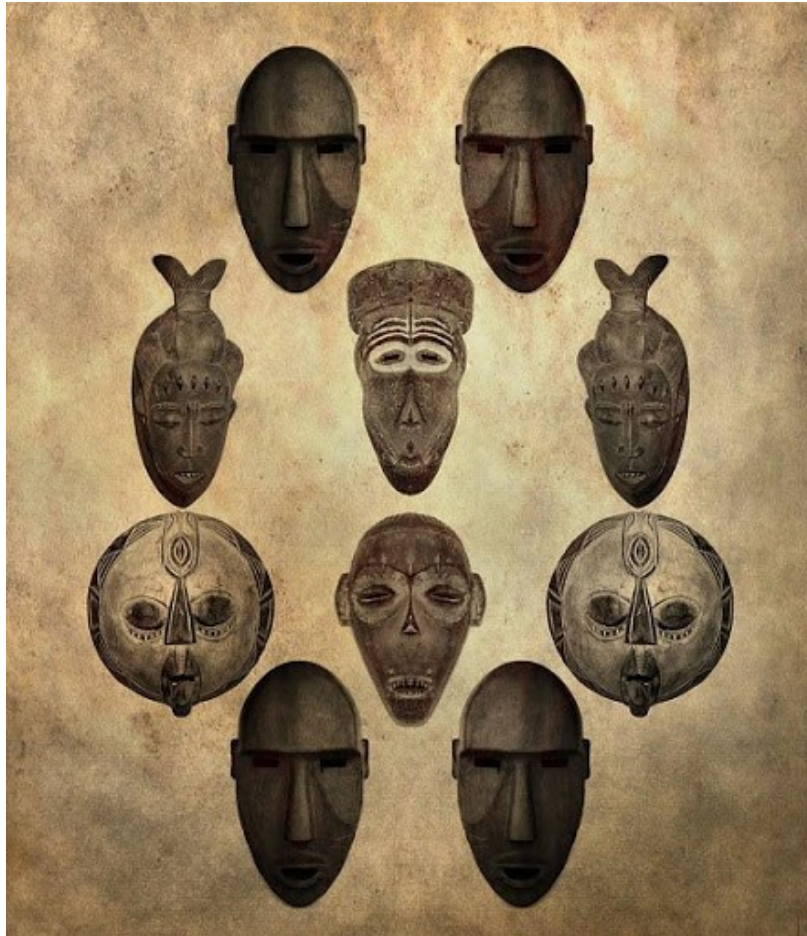


Figure 2 Examples of African masks used in some traditional performances<sup>20</sup>

Indigenous performances include(d) various initiation ceremonies which were an important occasion of ritual performance for the initiation of young people into adulthood or secret societies though such performances are not as common in present times. An example of a ritual dance is *Gule Wamkulu*, which was part of the initiation of young men into a secret cult among the Chewa in Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique, teaching its audience about social and moral values.<sup>21</sup> The *Gule Wankulu* masquerade was also performed at funerals of chiefs and on other important ritual occasions.<sup>22</sup> The dance was performed by members of the *Nyau*

<sup>20</sup> Diakhaté and Eyoh. “*The Roots of African Theatre Ritual and Orality in the Pre-Colonial Period.*”

<sup>21</sup> Today it is inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, though its function has been changing UNESCO, “UNESCO - Gule Wamkulu,” accessed May 25, 2020, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists>.

<sup>22</sup> I will discuss Gule Wamkulu more in the next chapter as I look at pre-colonial performances in Zambia



brotherhood, a secret society of initiated men.<sup>23</sup> It is also “associated with the placation and the nominal reincarnation of spirits of the dead.”<sup>24</sup> With the advent of colonisation, the colonial government discouraged such performances, nevertheless, they survived. Theatrical elements were also present in female initiation ceremonies. For example, in present-day Malawi, some female initiation rites of passage such as *Chinamwali* make use of songs, dances, mimes, or even short sketches when teaching about sexuality and social etiquette.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 3 Public Gule Wamkulu performance. Photo by Malawi National Commission for UNESCO.

<sup>23</sup> David Kerr and Stephen Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” in *A History of Theatre in Africa* ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 269-270.

<sup>24</sup> George Sembereka, “The Place of Gule Wamkulu in Dreams Attributed to Spirits, Nominal Reincarnation and Spirit Possession: The Nankumba Experience,” *The Society of Malawi Journal* 49, no. 1 (1996): 1.

<sup>25</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” 272.

Performances in pre-colonial Africa appear to have fulfilled both ritual and didactic functions as opposed to what is known as “art for art’s sake.”<sup>26</sup> In Kenya for example, the traditional Kenyan child was introduced to drama at birth, with the belief that drama assisted in ushering the child into the world.<sup>27</sup> Among the Miji Kenda of the coast of Kenya, during childbirth, song and dance played a significant part in easing the pregnant woman’s labour. The women assisting in the delivery process would treat the labouring mother to a performance. The movements of the performance were related to the whole process of procreation.<sup>28</sup> It appears, therefore, that dramatic experience and the use of art forms such as dance, music, and visual elements appear to have been, and continue to be necessary for the fulfilment and execution of festivals and rituals.

When rituals and festivals are compared, festivals have a more central role in the community.<sup>29</sup> These festivals which usually happen annually and during certain seasons bring more people together in celebration of a community’s achievement during the year, give thanks for the harvest, prepare for harvest, or continue reminding themselves and visitors of their identity and history. Both rituals and festivals “share a common dramatic experience in a communal setting through participation”, however, festivals reached out to more people.”<sup>30</sup>

Where performances were ritual, they performed to appease the spirits but also let the spirits take over the performances. There are examples where the performer would be possessed by the spirits as they engage in the ritual performance. Other ritual dances would be performed to acknowledge the gods. They were used to mark important community stages

<sup>26</sup> Jane Plastow, *African Theatre and Politics: The Evolution of Theatre in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe : A Comparative Study* (Rodopi, 1996), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ciarunji Chesaina and Evan Mwangi, “Kenya,” in *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 206–31.

<sup>28</sup> Chesaina and Mwangi, “Kenya,” 209.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Kennedy, *In Search of African Theatre* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 70.

<sup>30</sup> Kennedy, “*In Search of African Theatre*,” 70.

acknowledging birth, death, harvest, and other aspects of the passage of time.<sup>31</sup> Several such performances were banned or discouraged with the advent of colonialism as they were considered barbaric and not in line with the Christian faith.

While some events were based on real events, some were imaginative. They were community-based activities that were already fulfilled or to be fulfilled in the future.<sup>32</sup> War heroes, for example, imitate the real incidents of what happened on the battlefield for the community to see. Even in some religious ceremonies when they asked their gods for their harvest or children, they would imitate the outcome they desired.<sup>33</sup>

These performances were not just for teaching, some of them were for entertainment, performed at such events as weddings and annual celebration festivals. Performances were meant for live audiences and would usually occur in open places. The main way of communicating with the audience when narrating what happened or what would happen in the future was through spoken word. To keep the audiences constantly engaged, music, dancing, mimicry, masks, and costumes were used to complete this oral tradition of storytelling.<sup>34</sup>

## 1.2 Foreign Influences on African Theatre and Performances

Indigenous forms of performance in Africa, and western-style theatre, particularly that of Europe, have interacted with each other from the arrival of Europeans in Africa resulting in African theatre as it is known today. Indigenous African performances have undergone changes owing to the interaction with other cultures. Missionary societies that were set up in Africa aimed at converting and “educating” Africans, leading to the overshadowing of indigenous

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<sup>31</sup> Dale L. Byam, *Community in Motion: Theatre for Development in Africa* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Chitra Jayathilake, “*The Origin of African Theatre: An Overview*,” accessed January 26, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/2466069/The\\_Origin\\_of\\_African\\_Theatre\\_An\\_Overview](https://www.academia.edu/2466069/The_Origin_of_African_Theatre_An_Overview). 1.

<sup>33</sup> Jayathilake., “*The Origin of African Theatre*,” 1.

<sup>34</sup> Jayathilake. “*The Origin of African Theatre*” 2.

African performances.<sup>35</sup> This contact also brought in new concepts of drama, concerts, and theatrical presentations. Before this time, Africans did not stand on a platform to sing songs, say things, and dance to entertain people that were static and sitting on chairs.<sup>36</sup> The words theatre and drama were foreign. In addition, these performers would be largely in English, a new language that students had learnt in the new missionary schools.

Power structures between Africans and Europeans in this cultural space shaped the type of theatre that has developed. Ravengai, in his discussion of urban theatre in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) from 1890-1950 makes a statement to highlight the unbalanced between Europeans and Africans “The contact between Europeans and Africans was not only physical but cultural and in the latter allowing cultural transmission, less in the direction of the coloniser and more in the direction of the colonised owing to unequal power relations.”<sup>37</sup> In the “formal” performances spaces such as theatre houses, this statement may be true, however, indigenous performances have managed to continue playing a significant role in communities and have developed side by side, in some cases more popular. Traditional ceremonies have continued to get more numbers, although this is because they may happen only once a year and open to the public for free.

Though there were a lot of cultural assets which have dramatic components in pre-colonial Africa, colonisation created a situation where aspects of “African drama” were repressed and replaced.<sup>38</sup> In some instances, as a reaction to colonisation, some African masquerades partly turned their satire on the European settlers who were considered

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<sup>35</sup> Kennedy, *In Search of African Theatre*.

<sup>36</sup> Kennedy, *In Search of African Theatre*.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Ravengai, “Contesting Constructions of Cultural Production in and through Urban Theatre in Rhodesia, c. 1890-1950,” in *African Theatre Histories 1850-1950* ed. Yvette Hutchison (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 68.

<sup>38</sup> Seok-Ho Lee, “Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s Postcolonial Orality: Towards a New Poetics of Drama,” *International Area Review* 2, no. 2 (September 1, 1999): 154.

intruders.<sup>39</sup> For example, indigenous Africans would create masks, costumes and characters protest that would mock Europeans. This is partly a concept of “theatre of the dominated majority,” where those who feel oppressed against the ruling classes using theatre (in this case, through adaptation of indigenous performances).<sup>40</sup> In the present day, a number of these ceremonies are becoming commercialised and are popular with tourists and politicians. Performances such as dance and song have come to be part of the collective identity of countries and are often an integral part of government departments of tourism, arts, and culture.

Following colonisation, a theatre life began to emerge among European settler communities in some African countries such as present-day Zimbabwe and Malawi. They created theatre halls and staged plays that were focused on European and American musicals, reviews, and comedies, among others.<sup>41</sup> The theatrical performances came with extra formality of audience dress code and emphasised traditional nineteenth-century conventions. The theatre experience was an attempt of recreating European cultural life and experience. When European colonial rulers imposed European theatre on Africa, the intention was not only to entertain the European settlers but also to inculcate European values and attitudes among the colonised.<sup>42</sup>

On days like Empire Day, which was celebrated every year in the British Empire, there was a display of military power to impress the colonised peoples. During the celebrations, there were also African traditional dances and improvised plays. These traditional dances and plays that we incorporated were largely to show some form of perceived cooperation of the colonised.<sup>43</sup> Indigenous theatre was largely overruled by the dominant Western-oriented theatre. Village dance drama was ignored by the colonial authorities.<sup>44</sup> Where it was not

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<sup>39</sup> Anne Fuchs, review of *Review of African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day*, by David Kerr, *Research in African Literatures* 28, no. 1 (1997): 229.

<sup>40</sup> Mlama, *Culture and Development*, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” 278.

<sup>42</sup> Mlama, *Culture and Development*. 57.

<sup>43</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” 280.

<sup>44</sup> Kees P Epskamp, “Historical Development of Zambian National Theatre,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 21, no. 2 (1987): 158.

ignored, it was for the amusement of settler communities. Many ritual and dance dramas had to adapt to the new way because of European influence.

Despite the controversy around power relations in the colonial period, the colonial period can be considered as a significant foundation and second pillar in the development of African theatre. In traditional forms, performances were communal and closely linked to ritual, the forms introduced in the colonial era were more for the stage and creating performances for entertainment and recreation. In the traditional forms, the line between the performer and the audience was very thin, where a spectator could also be a performer if they so wished. Forms introduced during the colonial era, particularly in the designated theatre halls, had a clear separation between the audience and the performers.

Prior to independence, particularly in the 1950s, there were some indigenous Africans who staged plays that frequently attacked the prevailing colonial authorities. Overly political productions were banned and in some cases producers fined.<sup>45</sup>

### 1.3 Theatre and performance in post-colonial Africa

Following the independence of most African countries from the mid-twentieth century, the anticolonial theatre-makers staged celebrations of freedom. These “anti-colonial authorities” playwrights shifted to creating plays that criticized African governments in independent African countries because the new governments turned out to be not so different from colonial powers.<sup>46</sup> After independence, most African countries continued with colonial theatre structures. Theatres that were originally set up by European settler communities were still largely showing European plays. The theatre, therefore, through colonial policies and

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<sup>45</sup> I. Peter Ukpokodu, “Plays, Possession, and Rock-and-Roll: Political Theatre in Africa,” *TDR (1988-)* 36, no. 4 (1992): 28.

<sup>46</sup> Ukpokodu., “Plays, Possession, and Rock-and-Roll,” 28.

ideology, encouraged theatrical importations that featured themes and values from remote European tradition which could only be accepted and appreciated by those who had gone through a western-type education system.<sup>47</sup> This led to calls for theatre that would be appreciated by the wider society. In Kenya for example, by the time of independence in 1963, theatre was an established entertainment tool among the settler community as well as an agent of anti-colonial struggle among indigenous Kenyans.<sup>48</sup> These two strands of theatre developed side by side in post-colonial Kenya. From my observations in theatre circles, this is a trend that was common in several African countries including Zambia. Following independence, there was no automatic merger of organisations that were led by settler communities and those of indigenous Africans. To this day, this separation is still visible.

Among the African majority, independence ushered in movements of nationalist patriotism, seeking autonomous cultural expression. This was coupled with the growth of cultural nationalism and attempts to displace the theatre imported with colonialism. One of the most important patriotic forms of expression was dance coupled with song. This was because dance had played a crucial role in raising the consciousness of people during the struggle for independence. Song and dance were usually adapted to praise public charismatic figures in the nationalist struggle.<sup>49</sup> This followed even after independence as theatrical performances were also used by African governments to meet their political objectives such as nation-building. They would help gather people and get their messages across.

Individual countries in Africa had different experiences in the development of theatre. This is because countries gained independence at different times and even their experience in the struggle for independence was different. Since countries were colonised at different times

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<sup>47</sup> Marti Mullet Tololwa, "African Theatre And The Colonial Legacy: Review Of The East African Scene," *Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences University of Dar Es Salaam African E-Journals Project* 07, no. 1 (1985): 20–29.

<sup>48</sup> Chesaina and Mwangi, "Kenya," 217.

<sup>49</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day* (James Currey Publishers, 1995), 197.

and by different countries, the implication was that their experience would also be different. For example, in Zimbabwe, one major factor in creating a new Zimbabwean theatre grew out of the liberation struggle.<sup>50</sup> Plays that were staged focused on celebrating heroes of the anti-colonial struggle and ambitions for the future. Indigenous performance forms were used in the process though it was noted that indigenous forms of performance in their pure form were not sufficient to support the liberations struggle of the time.<sup>51</sup> There was thus a call for a revolutionary theatre that would transform the indigenous culture. In Zimbabwe, dramatized dance was one of the pre-colonial cultural forms that were transformed as a result of exposure to colonialism. Another example was *Bira*, a spirit possession ritual that first stopped when the Shona were defeated by the British settler in 1896 but was revived in the build-up to independence. It appealed to indigenous African religions and nationalist sentiments.<sup>52</sup> Following Zimbabwean independence in 1980, plays from other parts of Africa played an important role in the development of theatre in the country.<sup>53</sup> Playwrights included Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya, and Athol Fugard and John Kani, from South Africa.

In the case of South Africa which moved to majority rule in 1994, which is late compared to other African countries, there was a growth of alternative theatre which articulated the struggle against Apartheid.<sup>54</sup> Some plays include *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island* in 1974, *Asinamali!* (1985; *We Have No Money*) and *Sarafina* (1987).

Each country used theatre and performance according to the environment in which it operated. What is clear, however, is that after independence, theatre and performance were used as one important way of creating a new identity of the new African states. African countries also encouraged exchanging of ideas and creating a platform where African artists

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<sup>50</sup> Martin Banham, "African Theatre - Southern and South Africa," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/African-theatre-art>.

<sup>51</sup> Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*, 212.

<sup>52</sup> Kerr, *African Popular Theatre* 211.

<sup>53</sup> Banham, "African Theatre - Southern and South Africa."

<sup>54</sup> Banham, "African Theatre - Southern and South Africa."



would gather. One of those ways was the creating World Festival of Black Arts also known as “FESTAC.” The first one was in 1966 in Senegal. It was an “attempt to unify artists from all over the African continent and their diaspora, to celebrate their convergence and cultural origins.”<sup>55</sup> The second FESTAC was in 1977, hosted by Nigeria.

One form of theatre that can be recognised in post-independence Africa is popular theatre. The term “popular theatre” comes from the French term, “theatre populaire” meaning theatre of the people, dating back to the times of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who wanted people to see festivals feature dances instead of stage plays.<sup>56</sup> This form of theatre relies on “community” as the integral and most motivating factor. It is theatre that speaks to ordinary people, dealing with issues that are relevant to them using their own languages or idioms. Popular theatre can also be defined as:

“theatre that is, in general, associated with opposition to ... refined theatre forms, ... which are standard, and which are used by the established order. Also included in popular theatre are forms which come under the heading of ‘theatre for development’; forms which strive for explicitly educative aims in the development process.”<sup>57</sup>

Since there was the “accepted theatre” in theatres that were built by the Europeans, popular theatre developed outside these official places, mostly using indigenous languages, and focusing on stories that local communities could identify with. The aim is to engage the broad masses and touch on issues that are familiar to them and people would freely express themselves. Through popular theatre, the young, old, men or women, and other marginalised groups could gather.<sup>58</sup> As popular theatre gained prominence, travelling theatres were created,

<sup>55</sup> Moments of the Past: Fesman 66 & Festac 77, accessed May 23, 2021, <https://mbassy.org/en/journal/fesman66-festac77>.

<sup>56</sup> Joel Schechter, *Popular Theatre: A Sourcebook* (Routledge, 2013), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Kees P Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change: The Relative Significance of Different Theatrical Approaches* (The Hague: Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (CESO), 1989), 12.

<sup>58</sup> Hilde Kvam, “Theatre for Development – A Tanzanian Road Towards Citizenship and Cultural Renewal,” 2012, 44–52.

with universities being at the centre of these travelling theatres. The theatres went out in rural areas with new forms of performances that would appeal to more people.

Another form of theatre, Theatre for Development (TfD), was introduced in several African countries in the 1960s. Theatre was to be a tool of communication in development projects. Theatre forms that are associated with TfD include community theatre, popular theatre, and applied theatre. All these forms are centred on people, addressing issues that directly affect communities. TfD as way for popular education was not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but other parts of the world such as Latin America and the Indian subcontinent in the 1970s.<sup>59</sup>

TfD aimed to encourage the spectators to analyse the social environment through dialogue and to spread information and knowledge through theatre, among all people even the illiterate. Messages were centred around issues such as health, good farming practices and adopting new technology. For example, some plays would praise farmers who adopt modern farming methods. In Malawi, following independence, Ministry of Agriculture officials used puppet shows for agriculture extension work which focuses on giving farmers technical information and helping them make the right decisions when farming, thereby, improving yields.<sup>60</sup> TfD was also inspired by the birth of new nations in Africa that wanted to develop their own identity whilst creating a strong national culture. The focus was on cultural roots as the basis for national culture.<sup>61</sup> TfD was later criticised for being forced on local people by external initiators, unlike popular theatre which was a product of the locals.

African theatre is a product of an accumulation of diverse forms of theatrical performances. Each country may have had its own path of development though there are many similarities. Several playwrights try to create plays that are rooted in Africa's traditions, and

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<sup>59</sup> Kvam, *Theatre for Development*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> Mlama, *Culture and Development*.,” 69.

<sup>61</sup> Kvam, “Theatre for Development,” 46.

acknowledge and make use of foreign theatrical traditions, especially those of Europe, however, there are also plays that were created as the environment dictated, for example, struggle for independence or the need for people to have knowledge on better farming methods or get information of how they can prevent certain diseases. In our quest to understand African theatre, the cultural, historical, and social conditions that led to the birth of African theatre should be taken into consideration.

## Chapter 2 – Collecting Memories of Zambian Theatre through Oral Interviews

*“The interview is a conversation. The art of asking questions and listening. It’s not a neutral tool, for the interviewer creates the reality of the interview situation....”*<sup>62</sup>

In this chapter I give a concise overview of the oral history interviews I have carried out in an attempt to collect more details of the development of theatre in post-colonial Zambia from people who were connected with the theatrical world of the period in one way or another. I did the interviews with people who were actors, writers, and producers. Those who were connected to the Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ) as well as the Zambia Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA). Some individuals also shared information about traditional Zambian performances including performances at traditional ceremonies. I also talked to community members who were not performers. I also did interviews with people who were not necessarily theatre-makers but have done some research on Zambian theatre.

In my discussion of these oral interviews, I make use of the following categories: Those who were part of or inclined to TAZ; Those who were part of ZANTAA, Chikwakwa Theatre, University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS), and Tikwiza Theatre; Those were not theatre makers but rather were researchers or journalists; community members (those who were simply watching); and lastly those who do not directly fall in these categories.

The interviews will be made available online so that anyone interested in researching and learning more about theatre and performance in the years following Zambia’s independence can make use of them. Through preserving the oral history of early post-

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<sup>62</sup> Quote from Denzin and Lincoln, Handbook of Qualitative Research. Taken from Podcast on Questions and Questioning by Andrea Pető

colonial theatre in Zambia, they will also contribute toward preserving a part of Zambian cultural heritage

## 5.1 Individuals affiliated with the Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ)

Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ) was formed in 1952 by European settlers. It was known as Northern Rhodesia Drama Association until 1964 when it changed its name to TAZ following Zambia's independence. It focused on promoting Western theatre. It controlled the Little Theatres that were set up in the main towns in Zambia.<sup>63</sup>

### 5.1.1 Katebe John

John Katebe is a retired theatre maker. He was an actor, playwright, and director. I had interacted with Katebe before my research project since we were both members of Nkana Arts Society (NKAS). Knowing that he was part of the early years of theatre-making in Zambia, he was one of the first people I contacted for an interview. He was co-founder of a theatre group called *Bantu Theatre* which was formed in Kabwe, a town in the Central province of Zambia. According to Katebe, the idea behind *Bantu Theatre* was to create a full-time theatre group of "mature" people who were interested in theatre.

As a former member of TAZ, he talked about its operations and why he opted not to be a member of ZANTAA. He highlighted how there was sometimes animosity between TAZ and ZANTAA. According to Katebe, ZANTAA was propagating African culture and politics of the United National Independence Party. He also highlighted how the Zambian President then, Kenneth Kaunda, wanted Zambians to express themselves through theatre. According to

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<sup>63</sup> "Little Theatre" is the name that was given to theatres that were created by European settlers especially in the mining towns. In Zambia, these were built in the 1950s. They remain the main theatres houses in Zambia today.

Katebe, he joined TAZ because he wanted to express himself through theatre without the interference of politics.

### 5.1.2 Barney Kanjela

Barney Kanjela was an actor and a member of the Theatre Association of Zambia. In the 1980s, Kanjela was once chairperson of Nkana Kitwe Arts Society (NKAS) at Kitwe Little Theatre. Currently, he is focusing more on writing and directing. From the onset of the interview, he detached himself from the work of ZANTAA and pointed out that he had no clue what ZANTAA was about as he focused more on learning the technical aspects of creating theatre with TAZ. According to Kanjela, ZANTAA had no theatre clubs except for *Bakanda* Theatre in Kitwe which he said was substandard because it did not have the basic requirements for a theatre. He was of the view that what was performed by ZANTAA was not “real” theatre and was poorly put together. He noted that many of the places where ZANTAA members performed did not have basic things such as lighting and curtains.

Kanjela talked about how TAZ did not align itself with messages of independence but focused on creating plays for art’s sake and not make any comments on politics. Kanjela generally focused on the technical aspects of creating theatre.

## 5.2 Individuals Associated with Zambia National Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA)

Zambia National Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA) was formed in 1975. It was formed following dissatisfaction with the work of TAZ. ZANTAA was meant to be an organization that would promote non-western theatre in Zambia. Aside “traditional theatre,” the association embraced performing art forms such as dance and poetry.

### 5.2.1 Mumba Kapumba

Mumba Kapumpa was a member of the University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS), a member of Chikwakwa Theatre and a founding member of *Tikwiza* Theatre. He was an actor, director, and producer. He talked about the work of these theatre groups that he was part of as well as the work of ZANTAA. He highlighted the contestations that arose between TAZ and groups such as UNZADRAMS at festivals organized by TAZ. Particularly the displeasure of indigenous Africans on having adjudicators at the TAZ festivals come from the UK every year who, they argued, did not understand the cultural context of plays that were written and staged by indigenous Zambians.

Kapumpa shared information about funding for theatre following independence. He was of the view that theatre was disregarded and received very little support from the government compared to the support that traditional dance received. He also talked about his experience at Chikwakwa Theatre and how Chikwakwa tried to experiment with African forms of performance by creating an open-air theatre where audience members were to be engaged more actively in the performances. He also shared information on the performances that *Tikwiza* Theatre did outside Zambia including the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) held in Nigeria in 1971.

### 5.2.2 Dorcus Habenzu

Dorcas Habenzu was an actor and secretary in Tikiwza Theatre. She mainly shared information about Tikwiza theatre. She shared information about the play *Soweto Flowers Will Grow* which was staged in 1976 and noted that this play was the most popular play done by *Tikwiza* Theatre.

She also commented on funding and peoples view of theatre at the time. According to her, at *Tikwiza* theatre, they funded their own productions and did not have direct support from the government. They focused on getting companies to advertise in their brochures. Because of the financial and time sacrifices involved, she pointed out that the membership of Tikwiza Theatre was mostly older people, unlike Chikwakwa Theatre which had students.

From her recollection, not many indigenous Zambians were writing plays and not many were interested in theatre as could be seen from the audiences that would show up at the plays.

### 5.2.3 Wamala Vivienne Silwamba

Wamala Vivienne Silwamba was also a member of *Tikwiza* Theatre. She shared how she started acting from her school days, but *Tikwiza* was the first theatre club she joined that was for adults. She joined in 1977. The first play she took part in was *Soweto Flowers Will Grow*. Asked about the kind of plays they were doing, she highlighted that they did plays with “revolutionary” themes touching on issues that were going in the region, countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe that were still struggling for independence. Silwamba highlighted how *Tikwiza* Theatre’s role of creating discussion around topics that mattered was not limited to Zambia, but the Southern African region. According to her, they were telling stories that commented on situation in the region. Silwamba also pointed out that the work they did was voluntary, no one was paid for it.

### 5.2.4 Dickson Mwansa

Dickson Mwansa was an actor, writer, and director. He started performing when he was in secondary school around 1963 to 1968. He talked about the operations of the Little Theatres, TAZ, ZANTAA, and the National Dance Troupe. He was initially a member of TAZ. When ZANTAA was formed, he became chairperson.



Mwansa talked about the contestations that were there between UNZADRAMS and organizers of TAZ festivals especially on the issue of having festival adjudicators come from the UK, a topic which was also raised by Mumba Kapumpa. He talked about the creation of ZANTAA and eventually the merging of ZANTAA and TAZ to create the National Theatre Association of Zambia (NATAAZ). Mwansa also talked about themes of plays that were created after independence which included betrayal of the promise of independence, white and black encounter, South African theme of apartheid, the Soweto plays and rising crime.

Other areas that Mwansa discussed included the creating of *Bakanda* Theatre in Kitwe, a group that was like Tikwiza in Lusaka. He also discussed the formation of the National Dance Troupe and its work. He shared his recollection of the Dance Troupes participation in the FESTAC 66 and their work after they returned home as they performed in schools around the country. According to Mwansa, the performances of the National Dance Troupe were a real portrayal of Zambian identity. This could explain why the government then supported National Dance Troupe more compared to any theatre group.

### **5.3 Individuals not clearly aligned with TAZ or ZANTAA**

In this category, I have individuals who may not have been necessarily affiliated with one group or the other. Some of them were not performers but researchers.

#### **5.3.1 Kaonga Wesley**

Wesley Kaonga was an actor and worked for the Department of Cultural Services which was set up immediately after Zambia gained independence. In my interview with him, he shared with me his understanding of African theatre, giving examples of performances such as *Gule Wankulu* and ceremonies such as *Kulamba ceremony* of the Chewa people. He shared examples

of plays that he thought were based on African traditions such as *Lobengula* by Kabwe Kasoma and Fwanyanga Mulikita's *Shaka*.

Kaonga talked about his early days of acting in colonial times noting that drama was an extracurricular activity that was encouraged by the British. According to him, plays were an integral part of the entertainment programs of schools and community centres. He added that the British wanted Africans to speak and behave like them, as such, encouraged such performances.

He talked about the “revolutionary” plays that were staged before independence but highlighted how the local dance performances such as *Fwemba* and *Kalela* became more powerful and popular. These dances were performed in welfare halls and public places. He referred to these as theatre renditions. He noted that the first President of Zambia acknowledged the important role of culture and thus encouraged performing arts such as theatre.

He also talked about the role of TAZ. He thought it had a positive influence on him and other people as it tried to develop a new crop of writers, actors and directors based on the British dramatic arts model

### 5.3.2 Angel Phiri

Angel Phiri is a filmmaker and TV producer. He spoke more from a position of a researcher than a performer. He talked of how miners on the Copperbelt in towns such as Mufurila and Kitwe used to have a lot of gatherings where they used to have performances, especially over weekends.

According to Phiri, people who had moved from the rural areas to these mining towns in search of work took these performances as a form of entertainment. There would be drama and a lot of dances in open public spaces/grounds that were created for such performances.

### 5.3.3 Kapesa John

John is the founder of Talking Theatre Zambia, an online platform that is a collection of theatre-makers in Zambia. It was through this platform that was able to find some of the people I interviewed. Though Kapesa was not an active actor, he has been writing about Zambia theatre and has reviewed several Zambian plays. In the interview, he shared his recollection of the early Zambian theatre groups highlighting groups such as *Chikwakwa* Theatre, *Tikwiza* Theatre and the University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS). He talked about the support that theatre groups received in the early days especially from private companies.

Kapesa talked about how there was always a teaching aspect in the plays that were staged. According to him, plays were expected to be “culturally/morally upright.” He also talked about the difficulties of fusing in traditional dances in plays because the dances were rigidly regionalized. In cases where plays had dance, they were entertainment dances to avoid conflicting interpretations of the meaning of dances.

### 5.3.4 Bright Banda

Bright Banda was an actor. He is still active in the theatre circles in Zambia as a director. I met him at the Lusaka Playhouse for the interview. In the interview, he talked about the sudden rush and desire for by indigenous Zambians to occupy places such as the Little Theatres

in the 1970s. For Banda, this rush to occupy these spaces of cultural production was not understood by the locals and led to failure to run them.

He talked about the growth of theatre in schools encouraged by teachers but spearheaded by pupils who begun to write and direct their own plays. He also shared information about the operations of the Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ) and Zambia National Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA).

## **5.4 Interviews with Community Members**

I had some interviews with ordinary community members to also shared their memories on what they experienced in the communities they lived in.

### **5.4.1 Chilengi R**

Chilengi grew up on the Copperbelt Province where he experienced some of the performances in the local communities. Though in the interview he shares that he was quite young and did not take part in performing, he remembers how there were traditional performances over the weekends in bigger townships such as *Chimwemwe*, *Buchi*, and *Ndeke*. These are areas where indigenous Zambians were living.

When asked about the type of messages that were in these performances, he highlighted messages around fighting for independence and liberation. He shared that before independence, the plays were against colonial authorities and after independence, most performances depicted celebration although there were also performances that portrayed the hardships of the colonial era.

Chilengi also talked about songs that were making fun of the colonial authorities before independence. He gave an example of satirical performances songs in the Bemba language

where performances did the opposite of what they sang. For example, they would chant “forward,” in a song, but be moving backwards, or “backwards” yet be going forward.

When asked if recalled other songs that were sung, he could not. According to him, it was because he was not a performer and did not take time to learn the songs. Chilembo suggested the second community member I talked to, V. Mulota. He was of the view that since Mulota lived in one of the most active townships on the Copperbelt Province at that time, he would be in a better position to share more about performances of the time.

### 5.4.2 Mulota Victor

Mulota Victor was minor on the Copperbelt province and lived in *Wusakille*, a township where indigenous Africans were living. He currently lives in Lufwanyama, a rural district on the Copperbelt province. During the interview, he shared that the performances in the townships/local communities were mainly dance performances. He knew about the existence of the Little Theatre at Nkana Arts Society (NKAS) in Kitwe, which was part of TAZ, but it was too far for him and others who lived in *Wusakile*.

Like Chilenge, the other community member I interviewed, Mulota noted that since he was not a performer, he could not remember the songs but the themes after independence were about celebrating Zambia’s independence. He also talked about how some plays performed in *Wusakile* and *Chamboli* shared information on health and hygiene.

# Chapter 3 - Indigenous Performances in Zambia

As discussed briefly in Chapter One, African countries have their own indigenous performances which go back to pre-colonial times. Zambia is no exception. This chapter looks at some of the indigenous performance traditions before colonization. I have mainly sourced information about these indigenous through desktop research and oral interviews that I carried out. I discuss these performances in this section to give some background to the transition (or lack of) that comes when foreign forms of performance art are introduced. These performances include traditional dances, dance drama and ritual performances. Some forms of these performances are still practised today in certain (primarily rural) areas or at annual traditional ceremonies that are still celebrated by ethnic groups and encouraged by the government as a way of celebrating the country's diversity and heritage.

For public performances from the pre-colonial era, traditional ceremonies remain one of the main ways the public can witness these performances and celebration of Zambia's cultural diversity. "There are more than 20 annual traditional ceremonies in Zambia, manifesting customs, social life, rituals, oral history, material and spiritual culture. They provide valuable insight to a traditional culture that has been passed down from generation to generation."<sup>64</sup> In other words, as noted by one of the people I interviewed, Wesley Kaonga, a former cultural officer in the department of culture and a session actor, "the traditional ceremony is

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<sup>64</sup> Embassy of the Republic of Zambia in Washington, D.C., "About Zambia," accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.zambiaembassy.org/page/about-zambia>.

where each ethnic linguistic grouping will [expose themselves] to their children and youth, and to visitors about their way of life, who they are.”<sup>65</sup>

At these ceremonies, several activities may be classified as theatrical. Apart from specific people who might have specific roles to perform, for example, sing praises for their leader, leaders may also be expected to carry out some performing acts like dancing, to the excitement of their subjects. While there are these public performances, there are also private ones like those at initiation ceremonies or ritual dances that are not meant for the public. In the paragraphs that follow, I discuss the categories of these performances.

### 3.1 Categorizing Traditional Performances in Zambia

Zambia has many ethnic groups with 73 languages, similar in many ways but also different. Categorizing performances from these groups is not an easy task, if not futile. Performances may have different meanings and a dance that might fall in, for example, a ritual category might also be considered as an entertainment dance. However, I will go ahead with the discussion and borrow from David Kerr’s categorization of performing arts in Zambia.<sup>66</sup> I borrow from Kerr because I found his categorization easy to follow and because other authors were discussing the performance individually. Kerr has several categories which include ritual and religious performances, rites of passage performances, performances with a specific end in view, such as work and war songs, performances of political nature, and entertainment performances. Though in my discussion I refer to these performances as something that used

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<sup>65</sup> Kaonga, Wesley. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 28.10.20. Theatre director and actor, and former cultural officer, Cultural Services. By “expose themselves,” he meant sharing with others, opening and letting them see what the community is about. People learn more about the leadership structure of the group, ways of farming, their history and route of migration into Zambia. Sometimes, where the chief/king is rarely seen by the people, this is the only time they get to see the King/Chief.

<sup>66</sup> David Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South-East Africa* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 1998).

to happen in the past, some of these performances are still present in some communities to this day.

The first category is for performances that are associated with ritual and religious life. Some dance forms that may be seen as religious performances are “masquerades” that represent ancestors and spirit possession dances.<sup>67</sup> The term masquerade in this discussion “refers both to the performance given by masked characters and to the masked performer.”<sup>68</sup> In Zambia, the major ones were the *Makishi* of the Luvale and Lunda people and the *Gule wa Mkulu* of the Chewa people. *Makishi* were representatives of ancestral spirits who return to human society during special times, for example, during the initiation ceremony for boys, *Mukanda*.<sup>69</sup> The *Makishi* are masked characters. There were different kinds of *Makishi*, some would represent great chiefs from the past while others would represent animals such *Munguli* (hyena) and *Kanyenenyenge* (pelican). Others represented qualities of people such as anger (*Wutemu*), *Chiwigi*, representing a young woman who is seen as proud. There are also masks such as *Katoyo* or *Chindele* which were originally used to mock foreigners and outsiders including the colonial powers.<sup>70</sup> All roles were performed by men while the characters can represent both female and male characters.<sup>71</sup> These performances made extensive use of song and dance.

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<sup>67</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Martin Banhan et al., *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>69</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> “Cantor Arts Center Exhibition of Makishi Highlights Central Africa | Stanford News Release,” April 2, 2008, <https://news.stanford.edu/pr/2008/pr-makishi-040208.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 20.





Figure 4 Makishi dancer representing an ancestral spirit who assists at initiation rites of the peoples in North-Western Zambia. Carl Frank/Photo Researchers

Another type of performance that falls under the religious category is *Gule wa Mkulu*, which I referred to in chapter two. It is associated with the *Nyau*, a secret society of men. It was practised among the Chewa people in Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique.<sup>72</sup> It was performed during extended rituals for events such as funerals, installation of a new chief and girls initiation ceremonies. The dance is connected with hunting, an important source of food, and this is reflected in some of its most sacred masks. Some masks represented wild animals such as the lion and elephant, domesticated animals such as cattle and even representations of human characters such as *Thamuthamu*, meaning drunkard and *Tsempho*, meaning someone suffering from a sexual disease.<sup>73</sup> In my interview with Wesley Kaonga, he noted that Chewa's

<sup>72</sup> "UNESCO - Gule Wamkulu," accessed May 16, 2021, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists>.

<sup>73</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 20.

have over 450 characters represented by these masks.<sup>74</sup> These masks were not static, they changed with time, represented characters as seen as necessary by the performers. Some of the animal characters, though frightening, were meant to encourage young men to endure and be ready to become men.<sup>75</sup>



Figure 5 *Gule Wamkulu*, a ritual dancer among the Chewa. Picture from the article “The Roots of African Theatre Ritual and Orality in the Pre-Colonial Period” by Ousmane Diakhaté and Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh.

Both *Makishi* and *Gule wa Mkulu* were meant to invoke the power and protection of ancestral spirits. This was part of the community’s celebration of their origin and the dances also had an instructive function, openly castigating behaviour such as drunkenness or laziness, considered to be a danger to the vitality of the community.<sup>76</sup> Today, performances of the *Makishi* can be seen at *Likumbi Lya Mize* traditional ceremony, an annual festival of the Luvale

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<sup>74</sup> Kaonga. Interview.

<sup>75</sup> Kaonga. Interview

<sup>76</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 20.

speaking people of the North-Western province of Zambia. *Gule wa Mkulu* performance can also be seen at the annual festival known as *Kulamba* Traditional Ceremony of the Chewa people of Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia. The second category is for performances that were connected to rites of passage.<sup>77</sup> These are the ones Kerr refers to as life cycle performances. These were performed at life-cycle events such as birth, puberty, marriage, and funerals. For example, children that come of age may have been separated from others.<sup>78</sup> While in seclusion, they were taught and required to perform certain rituals. In the traditional community, an individual used to have a socially defined identity, as either a child, grown woman, or man, However, while in initiation ceremony camps, this identity was taken away. When those being initiated left the initiation camp, they acquired a new identity.<sup>79</sup> Those who were being initiated usually had no say in what happened there. It was the authority of the initiation leader that mattered the most. Those being initiated may have had a grownup who was familiar to him or her to render assistance as a personal attendant during the transition period.

Though different ethnic groups employed different procedures, dance and music had a special significance with these rituals.<sup>80</sup> The process of initiation was not an individual affair, it was connected to the rest of the community. There was singing and dancing when those being initiated were separated and when they were re-admitted into the community. An example of rites of passage ceremonies is *Mukanda*. The ceremony refers to both the place where boys are isolated, that is the hut, which can be outside the village, and the sum of organised activities

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<sup>77</sup> C.P. Epskamp, "From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia," January 1986.

<sup>78</sup> Though most people no longer observe this practice, there are still some communities where initiation and initiation camps/schools still exist.

<sup>79</sup> Epskamp, "From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia."

<sup>80</sup> Epskamp, "From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia."

followed throughout the initiation ceremony, that is, the preparation, circumcision, recovery, and education while in seclusion.

The third category consists of performances that had a specific end in view. These are the ones Kerr refers to as instrumental performances such as war dances and work songs.<sup>81</sup> War dances encouraged soldiers in battle to celebrate victory and encouraged the soldier to go for greater exploits. The Ngoni people who settled in Eastern Province had a well-developed form of war dance. The work songs included songs women sang together while pounding grains or crops. They helped women carry out the monotonous task of pounding crops such as millet and sorghum. The songs were also used by women as a medium to express their happiness over domestic achievements or their displeasure over domestic problems. Such work songs were also common among men. In one of my interviews, the interviewee gave an example of how men doing manual labor on the streets would sing songs together and lessen the burden.<sup>82</sup>

The fourth category is one with political performances. Examples included rituals around the installation of chiefs and annual ritual re-enactments of important events in the history of the community. These were mostly annual or seasonal events. Several of these traditional ceremonies have continued to this day and happen annually in chiefdoms across the country. The *Mutomboko* ceremony is an example of a historical re-enactment. It is held every year among the Lunda people of Luapula to celebrate the crossing of the Luapula River in the eighteenth century and to commemorate the victory associated with the event.<sup>83</sup> Another example of a ceremony that has continued to this day is the *Kulamba* Ceremony which I referred to earlier when I first referred to *Gule Wa Mkulu*. The ceremony is held annually. The

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<sup>81</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 21.

<sup>82</sup> Phiri, Angel. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 18.10.20. Kitwe. Phiri is a film maker and researcher.

<sup>83</sup> Kerr, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South-East Africa*, 22.

purpose of the ceremony is to pay homage to the leader, Kalonga Gawa Undi. In my interview with Kaonga, shared what part of what happens as Undi's subjects pay homage to him:

During the *Kulamba*, they re-enact what used to happen before. Gawa was a slave trader, so he will sit there and receive his chiefs, headmen and whoever, coming from Mozambique, from Malawi and from Zambia, to report how his villages, towns and cities are doing and he will sit in that hut....<sup>84</sup>

These political performances also served to keep the community's memory alive. At *Ncwala* ceremony of the Eastern Province of Zambia, to this day, some songs are sung about Nsingo, a warrior who was killed in an uprising against the British in the late nineteenth century. The ceremony was banned after the local people were defeated in the uprising and was only revised in 1980.<sup>85</sup> The reason behind the revival of the ceremony was to enable the people to pay homage to their ancestral spirits as well as commemorate their victories during their migration into present-day Zambia. Another example of a ceremony that still happens is the *Mutanfya Nsala* Traditional Ceremony of the Lamba people, Lufwanyama district in Chieftainess Shimukunami's chiefdom.<sup>86</sup> This is where I currently live and have been to their annual ceremony. The ceremony is usually a hive of activity. There is singing and dancing. Some performances are specifically meant to remind attendees of the history of the Lamba people of this area, including where they migrated from. It is also meant to encourage people to grow crops and ensure they have enough. Though these ceremonies have remained symbolic, the performance aspects remain a central part of the activities at the ceremonies. I say symbolic because the initial goal of the ceremonies, for example, praying for a good harvest, or paying homage to their ancestors may not be the goals today.

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<sup>84</sup> Kaonga. Interview.

<sup>85</sup> Phiri. Interview.

<sup>86</sup> Mutanfya Nsala can be directly translated as "chasing away hunger." Its about ensuring food security.

There were also performances merely for entertainment, though there was an aspect of teaching in most of them. They included young people's courtship dances. Examples of entertainment dances include *Ching'ande* of the Tonga people where couples danced in pairs, with the man pretending to chase the woman, and *Chimitali* of the Chewa, a women's dance in which dancers perform in a circle surrounding drummers.<sup>87</sup> There were also oral narratives that would be performed at night around the fire where the audience would participate by singing or miming along<sup>88</sup>

The performances discussed above were held either in public or in private depending on the form. Private or even secret performances such as initiation ceremonies could be held in the bush or some prepared secluded place. Others were held in public places such as those that would be meant for re-enacting a historical event or giving praises to chiefs or those that were for entertainment purposes. It was also common to see masked dancers on the streets, sometimes they would be too aggressive, and people would be afraid of them. When I was a small boy in the ninety's, I remember seeing masked dancers on the streets, though we would usually be running away from these dancers as they were usually aggressive and they seemed to have the right to act in that way, they seemed to have the right not be questioned on how they behaved.

These are some of the categories of performances in pre-colonial Zambia. They are not exhaustive but give a picture of the type of performances that were there. With the advent of colonization, these performances, as can be expected, changed.

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<sup>87</sup> Grant Macloly Moloko Nthala, "*The Chewa Art of Drumming and Its Influence on Modern Malawian Music*" (MA, Bloemfontein, University of the Free State, 2009), 147.

<sup>88</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 23.

## 3.2. The reaction of Indigenous Performances to Foreign Influence

By the late nineteenth century, European settlers began to come to most parts of central Africa and began to set up their European type of administrative structures. The urbanization and the rural to “urban” migration that followed led to the modification of traditional performances discussed above. Such “new” and modified performances included *kayoye* which is a courtship dance based on a cock and hen interaction, and *kachala* based on spirit possession, puberty rites and mimed satire of contemporary mores. Other traditional dances included *fwemba*, a highly active acrobatic dance developed by soldiers returning from the Second World War and *kalela*, a satirical dance of European manners and dress.<sup>89</sup> Other dances included *Mbeni*, *Muganda* and *Malipenga*. The dances “combined indigenous competitive war elements with an imitation of colonial army marching steps and uniforms.”<sup>90</sup> These dances were later associated with the struggle for national independence.

*Gule wa Mkulu* was used to express resistance to colonialism.<sup>91</sup> The *Nyau*’s opposition to colonialism came as a reaction to the Catholic missionaries attempt to discourage what they saw as heathen and sexually immoral rituals. “Masqueraders lampooned the iconography of Christianity (particularly Catholicism) through the creation of white masks representing characters such as *Simon Petulo*, *Yosefe* and *Maliya* (Simon Peter, Joseph and Maria).”<sup>92</sup> When colonialism was established and a “European” administrative network set up, new satirical masks were developed such as *Disi* referring to D.C. (District Commissioner) and *Sajeni*, referring to sergeant of a mine compound police force. Another mask, *Mjoni* satirized human

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<sup>89</sup> Martin Banhan et al., *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>90</sup> David Kerr and Stephen Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” in *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 274.

<sup>91</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 31.

<sup>92</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” 274.

vices and follies. The mask portrayed behaviours like that of European settlers bossing labourers in the Rand mines of Johannesburg.<sup>93</sup>

Following strikes in the mining towns in 1935 on the Copperbelt Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia), there was an investigation into the role of *Mbeni* groups in the cultural support of the strikes. As noted by Kerr and Chifunyise, in the early days of Western imperialism, such dances were a cultural form that initially imitated colonial life, developed variants that were militantly opposed to imperialism by the period of late colonialism.<sup>94</sup>

Before independence, while European settlers were beginning to build theatres and perform there, indigenous people who were moving to the urban areas in search of work begun to perform the modified traditional dances discussed earlier such as *Fwemba and Kalela*. They were performed mostly at weekends in community halls, bars or open spaces. Mining companies encouraged creating open spaces in African localities where such dances were performed.<sup>95</sup> The dances they performed became known as “township dances” such as *Kalela, Ndendeule, Fwemba and Muganda*. Movements of these dances were disconnected from their original context. The ritual aspects of the dances were side-lined, and dances were now more for amusement. These dances also included various dances from different parts of the country, regardless of the ethnic origins of the dancers themselves.<sup>96</sup> Dances in the urban areas were no longer focusing solely on the communal heritage of the original region of the dance but individual choreography.<sup>97</sup>

Indigenous performance forms from pre-colonial times did not remain static. They have adapted as the times demanded. For some, they changed to ridicule those they saw as intruders,

<sup>93</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*.31.

<sup>94</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” 274.

<sup>95</sup> Kabwe Kasoma, “Development of Theatre in Zambia,” in *Zambia Performing Arts: Currents, Issues, Policies and Direction* (Lusaka: Centre for Continuing Education, University of Zambia, 1984), 20–32.

<sup>96</sup> Epskamp, “From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia.”

<sup>97</sup> Epskamp, “From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia.”



including European settlers, in other cases they changed from being ritual dances to being entertainment dances that incorporated dances from other ethnic groups. This could have been a way of survival. I will now turn to the introduction of Western theatre in Zambia.

## Chapter 4 - A struggle for the Stage: Cultural Expression Through Theatre

In this chapter, I discuss the introduction of western-style theatre in Zambia. I make use of data from the oral interviews discussed in Chapter Two, as well as information from my desktop research to make conclusions about the type of theatre that developed in Zambia following independence. I also discuss the extent to which indigenous forms of performance were fused with western style theatre, an attempt to create a “new” form of theatre. I look at creating alternative avenues of cultural production such as Chikwakwa theatre and the Zambian National Theatre Arts Association. As I discuss these, I also highlight the role of theatre. In the discussion, I make use of quotes from the interviews.

### 4.1 Little Theatres along the “Line of Rail”: Introduction of Western Theatre

*The theatres today we occupy were created for the white group and not the Africans. Let me give you an example, Waddington theatre ... that became for blacks.... That is where KK (Kenneth Kaunda, first President of Zambia) and his friend Gwendoline Koni were acting and the (Lusaka) playhouse was for whites.*

- Dickson Mwansa.

*There is also the influence of British American contemporary theatre practices like the TAZ (Theatre Association of Zambia), the old white people's organization that brought adjudicators from the UK here (Zambia) to develop a genre of writers, actors, directors but based on the British dramatic arts model. That also had a very useful impact on many of us.*

- Wesley Kaonga

Zambia was a British colony between 1888 and 1964, though it was only controlled directly by Britain only from 1924. Between 1888 and 1924, the British government had given authority to the British South African Company (BSAC) to control the area. During the colonial period, Western-style theatre was introduced, and an all-white Northern Rhodesia Drama Association (NRDA) was formed in 1952. Formal scripted drama as understood in the western sense started with the establishment of European theatre clubs.<sup>98</sup> These clubs were in towns that had a sizable population of European settlers, such as Ndola, Kitwe, Kabwe and Lusaka. More settlers were attracted to come to Northern Rhodesia, at the height of the copper boom between 1953 and 1958. There was a significant investment in the cultural life of the European settlers, resulting in the construction of theatres, known as Little Theatres.

During this time, there was racial discrimination, not only in theatre circles but in other areas as well. There was a clear policy of excluding black Africans from theatre clubs until 1958 when Waddington Theatre in Lusaka, the first multi-racial theatre, joined the association.<sup>99</sup> Though indigenous Africans may have been allowed to watch plays, the audience then was predominantly white. This was the trend long after Zambia's independence. At independence, NTDA changed its name to Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ). The TAZ membership was made up of all the Little Theatres in major towns from Southern province to Copperbelt province along what became known as the "line of rail."<sup>100</sup> These theatres were created by the city councils and run by the European settlers. Indigenous people were not allowed to be members of the clubs at these theatres house, in some cases up until the 1980s.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*.

<sup>99</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, "Southern Africa," 278.

<sup>100</sup> Theatre halls that were built by European settlers were called Little Theatres. They are called that to this day. There are cities/towns from the Southern Province of Zambia all the way to Copperbelt that are referred to as being along the line of rail because they are on the main rail line in Zambia.

<sup>101</sup> Kapumpa, Mumba. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 14.05.21. Mumba is a former member of Chikwakwa Theatre, founder member of Tikwiza Theatre and former Chairperson of the National Arts Council.

Because of their influence, Little Theatres played a central role in how theatre developed in Zambia, both in the colonial and post-colonial era. Dickson Mwansa in his book, *Reflections on Revival in Theatre, Film and the Creative Economy* points out that “though theatre did not begin or end with Western theatre, the Little Theatre movement gave credence to the Western theatre tradition in colonial Africa that became mainstream and attracted more funding and attention of the colonial government.”<sup>102</sup> In agreement with Mwansa, I would say these theatres might have been small but their cultural impact was not “little” at all. In towns where they were built, they remain among the main cultural institutions with regards to performance arts.

The plays that were staged in these theatres were mainly British, they reflected life home in Britain and not Zambia. They were meant to recreate and continue life as it was in Britain, but also to link the colonial audience with the imagined cultural life back home in Britain.<sup>103</sup> The little theatres were citadels of western culture.<sup>104</sup> The plays, pantomimes, musicals, and other forms of performing arts that were produced in them were for the exclusive consumption of Europeans. Membership was also restricted to Europeans. There were nine little theatres in Zambia, mainly in the mining towns.

To keep their link with Britain, they invited British adjudicators to judge entries into annual theatre competitions and kept their membership to the British Guild.<sup>105</sup> In my interview with Vivian Wamala Silwamba, who was an actor in *Tikwiza Theatre*<sup>106</sup>, she also highlighted how judges for plays came from Britain. This was in post-colonial Zambia. “If I recall... we never took part in any TAZ adjudication... but they used to have adjudicators, I do not know

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<sup>102</sup> Dickson Mwansa, *Reflections on Revival in Theatre, Film and the Creative Economy* (Lusaka, 2019), 43

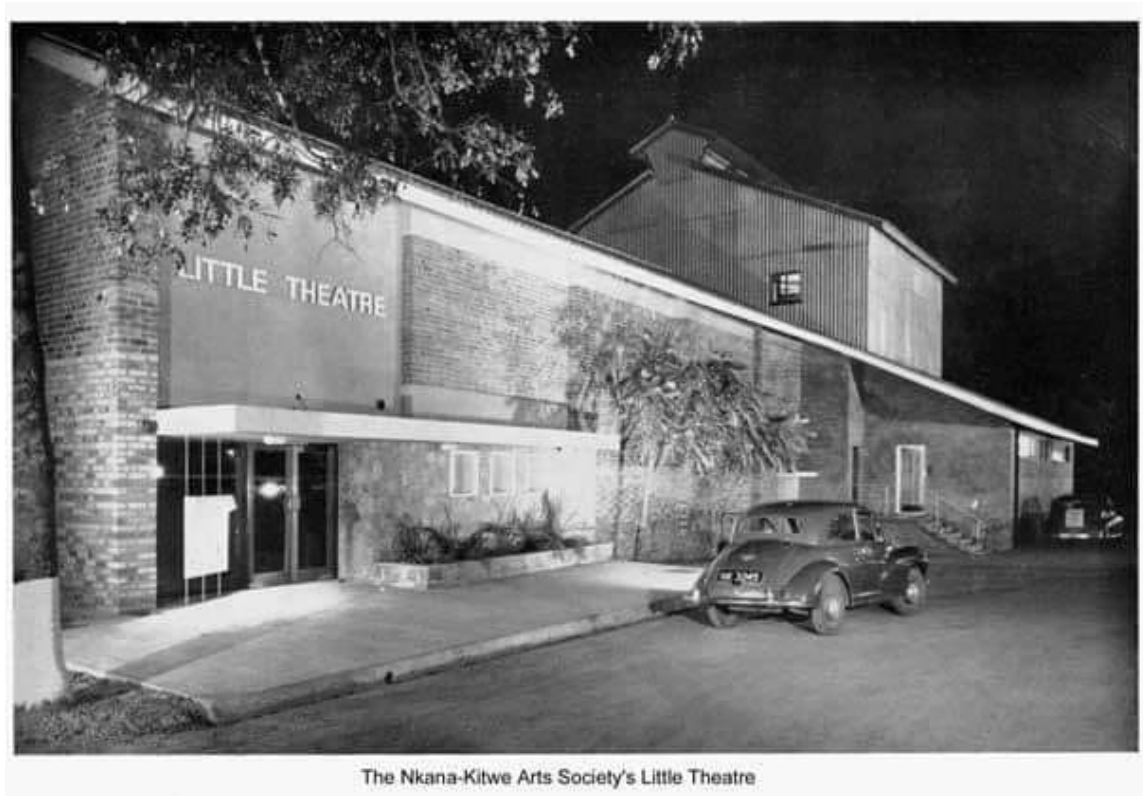
<sup>103</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 212.

<sup>104</sup> Mwansa, *Reflections on Revival in Theatre, Film and the Creative Economy*, 43.

<sup>105</sup> Mwansa, *Reflections on Revival in Theatre, Film and the Creative Economy*, 45.

<sup>106</sup> Tikwiza Theatre group that was formed in 1975. Discuss it in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

for some reason, the person who used to adjudicate plays for the TAZ always came from England.”<sup>107</sup> Having adjudicators from Britain was a way to keep a certain “standard.” This standard kept non-Europeans out of these theatres.



*Figure 6 A Photo of Kitwe Little Theatre in the 1950s. Photo Shared by Barney Kanjela. Facebook.*

Since there was racial segregation during the colonial period, African participation in watching performances and membership in the little theatres were restricted.<sup>108</sup> Africans who desired to create plays had to form their own groups. However, there were not so many such clubs. In 1958, a multiracial club at Waddington Centre was formed in Lusaka. Even after Zambia gained its independence, the Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ), was dominated by

<sup>107</sup> Silwamba, W. Vivienne. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 13.05.21. Silwamba is a former member of Tikwiza Theatre.

<sup>108</sup> Mwansa, *Reflections on Revival in Theatre, Film and the Creative Economy*, 47.

white clubs and practitioners. The influence of TAZ has continued to be seen up to present times. British practitioners may have left but their influence can be seen to this day.<sup>109</sup>

Part of the reason that there were not many plays on Zambian life was that there were not many Zambian playwrights. Mwansa explained why the situation was like that:

The little theatres said for you to enter plays in the white society, you needed to have three-act plays and in English. That is why for a long time, up to independence, we didn't have any playwrights, no Zambian playwrights, except Andre Masiye who wrote *To the Lands of Kazembe* and later followed by Fwanyanga Mulikita. It was because for you to participate in drama, you needed to do European plays, and those Europeans who were here, they were not literature people but they loved acting and they only acted things they saw in England. That is one reason for the drought of playwrights. They only come later from 1974, that is when a surge of playwrights emerges<sup>110</sup>

John Kapesa, a teacher, and theatre columnist added to this argument. According to Kapesa, little theatres were European oriented though after independence some individuals joined Little Theatres and started producing plays that were written by indigenous Africans from other countries in Africa.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Mwansa, Dicskon. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 18.10.20

<sup>110</sup> Mwansa. Interview.

<sup>111</sup> Kapesa, John. Interview. 18.07.2020

## 4.2 Towards Creating National “Zambian” Theatre

*We formed this Bantu Theatre, the idea was that we were very ambitious, we wanted a full-time theatre group with mature people. So, we gathered people... mature people who were in society but had an interest in theatre, bankers, teachers, headmasters and so on. So, we formed this Bantu theatre and announced it in Kabwe.*

*-John Katebe*

Following Zambia’s independence in 1964, the new government led by Kenneth Kaunda set up a Zambian national ideology and philosophy which came to be known as Zambian Humanism. Zambian Humanism “was a form of African Socialism, which combined traditional African values with Western socialist and Christian values.”<sup>112</sup> Through Humanism, Kaunda emphasized the role of education, non-violent resistance, and hard work in the process of liberation. In post-independence Zambia, cultural activities were acknowledged as a bridge between tradition and modernity. The concept of culture was about raising the national consciousness of Zambians. To attain this national consciousness, people were to be educated through cultural activities.

Cultural activities were to play an essential role in shaping the ideology of humanism, of working together as a people, helping one another, and sharing what the community had. For the new government then, culture was going to be central in helping people get rid of feelings of inferiority created due to colonialism. Theatre was to be used as a tool for mass education and celebration.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Kanu, “Kenneth Kaunda and the Quest for an African Humanist Philosophy,” *International Journal of Scientific Research* 3, no. 8 (august 2014): 376.

<sup>113</sup> Patrick E. Idoe, “Ideology and the Theater: The Case of Zambia,” *Journal of Black Studies* 19, no. 1 (September 1, 1988): 70.

After noticing that theatre in Zambia was mostly modelled on European standards, there were calls to create “Zambian Theatre” whose main aims were to help in the creation of Zambian identity; preserving Zambian heritage; and as a tool to teach and share messages on developmental issues such as health and agriculture. Though “theatre” might have been central to creating this new identity in post-independence, it was not directly supported by the government as traditional dance was. The members of the National Dance Troupe that was created following independence were full-time performers who were paid for it.<sup>114</sup> This was not the case with theatre. From the interviews I had, most of the respondents acknowledged the positive role of theatre but no concrete government support. There were promises of a National Theatre, but it was never created, to this day.

According to Mumba Kapumpa, a former member of the University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS), *Chikwakwa* Theatre, and a founding member of *Tikwiza*, the early days after independence, the government paid little to no attention to “theatre.” A statement I am inclined to agree with. The government could have realized that theatre in the Little Theatres was not popular among indigenous Zambians. The Little Theatre movement seems to have had its own structures to sustain itself financially. Thus, theatre outside the Little Theatres was more about individuals spearheading it with the support of individuals and groups, which included the Republic President, Kenneth Kaunda who loved to watch plays. Kapumpa had rather an extreme view of the level of support from the Zambian government:

the Zambian government did not appreciate theatre in 1964.... So, at independence, the Zambian government comes into power, theatre was totally disregarded. The Dance Troupe was a different case, they paid attention to the dances, the national dance troupe was promoted by the cultural services department but not theatre. Theatre was left to individual actors and actresses to fight

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<sup>114</sup> I discuss dance and the National Dance Troupe in more in Chapter Four.



for themselves.... The Zambian government does not pay attention to theatre, it has never paid attention to theatre, even up to now.<sup>115</sup>

Dorcas Habenzu, a former member of *Tikwiza* Theatre also highlighted this lack of funding for theatre. According to her, there was no direct financial support from the government. The government only helped with basic things such as transport or securing a place to perform at. When I asked her about the level of support from the government, this is what she had to say:

Yes, the support was there but it was like Zambians were not too much into theatre. The support was there in that, for us to stage, we do a program, we visited companies to advertise. Companies like Zambian Breweries advertised in our brochure, then paid us, that is how we survived. That was the support. Financial support from the government was not there. The government only helped when we were looking for a venue, we would say please we need this, we need to perform here. Because at that time, the only place we would perform was Lusaka Theatre Club. We met anywhere to rehearse, and we were so thankful for the Russian Cultural Centre... they used to allow us to rehearse from there.... So, help from the government came in the manner that they helped, sometimes transport, when we had to go and perform somewhere at State House's request.<sup>116</sup>

Kapumpa and Habenzu's argument may explain why Zambia has never had a National Theatre. Support for theatre remained to individuals or business entities to support. Theatre makers had to sacrifice their time and resources, unlike the National Dance Troupe that was supported by the department of cultural services. However, support may have improved in the later years. John Kapesa for instance shared that there was support for some clubs from the Bank of Zambia.<sup>117</sup> Kapesa also noted the support from the president during school

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<sup>115</sup> Kapumpa. Interview.

<sup>116</sup> Habenzu, Dorcas. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 06.09.20

<sup>117</sup> Though the Bank of Zambia is an official government institution, I am of the view that the support received was not formalized support. Most likely one-off support.

festivals. He gave an example when they had travelled to Livingstone, the administrative capital of Southern Province of Zambia, and they did not have enough money, they were advised to go to the UNIP offices where they would be given a cow.<sup>118</sup> This somehow shows how they were supported. However, this also shows how this support was not formalized like the case was with dance.

Other forms of support came through sponsorship for trips outside the country. Silwamba noted in my interview with her that they travelled to different parts of the world including Cuba and Zimbabwe to perform. Kapumpa also noted how Tikwiza Theatre had travelled to Nigeria for FESTAC 77, the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977. Since they were able to travel to these places, it shows there was more support in the years that followed as compared to the first few years after independence. The lack of formal government support for theatre could have also been because of the number of people it reached out to and appealed to. Theatre in the theatre halls seemed to have remained something for a select few.

Getting back to the role of theatre, it seemed to focus on wanting to help the nascent state of Zambia create its own identity and encourage post-colonial unity in highly heterogenous Zambia.<sup>119</sup> Aside from playing this internal role, since Zambia hosted leaders of liberation struggles in countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia, theatre groups staged plays around issues that were going on in the region. When asked about the role of theatre, Silwamba responded in the affirmative, she noted that the role of theatre was:

Major, especially when we did *Soweto Flowers Will Grow*, and Tikwiza also performed *Waiting for Sanctions*, I was not part of that production, but it did play a major role especially that we

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<sup>118</sup> Kapesa. Interview. This is another example of informal support.

<sup>119</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*.

were housing ANC [African National Congress]. ANC people lived in Zambia including the former president Thabo Mbeki, people like Oliver Thambo, lived in Lusaka then. And obviously, our plays played a major part in their own way because they were telling the story of what was going on especially when we did *Soweto Revisited* because that is when the June massacre happened, the June 16 uprising happened. So we were telling stories that were relevant to a true situation.<sup>120</sup>

When Zambia gained independence in 1964, most of her neighbours were still under colonization. Leaders of the liberation struggles in countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa were living in Zambia. According to Silwamba, plays that were created addressed issues that neighbouring countries were facing such as the massacre of students on June 16, 1976. This play was staged not only in Zambia but in Cuba, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria. Dorcas Habenzu, also a former member and secretary of Tikwiza, who worked in the Prime Minister's office, shared her recollection of Tikwiza Theatre:

That play, I would say hit Zambia by storm. Because we took it to Cub, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Botswana. Here in Zambia, the play was everywhere at the demand of the president. I remember there was a big meeting at *Mindolo* where there was a meeting of bishops coming from different countries and we were asked to go and perform the same *Soweto*. The president was having meetings with heads of state and we performed it at the cathedral. I don't know how many times we performed it at the Lusaka Playhouse. Even the president saw our performance at the Lusaka Playhouse. Even when we had other plays like *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi*, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and *Let Me Die Alone*, they were overshadowed by *Soweto*<sup>121</sup>

The role of theatre during this time seems to have been one of creating conversations on issues that mattered. For Theatre groups such as *Tikiwza* and *Chikwakwa*, they addressed issues

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Vivian Wamala Silwamba

<sup>121</sup> Habenzu. Interview.

relevant not only to Zambia but neighbouring countries like those of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and Apartheid in South Africa.

## 4.3 Creating Alternative Avenues of Cultural Expression

### 4.3.1 The University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS)

As a way of moving away from Western-style theatre, seen was meant for a select few, The European settlers, and the desire to experiment with Theatre for Development, the University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS) was formed in 1966. UNZADRAMS took a leading role in creating theatre which would speak to ordinary people in their own language deal with issues that are relevant to them. UNZADRAMS wanted to create a theatre that would promote and encourage appreciation of theatre in Zambia by staging plays that portrayed a Zambian way of life.<sup>122</sup> Though this was the goal, most plays that were staged were written by African playwrights and not necessarily Zambians.

Individuals such as Masauto Phiri and Mumba Kapumpa (who were students at the time and eventually became important figures of Zambian theatre as actors and directors) worked to find a popular orientation to their drama. They worked with two native English lecturers at the University of Zambia, Michael Etherton (British but born in Zambia) and Andrew Horn who was an American. These two men were at the forefront of the establishment of Chikwakwa theatre in 1966. Chikwakwa Theatre was part of the University of Zambia English Literature Department and used as a learning platform for students. “It there so that those people who

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<sup>122</sup> Stephen Chifunyise, “Chikwakwa Theatre and Its Offshoots: Analysis of Chikwakwa Theatre Influence on the Development of Zambia Theatre,” in *Zambian Performing Arts: Currents, Issues, Policies and Direction* (Centre for Continuing Education, University of Zambia, 1984), 1–19.

did English literature classes and they needed a place to exhibit what they had learnt.”<sup>123</sup>

Membership was open to other students from other departments. Chikwakwa Theatre achieved fame and played an important cultural role in the early years of Zambia’s independence.

### 4.3.2 Chikwakwa Theatre: An Attempt to fuse Traditional Zambia Performances with Western-style Theatre

One of my questions in my research was to ascertain the extent to which Zambian traditional forms of performance may have been merged with Western-style theatre. Chikwakwa experimented with this. It encouraged staging locally written plays and made use of the traditional heritage of dance, music, and storytelling. Both English and local languages were used in the performances.<sup>124</sup> Chikwakwa wanted to borrow from forms of performance in the local communities where there was no clear demarcation between the performers and the audience, to the extent where anyone could be a performer. For example, in a traditional performance space, when there was a dance, any spectator could join the dance, if they so wished. They could abandon their role as a spectator to become a performer.<sup>125</sup> Kapumpa narrated how Chikwakwa Theatre tried to fuse in traditional forms of performance:

Chikwakwa Theatre, therefore, represented a typical African idiom, it was in “open air,” all dramatic activities of the African were never done inside a hall, it was always done outside. Two, because it was built in such a way that there was a stage there, but the stage literally extended into the audience... you hardly separated the audience from the actors. And when you did a play, if you began a song, the people on the stage never started a song which the people in the audience

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<sup>123</sup> Kapumpa. Interview.

<sup>124</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, “Southern Africa,” 286.

<sup>125</sup> Epskamp, “From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia.”

did not know, or if the people in the audience did not know, they were taught very easily, they picked it up very easily because the songs were usually very simple songs that told the story.<sup>126</sup>



*Figure 7 A Drawing of the structure at Chikwakwa Theatre as depicted in African Popular Theatre by David Kerr*

Another feature of Chikwakwa Theatre that might have been rooted in traditional forms of performance was the drum. In traditional African society, drums have both symbolic and historical significance and have been part of African life for centuries.<sup>127</sup> According to Kapumpa, at Chikwakwa Theatre, as the audience was coming in before a play started, there was always someone playing the drum and other African musical instruments.

<sup>126</sup> Kapumpa. Kapumpa.

<sup>127</sup> "African Drums," Contemporary African Art, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.contemporary-african-art.com/african-drums.html>.

In addition to the use of the drum, Chikwaka Theatre had no “typical” theatre backstage, which is the case with traditional African performances:

Unlike typical Western theatre (as was the case in the Little Theatres in Zambia), you have a backstage where you change and then you run in, Chikwakwa theatre does not have a backstage. The backstage is simply at the back of a wall that has been built, so you run in and you run out. Because Chikwakwa theatre is in the open, in a typical African theatre, you don't have curtains, you don't have lighting which says lights out and so forth, and the curtains are drawn and the stage management team rushing on to the stage to begin changing the props and so on, no. In a typically African play, which Chikwakwa Theatre represents, you change the props on stage in full view of your audience. Therefore, your music helps, because as you are playing the music, you are playing the drum, somebody is singing, and you are changing whatever you want to change. But... and a very big but, most African theatre, very rare do they move things around, they will put things there in one corner which will be used in the later scenes, in the later acts and concentrate on another scene so that at the end of the day, it is very rare that when you play at Chikwakwa Theatre theatre you need to change your props. When I acted at Chikwakwa theatre in Che Guavara for instance, we did not change anything, there were no props changed at all... each particular person had a prop they came on with, and they took it away with them and so on. So, that is Chikwakwa theatre, typically theatre, with an African idiom, and it provided an opportunity to do plays which are not western, plays which emphasized the audience participating, the music, the drums, that is Chikwakwa theatre.<sup>128</sup>

Looking at Kapumpa's recollection of how Chikwakwa Theatre operated, I am inclined to conclude that it was successful in making use of traditional performance elements in Western-style theatre to try and create something new although the company might not have been completely successful. This also leads me to agree with Chifunyise's view that

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<sup>128</sup> Kapumpa. Interview.

Chikwakwa Theatre encouraged the integration of the concept of theatre within the ancient traditional elements of the Zambian performing arts.<sup>129</sup>

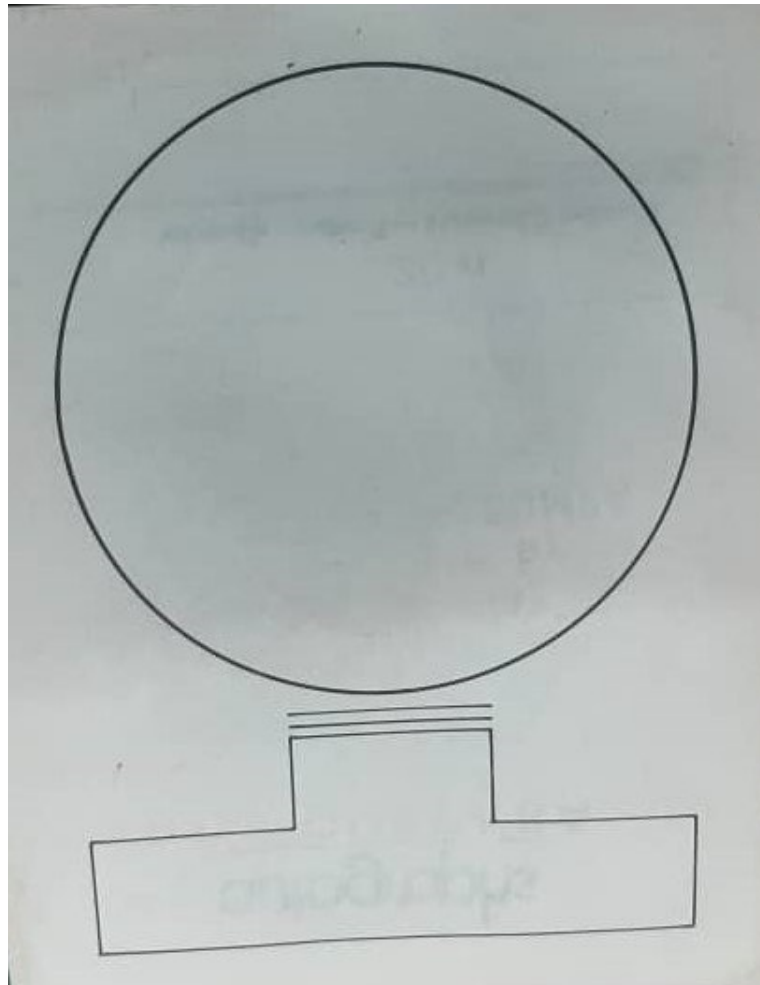


Figure 8 Plan of Chikwakwa on a brochure. Round open space. Source: Mumba Kapumba personal collection.

#### 4.3.3 Zambia National Theatre Arts Association Vs Theatre Association of Zambia: Fighting Over Theatre

*So, we had TAZ, an organization for the Little Theatres, so now this group of indigenous*

*Africans decided to form the local organization, ZANTAA, so ZANTAA now encompassed*

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<sup>129</sup> Chifunyise, "Chikwakwa Theatre and Its Offshoots: Analysis of Chikwakwa Theatre Influence on the Development of Zambia Theatre."



*everything drama, choral, poetry... so even the way the festivals were structured were different. The TAZ festival was very well organized. As groups, you were supposed to send your scripts to the adjudicator, sometime in November, in the UK, so that the adjudicator will have all the time to read through, then he will come here now to come and adjudicate.*

*Bright Banda*

*Around June/July of 1975, we decided to form another organization that would promote African theatre, and that is what we called ZANTAA.... And so ZANTAA, was formed specifically to move away from TAZ. ZANTAA was formed as the answer to the cry of colleges and secondary schools where drama was being practised but there was no one to bring them together.*

*Mumba Kapumpa*

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were discussions around what kind of theatre was to be practiced in Zambia. The discussions concerned “the appropriate language, dramaturgy and cultural setting for plays.”<sup>130</sup> Activists advocated for popular theatre that was rooted in Zambian culture. This led to the creation of the National Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA) in 1975. It was a brainchild of academicians from the University of Zambia.<sup>131</sup> Among other things, ZANTAA aimed at supporting dramatic and other performing arts in Zambia, writing and production of plays by Zambians, using local languages in plays and promoting and supporting the use of Zambian folklore, myth, ritual, song, and dance.<sup>132</sup>

The major difference between ZANTAA and TAZ was that the former wanted to highlight African culture and politics of the then ruling party, UNIP, which wanted Zambians to express themselves through theatre while the latter was more interested in theatre for

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<sup>130</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*, 215

<sup>131</sup> Mwansa. Interview.

<sup>132</sup> Dickson Mwansa and Francisco Banda, “Zambia National Theatre Arts Association of Zambia (ZANTAA),” in *Zambian Performing Arts: Currents, Issues, Policies and Direction* (Lusaka: Centre for Continuing Education, University of Zambia, 1984), 32–47.

theatre's sake, as an art form.<sup>133</sup> TAZ did not even make comments on politics, which was the very opposite of ZANTAA.<sup>134</sup> ZANTAA used concepts from UNZADRAMS that were popularized by Chikwakwa Theatre. Another difference is that ZANTAA used to have specific themes for its annual festivals while TAZ was open to different themes. For ZANTAA, they insisted that the plays had to have a moral and aim at teaching people. In my interview with John Kapesa, he shared that though there were not many "good" writers then, their plays were teaching a lesson. He described a play they did where a young girl decides to run away from her home because they are poor. Where she goes, she ends up getting married. Later, the husband discovers that she was never taught as somebody getting into marriage. The man starts being unfaithful. Since the girl has run away from her family, she ends up with nowhere to go. According to Kapesa, one of the messages in the play was to let the audience know that girls should not run away from home.<sup>135</sup>

There were, however, cases when plays that were seen to be without some form of teaching or "moral" message would be accepted at ZANTAA festivals. John Katebe in one interview pointed out that his play "*Black Empire*" was accepted at the ZANTAA national festival and won awards.<sup>136</sup> He noted that his play was liked by the young people who were part of it, and they decided to take it to a ZANTAA festival. According to Katebe, the play "was not supposed to be allowed or to even to win but it won the award, national award. Even the next year it won, which was very interesting because it should not, no, it should not. Because it had no morals, it was just crime. But it was so powerful, it won."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Katebe, John. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 19.07.20.

<sup>134</sup> Kanjela, Barney. Interview. By Suzyika Nyimbili. 22.11.20.

<sup>135</sup> Kapesa. Interview.

<sup>136</sup> Katebe. Interview.

<sup>137</sup> Katebe. Interview.

One of the major issues people were dissatisfied with TAZ was their adjudication of Zambian or African plays, especially that the judges were always from Britain.<sup>138</sup> It was argued that adjudicators at TAZ festivals displayed a lack of understanding of the social-cultural background of most Zambian or African plays.<sup>139</sup> Mumba Kapumpa, who was a member of UNZADRAMS shared his view of things about the 1969 TAZ festival when UNZADRAMS staged the play, *The Fools Marry* by Kabwe Kasoma:

That was our entry in TAZ with UNZADRAMS, and we lost, we never got a single award, because TAZ used to bring the adjudicator from the UK, not even once did they ever bring an adjudicator locally... that was my first experience of TAZ, it was a racial organisation that supported the white theatre, they totally disregarded African theatre.<sup>140</sup>

Kerr, however, differs with Kapumpa, arguing that the problem was not that the British adjudicators were completely unsympathetic to the development of Zambian theatre, but that “the white adjudicators and theatre promoters did not understand popular Zambian theatre forms and thought that Zambian drama would have to develop on European traditions.”<sup>141</sup> I argue that there was a gap in the colonial cultural spaces, and a desire for indigenous Zambian to express themselves but TAZ was not flexible enough to forego the standards it had set for itself. Mwansa, speaking about the move to create ZANTAA noted that:

It was an anti-colonial reaction (here is referring to the formation of ZANTA) which started in 1971[1969] when UNZADRAMS entered TAZ festival, one adjudicator could not understand a phrase like going to the moon in the context of women attending her monthly period, and he

<sup>138</sup> Mwansa and Banda, “Zambia National Theatre Arts Association of Zambia (ZANTAA).”

<sup>139</sup> Mwansa and Banda., “Zambia National Theatre Arts Association of Zambia (ZANTAA).”

<sup>140</sup> Kapumpa. Interview.

<sup>141</sup> Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*, 110.

heard people laugh and he said, “what are you laughing at, just laughing about going to the moon.” He did not understand.<sup>142</sup>

There were indigenous Zambians who did not agree with the concept that was being propagated by ZANTAA. For example, John Katebe, you had joined TAZ and felt he should not write plays that were based on ideology. For him, theatre was about expressing art regardless of politics, religion, race, or other things. He argued that his view was that as a writer, he was not to be impeded by demands such “as theatre has to reflect culture.”<sup>143</sup>

At the 1973 TAZ festival, there was still conflict between TAZ and UNZADRAMS. More and more people began to view TAZ in a negative light eventually led to the creating of ZANTAA in 1975. The two organizations continued to work separately until 1986 when the Ministry of Education and Culture directed that ZANTAA and TAZ were merged to form the National Theatre Arts Association (NATAAZ). This merger was, however, not successful. One member from Talking Theatre Zambia when discussing the merger noted “The TAZ/ZANTAA Merger experiment worked for about a year or two but later it started crumbling and failed because of differences in our approach to programming and generally the running of theatre programs and activities in the two Camps....”<sup>144</sup> Those who were members of TAZ simply withdrew from NATAAZ and focused on producing plays in the Little Theatres.

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<sup>142</sup> Mwansa. Interview.

<sup>143</sup> Katebe. Interview.

<sup>144</sup> This post was in group created on “WhatsApp”, Talking Theatre Zambia. Members discuss various topics connected to Zambian theatre.

#### 4.3.4 Tikwiza Theatre, (the “Almost National Theatre”) and other Theatre Groups

*My most memorable moment for me was when we performed Soweto Revisited, memorable and very gratifying, it was very gratifying because I was on stage and the discipline that was taught by the director, brother K (Mumba Kapumpa), was just do your thing, don't look at the audience, but for some reason, when I got to the front stage, somehow I caught KKs (Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's first President) face and he was in tears....*

*Vivian Wamala Silwamba*

One of the major visible products of the creation of ZANTAA was the formation of *Tikwiza* theatre in 1975 by ex-university students who saw themselves as creating a truly Zambian theatre and proclaiming Africa's “socio-cultural revolution.”<sup>145</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, *Tikwiza* was the nearest Zambia came to having a National Theatre.<sup>146</sup> Their first play, *Uhuru wa Dongo* criticised not only the brutality of the colonial government but corruption in post-colonial Zambia. By the 1980s, there was huge dissatisfaction with the post-independence government in the way they were running national affairs. *Tikwiza* Theatre was disbanded in 1984. *Tikwiza* became a popular theatre group. Compared to Chikwakwa, which was made up of students, *Tikwiza* was more for older people:

*Tikiwza* embraced the working class, the school, and a few young ones. Tikiwza Theatre was basically matured people, bena (the likes of) Godfrey Miyanda, Minister of state ba Nsingo, even bena Mumba Kapumpa. So, if you have got such caliber of people, you don't expect young ones. Because there was sacrifice, first sacrifice and time.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Kees P Epskamp, “Historical Development of Zambian National Theatre,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 21, no. 2 (1987): 157–74.

<sup>146</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*.

<sup>147</sup> Habenzu. Interview. “Ba” is a prefix usually used to refer to some who is older. Hazebenzu herself was working in the Prime Minister's office. Godfrey Miyanda was a “retired” army general by then. Nsingo was Minister of State. It shows the caliber of individuals that were part of these theatre companies.

Another group, *Bazamai*, focused on creating historical plays, for example, *The Night Fall*, a play about the fall of the Ngoni, an ethnic group from the Eastern Province of Zambia. The group also staged *Kuta*, a play that had a detailed representation of different Zambian dance dramas. *Bazamai* was disbanded a year before Tikwiza was formed in 1984.



Figure 9 Tikwiza Theatre Logo. Collected from Mumba Kapumpa.

Aside from dance, theatre and drama which included dialogue were used to encourage cultural nationalism. Some plays shared the history of the people such as *Lands of the Kazembe* staged in 1971, which was a story of how the Lunda King denied the Portuguese a chance to create an empire stretching from the Indian to the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>148</sup>

The names of the theatre groups signified a shared national and cultural identity, calling for cooperation and a common purpose.<sup>149</sup> The names included *Tikwiza*, a Tumbuka name

<sup>148</sup> Epskamp, "Historical Development of Zambian National Theatre," 158.

<sup>149</sup> Stewart Crehan, "Fathers and Sons: Politics and Myth in Recent Zambian Drama," *New Theatre Quarterly* 3, no. 9 (1987): 29–43.

meaning 'We are coming', *Tithandize*, 'Let us help,' *Tabwera*, 'We have come' and *Tafika* meaning 'We have arrived.' Others included *Tikondane*, 'Let us love one another, *Zhaninge* ('Come!'), *Zani Muone*, 'Come and see' and *Tigwirizane* meaning 'Let us support one another.'

To conclude, the development of Western theatre in Zambia was largely shaped by the establishment of the Little Theatres. For a long time, performances in these cultural spaces were restricted to European settlers until 1958 when Waddington Theatre, a multi-racial theatre was created in Lusaka. Theatre experiments such as *Chikwakwa* Theatre targeted combining Western-style theatre and indigenous performance, they had some success while they operated. *Chikwakwa* created an open-air theatre, created a stage that extended into the audience, made use of traditional drums, and staged local plays such as to the *Lands of Kazembe*.

Because of the restrictions and “standards” that were set by the Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ), which included having adjudicators at annual festivals come from Britain, there was a call and desire by indigenous Zambians to create a new platform that would specifically focus on the development of Zambian indigenous performances. In 1975, Zambia National Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA) was formed as a reaction to the operations of TAZ. New theatre companies such as *Tikwiza*, *Bazamai*, and *Zhaninge*. In 1986, TAZ and ZANTAA were merged to create National Theatre Arts Association but this merger did not necessarily lead to the merging of performances traditions. Western-style theatre and indigenous in Zambia have to a large extent developed independently.

## Chapter 5 - Traditional Dance and the Zambian National Dance Troupe

*Dance is an integral part of life within the African social and cultural structure and is performed to satisfy certain needs. Dance for dance's sake is purposeless. There is a time to dance, and the type of dance is related to ceremonial and recreational needs. The dance often serves as a means of bringing a society together to renew ties of kinship, to worship together, to face common dangers or express relief, to reaffirm loyalty, to remember historical associations and experience, to share in each other's sorrows and to find recreation and relief from daily chores.*<sup>150</sup>

From the onset, let me make mention why I consider traditional dance as something theatrical in nature. Firstly, it is because prominent authors on theatre and performance in Africa, when discussing theatre, have discussed dance under theatre.<sup>151</sup> Even those that have written about theatre in Zambia have a category of dance as a theatre form. Secondly, discussing African theatre, as a concept that developed in the Mid-20th Century following the decolonization of most parts of Africa is not complete without discussing indigenous forms of performance as these two, developed side by side. Lastly, traditional dance, in Zambia and other parts of Zambia is quite dramatic and stories are told within the dances. Though a large part of the information in this Chapter is from desktop research, I make use of information from the oral interviews I carried out as was the case with Chapter Three and Chapter Four. I also share information from my own experiences. In this chapter, I focus on the National Dance Troupe and its role in post-independence Zambia. I argue that, compared theatre (happening in Little Theatres, university and school halls, and open-air theatres such as Chikwakwa) dance as an organized art form, reached out to, and appealed to more people

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<sup>150</sup> A. M. Opoku, "The Presentation of Traditional Music and Dance in the Theatre," *The World of Music* 18, no. 4 (1976): 60.

<sup>151</sup> Authors include David Kerr, Dickson Mwansa, Stephen Chifunyise, Martin Banham, Kees Epskamp.



## 5.1 Formation of the National Dance Troupe and its Role in promoting Zambian Cultural Identity

At independence, the Zambian government recognized the power and popularity of indigenous performances, seeing it as a cultural asset that could be used for purposes of building national unity.<sup>152</sup> Traditional dance was one of the main ways of engaging people, encouraging unity, and communicating the new identity following independence. To harness the potential of these traditional dances, the National Dance Troupe was created in 1966, two years after independence through the department of cultural services. The dance troupe performed dances from different ethnic groups in Zambia. It was tasked with promoting traditional performance arts in Zambia. It was formed following the recognition that dance drama was an autonomous form of African theatre.<sup>153</sup>

As a way of preserving traditional dance in Zambia, including those that developed during the colonial period, competitions were organized across the country in 1965 and the best dancers were selected to be part of the National Dance Troupe. The main goal of the dance troupe was to preserve and promote Zambia's traditional performing arts. The government saw this as an effort to maintain the national cultural heritage. The government dedicated resources and hired the dancers as full-time performers.

The National Dance Troupe may have contributed to people having pride in what was "Zambian," especially after returning from the First World Festival of Black Arts in 1966 also known as FESTAC 66. It may have also set the tone for how other dance groups developed. In my interview with him, Mwansa shared his recollection of the Dance Troupe.

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<sup>152</sup> Kerr David, *Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa*.

<sup>153</sup> Kees P. Epskamp, "Historical Outline of the Development of Zambian National Theatre," 168.

When they came from FESTAC, they danced in schools, now they begun world tours, they went to Russia, they went to England... when they came, they were our heroes, these villagers who had been collected (recruited from villages) .... We admired them when they performed. They went to perform in schools, which created a very big interest, it was real portrayal of who we are.<sup>154</sup>

Since people admired the dance troupe, it could be another reason why to this day, traditional dances are common at national events such as welcoming or seeing off national leaders, community engagement projects, and launching of government.



Figure 10 A Postage Stamp from the 1970s depicting the National Dance Troupe. Source *A Stamp A Day*

Following independence, dance was seen as essential in the post-independence agenda for nation-building. I am of the view that this was because it was able to reach out to more people. Another reason was that it had already been tested as it played a crucial role as a conscious raising tool in the fight for independence.<sup>155</sup> It had a uniting force and was usually paired with song. The goal was to have dances from different parts of the country, in this way, people would have seen themselves represented in the dances and the identity of being

<sup>154</sup> Interview. Dickson Mwansa.

<sup>155</sup> Kerr and Chifunyise, "Southern Africa," 283.

Zambian. The performances of the National Dance Troupe were central to making theatre groups in Zambia take pride in their traditional performing arts.<sup>156</sup> The National Dance Troupe, however, went into decline in the early 1980s. This period coincided with the period when Zambia was going through economic hardships leading to a lack of funding for the performing arts. and the Dance Troupe, in particular. A view that Mwansa also shared in my interview with him, “Later it was only because of the cost of a keeping a full-time company because they were fully salaried....”<sup>157</sup>

## 5.2 Experimenting with Traditional Dance Forms

The years that followed allowed the Dance Troupe to experiment with dances and improve their performative aspects. In 1969, the artistic director of the troupe, Edwin Manda, who had been trained in the United States, tried to fuse in Western dance concepts into the local dances. He emphasized individual creative skills as opposed to collective improvisation. This led to the dances being less traditional.<sup>158</sup> Manda integrated several traditional dances to create new dance dramas. The dances were also combined with traditional storytelling styles. Eskamp an example of storytelling and the use of dance in the dance drama, *Nsombo Malimba*:

The story is about the girl Mombo who is unable to laugh. Her father promises her to the man who succeeds in making her laugh. A number of candidates try but finally it is somebody from outside the community who walks off with the prize. The translation into dance runs as follows: as the girl is growing towards her adolescence a *Nyau-dance* is performed. Next, the initiation-dance *Ndendeule*, followed by her taking leave from her contemporaries by the *Lilomba* (men and women), then the acrobatic *Fwemba*

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<sup>156</sup> Idoye, “Ideology and the Theater,” 78.

<sup>157</sup> Mwansa. Interview.

<sup>158</sup> Epskamp, “From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia.”

dance which is presented by the people who offer gifts to the girl. She is now marriageable. In a dance, various men try to make her laugh, but they are unsuccessful.<sup>159</sup>

The different aspects of this dance-drama represent stories that are part of performances at special events in different parts of Zambia. In the dance, the girl is finally made to laugh by a *Vimbuza* dancer. Traditionally, a *Vimbuza* dancer has a healing power in his dance. In this story, the *Vimbuza* dancer makes her laugh through his movements and then becomes her husband.

In the new performances, the dances detached themselves from the tradition of the dance as part of communal heritage. The focus was now more on individual perfection, virtuosity and creating independent style.<sup>160</sup> Festivals and competitions were created for these individually created dances. One of the dances from these competitions was *Kachala* named after the creator, Kachala who was from Kabwe, a town in the Central Province of Zambia. *Kachala* copied from the music and rhythm of the *Manyantya* dance, which was performed exclusively by women at the initiation ceremony of Lenje girls. He also borrowed from the trance dances of the *Mashawe* dance of the Nsenga, the Soli and the Lenje people. *Mashawe* was originally used by women who were assumed to be possessed by a spirit. In the dance, *Kachala* revealed aspects of modern city life and used various local languages and “broken English.” “The foreign influences and the moral changes which were inherent to city life, such as miniskirts, prostitution, and dancing cheek-to-cheek in public, were targets of his dancing acts.”<sup>161</sup> Through the dance, Kachala spoke against these “moral changes” that were seen in

<sup>159</sup> Epskamp, “Historical Outline of the Development of Zambian National Theatre.”168.

<sup>160</sup> Epskamp. “Historical Outline of the Development of Zambian National Theatre.”168.

<sup>161</sup> Epskamp., “Historical Outline of the Development of Zambian National Theatre,” 169.

city lifestyle. Something that fell in line with what the government wanted then, as it spoke against such new ways of life.

The National Dance Troupe also performed outside Zambia. They took part in the First World Festival of Black Arts in 1966 also known as FESTAC 66.<sup>162</sup> It was a month-long arts festival. According to Mwansa, the gathering made countries concentrate on producing their own indigenous forms. Each country on the African continent assembled a team to present the variety of dances within their own boundaries. Mwansa added that the dances presented by FESTAC 66 were created with the support of a professor from Sierra Leone who had come to Zambia. Individuals were also sent outside Zambia to get some training. The dance troupe sent “people to go to Israel to study, two of them Gideon Lumpa and Kenneth Nkhata. These went to train with the Israeli theatre company. And these are the people who took the first dance troupe to the 1966 FESTAC.”<sup>163</sup>

### 5.3 Traditional Dance: Criticism and Challenges

The Dance Troupe was not without challenges and criticism, particularly in relation to mixing modern and traditional influences in the performing arts. There are reported cases in which elderly people from areas where dances or stories came from originally were offended at the way their stories had been used.<sup>164</sup> This required performers to ensure “authenticity” in the performances they created. Which is almost a futile endeavor.

With regards to fusing traditional dances into staged plays, John Kapesa was of the view that the dances were too regionalized to be fused into plays:

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<sup>162</sup> Mwansa. Interview.

<sup>163</sup> Mwansa. Interview.

<sup>164</sup> Epskamp, “From Indigenous to Endogenous Performing Arts in Zambia.”

Dance has sort of been rigidly regionalized, where if you do a play with a particular dance, especially traditional dance, people will tell that this dance is meant for a funeral in this province, they are very regional, you do a dance, a traditional dance, they will tell you this dance is for circumcision events in this region, they will tell you this dance is a ceremonial dance when you are installing a chief or somebody... they have not been very easily infused in the local activities other than the few dances that are basically for entertainment.<sup>165</sup>

Though this statement by Kapesa has merit, I am of the view that since post-independence Zambia already had dances, such as *Kalela*, *Vimbuza*, and *Fwemba*, which were seen as “urban dances,” and entertainment dances, they could still be fused into plays if playwrights desired. The limited number of playwrights and other theatre makers, particularly those interested in doing so. However, to be respectful of people’s beliefs and traditions, playmakers avoided dances that would bring controversy. I have written a play myself, *Love Tragedies*, staged by the Kitwe Little Theatre in 2018, which did not have dance in the script, but the director decided to include dance. A dance troupe was hired to perform. However, the dance was merely an entertainment dance, but still a traditional one. This could have been a way that theatre-makers in post-independence might have used but may have been preoccupied with other themes to think about infusing traditional dances in plays.

At the School Arts Association of Zambia (SAAZ) festivals that I have attended and taken pupils to participate when presenting a traditional dance, each school is required to present three dances and each dance should come from a different province. To be judged favorably, the dancers must ensure their dressing, the type of drums used, the number of drums, the songs, and the number of dancers are as the original dance. This is meant to encourage a level of “authenticity” of the dances. It is, therefore, not just about the skills but imitating the “context” of the actual dance.

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<sup>165</sup> Kapesa. Interview.

There was also a clash between the call by the government of UNIP for morality in the community which included dressing, and the costumes of the Zambia National Dance Troupe. Right after independence, “mini-skirts” were banned. However, traditional performances were usually performed by individuals who were topless and wore skirts that exposed bodies more than the banned miniskirts. The challenge was, therefore, on how dancers should be dressed.

In the interview with Dickson Mwansa, he noted that the dances that were created by the National Dance Troupe were not preserved well even though they were very good and admirable dances:

“They sent scouts, they sent people to look for good dramas, good dancers. And people like Edwin Manda who was himself trained in the west also fine-tuned them. And they became very good. Very admirable performers.... All those movements, choreographies, we have not preserved them to be taught well.<sup>166</sup>

This could be partly because teaching younger people these dances was never consciously formulated as an aim. Secondly, there is no National Theatre or even a school of performing arts. There are, however, many independent dance troupes across the country which are still actively involved in staging these traditional dances. SAAZ also has an annual festival where the traditional dance category is one of the most competitive and exciting. However, I note here that previous, “perseveration” of these dances was through the annual festivities which reminded people of their history and where they have come from. For some dances, only a select few would have the knowledge and skill to perform and they would pass it on the next generation. Preservation and documentation, in the sense that Mwansa shared, was a relatively new concept, which people at the time did not see as necessary. The goal for the dances may not have been to be packaged, filmed, documented, and preserved.

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<sup>166</sup> Mwansa. Interview.

# Conclusion

When Zambia became independent in 1964, there was a nationwide campaign to create a cultural identity and foster unity in the ethnically diverse new nation. Through the Department of Cultural Services, performing arts were encouraged as a way of getting messages to the people. In my thesis, I give an overview of the development of theatre (including traditional dance) in post-colonial Zambia. I look at the role of theatre and the extent to which European theatre traditions and indigenous forms of performance may have been used together.

Regarding the role of theatre, I found that Zambia theatre was used as a way of organizing and educating people. Through the Cultural Services set up in 1966, performing arts, especially dance, were supported and used in the nation building process. There were also plays that were created to send out messages on issues such as health and agriculture. In the early days after independence, theatre, as a performing art, did not receive as much support from the new government compared to traditional dance. This could have been because “European theatre” in the theatre halls did not appeal to most indigenous Zambians. It remained something for the European settlers and a few Zambians. Even when the theatre halls began to allow indigenous Zambians, plays that were staged were largely foreign plays that the local people did not relate to. Theatre groups started being created outside the Little Theatres which were associated with theatre for the European settlers.

The second question in my thesis focused on the extent to which motifs of pre-colonial performance genres were incorporated into Zambian theatre. Though there was an assumption that there was a merger of indigenous forms of performance and European style theatre to create Zambian theatre, my research did not find a clear indication of this mixture. One theatre group that tried to experiment with European theatre traditions and indigenous performance concepts was *Chikwakwa* Theatre formed in 1967 at the University of Zambia. At its open-air



theatre, *Chikwakwa* Theatre encouraged the performance of local (written by Africans) plays, staged plays that encouraged direct participation of the audience members and had a stage that extended into the audience. When a play was staged at *Chikwakwa* Theatre, African drums were played in the background while the audience walked into the theatre and while actors changed costumes or props if they needed to. The performance space was also adorned with “African designs.” However, this experiment did not last long. Most plays that were staged in post-independence Zambia seem not to have employed both European and traditional African forms of performance. The two seem to have developed independently.

What seems to have happened is that European style theatre continued with its traditions, supported by the European oriented Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ), having its own theatre standards while indigenous forms of performance also thrived in their own spaces. Indigenous Zambians also started creating theatre clubs such as *Tikwiza* Theatre in Lusaka and *Bakanda* Theatre in Kitwe. The Zambia Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA) was created in 1975 to support the development of indigenous art forms. It was an umbrella body that encompassed theatre, poetry, and traditional dance.

Traditional dance, as a theatrical form, took a different route and a leading role in the government's agenda of creating a cultural identity for Zambia. The National Dance Troupe was created immediately after independence. Members of the dance troupe were picked from different parts of the country through competitions meant to find the best drummers and dancers. The Troupe presented traditional dances from the different ethnic groups in the country.

The National Dance Troupe on the other hand was a collection of performers who were from the rural areas, ordinary people with whom most Zambians identified, and they performed dances that were a form of representation of the people. They performed in schools and at

government events and represented Zambia at different international events such as the “First World Festival of Black Arts” in 1966 (also known as FESTAC 66). The dance troupe also had a full-time company while members of theatre groups such as *Tikwiza* were volunteers. This lack of direct support from the government could have meant that the government then, didn’t see theatre, as performed in the European built theatre halls, as an indigenous form of cultural expression, as compared to traditional dance. Since it did not draw many crowds, it was not a priority.

Through this research, I have collected memories and stories of some of the people that were part of theatrical performances in the years following Zambia’s independence. This collection is a start to creating a platform where such stories and memories can be found in digital form for individuals who are interested in studying this part of Zambia’s cultural history and Zambian theatre heritage. I intend to share these recordings with institutions such as National Archives of Zambia which currently has no information on Zambian theatre in the years following Zambia’s independence. I may also deposit the recordings in Open Society Archives (OSA) at Central European University. OSA has a database that provides open access to materials to anybody for educational and research purposes. I also intend to create a podcast using the audio material that I have collected through the oral interviews. The podcast will be another way to preserve Zambian theatre memories, which are part of Zambian theatre heritage, in a more accessible format. I am also creating an online crowdsourcing platform where people share memories of Zambian theatre through materials such as posters, tickets, costumes, among other things. The audios from these oral interviews will also be part of this collection.

This is the first time such research has been undertaken from a cultural heritage perspective and needs further study. There are more former actors, directors, writers, audience members, and other individuals who can share their memories and recollections. More research

on documenting Zambian theatre history as an aspect of Zambia's cultural history and heritage is required to ensure preservation of such memories.

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