

# Designing the Protest-Demolitions, Human Rights and Democracy in Post-2000 Zimbabwe in Demolishing Democracy (2015)

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## Abstract

Stage design as a process and the concept is drawn from and based on the script, thereby becoming reflective of the script and its thematic concerns. This realization informed the thrust of this investigation on contemporary protest theatre and its scenographic designs. The study investigates how scenographic elements employed in protest theatre enriches the concept of 'protest'. The assessment is on the play *Demolishing Democracy (2015)* and its use of costume, props, set and scenic design in relation to the thematic concerns. Scenography and design is an alternative mode which deepens the concept of protest in protest theatre, it goes beyond dialogue in the fabrication of different meanings in the communicative process. The study employs semiotics (a concept focusing on the use of visual signs onstage) in assessing the design of the play. The researcher recommends that there be vibrant a relationship between theatre training college and the art industry in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** scenography, design, protest theatre, human rights, democracy, *Demolishing Democracy*, post-2000 Zimbabwe

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwean political theatre has been subject to government scrutiny through the implementation of different laws and acts designed to control the theatre's discursive elements in relation to socio-political and economic issues of the day. The theatrical presentation of politics and related issues has been under the suppressive eye of the State with examples of the creative works of Raisdon Baya, Cont Mhlanga and Daves Guzha being some of the many whose works were banned or scrutinized. This is through the assessment of the content of the plays and their thematic concerns. To counter this censorship, the theatre makers have sought ways of creating subversive meanings for public consumption and discussion. This has a bearing on the stage design and performativity of the theatrical performance. It is against this background of protest theatre performance encompassing issues to do with human rights and democracy in Zimbabwean performance theatre that this study assesses how protest theatre makers have engaged scenography in advancing the concept of 'protest'.

Scenography, in this case, becomes an interpretation of the script in visual terms which exists as a site of protest advancing the thematic concerns embedded within the performance. This consideration explains scenography as an alternative way of depicting meaning in protest theatre other than action only. This informs the need to consider and establish the manner in which Zimbabwean protest theatre makers have employed design in portraying the messages embedded within the play in visual terms. It is therefore an exploration of the means of visual design which protest theatre makers in Zimbabwe have adopted as a means to present and develop a stronger picture of 'protest'.

It is imperative to acknowledge the view that, 'political theatre in Zimbabwe tends to disrupt the dominant ideology either of the colonial administration or the ZANU PF government. The themes and performance techniques are deliberately placed to communicate a range of potential ideological readings that challenge the existing order' (Ravengai, 2008). Scenography becomes a constituent factor of a performance technique which illustrates and antagonizes the status quo imperilled to the masses by the ZANU PF government.

This informs the adoption of the view that the form of political theatre under scrutiny has much to do with the Zimbabwean nation, the remonstrance against the government and its ostracised policies, implying that the approach adopted in stage design plays along with such a view. The political field in Zimbabwe is one which is marked by contestations, contradictions and mayhems that impact the social and economic life of the people. Subsequently, this inspires theatre makers and other creative persons who find art as a method of expression in which they insert a form of objection, through theatre, as an alternative address against the hegemony. Thus, 'the making of political theatre [in Zimbabwe] is interventionist on a political level. The performance dwells on a theme to reveal the negative impact of a government policy so that the audience suggests a way out of the problem or mourns about how bad the situation is...' (Ravengai 2008:12). Thus, the Zimbabwean political landscape advises the making of political theatre, and the design process of such plays is influenced by this aspect.

To this effect, there is an employment of different design concepts and a different approach to the use of scenography in performances based on the nation. This investigation stretches to assess the forms of staging and

design used by the makers of *Demolishing Democracy* (2015) in portraying and advancing the themes embedded within the text. The main focus is on costume, props, set and scenic design. These scenographic elements are informed by the theory of semiotics. This is because scenography is influenced by the aspect of symbolism onstage, which is an aspect within the notion of semiotics. Semiotics is originally defined as a discipline of studying the meaning of sign system (Umberto, 1975). Semiotics allows for an understanding of sign structures and a symbiotic assessment of the visual elements found onstage in a performance.

The analysis of the design is based on semiotics with a concern on the underlying themes/meaning which the design engenders, and thus seeking to establish the link between scenography and the concept of 'protest' in *Demolishing Democracy* (2015). The research addresses the following questions, can scenography communicate the concept of 'protest' in protest theatre? How is semiotics employed in design when advancing the concept of 'protest' in protest theatre? To what effect does this speak to the conditions and circumstances presented in the play? How does costume, light, set and scenic design effect and affect the image of 'protest' in protest plays onstage?

## 2. FROM THE CONCEPT OF 'PROTEST' TO PROTEST THEATRE

Here I adopt and define the concept of 'protest' in terms of any anti-establishment or anti-government movement. I consent with the view that whatever the masses perform and design about [in protest theatre] amounts to struggle and that anything to do with the culture and tradition of the dominated people is a threat to the culture and existence of those who dominate them (Vambe, 2011). Protest is thus a concept embedded "in a genre of theatre that manifests itself in many situations of political conflict and social oppression, and unashamedly calls itself by this name [protest theatre]" (Van Graan 2006:3). The concept of protest becomes an anti-establishment movement which provokes a different and insightful understanding of predominant exploitative activities within a society. The concept informs a version of a theatre hinged on nonconformist reactions to the status quo by a disenfranchised, discontent and melancholic people living within a particular setup where the oppressor trembles upon the existence of the oppressed who has no other means to express sentiment, only to do so through the "theatre of protest" (Marotti 2009:113).

Protest theatre has had an array of duties within communities, and the Zimbabwean community is no exception. From the precolonial era through to the post-independence era, theatre has had a formidable role of analysing, explaining reflecting, and questioning prevalent occurrences in Zimbabwe. In the post-independence Zimbabwean era, protest theatre has been employed as a counter to the status quo, a means of questioning a people's integrity and dignity at the face of a repressive ZANU PF led government. This theatre in Zimbabwe not only played a role in the fight against the white minority rule but has also been part of the brand which has interrogated and challengingly protested against the post-independence black government.

The performance of protest theatre also indicates the use and design of the stage in different forms, whether it uses found spaces or indoor theatre halls. This investigation stems from the observation that much analysis has been on the content of the script and how it assimilates the crises of the post-2000 period more than on the visual elements of the performance and their relationship with the depicted society as an enhancer to the concept of protest embedded within the theatre. Therefore, there is a need to understand how scenography and all the design elements exist as subversive means through which protest thrives on in as much as it thrives on dialogue. The argument is that design does not function primarily on aesthetics but also exists as a site of protest which progresses the underlying concept of 'protest' in protest theatre.

Protest theatre is a branch of political theatre which encompasses agitational propaganda, theatre of confrontation and resistance. It is oppositional, contrarian theatre with a purpose of challenging hegemonic values and change the status quo, radicalise predominantly working-class audiences, inspire more "progressive" positions and even political action, and stand outside mainstream repertory by embracing experimentation and eschewing commercialism (Marotti, 2009). The value given to political theatre has an implication on the relationship between the State and the majority, showing the people's incompatibility with the State rule and the everyday happenings. Its role is to instil a sense of radical opposition against exploitative absolutism, it is an antagonistic method of dealing with subjects on belonging, social justice and political engagement.

Protest theatre is the focal point of the study because 'it is visible in Zimbabwe [and] this is mainly the strand of theatre that is being used by theatre groups in Zimbabwe to fight against unpopular policies of the ZANU PF government' (Ravengai 2008:14). This can be attributed to the intensification of political unrest, economic downfall and an impoverished sociality since the early 2000s. These upheavals have led to an escalation in the use of a theatre branded by protest against the Zimbabwean government and these include the works of Tafadzwa Muzondo's *All System Out of Order* (2005), Daniel Maphosa's *The Good President* (2007) and Silvanos Mudzvova's *Final Push* (2007) among others. The plays, infused with the people's discontentment explores themes such as the ZANU PF's misrule and authoritarianism, immense corruption, mass intimidations, human rights contravention, a disregard of the law which has led to the judiciary system being questioned of its legitimacy and independent existence from the control of Robert Mugabe, the 2005 Operation *Murambatsvina*

(the clean-up campaign) and the FastTrack land reform program which left thousands jobless and hundreds of whites and their black workers brutalized.

All these upheavals among other factors led to the rigorous use of a theatre characterised by protest and thus protest theatre which can also be understood as 'Revolutionary Theatre' (Jones, 1965:4). This form of theatre is a reactionary theatre that "accuse[s] and attack[s] anything that can be accused and attacked. It must Accuse and Attack because it is a theatre of Victims" (Jones 1965:4). Thus being a theatre of the victims, protest theatre converts to being an alternative way which the victims uses to express and show their sentiments against the leaders. It becomes a rebellious theatre made by those at the periphery and is largely about and against the establishment and its status quo.

This theatre is a way to open people's political consciousness to include alternatives, or the possibility of alternatives, to contemporary capitalist society (Reynolds, 2006). It is formed by the world, and moves to reshape the world, using as its force the natural dynamism and perpetual vibrations of the mind in the world (Jones, 1965). "It is a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dim-witted fat-bellied white guys who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on" (Jones 1965:5). Differently contextualized, Zimbabwean protest theatre is an alternate weapon against the ZANU PF led government that relentlessly searches for self-aggrandizement at the expense of the common man whose life is a true definition of struggle because of the laws which it passes and often wobbles upon. It is a theatre for revolution aiding to the exclamations and contestations against the ZANU PF leaders who assume Zimbabwe as their own place to run, evidenced by the famous Mugabe speech 'so Blair keep your England and *I* will keep *MY Zimbabwe*'. Under these conditions, protest theatre is therefore a challenging movement against the ZANU PF and its socio-economic and political policies that have always affected the life common man.

### 3. SCENOGRAPHIC DESIGN IN THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES

Design in theatrical performances is a crucial element based on and derived from the script. The design process calls for a critical analysis of the script to bring out its meanings and themes through visual elements placed onstage. It is understood that, "the theatre production script embodies a lot of design problems to be studied and solved by the technical director, working with his team of designers in various specialties [including] costume, set, props, make-up, lighting and sound" (Esekong 2014:1). Design forms the basis on which the deliberations on costume, set and scenic design, make-up and props are based. It is influenced by a design concept which is an embodiment of the script to be interpreted visually.

The (none)existence of visual elements onstage during a theatrical performance can be regarded to as design. To this effect, scenographic design is a critical aspect which builds on a given theme of a script and as such should aid to its depiction. Here, it is considered that scenography is the visual presentation of the play onstage through visual elements, it is a theatrical conception through images onstage.

Scenography is defined as the transformation of drama into a system of visual signs (Manoledáki in Howard, 2002). Elsewhere, scenography is seen as the suggestion of space which transforms in the head of the spectator to anything possible (Kouwenhoven in Howard, 2002). The observation is that scenography is the presentation of a script inclusive of the themes onto the stage and these presentation are left to the interpretive discretion of the audience to render them relevant and meaningful. It is also explained as the complete metaphoric realisation of the visual world of the play (Unruh in Howard, 2002). It is the optical presentation and narrative manifestation of the play through the use of visual elements onstage. Therefore, scenography is the script defined visually onto an area of performance. There is a transformation of the narrative into visual symbols that can be seen by the audience through a careful deliberation process by the designers and the director.

In this regard, scenography forms the visual and spatial poetics of performance (Pantouvaki 2010:67). This is to say, scenography involves the delineation of 'dramatic, emotion and communication elements and contributes to the creation of the aesthetic context of theatrical action' (Tahir, 2000 in Howard, 2002). This interprets scenography as the communicative visual aspect imbued on a theatrical stage through costume, light, scenic and set design. Thus, visual images become a chronicle of the play and its thematic concerns. To this end, scenographic-design is the hallmark of theatre from the beginning with some design areas becoming even more prominent than the performers [and] in certain arrangement, visual aspects came to the forefront (Wilson and Goldfarb, 1991 in Esekong, 2014).

Further, it forms the underlying pictorial meaning of the script thereby becoming central to both the compositional and production processes of performance and also to the audience's experience (McKinney, 2008). In a similar tune, it,

visually liberates the text and the story behind it, by creating a world in which the eye sees what the ears do not hear. Resonances of the text are visualised through fragments and memories that reverberate in the spectator's subconscious, suggesting rather than illustrating the words (Howard, 2002).

It is a component which adds to the meaning of a theatrical event and does so through visual aspects,

thus it becomes a part of the agents of a theatrical event in meaning construction. The inference is that scenographic-design is the visual expression of the script through expressive and symbolic means.

Scenography, through the visual artist deals in extracting the essence from actuality, and presenting it with clarity on the canvas (Howard 2002:35). This presentation feeds off reality to accurately depict a society's life or at least be suggestive of a society onstage through design. It becomes an expression of the context in which the audience find themselves, hence becoming a realist or suggestive realist (re)presentation. The stage design should therefore have an impact on the audiences' memory as they create meaning in juxtaposing the stage design and the context with which the performance is concerned. Thus, the viewer's memory and recognition is activated, seeing through the selective eye of the artist, clothing, objects, or colours, which reawaken forgotten memories and provoke the joy of recognition (Howard 2002:5). It is in this consideration that the study seeks to contextualize scenography as a site of protest which aids the narrative.

### 3.1 THE DESIGN AND SCENOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

The visual considerations, through the design process by the designer, director and the performers are critical elements in explaining and complimenting the theme(s) embodied in a particular play. The design that supports a production in theatre is often an integral aspect of a show...it creates the mood of the play and greatly affects the audience's perception of a location, a character, and a story (Wiecek, 2009). Scenography abodes the following basic components in stage design: costume and makeup, set and scenic design, sound and lighting design. Its role can be precisely conveyed through these visual and auditory aspects. Through these 'the spectator is connected to the subject when a scenographer has been able to choose an object which expresses more than its physical reality' (Howard, 2002:35) Thus, objects onstage bear meaning more than their physicality, they speak to issues of existence.

Firstly, costume can be defined as, "anything worn onstage whether it be layers of clothing or nothing at all" (Barbara and Cletus 1992:377). All that is put on by an actor on stage serves as costume whether or not it was due to a conscious and well planned decision (Nenjerama, 2015). They form part of a theatrical visualization process wherein the actors assume clothing that is either consciously or unconsciously selected to be worn as part of the expressive symbols borne in a play. They become "a storytelling tool, communicating subtle details of each character's personality and history quickly and economically to the audience. They help actors leave their own personalities behind and become new and believable people" (Numsina, 2008). Costume has a distinctive communicative role. For a performer to assume and depict a role of a character, there is need to have expressive symbols that can be used in conveying the character.

Stage design is also inclusive of set and scenic design which also plays a communicative role in meaning production. The two entail all the aspects found onstage and more importantly include the spatial design which in turn implies the scenic design. Scenic design "includes all the visual aspects of a production rather than those contributed by the actors themselves in movement and personal appearance" (Jones, 1965:2). Scenery helps the audience understand and enjoy a play by providing a visual reinforcement of the production concept (Gillette, 1992). The visual elements placed onstage help create an audiences' understanding of the interpretation of the script. Therefore, the purpose of everything onstage is to help create the world of the play (Weinerck, 2009).

Scenery thrives on these elements, mood and spirit, historical period, locale, socio-economic level and personality of the play (Gillette, 1992). This is important in indicating to the audience whether a play is realistic or departs from realism (Wilson and Goldfarb, 2002). Thus, design has the role of placing and contextualising the dramatic action onstage to a specific time. Thus, scenery periodizes the action onstage.

Properties are also embedded in scene design. These are significant in aiding the dramatic action, defining and portraying a character onstage. These are categorized into three, that is, set props, hand props, and decorative props. "Set props are larger movable items, not built into the set, that are used in some way by the actors. Hand props are small items that are handled or carried by the actors. Decorative are those used to enhance the setting visually but are not specifically touched by the actors" (Gillette, 1992). Thus, props as the constituent part of scenery vital elements with a co-existential relationship with the characters onstage. They are co-equal design elements with a primary role of providing clues about the personality and socio-economic status of the inhabitants of the set (Gillette, 1992).

All these aspects need illumination for them to have meaning. For every action onstage there must be an illumination of some sort. However, illumination is not the only the role of lighting but there are other underlying roles which lighting has in consideration of the meanings embedded in the text. Reid (1995:21) asserts that lighting is related to the use of words such as;

...accent, atmosphere, blending, composition, concentration, dimension, distribution, emotion, fluid. Illumination, location, modelling, mood, motivation, orchestration, painting, perception plasticity, progression, punctuation, sculpture, selectivity, texture, and toning

The process of light designing for a stage performance considers these different aspect in depicting given



pictures onstage: naturalism, surrealism, pointilistic, futuristic, minimalistic and expressionistic picture. Thus lighting helps in the process of periodizing the performance, explaining the mood, contextualising the occurrence of the dramatic action onstage in relation to action and words. Lighting thus becomes the expressive visual metaphor of the play.

It can therefore be ascertained that light design does not only strive on showing the action onstage but also has a multidimensional role in a performance. The light that illuminates the stage has a multi-behaviour role in that it offers the relevance of the scene, showing the underlying meaning of physical aspect and the physicality of the stage and offers the atmospheric disposition of a scene in relation to the dramatic manifestation onstage.

#### 4. OUTLINE AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

##### 4.1 Operation *Murambatsvina* (2005) to Arlington Park Demolitions (2015): Demolitions, Human Rights and Democracy in post-2000 Zimbabwe

This study comes in at a time when the socio-economic and political landscape of Zimbabwe is prone to State sponsored violence and abuse of the majority since the early 2000s. The ZANU PF government has used various means in enforcing its control over the citizens. The urbanites who were deemed supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (henceforth MDC) were punished in 2005 through the demolitions and forced evictions codenamed Operation *Murambatsvina*, under the facade of re-establishing order in Zimbabwe. The recent attacks on the settlement along the airport road in Arlington residential area, high suburbs of Kuwadzana and Highlens in Harare, are another show and exercise of the ZANU PF power and control over the masses. It is also important to make reference to the Operation *Murambatsvina* since it shows the disregarding of the masses and their rights through the policies and governance of the Zimbabwean government.

This section therefore throws light into the reasons why critical art and performances have continued to thrive from colonial period through to the post-independence period. The critical artists' vision is to present their grievances and those of the masses over state-sponsored violence and violation of human rights. In May 2005 the Zimbabwean government initiated terror through the implementation of the Operation *Murambatsvina*, a 'clean-up' movement wherein thousands of people were dispersed and had their homes destroyed by the State. CPIA (2005:94) asserts that;

Many people view this campaign as having been a retribution against unsupportive urbanites. The victims of the operation in the majority were street people, the informal sector and the homeless who had found a home in the shacks all over high density suburbs. No consultation took place prior to the demolition of the only source of livelihood of close to over a million people. The argument is, the government is always right and any questioning would imply speaking one's masters' voice that is, that of the British and the Americans, who are considered to be against the land reform programme

The Zimbabwean government proved tyrannical in the demolitions because of the lack of interaction and dialogue with the masses that were to be affected. The government breached the principles of the Constitution and rendered itself supreme over the law. The evictions saw houses demolished along with a people's sociality, succumbing them to ill-treatment and infringement of their rights. The principles of Constitution were broken as

Authorities brazenly violated several of the key protective provisions. One of these provisions which was broken, as the right to life (section 12), when three children died after walls of structures fell on them, the right to protection against torture, inhumane or degrading treatment of punishment (section 15), and assault and intimidation of the masses by the police. (CPIA 2005:95).

This shows a governance crisis which led to the suffering of the people as the demolitions marked a decline in standards of life and infrastructure which was highly evidenced by the rise in the cholera outbreak in 2008. This trend has marked the demolitions which the State under the order of Mugabe has fostered upon the masses.

The recent wave of demolitions in the Arlington residential area near the airport is another haven of debate as there are claims of corruption, injustice, a two-faced and incompetent government and its local authorities. The Arlington Park demolitions have caused and led to different perspectives and understandings about the Zimbabwean government and the local authorities. This is so because the local authorities gives the go ahead by authorising cooperatives in Zimbabwe to sell stands to the generality.

The demolitions revealed an elevated level of corruption in Zimbabwe because of the allegations that some of the house owners had title deeds and processed papers showing ownership of the stands and houses. "The Harare Council is the department responsible with giving information and processed official papers that show ownership of a stand. However, in a turn of events the council and local officials denied and divorced themselves from the implications after Mugabe had delivered an order for the demolitions to take place" (The Herald, 7 August 2015). The High Court, after rendering the demolitions unlawful pointed out that "certain remedies may be available to the applicants (residents) flowing from the unconstitutionality of such conduct. Applicants may have remedies against the negligence of certain Government departments in failing to protect them from the actions of omissions of Nyikavanhu Housing Cooperative, when they knew that the cooperative

was continuing to allocate and take cash from the members of the public, for stands on Arlington Estate when it no longer had the mandate to do so” (The Herald, 7 August 2015). Here, there is clear evidence of the contradictory nature of the government and the relevant authorities. It also reveals Robert Mugabe’s authoritarianism in that though some had papers showing ownership, his word is supreme and led to the demolitions of the houses.

The demolitions were engendered by Mugabe in 2015 as he was much more interested in the image of the country more than the sociality of the people. Mugabe questioned, “What is that being seen from here? You cannot do that because visitors pass through here. People settled here should leave” (Mugabe in Newsday, 2016). Similar to the Operation *Murambatsvina*, where there was little warning for the people to vacate, Mugabe ordered the demolitions of the houses. This explains the extent to which people were subjected to State terror and a disregard of their rights.

With inspiration drawn from these turmoil, art, theatrical performances and design is used as a way of questioning the ZANU PF ideologies negatively affecting the people. The government described and justified its actions as a measure of clearing cities of ‘illegal activities’, steering the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, demolition of homes, businesses and property, widespread loss of livelihoods and the injury and deaths of some residents (CHRE and ZLHR 2007:4). The State-led demolitions and evictions capitulated the masses to a state of vulnerability resulting in the distortion of a people’s survival and an endangerment of a democracy in Zimbabwe.

It can further be stated that the Arlington Park evictions, ...in Zimbabwe may constitute a crime against humanity since the Statute of the International Criminal Court clearly prohibits the deportation and forcible transfer of population under certain conditions that appear to be present in the Zimbabwean operation. According to the Rome Statute, deportation or forcible transfer of population is the forced displacement of person from the area in which they are lawfully present, without any grounds permitted under international law, and in the context of a widespread and systematic attack against civilians (CHRE and ZLHR 2007:4).

There is a lack of the consideration of the Zimbabwean generality by the government since the country was already immersed in disaster, economic and political strife which has always characterised the Zimbabwean community. In Arlington Park there have been cases of lost lives and evident effects of the demolitions on both the young and the old in a Zimbabwe that is presently floundering in poverty, high unemployment rate and a struggling and corrupt government.

However, though days after the demolitions had occurred, the high court ruled the demolitions unconstitutional. It was noted that “under no circumstances are the Government departments at liberty to demolish any structures in the absence of a court order authorising them to do so, whether the structures are illegal or an eyesore. The unlawful conduct of the respondents (the government) of demolishing the applicants’ houses without notice and without a court order was deplorable and not justifiable in a democratic society. This is a democratic society in which such conduct, especially on the part of Government departments, whose operations are funded by taxpayers’ money, is not justifiable” (Justice Chigumba in *The Herald* 2015). The government breached the law and should be held accountable and face the consequences of its actions.

Thus having understood the rational and the setting with which the article is concerned, the next section assesses the design of the play *Demolishing Democracy* (2015). The play is an address and a protest against the demolitions of houses by the government under the facade of rebranding Zimbabwe. The study uses semiotics in analysing the design of the play to locate design/scenography as a form of protest in protest theatre.

## **5. DESIGNING THE ‘PROTEST’: HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN *DEMOLISHING DEMOCRACY* (2015)**

The play *Demolishing Democracy* (2015) is a production by the EDZAI ISU Theatre Company which engages in applied theatre projects to foster community dialogue. The play is centred on issues of corruption, human rights violation, violence, unemployment, misrule and an arbitrary judicial system. This article employs the theory of semiotics in analysing the scenographic-design signs and symbols used in the design of the play. The study uses semiotics because it is not limited to language, stories and other forms of discourse, but was also studied in other semiotic codes, such as images, film, dance and architecture (Van Leeuwen, 2005). The analysis and descriptions given are therefore based on the pictures extracted from the performance.

## The Analysis



Figure 1

The set and scenic design from *Figure (1)*, it is evident that set is relatively empty, only to be occupied by law enforcers who constantly shout “*vacate this place now, you have been warned*”.<sup>1</sup> This can be considered to be a representation of the Zimbabwean society which is immersed in disaster as there are demolitions that the play speaks against. This reveals a protestant stance which the designer adopted as a means to engender a protest sentiment against the Zimbabwean government. There is a backdrop of a clothing line with a few clothes hung in an unorganized manner as a protest depicting a background of a deprived Zimbabwean society.

The policeman, through costume are a representation of the colonial dispensation. Their uniform is a replication of the police force uniforms from the colonial society and can be regarded as an objection of neo-colonial tendencies through the “juxtaposition of the colonial and neocolonial realities events in the conctemporary” (Okpokodu 1992:34). The costume used speaks of a tyrannical dispensation through State police, thereby showing the extent to which the people are subjected to oppression. The costumes expresses a protest in which “ironically...the people oppose state policies, particularly those that the masses view as not contributing to or working towards fulfilling their understanding of what independence should mean” (Vambe 2002:80). However, the costume design of the play lacks an element of colour since the colonial police force had different sets of uniforms. This regresses the emphasis of a protest against the government officials who are used as tools to violently control the masses.

Further, the use of the costume is suggestive and communicates protest against the evictions and police brutality as it visits the “colonial era of violence, forced removals, ironically, now from a black administration against its own heavily marginalised urban poor who put them into office” (Magosvongwe 2014:87). The the designer used scenography as a subversive method of speaking against neocolonialism and the inheritance of despotic methods by the State from the colonial period. The design disputes through a clear depiction of the tryannical tendencies of the state over the masses. They rule by the fist and foster violence on the masses through the use of the police thereby *Demolishing Democray* in Zimbabwe.

The visit to the colonial era through costume not only to show the degrading exploitations of colonial past but it is a cry, a struggle and a protest against the neocolonial system which has used the same methods as the Rhodesians did to the black person. Thus, this costume shows ZANU PF’s “ideological confusion that threatens further to dominate (...), reveals the tensions handled in the chimurenga [struggle] (...) to the conflicts between the African people and the white colonial system” (Kwaramba 1991 in Vambe, 2011). This use of costume in the performance is a vibrant consideration of the concepts of representation of the struggles between the white minority and the black persons. It is a challenge to the government to reassess the founding principles that formed the Chimurenga struggles which can be dubbed as a fight for indipendence and democratic survival of Zimbabwe.



<sup>1</sup> *Demolishing Democracy* (2015), scene 1





Figure 2

The above pictures from *Figure 2* shows four different characters in the auditorium, placed in different spots at different times. The first evident aspect in the different pictures is that the characters appear to be ordinary people who are expressing their concerns to someone. The actors appear as part of the audience who are universally affected by the state-sponsored demolitions. They therefore are a representational feature used to convey the concerns of the people.

The simultaneous use of the stage and the theatre hall is a symbolic presentation of the different generations that are affected by the demolitions. This is suggested by the first 'old man' who is in an overall, representing the older generation of the Zimbabwean society which was affected by the demolitions. The 'youthful' man in jeans, shirt and a tie represents the youth and in this regard, it is a means which design uses in contesting against the status quo and the government regulations and conduct. Similarly, the two ladies are a representation of the views and the concerns of the women who are present in the audience. In this respect, protest is not only in content and dialogue but also existent in the concurrent use of the stage and auditorium. This approach in the use of the stage interchangeably with the auditorium prompts and assists in the portrayal of protest in theatre because it contextualizes the agenda of the play with its viewers.

Another inference from *figure 2* is that the use of four different characters using various areas in the auditorium is a symbolic representation of the Zimbabwean society at large. This representation presents a cry of the different age groups that has been subjected to pain and distasteful activities by the government. This approach adds to the value of protest as it "continually attempt to transform, reorient and incorporate 'dissident' values" (Bennett, 1994). This is evident in the use of the acting space which incorporates the auditorium thereby bringing about a sense of protest manifesting from the audience against the state-sponsored violation of human rights in Zimbabwe through the destruction of houses.

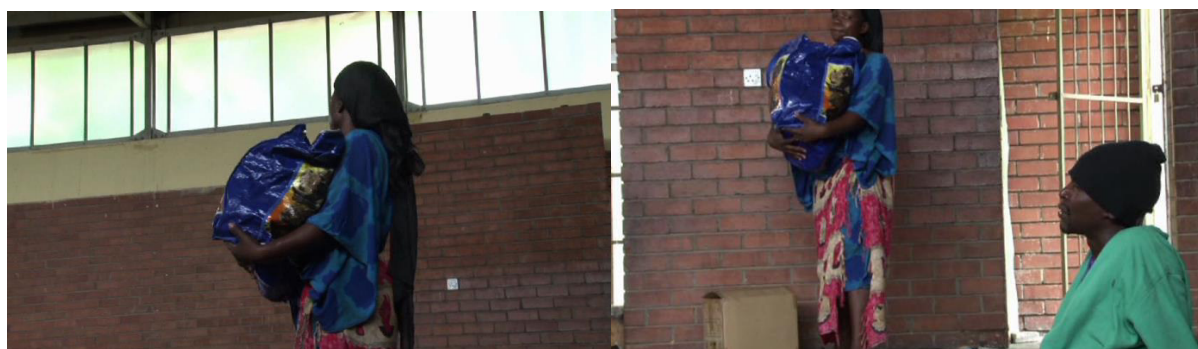


Figure 3

In the play, there is the adoption of minimalism. This is an aspect which narrows the use of design to give a desired meaning. This is evident in the use of props. In the above figure there is a clear depiction of a survival which is characterized by poverty. The picture can be interpreted to mean that the woman by holding the blue bag, it consists of all of her belongings, therefore shows the hardships and the struggle for survival within the Zimbabwean society.

*Figure 3* reveals issues to do with the sociality of the Zimbabwean masses at the face of demolitions. The use of the bag shows the scenographic communication of protest as it illustrates a population whose life is at stake and all they have is what is in the bag and nothing else. Such a use of props is suggestive of the "undercurrents of multiple forms of violence visited upon the [Zimbabwean people], partially hinting at underlying causes of internal migration in post-2000 Zimbabwe" (Magosvongwe, 2014:87). Thus the use of the bag with the woman constantly looking back reveals desperation as she is forced to move and thus entailing internal migrations that yield to more suffering initiated by the State upon the vulnerable majority. This approach



to design and use of props onstage is a clear sign which shows that scenographic considerations in protest theatre enhances and aids to the concept of protest in protest theatre.

Similarly, this approach “further hints at uncertainties of survival in the fluid environment of the post-2000 Zimbabwean economic meltdown, growing poverty, unemployment and accompanying insecurities, especially on the urban landscape. The marginalised majority’s plight had been compounded by vulnerable livelihoods and exclusion arising from inaccessibility of land/resources, accommodation, jobs, basic necessities and social services in a country they fought to liberate” (Magosvongwe 2014:87). The design is a means to depict and protest against an uncertain survival within the Zimbabwean community. This is evidence to the fact that scenography can play a critical role of engendering a sense of protest in protest theatre for it reveals characters and their state which in turn reveals the current state of life of those evicted as many millions “of evictees continue to face poverty, malnutrition, starvation and disease”(UN Report, 2007).

Accordingly, an analysis of *Figure 3* also reveals a remonstrance against the political onslaught which led to enormous movements of natives as it was punctuated by destruction of homes, torture of citizens and other exclusionist operations (Runyawu, 2013). This rendition shows the disregard of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which refuses the removal of any personnel without due consideration and the protection every citizen’s human dignity (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). The *Figure 3* shows the symbiotic relationship of the Zimbabwean government and its disregard of human rights by demolishing democracy at ‘the expense of the laity and Zimbabwe (Machoko, 2013). This shows the importance of props design showing a sense of protest against the endangerment of the people’s life by ‘moving them from somewhere to nowhere’<sup>1</sup>.



*Figure 4*

*Figure 4* shows a Zimbabwe wherein matters of importance (the Constitution, belonging and justice) are discussed in bars regarding them as trivial. This is a protests against the devaluing of the meaning of being a Zimbabwean at the face of demolitions. Coupled with the use of props, the designers employed the suggestive use of broom sticks and table as pool table, thereby placing the play within the locale of a bar. This is also reflective of the lives of the Zimbabwean youths who are subjected to a high rate of unemployment which has led to many spending days playing snooker in their neighbourhoods.

Further, through the application of semiotics in scenography one can also read that the set design and use of props accentuates the concept of protests embedded within protest performances. It is a clear depiction and presentation of protest and thus theatre design is not a “pristine place free from controversy: [it is] also interpolated into systems of power and ideology” (Dolan 2001:5). This controversial characteristic of theatre design also plays to the advantage of the presentation of aversion to hegemony. Props are underscoring the concept of protest for it is a repugnance of an exploitative dogma coerced upon the masses by the hegemony.

Further, in *Figure 4*, there is a background of a washing line where there is a range of disorganized clothing. The set design shows a peoples’ sociality that is hanging in balance because of the State-sponsored

<sup>1</sup> Demolishing Democracy, scene 3

terror, unemployment and a crippling economy characterised by cash shortages. It is a clear deliberation of protesting against the inconsiderate leaders whose governance is weak and are involved in “greed, incompetence, corruption, and mismanagement of resources...” (ZCBC 2007 in Kaulemu 2010). This setting is combined by actors that engage in corrupt activities and discussions. The design incorporates struggles of disapproval against pervasive social blights like nepotism, corruption and dictatorial tendencies of the government. This is a reflective design process showing the extent to which the people’s lives are jeopardized and hence the design expresses and converses a sense of protest against these corrupt leaders who highly considers themselves at the expense of the vulnerable poor people.

Figure 4 shows judges engaging in bribes and subversive discussions, threatening and compromising the application and existence of democracy in Zimbabwe. In this regard, design shows that “every work of art’s being is dictated by events and by life as lived in society. Hence, [designers design] what they see, hear or imagine to be transpiring [in the Zimbabwean] society and it is their undoubted responsibility to demonstrate commitment to this fact” (Makaudze 2009:1). The set and scenic design records the difficulties within the Zimbabwean society, and as such exists as a representational interpretation of a Zimbabwe wherein the government is struggling to fulfil its promises of job creation at the face of a weakening economy and a deteriorating industrial trend.



Figure 5

Figure 5 is a demonstration of protest as it shows a Zimbabwean nation that is only inhabited by the people but with minimal production. The minimal production is affective of a range of the different age groups, the young and the old, women and men. This can be regarded as such because of the extensive use of the ‘empty space’ and the washing line present in every scene of the play. In scenic and set design the play adopts a minimalistic design system which implied that the set was to cover and cater for all the scenes of the play as a ‘sensitivity of struggle (...) carried over during the colonial and post-colonial periods by African masses fighting both colonialism and the post-independence black leadership’ (Vambe 2011:3). This shows an objection, a fight and a dispute against the ZANU PF governance and its policies thereby assimilating the concept of protest in design processes.

Further, Figure 5 shows that “art has been man’s faithful companion. Through it, man has managed to come to terms with reality, exposing reality, explaining, criticising and changing it for the well-being of humankind...art has been viewed as a form of social consciousness, a mirror of society’s code of conduct, arising to explore, explain and shape life” (Makaudze 2009:1). In this regard, the design of the space reveals a Zimbabwean society which has nothing left in it, jobs are scarce and people are living a deprived life and there is nothing they can hold on to except the clothes they have on them. This is a struggle against the Zimbabwean government which has subjected the masses to an unfavourable existence marked by turmoil and disaster. Scenic design plays an important role of protesting against a social order and a government by employing and assimilating reality onstage.

The Zimbabwean life explored through scenography in Figure 5 shows a society that has been swept of everything by the demolitions, leaving people with nothing. It is also in this regard that I contextualize scenography as an aid to the concept of protest in protest theatre because it “does not grow or develop in a vacuum but is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in the Zimbabwean society” (Ngugi, 1972). The inference is that designers and theatre makers use and show what they observe in the society they live in.

Figure 5 further shows a distressed community whose existence is a terrain of havoc dissension at the face of an ill-defined and deteriorating democracy. This protestant nature of theatre design in terms of democracy shows that “...the arts are indeed political—that they create a space for dissent and debate,

disagreement and critical refinement, a forum through which to think about values and in which to install new visions of self, community, and nation” (Dolan, 2001:5). This role converts scenography to becoming a site of protest as an emphasis and communique of the thematic concerns of a performance. This is clearly depicted in *Figure 5* where the Zimbabwean community is presented as a haven of turmoil as the people find it hard to make ends meet at the face of state-sponsored demolitions therefore they find every reason to protest against this discourteous endangerment of a people’s life.

However the set design of the play lacks dynamism. This can be realized in that the above images from the play shows a stage which is only designed through characters, a table and a washing line with clothes on. The washing line however multifaceted in meaning as it is, shows a lack of the aspect of creativity in the design of the play. This is because the washing is present throughout the play.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The process of design carries a dynamic task of visually driving and interpreting the script onstage. The concept of protest speaks of values of challenge, disenfranchisement, dissatisfaction and an indication of the contrary standpoint of the protester. It is a concept highly assimilated in protest theatre, because protest theatre emanates from the periphery against the core. Thus, as a means to drive the concept of protest and its themes, scenography can be heavily depended upon as it struggles with pervasive social scourges like corruption and dictatorial tendencies. The design of *Demolishing Democracy (2015)* denotes a Zimbabwean community succumbing to great distress in socio-economic and political facets, through the use of the stage and the auditorium as acting areas which are meant to appeal to the audience. In terms of costume, the design engaged a concept of protest against the demolitions, a weakened democracy and life marked by struggle from colonial to post-colonial period. The use of props in the play, is another element that enriches the concept of protest which the play sought to illustrate. There is the use of broom sticks and a table, which is a two-faced replication of the current situation in Zimbabwe wherein the unemployed youth and old have resorted to spending their time playing snooker. It is also representative of the government officials who live a splendid life, with the poor succumbing to great poverty. Thus one can therefore deduce that for protest theatre to fully thrive there is need to highly consider the design of the performance because it is a visualization of the script in relation to the society at large.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the above conclusion; the researcher recommends that;

- Theatre teaching programs proliferate the production of graduates that are technically adaptable to the demands of various scenographic genres and performance spaces, (Sibanda, 2013)
- There be an administration of professional courses, workshops and seminars on design and its role in theatrical performances,
- That theatre teaching institutions develop and relationship with the industry for attachment of theatre students in areas such as scenography,
- Theatre groups and individuals expand and gain knowledge in new and contemporary perspectives to stage designing and design concepts,
- There be a high consideration of design concept rather than misemployment of the aspect of ‘poor theatre’.

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