

Dramatised and Real Xhosa Ritual in a Contested Urban Theatrical Space

by Rod Suskin

This research explores how the use of profane space as sacred space caused conflict over the use and meaning of theatrical space at a performance in Cape Town. The aim of the research is to explore Bender's notion of 'contested space' from the viewpoint of differing 'contestants' for the theatrical space. The research examines the Xhosa notion of sacred space and how it was applied in the context of an urban theatrical performance through interviews with the key players in the conflict. It will also consider contemporary dramatic theory in the light of ritual and drama. It will be argued that the contest over theatrical space and meaning at this performance is a manifestation of the contested historical discourse of the assassination of Xhosa king Hintsa in 1835 by colonial forces as well as between traditional and urban cultural expression.

Background

In 1996, a Xhosa *sangoma* (South African healer/diviner) called Nicholas Gcaleka had a dream in which he was told to travel to the United Kingdom to recover the skull of legendary Xhosa king, Hintsa. According to oral tradition the skull had been taken there after Hintsa's assassination by British soldiers in 1835.¹ Gcaleka was told in his dream that returning the skull to its place of origin would 'usher in an era of peace.'²

Hintsa's killing marks a turning point in the colonial domination of the Xhosa.³ Even at the time it aroused some controversy, both because of the murder of a royal hostage and because of the mutilation of the body.⁴ According to the colonial archive, Hintsa's skull was shattered, his ears cut off and the rest of his

¹ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009).

² Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*. p. 1.

³ Noel Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (London: Pimlico, 1992).

⁴ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*.



Approximate position of Xhosaland in 1835 here shown on a map of modern South Africa

remains abandoned.⁵ Gcaleka's pronouncement was also controversial as it conflicted with the historical record and because some regarded him as a fraud. His mission to reclaim the skull so that the king's soul would find a place to rest provoked both ridicule and aroused many supporters.⁶ When he eventually returned to South Africa with a skull in hand, the Xhosa royal family demanded to have the skull tested and found it to be that of a European woman.⁷

The controversy saw Gcaleka being denounced as a charlatan by the royal family and hounded by the press as a crazed guru figure.⁸ At the same time, he had many supporters, one of whom was the noted South African playwright and theatre director Brett Bailey, who wrote 'the point is this: exactly whose neck the skull once sat upon is really irrelevant ... no scientific test can ascertain the symbolic value of an item, the importance it has for the people who revere it.'⁹

Bailey produced a play called *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), which explored the skull affair. In his discussion of this play Bailey states his intention 'to fuse ritual and theatre in some way, to make drama that would transport performers and spectators ... this is a trip akin to those we take in dreams that leave us haunted,

⁵ Noel Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People*. p. 725.

⁶ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*.

⁷ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*.

⁸ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*.

⁹ Brett Bailey, *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003). p. 99.

enchanted, disturbed.¹⁰ The production featured an account of the contested histories of both Hintsá and the skull, as well as an enactment of a ritual in which actors played Gcaleka and other *sangomas*, and during which the sacrifice of a chicken was feigned.

Amongst the performers in the 2003 Cape Town production of the play was an actual practicing Xhosa *sangoma* of the Pondo tribe, Ntombethongo Tutsu.¹¹ He was called upon nightly to pretend to be dancing in trance and pretend to slaughter a chicken. On the final night of the performance, instead of feigning it, he actually slaughtered a chicken during the onstage ritual.¹² At this performance, which drama critic Judith Rudakoff says took place in a theatre of predominantly white people in a middle class area, the audience reacted with outrage and large numbers of them walked out of the theatre.¹³ Some laid complaints with the authorities, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) or wrote to the press.¹⁴ The complaints were about a wide variety of issues, notably animal rights as well as about the appropriateness or legality of conducting a ritual sacrifice in a public space.¹⁵ The Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals later laid charges with the police, although the prosecutor later declined to pursue the charges.¹⁶

Prior studies of the events surrounding Hintsá's death have shown that the colonial record which has entered into history 'was extensively stage-managed by Colonel Harry Smith and is of little relevance to the historian seeking to construct an alternative or truthful account of events.'¹⁷ In this account, which Premesh Lalu asserts has been treated by historians with the utmost brevity, Hintsá was taken hostage by British soldiers who killed him and cut off his ears as souvenirs.¹⁸ Peires, who also acknowledges the unreliable nature of the record, describes the 'Kafka-esque' nature of the subsequent inquest and its entry into history.¹⁹ This remains the generally accepted historical discourse, while the

¹⁰ Brett Bailey, *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*. p. 15.

¹¹ Yunus Kemp, 'Big Flap Over 'Senseless Murder' of Chicken,' *Cape Argus* August 12, 2003.

¹² Yunus Kemp, 'Big Flap Over 'Senseless Murder' of Chicken.'

¹³ Judith Rudakoff, 'Why Did the Chicken Cross the Cultural Divide?: Brett Bailey and Third World Bunfight's Imumbo Jumbo,' *TDR (1988-)* 48, no. 2 (2004): 80-90. p. 85.

¹⁴ Yunus Kemp, 'Big Flap Over 'Senseless Murder' of Chicken.'

¹⁵ Judith Rudakoff, 'Why Did the Chicken Cross the Cultural Divide?: Brett Bailey and Third World Bunfight's Imumbo Jumbo.' p. 86.

¹⁶ Yunus Kemp, 'Chicken 'Killers' Set to Land Up in Court,' *Cape Argus* October 2, 2003.

¹⁷ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsá*. p. 33.

¹⁸ J.B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981). p. 112.

¹⁹ J.B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence.*, p.112-113n.

Xhosa one, which has been in writing since at least 1905, remains outside of the discourse of history.²⁰

Recent studies have been done of the suppression of historical discourse concerning the conflict between the colonial record and Xhosa oral and written history. Postel emphasises the symbolic relevance of the skull in the context of a culture which too readily accepts scientific reality.²¹ For example, Xhosa historian Nomalanga Mkhize argues that the skull is an appropriate symbol for the 'horrors' of the frontier wars and, along with dreams, is entirely valid within an African way of representing reality.²² Additionally, Lalu offers a Marxist analysis of the attempts to control the historical discourse and the resulting effect on Gcaleka's skull retrieval mission, saying that,

a healer-divine brought an encounter between the colonial past and the post-apartheid present to the fore, in which it became not only possible but imperative to inquire into history's relation to the exercise of power...the healer-diviner unwittingly solicited responses from within a discourse of history, organised around competing constructions of colonialism and anti-colonialism.²³

Lalu asserts that Gcaleka is excluded from the historical discourse because his claims are based on the oral history of the vanquished culture and on a dream.²⁴

Bailey's work has been studied in the context of theatre, ritual and 'body theatre' by a number of recent theses and papers, as well as politically. Tang discusses Bailey's attempt to create the 'shamanic presence' in his work.²⁵ O'Connor refers to Bailey's 'use of ritual and history, both rooted in the South African context. Through ritual he establishes a spatial dialectic, invoking the clash and tensions between the local and global contexts.'²⁶ Keevy analyses *iMumbo Jumbo* in the light of 'interracial' cultural representation, suggesting that

²⁰ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*.

²¹ Gitte Postel, 'Media, Mediums and Metaphors: The Modern South African Sangoma in Various Texts,' *The Free Library* (2010).

²² Nomalanga Mkhize, 'Nicholas Gcaleka and the Search for Hintsa's Skull,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 1 (2009): 211-21.

²³ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*. p. 10.

²⁴ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa*.

²⁵ Cheong Wai Acty Tang, 'Gazing At Horror: Body Performance in the Wake of Mass Social Trauma' (Master's dissertation, Rhodes University, 2006).

²⁶ Lloyd Grant O'Connor, 'Summoning the Healing' : Intercultural Performance, Immediacy, and Historical and Ritual Dialectics in Brett Bailey's the Plays of Miracle and Wonder (2003)' (Master's dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2006). p. iii.

'the ritualistic and exotic caters basely to the colonial gaze.'²⁷ Furthermore, Moyo looks specifically at cross-cultural and racial issues, suggesting that Bailey's work confronts 'intellectuals... [with] the difficult question of *identity as cultural ownership*. The artist's class-race background had exposed him to unofficial forms of artistic censorship.'²⁸ (Italics in original.)

Bailey has stated that he is 'fascinated with entranced performance and the interaction of ritual and drama ... I spent several months living in the rural villages of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa investigating the ceremonies of the local traditional healers (*sangomas*), who dance themselves into trance to channel the healing wisdom of their ancestors.'²⁹

Other performance theorists have also studied the relationship between ritual and drama. In one example, Richard Schechner examines theatre in the context of its efficacy, asserting that in the post-Elizabethan era theatre took on ritual's role of effecting personal and social change.³⁰ He sees post-1970s theatre as deliberately modeled on aspects of medicine and religion and says 'no wonder shamanism is so popular amongst theatre people: shamanism is the branch of doctoring that is religious and the kind of religion full of tricks, that is theatrical.'³¹

The work of anthropologist Victor Turner is also relevant in the context of this episode. Working with Schechner he suggests the use of performance as an ethnographical method.³² He identifies drama and ritual as mirrors of society and suggests that performance may even be a way to study society reflexively.³³ He sees both theatre and ritual as having an important role in 'social metacommentary,' both of them involving 'liminal events and processes' which allow for the containment, diffusion and resolution of social dramas.³⁴ Theatre is able to do this in forms not usually allowed and like ritual is an effort to

²⁷ Jacqueline Keevy, 'Interracial Mumbo Jumbo: Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey's Theatre' (Master's dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2008). p. 34.

²⁸ Arifani James Moyo, 'Deconstructing the Native/Imagining the Post-Native: Race, Culture and Postmodern Conditions in Brett Bailey's 'Plays of Miracle and Wonder'' (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2009). p. 31.

²⁹ Brett Bailey, 'Playing in the War Zone,' *TDR* (1988-) 48, no. 3 (2004): 180-85. p. 181

³⁰ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

³¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*. p. 122.

³² Victor Turner, and Edith Turner, 'Performing Ethnography,' *The Drama Review: TDR* 26, no. 2 (1982): 33-50.

³³ Victor Turner, 'Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology,' *The Kenyon Review New Series* 1, no. 3 (1979): 80-93.

³⁴ Victor Turner, 'Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual and Drama?,' in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner, and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). p. 8.

reestablish the cosmology and 'produce cosmos.'³⁵ The available major texts about Xhosa culture will be discussed later in this paper, and an interview with a Xhosa *sangoma* is used as the primary source on which the current research is based.

Methodology

The current qualitative research focuses on interviews with Ntombethongo Tutsu, the Xhosa healer-diviner taking part in the performance, Brett Bailey, author and director of the performance, and 'Brad', a member of the audience at the performance who was identified through readers' letters to the press. Through the interviews it was possible to explore whether the process of social and ritual drama leading from breach to resolution, as defined by Victor Turner, successfully led to re-integration and explored the actors' understanding of the use of the theatrical space as sacred in this play. Turner provides a model to understand the common functions of ritual and drama:

A social drama is initiated when the peaceful tenor or regular...life is interrupted by the *breach* of a rule containing one of its salient relationships. This leads swiftly or slowly to a state of *crisis* which...may split the community into contending factions and coalitions. To prevent this, *redressive* means are taken by...the most legitimate or authoritative representatives of the relevant community. Redress usually involves ritualized action [which may be] religious (involving belief in the retributive action of powerful supernatural entities), and often involving an act of sacrifice.³⁶ (Italics in original.)

If the sacrifice is successful, re-integration will follow.³⁷ This process of breach-crisis-redress-integration is central to Turner's thesis that examines the parallel processes and functions of ritual and theatre, and is critical in gaining an understanding of the motivation and behaviour of Gcaleka and Tutsu.

Discussion

Tutsu was questioned over his motives in slaughtering the chicken. According to him he wanted to appease his ancestors' possible anger or confusion over being called for a fake ritual and so he decided, in consultation with Bailey, to offer a chicken as a sacrifice to redress this problem. He expressed the need for protection:

I told Brett I can only be involved in this play if we are going to make a small ceremony right in the beginning to join the ancestors and the cast

³⁵ Victor Turner, 'Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual and Drama?' p. 19.

³⁶ Victor Turner, 'Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology.' p. 83.

³⁷ Victor Turner, 'Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology.' p. 83.

together ... and at the closing we have to have a special time to do it again, to say, now we are done... that is when we decided we must do it on stage... To say thank you so much, *we were safe*... Actually, this is [a ceremony]. That piece of time, we have to do it right through, not to do it as an act anymore...to be like a serious [ceremony] because people are here, attending [it]. So I asked Brett, he said yes.

In an interview with the author, audience member Brad acknowledged the capacity of theatre in 'raising consciousness because we were shocked' but stressed that for him, 'the real issue is that it was inappropriate. I don't have a problem with ritual sacrifice, I just don't think it's entertainment. It's inappropriate. Sacred things should be kept in sacred places.' This is consistent with statements made to the press by other audience members.³⁸

Barbara Bender has discussed the social, economic and political control of space and its meaning from a Marxist perspective, using examples of ritual to show that space deemed culturally significant '[operates] at the juncture of history and politics, social relations and cultural perceptions.'³⁹ She uses Stonehenge to illustrate how those in power control access to and interpretation of sacred space.⁴⁰ She defines the ensuing conflict over access and meaning as 'contested space.'⁴¹ Moreover, Christopher Tilley elaborates this notion stating that 'control over space is crucial for the maintenance of power relations within and between individuals and groups.'⁴²

Following Turner's model, the breach created by the murder of Hintsu and the alleged removal of the skull led to what Gcaleka perceived as a critical state of conflict in South Africa. His attempt to redress this through a dream-inspired pilgrimage to fetch the skull aimed at establishing peace in the land and to achieve the 'reintegration' of the various conflicting elements of the postcolonial society. Tutsu experienced the same process. According to him:

When Brett first approached me I told him I was uncomfortable, because I am supposed to play a *sangoma* but this is my real life, I am supposed to heal people. I am supposed to work for my ancestors, not just for a play. Something feels wrong about it. So something right has to be done to be able to get into that job, which came from my ancestors, *because I dreamed it before I answered his request* [my italics].

³⁸ Yunus Kemp, 'Chicken 'Killers' Set to Land Up in Court.'

³⁹ Barbara Bender, 'Introduction,' in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Providence: Berg, 1993). p. 3.

⁴⁰ Barbara Bender, 'Stonehenge - Contested Landscapes (Medieval to Present Day),' in *Stonehenge: Making Space*, ed. Barbara Bender (Oxford: Berg, 1998).

⁴¹ Barbara Bender, 'Stonehenge - Contested Landscapes (Medieval to Present Day).'

⁴² Christopher Tilley, 'Art, Architecture, Landscape [Neolithic Sweden],' in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Providence: Berg, 1993). p. 81.

Referring to the sacrifice he performed, Tutsu said he did it 'so that our ancestors don't create some sort of anger, because they might get the anger from some people's ancestors not understanding exactly what was happening.' The breach created by the raising of the ancestors without intention created a potential crisis, the ancestors' anger. So the actual ritual sacrifice would be performed to redress the problem with the ancestors and achieve peace.

According to Tutsu, sacred space and sacred places in nature in Xhosa culture are generally not fixed and are not sacred because of their location or physical characteristics. It is the actions of the *sangoma* and the ritual participants which make it sacred, or the presence of the ancestors. Xhosa spirituality has many characteristics commonly used to define shamanism.⁴³ For example, dreams guide the role of the *sangoma* in performing his duties.⁴⁴ Geertz states 'in a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing [an] idiosyncratic transformation in one's sense of reality.'⁴⁵ Accordingly both Gcaleka and Tutsu were told in dreams to perform the redressive action.

Bailey's intentions with the play are similar. Observing the powerful effects of Xhosa ritual he aimed to 'summon a healing ... [to create] dramatic battles to restore health and harmony to communities invaded, assaulted, diseased.'⁴⁶ Gcaleka also attempts to achieve redress through pilgrimage, which according to Janzen in Nguni cultures such as the Xhosa, may be used to fetch a symbol of the tribe to restore wholeness.⁴⁷ His claim that he can restore peace to the nation is consistent with the Nguni worldview 'in which individual experience is brought together with culturally normative knowledge. It is therefore not an exaggeration to speak of particular spirits as specific paradigms and the realm of spirits as a generalized paradigm.'⁴⁸ Correspondingly Hammond-Tooke states that it is the role of a Xhosa chief to sacrifice to ancestral chiefs 'during times of national emergency' and Gcaleka sought just such a global healing.⁴⁹ These notions

⁴³ W. D. Hammond-Tooke, 'Selective Borrowing? The Possibility of San Shamanistic Influence on Southern Bantu Divination and Healing Practices,' *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 53, no. 167 (1998): 9-15.

⁴⁴ John Janzen, *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992). p. 102

⁴⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973). p. 112.

⁴⁶ Brett Bailey, *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*. p. 9.

⁴⁷ John Janzen, *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa*. p. 120

⁴⁸ John Janzen, *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa*. p. 141.

⁴⁹ W. D. Hammond-Tooke, 'Worldview,' in *The Bantu Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, ed. W.D. Hammond-Tooke (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974). p. 350.

suggest that to Gcaleka the authenticity of the skull is less significant than its function.

Monica Hunter defines two types of ritual amongst the Xhosa, family based and community based.⁵⁰ Gcaleka pursued the latter while Tutsu the former. Tutsu used the theatre to create the traditional dance space for Xhosa ritual and stated that ritual always calls the ancestors, their presence creating a sacred space:

Tutsu: [The ancestors] have their own sacred place where they live, and then come to attend us and look at us and give us some news or messages. Their sacred places are forests, rivers, the sea, mountains. Those places are sacred only because the ancestors are living there. Once a [ritual] starts, right in the beginning when we're preparing the [traditional beer], we know that the ancestors are always there. They always come. Its like you make a shout out once you make beer, because you are calling all of them... that they must come to bless this dance. Once they come, this place becomes more powerful than ever.

Interviewer: Does making the [ritual] there make the space become a sacred space?

Tutsu: Exactly. I think the whole drumming thing changes the place to become a sacred space, because the people who belong to this drumming sound [the ancestors] come to this place. It calls them.

He reported that once the ancestors arrive, strict rules must be followed, such as the audience participating by clapping and singing and removing their shoes. Hunter confirms the same sequence of events and rules operational since precolonial times.⁵¹

Turner identifies ritual sacrifice as the key means by which ancestors are appeased, saying it functions to restore the 'flow' or general good of the group.⁵² Turner describes the shaman as being in a divided state with sacrifice intended to resolve this division.⁵³ In the ritual the participant audience should move from an exposed to a protected state.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact With Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

⁵¹ Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact With Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa*.

⁵² Victor Turner, 'Sacrifice as Quintessential Process: Prophylaxis Or Abandonment?', in *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, ed. Edith Turner (Tucson, London: University of Arizona Press, 1992). p. 104.

⁵³ Victor Turner, 'Sacrifice as Quintessential Process: Prophylaxis Or Abandonment?'

⁵⁴ Richard Schechner, 'Magnitudes of Performance,' in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner, and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

In the case of both Tutsu and Gcaleka, the ritual cannot be said to have succeeded in these terms. In the case of Gcaleka, rather than bring harmony to the country, he aroused ridicule, argument and contest over the sacrality of an object as well as displeasure from the Xhosa royal family. In the ritual that Tutsu performed, many people present felt unsafe and unprotected. Not only the audience felt unprotected, but the actors participating in the performance were taken by surprise. Bailey confirmed, 'the cast had no idea it was going to happen, Ntombethongo [Tutsu] was the only one who knew it was going to happen.' In addition, Tutsu had exposed himself to criminal charges. He was 'safe' spiritually but not in the world. Geertz says the ritual fails because:

ritual is not just a pattern of meaning; it is also a form of social interaction... the attempt to bring a religious pattern from a relatively less differentiated rural background into an urban context also gives rise to social conflict...because the kind of social integration demonstrated by the pattern is not congruent with the major patterns of integration in the society generally.⁵⁵

In both situations, it is the contested discourse of history and space that causes the ritual to fail in these terms. Similarly in the case of the failed Javanese ritual reported by Geertz, the 'chaos' and failure of the ritual arise from 'a basic ambiguity in the meaning of the rite for those who participated in it.'⁵⁶ The symbols used in the ritual 'were charged with both sacred and profane import.'⁵⁷ Therefore the people were not sure whether they were engaging in a sacred or a secular act. In terms not unlike those of Bender's contested space, Geertz says 'the conflict occurred not because of secularization/skepticism but because the participants did not share an integrated common cultural tradition. It occurs because of a 'discontinuity' between the existing social structure (urban) with the cultural structure (traditional).'⁵⁸ Tutsu acknowledged these problems but did not feel that the ritual had failed. While it did not conform to traditional rules of ceremony:

Tutsu: In my opinion I don't think it was perfectly correct or right [for the audience and cast] but there was no way we could stop the show and tell them what was going to happen. On the other hand, we had to do something for the ancestors because that's what we believed in, *because the spirits will come even though those people are wearing shoes*. We believe that the ancestors are there with us whether people are wearing shoes or no shoes. That's more important. So I felt we would be right in doing it (my italics.)

⁵⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. p. 165.

⁵⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. p. 165.

⁵⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. p. 165.

⁵⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. p. 164.

Schapera found that 'to conduct all ceremonies in the correct formal way and to deal with all crises of life according to traditional pattern is the foremost commandment of Bantu religion.'⁵⁹ In addition, Broster explains that 'the fact that every person participates accounts for much of the psychic and emotional efficacy of the [Xhosa ceremonial] dance.'⁶⁰ This illustrates one of the central problems with the audience's lack of awareness, or misunderstanding, of the process. However, Hunter notes that a *sangoma* 'might command that a traditional custom be modified in a certain way...claiming as his authority inspiration of his [ancestral spirits]' although she says this is less common in contemporary times because *sangomas* tend to function more frequently as 'keepers of the traditions'.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Tutsu did experience a certain amount of conflict regarding his own identity and role:

Tutsu: we would start dancing knowing that we are doing a play, but because this thing is just going inside, its pushing up, the ancestors are starting to realise, this is the place, here are people, then it starts to happen exactly as it happens in the [rural] hills...[the challenge to me] was not to get into the trance, because I would actually [start diagnosing] the audience and pick people out if I can see they have a problem...once we start dancing then the connection just happened so quickly. So then it's like the [ceremony] happens.

In effect, this is a conflict between Tutsu the actor and Tutsu the *sangoma* - Turner's 'blemished' and 'unblemished' selves.⁶² Myerhof, following Schechner, says 'it is essential that the performer maintains a measure of control and awareness, is not utterly 'lost' in his/her own portrayal or obliterated by it.'⁶³ Although Tutsu does not lose consciousness of which 'self' is which during his performance, he experienced Geertz's 'discontinuity' through the demands of his two roles, that of traditional healer and that of urban performer. In doing so, he introduced a sacred space into one which was deemed profane. As in the contest over space between police and 'free festivalers' at Stonehenge in the 1980s, the

⁵⁹ Isaac Schapera, 'Religious Beliefs,' in *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa: An Ethnographical Survey*, ed. I Schapera (London, Cape Town: Routledge, 1937). p. 259.

⁶⁰ Joan Broster, *Amagqirha: Religion and Medicine in Transkei* (Cape Town: Via Afrika, 1981). p. 33.

⁶¹ Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact With Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa*. p. 344.

⁶² Victor Turner, 'Sacrifice as Quintessential Process: Prophylaxis Or Abandonment?' p. 111.

⁶³ Barbara Myerhoff, 'Transformation of Consciousness,' in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner, and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). p. 254.

contest over the meaning of the space had immediate effect – leading to Turner’s ‘crisis’ point.⁶⁴

It can also be seen that the failure of the ritual to bring protection brings into question whether the play itself succeeded at the level of containment and diffusion of social drama as laid out in the model of Turner’s four stages. Bailey acknowledges the failure of his original intention, reflecting in interview as to, ‘whether it was a healing or not ... I think it failed to summon a healing. It caused an uproar ... that was a stupid decision. It was a shock to the cast, it wasn’t particularly wise.’ Nevertheless, he also analysed it in dramatic terms, saying

For me the interest of that historical moment lay in this conflict between the different world-views. I don’t think I ever believed it was Hints’a’s skull, for me Gcaleka’s voice and viewpoint were the most interesting thing. At the time I thought, I hate the sterility of theatres, lets turn the theatre space into a ritual space. I was so bowled over by these Xhosa rituals, that theatre could have that sort of impact on people, where it can really turn a theatre audience into ... a congregation, where they could all be swept up. But what I’ve learned in the interim is that ... the sense of congregation does require some sort of shared belief system. Otherwise the cultural symbols, the songs that go along with it, are too foreign, you know, we stand on the outside and look in.

This is congruent with Gurney’s view of theatrical space: ‘Drama is a fundamentally communal experience, and ... we go to plays to celebrate being part of a particular congregation.’⁶⁵ Furthermore, Tilley states that space defines our understanding of what happens in it: ‘A social space ... is above all contextually constituted, providing particular settings for involvement and the creation of meanings. The specificity of place is an essential element in understanding its significance.’⁶⁶ Bailey connects this element to his experience of theatrical space:

Bailey: But who decides what our spaces are for? Who decides which sort of ethics control those spaces or govern those spaces? I feel that about the theatre as well. Somewhere in the past it lost its connection to ritual. It lost its power base, as we all have as human beings. But I have realised that the ritual does not give me everything I desire because of its cultural limitations. Theatres are spaces which are governed by commercial imperatives. For me there’s already a problem there in terms of [trying to create] sacred space. So maybe it’s impossible.

⁶⁴ Barbara Bender, ‘Stonehenge - Contested Landscapes (Medieval to Present Day).’

⁶⁵ Albert Gurney, ‘A Sacred Place,’ *JAE* 29, no. 2 (1975): 4-5. p. 4.

⁶⁶ Christopher Tilley, ‘Art, Architecture, Landscape [Neolithic Sweden].’ p. 11.

The responses given by interviewees show that the relationship between the contested space and Turner's breach-to-reintegration model – and why reintegration fails - is evident when the steps from breach to resolution are, as Tilley noted, 'contextually constituted,' for Bailey and Tutsu in the contested space of the theatre, and for Gcaleka in the contested discourse of history.⁶⁷ When each narrative of breach-to-resolution follows the path of its proper context, resolution or re-integration is achieved and the ritual results in protection. Thus a *sangoma* in a traditional context can achieve re-integration through ritual, and an actor in a theatrical context can achieve re-integration through the safety of the artificiality of the slaughter (no police charges), but as soon as one context is contested the re-integration fails. Thus when Tutsu's action of redress occurs in the context of a theatrical space the ritual fails, as does Bailey's attempt to heal with drama by using real ritual in the wrong context. Equally, Gcaleka's pilgrimage and symbolic act could succeed in a context that acknowledged his historical narrative and fails when the contest over history occurs.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore the notion of contested space in the context of a theatrical performance of a ritual when a real ritual is performed instead. It found that the successful production of 'cosmos' and the process of re-integration after a religious or social breach, as modeled by Victor Turner, can only be understood and achieved in the light of Barbara Bender's notion of contested space, whereby the context, function and meaning of the space is subject to conflict concerning historical discourse and the conventions of the prevailing social, political and economic powers at work in the society. Furthermore, it showed that this contest was at the heart of the events which succeeded the final performance of *iMumbo Jumbo*.

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⁶⁷ Christopher Tilley, 'Art, Architecture, Landscape [Neolithic Sweden].'

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