

# Navigating a Censorious and Authoritarian Socio-Political Environment in Zimbabwe Through Street Theatre

Peace Mukwara<sup>1,2</sup>, Cyrl Mudzinganyama<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Media, Communication, Film and Theatre, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe

<sup>2</sup>Department of Creative Media and Communication, Faculty of Arts and Humanities University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

## Email address:

pmukwara@gmail.com (Peace Mukwara)

## To cite this article:

Peace Mukwara, Cyrl Mudzinganyama. Navigating a Censorious and Authoritarian Socio-Political Environment in Zimbabwe Through Street Theatre. *Social Sciences*. Vol. 12, No. 5, 2023, pp. 246-252. doi: 10.11648/j.ss.20231205.13

**Received:** April 23, 2023; **Accepted:** August 14, 2023; **Published:** October 30, 2023

---

**Abstract:** Street theatre in Zimbabwe has played a pivotal role in giving a critical commentary on the sociopolitical discourse. However the role of this art form has remained under researched. Over the years, the state has deployed confrontational and violent means to thwart any forms of dissent. This has necessitated street theatre practitioners to deploy non-confrontational and creative means to counter state excesses. Deploying James Scott's theory of public and hidden transcripts, this research unveils some of the creative ways by which artists and practitioners have devised in order to deal with the state. This article analyses how street theatre plays a political watchdog role in Zimbabwe's multilayered crisis. Whilst the paper argues that street theatre resists domination and the state in subtle ways. The research therefore examines the strategies that street theatre adopted so as to cautiously navigate power through the use of public and hidden transcripts. It also explores street theatre as resistance to other forms of dominance which are not necessarily political. The researcher examines thematic concerns, characterisation, and the use of song, dance and space as elements through which resistance is subtly communicated in street theatre.

**Keywords:** Street Theatre, Harare, Resistance, Covert, Hidden Transcripts

---

## 1. Introduction

Scott's theory of public and hidden transcripts has been deployed in examining artists' overall messages as resisting dominance in ways that do not attract backlash from the dominant. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, Scott has been widely used by political analysts who seek to understand subordinates' behaviour in best defending their interest against dominant groups. Though Scott's theories are not theatre-based, they can be applied in analysing people's behaviour in power-laden environments. Scholars such as [8] have made use of Scott's findings in examining how subordinates have subtly resisted domination in less confrontational ways. In theatre studies, [2] has used Scott's theories to analyse how subordinate groups resist domination in Zimbabwean protest theatre. For these scholars, the concept of hidden transcripts has been conceptualised in line with sabotage, feigned ignorance, satire and symbolism. Following Zenenga's application of Scott, this researcher

analyses resistant forms and hidden transcripts in line with the listed methods. However, beyond this application of Scott, he also analyses how the subtle treatment of thematic concerns, deconstruction and decontextualisation foster a hidden transcript.

The paper examines street theatre texts, its form and its use of radical aesthetics as tools that helped critique and navigate a chaotic terrain during the 'crisis period' in which the state censored critical or oppositional art and elite interests hijacked other forms of critical art [2]. During this period, the dominant theatre practice was confrontational political protest theatre, a term used to refer to theatre that overtly challenged the State, which responded, in turn, by curtailing critical art forms [12, 2]. This research therefore examines street theatre as a form of protest theatre, utilising Scott's theory of public and hidden transcript and post-linear dramatic theories to examine street theatre's texts, its form and the elements designed to covertly subvert dominance and the state. The study adopts the term aesthetics to refer to artistic devices or the manipulation of strategies so as to

conceal resistance, as well as describing the depth of artistic beauty and effectiveness.

## 2. Satirising State Excesses: The Case of *Marubble*

Satire maybe defined as a literary device or art which is intended to ridicule, often as an intended means of provoking the dominant [8]. Satire often makes use of humor which, as [9] notes, when used in political works, is critical in unmasking the dominant. [4] notes that humor is used in society for political purposes, so as to avoid direct confrontation. This section analyses how street theatre makes use of satire and humor in creating a safe public transcript where the subordinate can safely critique power.

*Marubble* is a highly comical play, which was performed by Vahombe Arts Production on 13 August 2013 at 1645hrs. This play was performed in the open space between the Harare City Council headquarters building and the Food World supermarket. As presented before, the area stretches from Cameroon Street to Leopold Takawira Street and is associated with informal trading, from cell phone dealers, green and white collar vendors, guerrilla film marketers, and street preachers [18]. Such spaces, as highlighted by [5], are spaces where the social life of a community is acted out. [2, 8] also note that the street represents a microcosm of society, arguing that the street, as suggested by [7] enables the study of humanity, as people convene and converse. The venue was patronized by huge non-paying audiences who formed a circle around the performance space. Audiences served as the backdrop to the performances, pointing the people-centeredness of the performances. The ever-busy site does not allow audiences to be enraptured in dramatic fantasy, but rather encourages them to follow the story critically. Audiences develop a critical approach to the performance, as the acting space, devoid of theatrical sophistication, does not permit them to identify fully with the action in the play since they are fully aware of the dramatics of the performance [13]. Such a scenario offers a sharp contrast to dominant theatre venues, located in up-market suburbs [17] which are highly inaccessible to the people.

'MaRubble' is a story that involves four characters, and stars Penzura, who plays boyfriend to Cde; the actress playing Cde doubles up as Penzura's girlfriend and Ghetto's wife; and Hot soup, who acts as a pupil and child to Ghetto and Cde. The narrative is delivered through a series of skits, all which centre on rubble. Rubble is the broken remains of an object or objects, in this instance bricks. The term "rubble" became well known in 2005 after the Zimbabwean government demolished houses in an operation dubbed Operation Murambatsvina.

This study argues that the play is highly satirical and critical of Operation *Murambatsvina* (Restore Order), a cleanup exercise undertaken by the government in 2005, in a bid, to restore order to the capital city of Harare. The government targeted for destruction what they termed 'illegal'

structures in the city. These included unregistered cottages, tuck shops and houses built without City Council permission. Sections of society have argued that the exercise was controversial, and that the main purpose of the exercise was to break up urban settlers, as they were deemed politically intolerable by the state [18, 12]. By destroying 'illegal' shelters, most of which comprised residential shelters for urban dwellers, the state would then be able to contain oppositional votes by disintegrating oppositional support. Scholars who are critical of the state assert that what is mind-boggling is that the same state had allowed these shelters to sprout for more than a decade. They let people build and settle without warning them. [9] states that the exercise was conducted in a brutal manner, left thousands homeless and jobless, and family investments were lost during this exercise. She argues that an estimated 30 000 people were arrested during the operation, and an estimated 650 000 to 700 000 lost either revenue generating investments or homes. In total, approximately 2.4 million people were affected.

Furthermore, [12] notes that the Government sought to control information flow through laws such as AIPPA and the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act. Through these laws and other forms of censorship, the state sought to silence alternative media. Critical art was confronted with well orchestrated plans to subdue it, and dissenting voices were suppressed, sometimes brutally. [3] suggests that the state has no qualms with art that distances itself from reality, and is even more welcoming towards art that supports its political ideology. In this regard, [16] says

In the short run, it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him (4).

It can be argued that street theatre, operating in anonymity and through innocuous activities, through a performance tradition that can easily be dismissed as comical and less critical, is a form of alternative media. Whereas government efforts were directed at mystifying their achievements, street theatre, clothed in satire, irony and comedy, revealed the very thing that the state sought to conceal.

## 3. A 'Safe' Subversion of the State

In the play *Marubble*, produced by Vahombe Arts, there is mayhem owing to social disintegration. Dramatic characters fail to locate one another owing to relocations caused by Operation *Murambatsvina*. In the first scene, Penzura wants to go and see his girlfriend. Penzura purchases expensive groceries and clothes for his new found love and cannot wait to go and show off his wealth to her. Upon reaching her residence, Penzura is astounded to see brick rubble, signifying a demolished house. However, upon realising the rubble heap, he starts shouting at the rubble, criticising it for hiding his girlfriend. He frantically paces around the acting space, showing a state of unease and apprehension. In his search, the actor occasionally mingles with the audience, to some extent identifying audience members as rubble.

Penzura laments at how the brick rubble has hidden his beloved. In this scene, he spends a great deal of time speaking to the rubble, and seems to distract attention from the fact that he cannot locate his girlfriend. To add to the humour, Penzura's mood shifts between anger, laughter and tears, and gimmicks meant to draw compassion from the 'rubble'. As he extends his search to the audience, the actor occasionally demands that the rubble release his mistress or face his wrath, but to no avail. In one instance, the character sobs and laments,

*Dai mandizorerawo musikana wangu*

(Please return my girlfriend to me)

This line draws laughter from audience members, as they laugh at the actor at engaging in a futile exercise. They periodically and non-verbally ridicule the actor's actions, suggesting that he move on with his life and forget about his girl friend.

From the above analysis, the play deploys satire in engaging a highly sensitive issue. Characters in the play engage with rubble, satirically depicting the effects of the exercise. Unlike protest theatre, which was highly confrontational, Penzura in this scene opts to talk to the rubble, in the process evoking humour. This study argues that the state's stance towards critical art has a profound influence on subordinates' strategies of resistance. This play metaphorically uses brick rubble to engage the state, and the subtleness through which Penzura engages the state in this scene reflects manufactured consent. [16] defines manufactured consent as subaltern actions meant to gain dominant approval. Penzura's act of engaging the rubble, seems detached from the political context of 2005, and he seems sincerely concerned with his girlfriend's whereabouts. This scene therefore lacks the political directness which is characteristic of confrontational protest theatre. One cannot escape the laughter and comedy in this play as Penzura takes out his anger on the rubble, and it is comical to watch the actor speak to inanimate objects. Though comedy has been used by protest theatre plays as a way of subtly subverting the state [12] one cannot ignore the bluntness with which most protest art engages the state. [18] states: "In Zimbabwean protest theatre we seem to mainly encounter stock characters and caricatures of those in power portrayed in ridiculously unapologetic fashion". However, street theatre, through the use of comedy and humour, uniquely engages the state, making humour a tool to safely camouflage resistance so that, as Scott [16] suggests, subordinate resistance is never an act of open defiance.

Penzura approaches audience members asking if they had seen his girlfriend. The actor exhausts the bare acting space searching for his girlfriend. This scene refrains from involving the state in any way, since the play deploys disguise, deception and indirection in critiquing power. [4] laments the fact that confrontational political protest theatre is contaminated with ideas of leadership change at the expense of dramatising the woes affecting the ordinary person. In this case, however, street theatre distances itself from the elite ideology of leadership change, concerning

itself with satirically depicting issues affecting the ordinary person. It is clear that Penzura's search for his girlfriend has been prompted by the demolition of houses; and, the actor presents his woes to audience members for them to critically engage with the message in the text. By so doing, street theatre creates a safe public transcript, since it does not openly challenge the state over its policy. This study argues that a closer analysis of the scene reveals that social disintegration is a result of the policy.[9] argues that *Murambatsvina* was the government's move to dismantle the urban vote, which mainly consisted of opposition voters.

[18], commenting on satirical protest art in Zimbabwe, states that

with their mixed cultural identity, popular theatre artists can easily claim that they are merely harmless comedians, jesters, clowns or entertainers who are out to make people laugh, rather than activists bent on inciting people [2].

In light of the above, the play appears to be a comedy, disassociated from the state's clean up exercise. However, the play arouses a need for introspection amongst audience members, who this study argues, are knowledgeable of their political reality. [15] suggests that they are introspective enough to draw meanings from texts. [16] Indicates that, "however, given a tradition of Zimbabwean satire, popular theatre activists can be fairly confident that audiences will understand the political implications of their work within the given contexts." Through humour and comedy, street theatre transcends other forms of protest, which seek to engage power directly, thereby attracting the wrath of the dominant. In this instance, street theatre operates as a unique form of resistance, as it subtly engages the state.

In the next scene, the actor who played the girl plays a housewife who is married to Ghetto. The scene opens with the housewife on stage, preparing a meal for her family. To aid the dramatisation of the scene, she makes use of mimed props and dialogically suggests the scene setting to audiences. Mai Yogie, acting as the wife, in this scene deploys the half-actor technique. According to [15], the half-actor does not forget who he/she is onstage. This acting technique, as will be discussed in the next chapter, at once creates an innocuous environment, which the subordinate takes advantage of to lampoon the state. The wife sings an unfamiliar melody as she prepares the meal, and she keeps looking behind as if expecting a guest. She goes about her preparations with high levels of energy and swift movements. At one point, she rebukes an audience member, whom she claims is eavesdropping.

*Imi amai, imi, zivai nezvemumba menyu!*

(Hey, Lady! Concern yourself with your own household)

This acting technique, according to Castagno (2000), breaks audience emotional attachment to the character, thereby allowing them to concentrate on play content. After about two minutes of dramatic preparation, Ghetto, playing the husband in this scene, comes on stage, wearing jeans and a shirt and holding a briefcase, signifying he is coming from work. It should be noted that street theatre costumes hardly change, and often characters make use of props to suggest

profession and other relevant character attributes. The wife jovially welcomes her husband and, after exchanging greetings, Ghetto requests supper. Cde requests her husband to sit on the couch, which is again indicated by mime, much to the delight of audiences, whereupon Ghetto proceeds to sit on the ground, commenting how the couch feels new every day, although they bought it five years ago. It should be noted, too, that street theatre makes use of minimal props, thus scenic design operates through actors' imagination. To further heighten the dramatic moment, the wife asks Ghetto to close his eyes as she intends to feed him. Ghetto, in anticipation, dramatically opens his mouth, whereupon the wife spoon feeds him unspecified food. There is a moment of silence on stage where Ghetto appears numb, before he jumps and starts insulting the wife. He hurls insults at her and in amazement the actress starts laughing, remarking that Penzura should not expect food when the shops are empty and are only selling rubble. The two actors exchange insults on stage, and at the end of the verbal fight, Ghetto bursts out laughing, admitting that he had been caught unawares by the wife. She then explains that the butcheries and shops are empty and are only selling rubble.

The playing out of this seemingly comical scene, contains hidden and aggressive messages when scrutinized in context. The scene subtly suggests an abundance of rubble. Relying on African performance theory, which coincides with post-linearity the wife implies that rubble has become an alternative meal [15]. In reality, one does not expect to see shops selling rubble, but using imagination, the play constructs an image in the audience's mind suggesting a place full of rubble. By so doing, the play reminds audience members about the clean-up period, prompting them to critically reflect on the effects of the operation. Furthermore, the period being dramatised was not only characterised by Operation *Murambatsvina*, but was also a period of crisis, when the nation experienced serious food shortages, among other things. The play thus manages to reflect on the multiple crises the nation was experiencing through a satirical reconstruction of the period. In as much as plays such as 'Final Push' have confrontationally critiqued power in a defunct state, street theatre comically insinuates the same challenges, yet in a less offensive way. To further distance street theatre from the sensitive themes embedded in texts, dramatic characters in this scene exhibit odd reactions as they laugh off the crises, unlike dramatic characters in confrontational protest theatre whom [13] castigates for overplaying the crisis. At the end of the scene, Ghetto retires to bed without having taken a meal, a sign of what was happening in Zimbabwe. Significantly, the play becomes relevant in depicting the experiences of the people not only in a historical context, but in present day reality. Although the play comically depicts shops selling rubble, the scene interweaves narratives as it captures nuances and truths associated with present day Zimbabwe. With an unemployment rate in Zimbabwe of over ninety percent, the play can further be seen as depicting the hunger that is creeping into households under the current government.

The foregoing highlights how satire and humour in street theatre become an effective subaltern resistance tool. Plays are packaged in satire and humour, in ways that detach practice from the immediate social, economic and political reality. This therefore demonstrates how street theatre resists the state in unique ways, as compared to other more confrontational performance forms.

#### 4. Inter-Subjectivity and Distortion

If the expression "Speak truth to power" still has a utopian ring to it, even in modern democracies, this is surely because it is so rarely practised. The dissembling of the weak in the face of power is hardly an occasion for surprise [16] This section analyses how street theatre expands the understandings and consequences of Operation *Murambatsvina* beyond customary conceptualisations, depicting a heterogeneous society. Customarily, the Operation *Murambatsvina* is widely understood to have been a move in which the government demolished illegal shelters. However, street theatre transcends this traditional understanding of the operation by representing, on stage, how the operation not only displaced citizens, but rather had a multifaceted impact on the citizenry. It is this multi-layered approach which produces indirection that camouflages resistance. [3] states that political theatre has been hijacked by elite interests, as it has seemed unjustifiably concerned with the leadership change theme. However, street theatre adopts a multi-layered approach, through which it dramatises subaltern needs and by avoiding themes associated with leadership change, street theatre creates a safe public transcript.

In the third scene of the play *Marubble*, Hotsoup plays a school pupil. In this scene, Ghetto and Cde act as parents to Hotsoup. On the fateful day, Hotsoup returns from school early, to the amazement of his parents. The visibly aggravated parents debate on the punitive measures to take against their son, upon which Hotsoup protests, saying the school had been demolished as a result its failure to pay water bills. Ghetto and Cde push and shove as they compete with each other to punish Hotsoup. The comical scrambling and disorder punctuating the scene can be seen as representative of the chaotic manner in which the clean up exercise was carried out, leaving thousands homeless. Hotsoup reaches out to the audience for vindication and support. He turns to a member of the audience whom he refers as Baba Tari, and exclaims

*Daddy, bvunzai Baba Tari kuti Tari haana kudzokawo here?*

(Daddy, ask Tari's father if Tari has not also had to return from school?)

The audience member referred to as Tari's father seems speechless at his untimely inclusion in the text. This leaves audience members in stitches, with some of them shouting at 'Baba Tari' to respond and give evidence. Audience inclusion, in this instance, is significant, as it allows them to co-script the play along with dramatic characters (see

Lehman 2006).

Hotsoup's parents remain adamant, accusing him of skipping school. As Ghetto reaches out for Hotsoup, a female audience member shouts

*Endaika kuchikoro kwacho munozvionera!*

(Go to the school and see for yourself!)

At this Hotsoup's parents decide to take Hotsoup back to school. To their shock, they discover that Hot soup has been telling the truth. The parents are embarrassed, and they too decide to take their anger out on the rubble.

Once again, though the play is a satirical critique of Operation *Murambatsvina*, in this instance, the play conceptualises the multiple effects of the operation beyond the customary debate. The play demonstrates how, inter alia, students' education had been negatively affected as a result of the operation. The play serves a core function of popular art in Zimbabwe, alerting the nation and the world of the very things the government has sought to conceal.

Another interesting factor is that the play reconstructs and de-contextualises historical events, imbuing them with new material. This level of fictionalisation, as I argue, detaches texts from political criticism. Apparently, no school was demolished during Operation *Murambatsvina*. The destruction of the school in this instance is metaphorical, serving as indirection and disguise. By distancing itself from actuality, the play avoids being labelled "anti establishment". In so doing, street theatre accomplishes what protest theatre has failed to. [14] criticises Zimbabwean protest theatre for almost always reproducing life on stage. "One questions the artistic and ideological implications of being explicit and too open in dramatic context [...] Is it necessary that such plays need to be confrontational in order to arouse social disapproval of the dramatised issues?" [14] This suggests that a decontextualised reconstruction of reality is critical in engaging the dominant. Street theatre's success lies in indirectness and, as [6] notes, protest theatre's success hinges on aesthetics boundaries and its ability to create art that does not directly resemble real life characters and events, so as to make the text less confrontational.

The play *Marubble*, furthermore, reconstructs reality untruthfully by altering the conditions under which the state carried out the clean-up operation. No demolition was carried out as a result of failure to pay water bills. Such twisting of conditions further separates art from reality, camouflaging resistance. These performance forms become part of the tools through which the hidden transcript is played out. On another level, the play demonstrates the results of the Operation as being unfavourable to society, becoming protest as it critiques power. In as much as the play alters the process, the play captures and reveals the results of the Operation, managing to reveal evils associated with it while using techniques that make it appear less confrontational. In this way, street theatre critiques power using subtle techniques and strategies neglected by other dramatic forms. Whereas protest theatre was confrontational in castigating the state, this genre, largely dismissed as informal, critiqued the state indirectly.

## 5. De-Contextualisation Through Symbolism

Finally, what permits subordinate groups to undercut the authorized cultural norms is the fact that cultural expression by virtue of its polyvalent symbolism and metaphor lends itself to disguise [16] By having a number of different meanings or purposes, as highlighted by Scott, street theatre disguises its critique of power. As mentioned earlier, the play *Marubble* involves dramatic characters who chat with inanimate objects, and from time to time the play involves audiences in co-scripting the text. This study extends the argument that rubble should not be perceived as mere brick. Rather, it is a symbolic reconstruction of real life characters. In scene three, which depicts the demolished school, for instance, Hot soup's father played by Ghetto shouts at the rubble

*Uri mambara wanzwa?. Kudzinga mwana agara ari dofo kuskuru!*

(You are good-for-nothing, do you hear? Chasing away an already dump student from school!)

In this instance, Ghetto's comment seems comical, and yet it proves problematic. Ghetto's states that his child is not bright, suggesting that the subaltern is lacking intellect. To some extent, the subaltern's critical awareness of his own state is questioned. Ghetto implies that his son is academically challenged and, with the play having only one young adult character, the statement could be taken to mean that the country's subaltern youths are not intelligent, and thereby sidelined from positions of influence. However, it is interesting to note how these performances always seem innocent on the surface. In the play, Hot soup keeps restraining his parents and castigating them as foolish and unlearned for trying to talk to rubble. He suggests that his parents are going insane as they take out their anger on the rubble. The rubble, this study suggests, symbolically resembles individuals or a system that, just like the stones, are or is impossible to penetrate and convince. The rubble, in this context, is representative of political hardliners, who did not consider the urban citizen during the demolition process. Just as Hot soup's parents cries are directed towards inanimate objects, so the people's cries (of despair) are also deemed to fall on deaf ears. Hotsoup thus plays the role of the voice of reason, hinting that it is foolish to engage such individuals. However, this symbolism is comically delivered as a way of hiding dissent.

The references [5, 6] are of the view that in politically stringent societies, artists have to adopt less confrontational means when negotiating (their) existence. Through symbolism, this study argues that street theatre safely critiques the individuals who orchestrated the demolition exercise, likening their hard-heartedness to that of the rubble. However, street theatre's use of symbolism, coupled with humour, allows it to safely critique power without inviting retaliation by the dominant. Street theatre displays what [11] terms "inward strategies", as street theatre's use of less offensive elements ensures actors' continued operation,

without state interference. By using symbolism, street theatre can therefore subtly castigate the state and through the use of open-ended texts, audiences can construct their own meanings.

## 6. The House as a Micro-Nation: The Case of Baba Manyanya

This section interrogates how street theatre makes use of deconstruction as hidden transcript. Deconstruction is a theory that advocates plural meanings within texts based on the reader's competence or context. Deconstruction creates unstable constructions based on arbitrary signifiers. In the play *Baba Manyanya*, the study argues that street theatre deconstructs the nation into a house, thereby establishing a multilayered approach, where the play can safely critique power through the creation of multiple meanings. Commenting on Zimbabwean protest music, [18, 12] suggests that deconstruction as one of the primary methods that artists have used to safely engage the state. By deconstructing the nation, texts achieve multiple meanings.

The play *Baba Manyanya* was performed by Yambiro Street Theatre Group on 5 April 2014. The play started around 1715hrs and lasted for about twenty minutes. This show drew audiences from the ever-clogged Chinhoyi Street where there is a recently opened flea market, and from the commuter omnibus terminus. I managed to watch the performance once, as I have been in the habit of frequenting street theatre performances. On this particular day, I managed to write notes in my journal.

Interestingly, the play is inspired by Oliver Mtukudzi's song, *Tozeza Baba* (We are afraid of Father) (Interview 2014), which [10] considers to be a castigation of the state. Closely following the thematic concerns of the song, the play centres around Aphiri, who is considered to be a ruthless father. It features three characters, Aphiri, Mai Yogie and Yogie. In this play, Aphiri runs amok in his home and does not tolerate any form of criticism. He is depicted through a series of scenes, in which he mistreats his family, sometimes without cause. Although his wife, Mai Yogie, and daughter, Yogie, are subjected to high levels of ruthlessness, they resolve not to leave their home. The play has four distinct scenes through which it delivers its message. The play was performed in an open dusty space in the Copa Cabana terminus just within the boom gate along Chinhoyi Street. The area is flanked between the bus terminus and Sammy's building, near the city council cabin and the public toilets. The performance area is characterised by a bare open dusty area and it allows the audience to create a circle around the performance. Audiences, on the day of the performance also took advantage of the steel bus terminus barricades for seating arrangements as the place was full. This allowed audiences on the steel barricades to get an elevated view of the performance.

The song, *Tozeza Baba* (We are afraid of Father) by Mtukudzi, from which the play derives its concept and name

[1] is one of the artist's biggest hits which has received international acclaim after its third remix when it appeared on the artist's 49<sup>th</sup> album, *Nhava*. The song is sung as a child's plea complaining against the violent escapades of a drunkard father. In the song, Mtukudzi is critical about the father figure in the home. Scholars such as Vambe (2012) and [17] argue that the song is not only critical in a familial light, rather as Muwonwa argues, discourses of fatherhood during the period of the song's production had been accentuated through media presenting the president and vice presidents of the country as father figures. Early in 2000, ...discourses of fatherhood had been accentuated. The national mythology purveyed in the mass media emphasised Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo as 'father' figures of Zimbabwean nationhood [11]. Furthermore, the nation was largely represented as a family, and the song begins to use such representations to castigate the authorial figure of all fathers in the nation. The song even though commenting on familial issues, it rides on the metaphor of 'nation as family' which corresponded with the limited space for discussion that existed in the country to question and castigate abuses of power.

Ravengai, S. [13] talking about the Zimbabwean context, states that no one censors your dreams, no matter how horrible or macabre they are. But if you start acting out your dreams into actual actions, that is when society moves against you in terms of the police, the army or the secret service.

Having established the state's stance towards critical art, it is important to analyse the ideologies emanating from the context of play production so as to examine how plays have subliminally subverted the state. [7] argues that during the 'crisis' period, the idea of nation was dovetailed with the concept of imagined communities. This means that the nation is not to be analysed as a pre-existing entity: rather it is a creation and forging of various mechanisms such as the media and the educational system. [5, 11] argue that the re-imagining of nation in Zimbabwe has taken the form of a family, where Mugabe is presented as the practical creator of what the liberation war heroes established. In this context, the play *Baba Manyanya* re-situates nation in a family set-up, allowing the play to articulate its message through the familial context. The concept of fatherhood is therefore used in street theatre to represent the state, in a less confrontational way, with the understanding that Zimbabweans have used fatherhood to foreclose political debate, as suggested by [10]. This approach thereby allows the subordinate to insinuate resistance, in disguise, into public transcripts. Since subordinate groups are rarely accorded the luxury of direct confrontation; subtlety is necessary.

## 7. Conclusion

The paper highlighted street theatre as resistant towards the state through the use of subtle resistance techniques. The article has demonstrated the ways in which plays offer sharp

dissent from the state in ways that are hidden to the unsuspecting eye. It argues that through the effective use of less offensive public transcripts, street theatre has resisted the state without attracting the wrath of the dominant, making it a unique platform of resistance, when most dramatic genres sought confrontation with the state. A highly repressive political environment gave impetus to subtle forms of protest, as players sought to negotiate their existence in the face of a well-oiled state machinery. The highly unstable political environment, characterised by ruthless acts towards opposition, was crucial in formulating resistant strategies that were favourable to subordinate groups. The paper has managed to interrogate the subordinates' covert forms of resistance in power laden situations, as indicated by Scott (1990), who argues that the subordinate, fully aware of their condition, evade as much as a possible direct confrontation with the dominant.

## References

- [1] Aphiri, 2014. Street Performances [Interview] (Actor), 14 June 2014.
- [2] Chikonzo, K., 2010. The Construction of Subaltern Consciousness in Zimbabwe's Protest Theatre: The Case of Heaven's Diary. *Latin America Report*. Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1 (2), pp. 118-124.
- [3] Chikonzo, K., 2015. Identity and Democracy in Pro-democracy Protest Theatre in Zimbabwe: 1999-2012. D. Phil Thesis University of Zimbabwe: Unpublished.
- [4] Chivandikwa, N., 2012. Theatre as/and Insurrection in Zimbabwean Theatre. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 32 (1), pp. 29-45.
- [5] Chivandikwa, N., 2010. Ndenglishing and Shongilishing the Stage: Reinterpreting and Recontextualising Monologuism, Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Zimbabwean Theatre. In: Monaka, K. E. A., ed. *Mapping Africa in the English Speaking World: Issues in Language and Literature*. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, pp. 105-16.
- [6] Chiwanza, 2003. Street Theatre in Post Independent Zimbabwe: The Case of True Vision African Theatre. Harare: University of Zimbabwe. Unpublished Dissertation.
- [7] Mangosho, T. (et al.), 2015. Contemporary Theatre Spaces: Politico-ideological Constructions in Zimbabwe: A Dialectical Approach. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, DOI: 10.1080/14682761.2015.1070638.
- [8] Mhako, D., 2014. Identities of Women in Protest Theatre. Harare: Unpublished M. phil Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe.
- [9] Muwonwa, N., 2011. Representation of Nation in Zimbabwean Television Drama and Documentaries. Harare: Unpublished M. phil Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe.
- [10] Ndlovhu-Gatsheni, S., 2009. Re-thinking and Re-imaging Nationalism in Twenty First Century African Ideology, Epistemology and Philosophy. In: W. Burszta, ed. *Nationalism Across the Globe. An Overview of Nationalism in State Endowed and Stateless Nations*. Poland: Pozna, pp. 53-78.
- [11] Ndlovhu-Gatsheni, S., 2012. Fiftieth Anniversary of Decolonising African Performance: A Moment of Celebration or Critical Reflection? *Third Quarterly*, 33 (1), pp. 67-83.
- [12] Sambo, K., 2009. Detonating Loaded Minds: The Question of Aesthetics and Pragmatics in Protest Theatre. Paper Presented at the Protest Arts International Festival: Unpublished.
- [13] Schechner, R., 1977. *Essays on Performance Theory*. New York: Drama Book Specialists.
- [14] Scott, J., 1990. *Domination and the Art of Resistance*. London: Yale University Press.
- [15] Seda, O., 2005. Bertolt Brecht and Traditional African Storytelling Theatre: A Comparative Study in Theatre as Pedagogy. *Calapoly Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Volume 18, pp. 95-99.
- [16] Vambe, M., 2009. The Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe. *Mukai-Vukani Jesuit Journal for Zimbabwe*, Harare: Weaver Press, 48 (1), pp 24-26.
- [17] Vambe, M., 2012. Rethinking the Notion of Chimurenga in the context of political change in Zimbabwe. *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa*, 8 (2), pp. 1-28.
- [18] Zenenga, 2008. Censorship and Surveillance and Political Theatre. *Zimbabwe Theatre*, 38 (3), pp. 67-83.