

African Macbeth steals hearts

Stories by
Rex
Chikoko

In every person, there is a good side and the bad side. However, when people are said to be good, often bad. People's predominant sides largely define their character.

The predominant sides in people are influenced by natural and artificial causes and this has been true since time immemorial.

Life is like a tragic play where characters rise to honour and then tragically fall into oblivion.

That is the core theme of *Macbeth*, a play which was written in the 16th century by one of the world's celebrated English playwrights, William Shakespeare.

Although the theme of the play remained an English one, in the 19th Century, a British trained theatre director, Kate Stafford, had Sunday Africanised the Shakespearean play that was performed at French Cultural Centre (FCC) to suit the Malawian culture and political set-up.

Since every person can get both the good and the bad side, it has been noted that even African politicians are driven by greed, jealousy, revenge, corruption, hunger for power and exponential beliefs in the sense that they would murder just to remain in power.

Africanised *Macbeth*, while putting across Shakespeare's theme, is an African setting and vernacular Chewa language.

In her drive to Africanise *Macbeth*, Stafford, changed the costume from cloaks for the king and his subordinates, replacing them with modern suits and jackets for men and traditional Chingachewes for women.

Another remarkable deviation from the 16th Century Shakespearean *Macbeth* was the starting of scenes on their own and the use of English and Chikwena.

During the 19th Century, women were not allowed to perform on stage. Another notable change was the use of guns when the soldiers were fighting instead of the Shakespearean sword.

Young Sward, Macbeth's first challenger drew a gun when he met Macbeth. Using a laser torch, young Sward killed Macbeth's dog, Macbeth killed away the gun from

young Sward, and then stepped back to see if he had killed him. In the original play, young Sward was killed by a sword.

Macbeth also killed a gun at Macbeth when they met. He later stepped the gun and opted to fight Macbeth using a knife. Macbeth killed Macbeth to death.

Macbeth's soldiers, while preparing an assault, were using traditional songs of inspiration like "Arikali mi? Ekhononi mi".

Stafford said people should expect the starting of of more Chikwena words in the play as one way of Africanising *Macbeth*.

"We made a lot of changes from the context to the use of language to make it more relevant to the Malawian audience."

"We will continue changing the play to make it more African," she said.

She said the integration of African songs also made it more African than the original Shakespearean play.

"Apart from the Elizabethan English, the whole set-up was modern African style," she said.

She also said the book was written in Chikwena because she was aware that the book was studied in the past years in Malawi and it is expected to attract the attention of the youth.

This interest that the book generated on the local scene brought in a kind of craze at French Cultural Centre on Saturday when the arena failed to accommodate fans.

Hundreds of people were sent back because the FCC Open Air Theatre was too small to accommodate them. Stafford was seen running up and down trying to stop people from entering the theatre.

"Popularity did the magic. French Council used all the media outlets to reach to the people including 1000 sms through Textism Networks Malawi," she said.

One of the persons, Benjamin Mwaanga, a student at University in Blantyre, said the play was professionally handled and it was truly Africanised.

"I have never seen such a crowd, in the extent that people were getting in line of charge because the operators could not take money any more," she said.

There was applause for the live sound track and the lighting which, she said, was not strictly new in Malawian theatre.



Part of the audience that watched *Macbeth* premiere at FCC



GUESTS AT MACBETH'S PARTY—One of the scenes in the play



KUSEKA—Macbeth



Macbeth's soldiers preparing to oust Macbeth (above) Chingacha to Lady Macbeth (right)

Malawi's theatre suffocated

NANZIKAMBE artistic director Kate Stafford said despite the fact that Malawi is rich in theatre, the country's system suffocates the industry.

Stafford said Malawi is the only country she knows that does not support theatre industry.

"Theatre industry is under-funded. It is actually disheartening to see how local artists have struggled to maintain the industry."

"All over the world, theatre is subsidised. It is only in Malawi where theatre is not subsidised," she said.

Stafford said, however, the country boasts of artists of high calibre despite this lack of theatrical training adding that: "Those that had training, they obtained it from outside the country because this country (Malawi) up to now has got no theatre colleges."

Stafford said Government and the private sector need to take an initiative to assist the theatre industry because they stand to benefit most.

British Council funded African *Macbeth* to the tune of \$3 million and the play, which has so far been performed in three places, has already attracted over 3,000 patrons in all places.

About 600 people thronged Socha Teachers College before over 1,000 people patronised the drama arena, French Cultural Centre, while Donnai Teachers College in Zomba accommodated about 600 teachers who watched the play.

"If companies associated themselves with theatre, they would benefit from the publicity. We are trying to set the pace so that companies should see live visual theatre is a business," she said.

Nanzikambe to be given to Malawians

DIRECTORS of Nanzikambe theatre company Kate Stafford and Melissa Eveleigh said their longtime plan is to hand over Nanzikambe theatre company to local managers.

The British-born ladies said once they are satisfied that they have reached the level they wanted Malawian theatre to reach, they would stop being actively involved in the theatre company.

Eveleigh said Nanzikambe intends to link Malawian artists with other artistic associations in the country.

"Currently, we are working with South African actors and we also would like to forge co-operation between Malawian and British actors," she said.

She also said Nanzikambe wants to change the method of performance from the usual lesson-based approach to that of story telling.

"In plays you are supposed to tell a story not educate. People should be able to get the message in their own, in Theatre you are supposed to entertain not 'educate', but change is a slow process it will take time," she said.

Stafford said after the directors are satisfied that the level of performance

has improved, they will hand over the group to local managers.

"What we wanted most was to win trust of the people, now we have the trust," she said.

Nanzikambe was established in 2001 and they have three plays to their credit. Two of the plays, *Hamlet* and *African Macbeth* were adopted from William Shakespeare and directed by Kate Stafford, while the third play, *Chilly Heart*, was written by Melissa Eveleigh.

Stafford refused to name likely candidates to take over the directorship of Nanzikambe.

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African Macbeth goes to Lilongwe

FOLLOWING a sell-out performance of *African Macbeth*, Nanzikambe will be at Kamuzu Institute for sports tomorrow, from 1.30.

Nanzikambe's Artistic Director Kate Stafford said she is overwhelmed by the response which the play has so far received.

"We have been almost overwhelmed by the numerous people wanting to see *African Macbeth*. Each and every performance has attracted over 500 peo-



The Nanzikambe crew doing the African Hamlet at French Cultural Centre

African version of Macbeth

BY EMMANUEL LUCIANO

AFTER successfully staging the African *Hamlet*, local theatre group, Nanzikambe, has embarked on yet another project—rendering the African version of the Shakespearean tragedy *Macbeth*.

Nanzikambe has re-worked on the 16th century play into an emotional stirring musical.

The group's artistic director, Kate Stafford, said the group has already started auditions for the production and rehearsals are expected to start soon.

"We have had an overwhelming response from actors and actresses who want to be part of the cast. From a group of 40 actors and actresses we will need to select a good cast of ten from a cross section of drama groups and individuals," Stafford said.

Nanzikambe, a modern theatre outfit, does not have permanent actors and actresses but recruits for each production. The group captivated the

Malawian theatre audience with their unique and inspiring rendering of *The African Hamlet*.

Stafford, who is directing the production of *Macbeth*, said she is being assisted by development director Melissa Eveleigh and Smith Likongwe of Story Workshop, who is the executive advisor.

"It is essential to have someone like Smith not only as vast experienced director and producer but also as someone who knows and understands African culture. We don't want to create the impression that we are an European theatre company," he said.

Set in unnamed African country, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is re-interpreted for an African audience and taps greatly from the traditional African culture and values which are interwoven with the modern world.

"Unlike *Hamlet's* production which was also put in an African context, *Macbeth's* rendition will be more modern and cast with African music," She said.

Likongwe in a separate interview said that the group is geared at revolutionising theatre in Malawi, with actors and actresses having an opportunity of making a full time career out of it.

"The group wants to make a difference by turning around things whereby people would be able to appreciate drama in the country. This would lead to actors and actresses making a fortune out of the career."

The *Macbeth* project is partially funded by the British Council. However, Stafford said the group is currently negotiating with other commercial partners to invest in the project.

Macbeth's premiere is set for French Cultural Centre in Blantyre on March 14 before touring the cities of Zomba, Lilongwe and Mzimba.

The play is expected to cross borders to Zimbabwe, where Nanzikambe has been invited to perform at the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA).



Nanzikambe performs Chilly Heart

'African Macbeth' premiered

BY A CORRESPONDENT

NANZIKAMBE premiered the "African Macbeth" on Saturday night at Soche Teachers' College, with many in the audience agreed that the play is poised to swiftly turn Malawi's drama for the better.

In a performance that included a collection of actors from diverse backgrounds, "African Macbeth" proved that Malawian theatre had come of age.

The play, written by the Bald of Stratford on Avon - William Shakespeare, was adapted by Kate Stafford and is a prelude to her other play from the same author, "The African Hamlet," performed by Nanzikambe.

The Soche Teachers' College hall almost burst at its seams, as patrons filled it to capacity to watch the rare treat, albeit its starting off an hour late.

"We are pleased with the turn-out, and we apologise for starting late. That is expected in theatre where so many things have to be done at the last minute, especially on the opening night," Nanzikambe Development Director Melissa Eveleigh said.

Running for ninety minutes, the plot of "The African Macbeth" is based on the Shakespearean creation, a mixture of witchcraft, war and politics. It begins with forces of the reigning king Duncan (Twaya Sanudi), led by the valiant Macbeth (Samuel Kuseka) and Banquo (Wongani Munthali) fighting rebels.

As the triumphant forces return from the battle field, they are met with three witches (Sally Nyundo, Ben Michael and Sam Katimba) who predicted Macbeth's rise to the helm of the monarchy.

Instantly upon the forces' arrival, the king promotes Macbeth and Banquo to Thane of Cawdor and Glamis. Macbeth, is however, encouraged to haste his rise to the kingship. He is further inflamed when the king names his son Malcom (Emmanuel Maliro) as heir to the throne.

When Macbeth tells the tidings to his wife, Lady Macbeth (Angella Ching'amba), the woman forces Macbeth to act like a man.

Consequently, King Duncan (Twaya Sanudi) comes to dine at Macbeth's home. With his wife's encouragement, Macbeth murders Duncan and usurpers the throne, forcing Malcom (Emmanuel Maliro) and Donalbain (Louis Masamba) to flee the country, since they suspected foul play in their father's death.

Knowing that Banquo (Wongani Munthali) knew what was going on, Macbeth orders his death. The killing spree does not end there. When one of his other trusted generals Macduff (Muthi Nblema) deserts him, Macbeth murders his wife and children.

Going by one of the main theme in the play, witchcraft, Macbeth goes back to the witches to find out if he would be conquered by the rebels and the witches tell him: "None born of a woman shall slay



IN ACTION—Part of the action in 'African Macbeth' — Pix by Nanzikambe

Macbeth... Macbeth shall not be conquered till Dunsinane Wood move to Birnam Palace." He is therefore convinced that he is invincible and indispensable.

The play reaches a climax when Malcom orders his soldiers to use tree branches to disguise themselves when they

invade the palace, making true the witches' saying of a "wood moving to the palace". In the final feat, Macduff, who was born through a Caesarean section, kills Macbeth and Malcom is restored to the throne.

"The play is a brilliant trial, more especially now that

Malawians are more politically conscious and preparing for elections," said one of the patrons Harry Thorncroft.

All the lines in the play are straight from Shakespeare's "Macbeth" save for a few from a porter, which do not exist in the play.

Nanzikambe returns to Lilongwe

TIMES REPORTER

NANZIKAMBE are planning an extra show of 'African Macbeth' in Lilongwe following the group's impressive performance last Sunday at Chipasula Secondary School in the city.

In a press statement, artistic director Kate Stafford says Nanzikambe bowed down to overwhelming demand by fans and decided to take the show to Lilongwe again this Sunday at Kamuzu Institute for Sports.

"We have been almost overwhelmed by the numbers of people wanting to see 'African Macbeth'. Each and every performance has attracted over 500 people, with around 1,000 at the French Cultural Centre alone.

"We are very keen not to disappoint anybody, so we have decided to extend our tour to include Kamuzu Institute for Sports, which is a very good venue for such a large show," says Stafford.

Patrons who flocked to see the 'African Macbeth' sponsored by the British Council were not disappointed.

With a cast of 16, including Ben Michael, Sally Nyundo and Sam Katimba of the Zigzaggers Band, who play the witches, the play has been enthralling audience across the country.

"I hope many people will enjoy this opportunity of seeing 'African Macbeth' again," says the director.

Nanzikambe's 'African Macbeth' proved to be an attractive



IN ACTION—Part of the 'African Macbeth' performance at Bembe.—Picture courtesy of Nanzikambe

piece last Sunday. Despite political rallies and an important football match in Blantyre, people still flocked in large numbers to watch

the drama.

Stafford said in an interview Nanzikambe would take the show to Northern Region a week after the

Lilongwe trip.

She said there were also plans to take the African Macbeth to Harare, Zimbabwe.

12 March, 2004

Nanzikambe produces African Macbeth

by Chisomo Kachapila

For those who have read Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the visual experience through *African Macbeth*, a political thriller, promises to be enriching.

However, those who have not read it need not despair as the show also promises to be self-explanatory.

Set in an idealised African country, the play talks about a country shrouded in modern day dictatorship.

Macbeth, with his yearning for power, fights a war against the rebel urban guerilla son of the loved assassinated presi-

dent Duncan.

"Those who will come to see it will appreciate the kind of talent that Malawi has in the play which comes at the right time when Malawi approaches elections," said Kate Stafford, director of Nanzikambe, the group which has directed the play.

Though studded with stars like Samuel Brown Kuseka who plays *Macbeth* and experienced theatre actor and director Babu Twaya Sanudi of Alabama Theatre as assassinated Duncan, new kids on the scene think their level of performance should not be underestimated.

"I will be performing for the

first time but I think the fans will not be disappointed because I have also fallen in love with *Macbeth's* themes of hatred, love and betrayal and I think people will be able to relate it to the Malawian situation," said Muthi Nkhema, who plays cabinet minister Mac Duff.

Those who will watch the play will not be disappointed because scary-painted Ben Michael and Sally Nyundo,

who play witches and provide the sound backing, will make them laugh their lungs out.

Set to be staged in five districts — Blantyre, Zomba, Dedza, Lilongwe and Mzuzu — the theatre opens to a paying audience with a performance at the French Cultural Centre on Sunday afternoon. The play has been produced by Nanzikambe with sponsorship from the British Council to the tune of K3 million.



Part of the cast: The rebels—Pic: Courtesy of Nanzikambe

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Nanzikambe brings Macbeth to Africa

Stories by
Oris Chimanya

BLANTYRE (Zimbabwe) — It will be a reminder for the brilliant production of Nanzikambe's African Macbeth as representatives of white and civil war and political ambition in a modern-day African country.

A large crowd which gathered at Blantyre's renowned Theatre Centre, was not disappointed with the way the actors and actresses articulated the original themes of Macbeth's political ambition and witchcraft as they came to Africa, and probably Malawi if we are to trace their roots.

For those who read the William Shakespeare play during their secondary school days, the African version of the epic made more sense than in a new setting. Most members of the young generation, Nanzikambe's African Macbeth proved to be very informative, convincing, and a history book read in stage action.

Macbeth under heavy, but shimmering light grey clouds of the communitarian, African Macbeth was more than likely there and used the death of the main actor, Macbeth that passes

connected the underground line for political power and the end that inevitably ensues. To a greater extent, African Macbeth is an epic that has political values of greed and ambition that can across the continent of rising knowledge of African politics mainly characterised by clinging to political power, economic empowerment and political state including assassination.

Nanzikambe's African Macbeth is not just a story of the ancient experience of the European Julius in the 17th century but applies not only to Africa but Malawi too where the subject of political power regime inspires the minds of political practitioners, commentators and civil society.

Forest settings, but African power corrupts absolutely, to name the saying. This is true, when Macbeth goes on to kill King Duncan and Banquo, both of whom are victims of Lady Macbeth's ill-considered murder to his husband.

Macbeth (consciously known as The Scottish Play), depicting the story of a well known 17th century English tyrannical leader, Macbeth.

While the original version of the tragedy strongly holds the values of political ambition and dictatorship, the African Macbeth



How it was in French Cultural Centre, Paris, Country of Zimbabwe.

who goes on to express the real wishful desire in the satisfaction of political power and ambition, especially in today's Africa — of

comes without having out the best subject of civil war and political misadventuring.

Jason King (British actor) "It was a brilliant play, exploring a play about totalitarian political systems, an opportunity was to be missed. Throughout the play there are references to killing over that fact."

The wife that is Macbeth's victim of Macbeth, the murder, who let Macbeth to divorce with their half brother to quest for glory in whatever power, rule or Malawi's context of the play end.

Malawi is a country where witchcraft is practised to greater levels, in the sense of starting for justice as neighbours' children without "concern" from the parents. This scriptural play's theme seemed gripping and acting.

In the play, Lady Macbeth plays a pivotal role in Macbeth's life as she encourages her male husband to seize on every opportunity of who is Macbeth, to become wealthy officials.

Macbeth is charged with more against Macbeth because of the death of his wife (Lady Macbeth), their 10th child and maid.

The play climaxes at a number of years, the where Macbeth regains their by writers and world writers. "A full evening but almost the evening danger (not from power and death), the wicked one (Duncan) has with them but Macbeth's drive will change.

People's comments on the play

The news was everywhere. Radio, television and newspapers were full of news from Zimbabwe, a new theatre north towards 2022 in Malawi by the artist and company.

Almost everybody got the news that Nanzikambe was going to perform their play African Macbeth at Blantyre's French Cultural Centre.

That Sunday afternoon, the news was fully covered that by 2:15 PM, gates had to be closed because the amphitheatre could not accommodate more people.

In the absence of a major hall, the audience sat on the ground, various social, economic and political issues, which the artist has intended to be an extension of the audience.

Malawi's hundreds of people who were invited only were disappointed. They could not get in and probably got 5,000 worth.

"I enjoyed it. I think it was well done, very creative and original. There was a lot of references to the use of two different cultures which made many people identify themselves with the play," said many a patron when the ghost of the combined African communitarian Macbeth was a very party where the king was killed by his wife, gentle and innocent. King James was named as Macbeth's uncle and his son was the 10th child and his wife was the 10th child.

In an eye-opening discussion, the play was well over of the influential, educating Macbeth, based on Shakespeare, Macbeth is considered by his own former husband, Macbeth without any error.

Featuring the major director of white and political ambition, Malawi's Africa, the two-hour African Macbeth is a job well done, where the artists cover their local Malawi (Zimbabwe) Malawi in their own way.

one for Chinese (Zimbabwe), the actors that the language had provided a wealth of basis for appreciation. It was a blend of African English mixed with ordinary English and Chinese at some points.

Benjamin said the traditional music, drum beating and whistling, were much good image and theatrical emphasis of the 20-man group.

Another patron, Zed-Zed (Zimbabwean) from Chitima who went in earlier to see the play, said he had the best of the actors played their well-known roles, acting among others, the victims.

The, however, said the three-year-old theatre (Zimbabwe) was tightened with the audience such that the old set was to see the play again. Bright Banda, another patron, also spoke highly of efforts by actors and actresses in the production of the 10 million Malawi County of approved play.

He said if other artists were to emulate Nanzikambe's productions, there would have been stiff competition between the actors and other patrons in the country.

Last Macbeth performance on tomorrow

BY REX CHIKOKO

GROUND-BREAKING theatre company, Nanzikambe, will showcase the K3 million African Macbeth play for the last time at French Cultural Centre tomorrow.

The play which has already been performed 10 times in Malawi and once in Zimbabwe enters into its final performance as the finances from the British Council, who sponsored the play, have been exhausted.

Nanzikambe's Artistic Director Kate Stafford said *Macbeth's* last performance was initiated by the actors and actresses themselves after a successful Zimbabwe tour where they went recently to grace the Harare International Festival of Arts (Hifa).

"Every one was talking how marvellous the Malawian productions were at Hifa, word went around about the quality of Malawian acting, so the performances sold out," said Stafford.

Nanzikambe staged two productions, *African Macbeth* and *Eating to Live*.

She said actors felt that although the money from the sponsor was depleted, they could still stage a final performance.

"This could be the final performance unless some sponsors come in. It is very expensive to stage *Macbeth*, it cost about K60,000 per performance," she said.

Stafford said they opted for Blantyre because all actors reside in the city and hence they would minimize costs.

Brains behind African Macbeth

Kate Stafford (Artistic Director)

Kate Stafford was trained in the United Kingdom at the Royal Old Vic Theatre School which is known for its training in classical theatre. She has worked as an actor in theatre, film and television in the UK and mainland Europe and also in youth and community theatre in North London where she created the Silver Street Project.

She also produced and coordinated National Theatre's adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. She was also an elected politician in the UK, serving as a Labour Party councillor in North London until May 2002.

After working in Malawi in 2002, she worked for the Story Workshop as their outreach coordinator before setting up Nanzikambe. In 2003, she directed the African Macbeth to great critical acclaim and is grateful to the British Council for supporting another advanced Shakespeare.

Melissa Evelyn (Development Director)

Melissa is a writer, director and performer. She gained a double BA Hons in Theatre Arts and English Literature from Gwent College.

University of London. She has trained with LAMDA, Philip Gaultier and Theatre De Complicité and Frantic Assembly.

She led her own physical theatre group, Essential Theatre Company. She has worked as a drama coordinator for the Story Workshop, For Nanzikambe, who has directed the double political satire, *City Heart* and *A Garden of Plenty*, which took Character College's three drama students to Young Vic Theatre in London last year. Currently Melissa is directing theatre-for-development projects for Concert International and Mwanza's Campaign International.

Smith Likongwe (Executive Advisor)

Playwright, writer and veteran director. He has directed over 10 award-winning plays including *ATM* competition winners. He co-directed British Council's *Julius Caesar* in 1996. Smith has also produced three plays. He currently works for the Story Workshop in developing projects for Zimbabwe, a radio soap.



Kate Stafford (Artistic Director)



Melissa Evelyn (Development Director)



Smith Likongwe (Executive Advisor)