Demystifying Pseudo-Freirian Development: The Case of Laedza Batanani
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Paulo Freire has become a household word over the last decade and many development workers have attempted to implement his ideas, often without an adequate understanding of the conscientization process and the Copernican shift it requires in educational practice.

This paper is a case study of a non-formal education project in Botswana which attempted to follow a Freirian model. The project name Laedza Batanani—loosely “Community Awakening”—indicates its espoused Freirian ideology. One of the key features of this programme is the use of popular theatre as the medium for encouraging participation, raising issues, fostering discussion, and promoting collective action.

The Authors played an important role in the development of this programme and have written extensively on it, primarily within an advocacy position. Since leaving Botswana they have had the benefit of distance, hindsight and fresh understandings of the political economy of development to make a more critical assessment of their work.

This paper is an attempt to demystify much of the earlier writing which failed to portray some of the key contradictions in this work and tended to mystify the popular base of this activity. In particular, it will focus on the pseudo-participatory nature of the programme—the involvement of villagers as actors, audience, and discussion members without allowing popular control over the process and direction of change. The dual potential of popular theatre will be clarified: its capacity for both
* authentic popular expression and raising critical class consciousness, on one hand, and
* disseminating dominant class ideas and inducing acceptance of the status quo, on the other.

The earlier writings on Laedza Batanani concentrated on its media aspects—the simplicity of popular theatre, its entertaining nature and its use of local languages. The purpose of this paper is to show that highly “participatory”, “engaging”, “entertaining”, locally understandable forms of communication can be used not only to “liberate” but also to “domesticate”.

The paper will begin with a description of the programme and then analyze the methodology, content, and outcomes.

Programme Description

Laedza Batanani was the first experiment in using popular theatre for non-formal education in Botswana. It was started in 1974 in the Bokalaka area of northern Botswana by a community leader and two expatriate adult educators working in the area. Laedza Batanani developed out of their concern to overcome problems of low community participation and indifference to government development efforts in the area. Their basic goal was to find a way of motivating people to participate in development, of mobilizing the community around important local issues. What was needed was a means of bringing people together to discuss their problems, to agree on changes and to take collective action. This process of people meeting and working together was codified in a rallying slogan and theme song Laedza Batanani: “The sun is already up. It’s time to wake up and come together for a common effort”. This slogan reflected the strong motivational orientation of the project; it assumed that a major
constraint on development was peoples' apathy and indifference; what was needed was a means of “sparking” people’s interest and involvement.

This mobilizational, educational and collective action process required a new approach to non-formal education. The organizers rejected the existing approach of merely providing services and information; they felt this reinforced dependence and individualism rather than encouraging self-reliant and collective action. They wanted to get away from the elitism of agricultural extension services, finding a means of involving all rural villagers and not just the wealthier farmers or cattle-owners. They also saw this as an opportunity for a collaborative inter-agency approach—a positive move away from narrowly sectoral programming and lack of co-ordination and co-operation among extension workers.

One of the organizers had previous experience with Freire’s approach to literacy work and felt that this could be applied to community animation. Instead of using pictures as problem-posing “codes” for discussion, the organizers decided to use socio-drama. This seemed a much more lively medium for

* raising community issues (mirror)
* involving people in discussing the issues (community forum)
* mobilizing people to get organized and take action on the issues (mobilizer).

In addition drama had the potential of being a good crowd-puller—an important asset in overcoming apathy towards community meetings.

Previous experiences with drama in workshops and conferences had shown the organizers that villagers were good at drama, took part in it with little self-consciousness, and enjoyed doing it. So drama seemed a good medium for ensuring active participation of local people in the running of the programme—for once villagers could be involved in presenting the programme (through drama) and not just responding to it as an audience. Participation then was seen as both a goal of the programme (i.e. to mobilize a large number of villagers in discussing and taking action on important local issues) and an important aspect of the methodology (i.e. community members were expected to help in planning and running the education/animation programme).

The venue for this annual event was to be the kgotla—the village meeting. In the past, the kgotla was a powerful medium for community decision making and a major part of village life. It was a vehicle par excellence or educating a community as a community. Since Independence, with the declining role of traditional leaders, it had lost its influence and no longer drew large participation. Laedza Batanani chose to resurrect the kgotla’s community education function by providing:

* a stimulus for attending such a meeting;
* a medium for presenting community issues in a powerful way so that people would want to talk about them;
* a new, more participatory means of organizing discussion within the kgotla—i.e., small group discussions.

How does Laedza Batanani work? It is an annual one-week “campaign” in which a team of extension workers and community leaders tour the six major villages in the area with a programme of popular theatre performances and community discussion.

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1. These services have been broadened in the late 1970's with the creation of farmers' associations but the majority of small subsistence farmers are still deprived of this form of advice and support.

2. Since 1976 a mechanism has been instituted by government at village, district and national levels to increase the integration and co-ordination of these different sectors.
The campaign is preceded by a participatory planning process involving two major events:

* a community planning workshop (attended by traditional leaders, village development committee members, extension workers, and leaders of other community organizations) in which the participants working in groups “brainstorm” a list of community problems, select one or two priority and solvable problems, and then improvise some short skits to reflect the problems.

* an actors’ workshop in which a smaller group of extension workers and community leaders take the priority problems and create a more polished performance (including puppet skits, songs, and dances) for touring through the villages.

For two of the campaigns (1975-1976), an organizing committee—with representatives from each village—was formed to co-ordinate the planning and running of the campaign. Committee members helped in the overall planning, publicized the campaign in their respective villages and organized logistical support (firewood, water, accommodation for the actors).

Once the planning and preparations have been made, the campaign is organized, normally in the period immediately before the ploughing season (September-October). During the one-week campaign the team of actors organizes an afternoon programme in each of six villages. Mornings are spent travelling to the next village, meeting with local leaders, evaluating the previous day’s performance and discussion and planning for appropriate changes based on this assessment, setting up a stage backdrop and puppet stage, and publicizing the community event to be held at the kgotla (the village meeting place).

In mid-afternoon the performance starts—a mixed programme of two or three drama sketches, a puppet show, and several songs. After the last song the actors move immediately into the audience inviting them to form discussion groups. Each actor sits down with one of the groups and leads a discussion on the problems presented in the performance, and possible solutions. Afterwards everyone reassembles in the full kgotla meeting and each group gives its report. The chairperson summarizes the major proposals and tries to get some consensus on action to be taken.

Themes covered in the first three campaigns included:

1974—family and marital conflict, the effect on community and family life of migrant labour and the drift to the towns, cattle theft, village development, youth problems.


1976—VD, nutrition, sanitation.

Evaluation of the first two campaigns indicated that while there had been a lot of enthusiasm for the performances and interest in the issues there was little apparent follow-up action. One solution was to reduce the number of issues and to be more strategic in their selection. With a clearer and more realizable target, it was argued, extension workers and community leaders could more easily focus the post-performance discussion and lead the community in taking action on the problems.

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3. A few of the actors drive around the village singing the campaign songs and inviting people to the kgotla over a loud hailer.

4. The performance is a community event with all ages in attendance. However, during the discussion, one or two of the actors organizes a “diversionary” event for the children—a participatory programme of songs, puppetry and traditional dancing. From experience this is preferable to involving the children in the discussion or sending them home.
The themes selected in the 1976 campaign and in subsequent campaigns were chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

* a modest target which groups can easily achieve;
* problems which require a local response rather than government action e.g. not the issue of unpaid headmen since this could only be solved by government;
* something concrete, specific (e.g. ‘neglect of traditional practices’ is too general);
* problems that individuals or individual families or groups can solve (e.g. large infrastructural projects which require the whole community should not be selected but left for Village Development Committees);
* problems whose solution can easily be supported by regular extension work.

Another development in the 1976 campaign was a more analytical approach to the drama scripting. Instead of creating the drama out of a common sense or “external expert” understanding of the problem, an intermediate step of problem analysis was introduced. This represented an attempt to get away from prescribing “text book” slogans (e.g. “Good nutrition means three balanced meals a day”) and to take account of villagers’ perceptions and the actual socio-economic situation. This took the form of a type of constraint analysis. This involves listing people’s knowledge, attitudes and practice with respect to each problem; identifying from this list the key constraints (e.g. misbeliefs, lack of resources); and deciding which of these constraints might be successfully challenged and which current practices should be built on and supported. Through this analysis participants work out a clear set of objectives and problems to be presented as a preliminary step to ‘scripting’ the drama, puppet play, dance and song.

For example, in analysing the inter-related problems of nutrition, cookery, and vegetable production before scripting the drama, the following constraints were noted:

* Water is a major constraint on production.
* Vegetables are regarded as a relish (something to make maize meal tasty) and not an essential part of the diet.
* Vegetable growing is regarded as the exclusive activity of the ‘civilized’—the educated English-speaking elite.
* ‘Modern’ vegetables (cabbages, tomatoes) are expensive and only available in Francistown (no local markets).
* People make little use of wild vegetables.
* The lack of variety in cooking makes husbands complain.
* Husbands often fail to give their wives money for food.
* Traditional methods of cooking wild vegetables have been lost and people are not used to cooking ‘modern’ vegetables.
* Vegetables are often over-cooked.
* Elders get the first choice of food.
* Children are fed only one meal a day which consists of maize meal only or ‘maize’ plus a watery relish. Many parents think that a diet of maize meal alone is adequate for their children. They are reluctant to give their children meat or other sources of protein and protective food.

In using the data from the analysis to formulate the content of the drama the final yardstick was realism. Important constraints were identified but only those that were considered to be amenable to change were introduced. For example, in the discussions
on VD some felt the practice of traditional medicine should be discouraged. In the end the workshop decided this would not work, only antagonise people. (It was suggested as an alternative that the clinic staff and traditional doctors should be encouraged to meet in order to discuss how they might co-operate on the eradication of VD). It was decided to aim at the fact that women were more reluctant than men to go to the clinic for VD treatment and try to get the community to recognize that:

* VD is not a ‘women’s disease’ (i.e. it is not caused by intercourse during menstruation; men and women can both transmit the disease).
* What is wrong is ignoring or hiding the VD symptoms and not getting treatment.
* Since VD is particularly difficult to detect in women, men should take the responsibility to tell their partners.

In the discussions on sanitation it was decided that the promotion of toilets at this stage would be unrealistic. Very few families have the resources or the motivation to build a toilet. As an alternative the festival promoted the digging of a trench by each family and the practice of taking a shovel to cover one’s excreta—crudely sloganized in the puppet show as ‘one family, one trench—one shit, one shovel’.

A third innovation in the 1976 campaign was a planned follow-up programme involving extension worker promotion of the major themes of the popular theatre campaign. In the 1974 and 1975 campaigns follow-up was left to the initiative of local field workers and groups and as a result very little happened. In 1976 the campaign organizers decided to do something about this; they negotiated with each extension department to allow its field staff to be involved not only in the popular theatre campaign but also in follow-up promotion work. Field workers received special training and support materials so that they could teach about and encourage new practices with regard to VD, nutrition, and vegetable production. Family welfare educators performed dramas on VD and gave talks and cooking demonstrations to women attending the clinic. Agricultural demonstrators ran a number of vegetable gardening courses and issued seeds to families who wanted to set up vegetable gardens.

Development of Popular Theatre in Botswana

Laedza Batanani provided the inspiration for other experiments in using popular theatre as a medium for non-formal education. Other districts, government departments, and community groups have taken up the idea and adapted it to their own situation and purposes:

* in 1978 family welfare educators and nurses in western Botswana (Ghanzi District) performed plays on health themes in a mobile campaign touring remote rural settlements;
* Basarwa (Bushman) participants in community workshops have been encouraged to use drama as a means of expressing their concerns and ideas about government’s resettlement programme;
* the Ministry of Agriculture mobile campaign unit and an appropriate technology centre have both introduced puppetry as their principal teaching medium in the field.
* improvised drama has become a standard technique for raising issues at district development conferences;

5. One medical expert recommended that a collaborative solution might involve the traditional doctor continuing to deal with the psychological aspect of VD and referring the patient to the clinic for penicillin.
self-help housing workers have found drama to be a useful tool for explaining issues to committees in urban squatter areas and to the residents themselves;

workers at the Oodi weaving factory have utilized drama not only as a means of challenging fellow villagers to deal with major problems but also as a medium for resolving misunderstandings and conflicts within their own factory;

a few family welfare educators have started to experiment with puppet plays as part of their health education programme at the clinic;

at recruitment meetings in each village for the pilot literacy programme, the village extension team have used drama rather than speeches to underline the importance of the literacy effort.

Popular theatre activity is promoted and encouraged at the national level through a popular theatre committee made up of representatives from every district and town and the major national extension agencies. The University's Institute of Adult Education (IAE) which provided a good deal of the leadership for the initial popular theatre work has provided the secretarial services for this committee. The national popular theatre committee is not a policy-making or planning committee; it operates primarily as a vehicle for exchanging experience and ideas among the different regions and agencies. There is no attempt to impose a common national approach nor a centralized programme. Programming initiatives are decentralized through a number of district and town committees which plan and organize their own popular theatre campaigns, community workshops, or other programmes in which popular theatre is one of the media used. Over half of the districts and towns are now active in this work.

In addition to these larger-scale, inter-agency initiatives, individual field workers who have experienced the potential of this medium, either through a campaign or a training workshop, use drama, puppetry, songs, and/or dances as appropriate in their regular work. For example a family welfare educator teaching nutrition might use songs or a puppet play; the village extension team might produce a drama to illustrate a problem to be discussed at the kgotla. In addition to these government initiatives, a few community groups have sponsored popular theatre programmes—for example the workers of the Oodi weaving factory have organized a number of popular theatre performances at the kgotla on village development issues.

Training in popular theatre has been done by the IAE. Up until 1978 this was done on an informal basis; extension workers and community groups learned the skills in an organic and pragmatic way in the course of planning, researching, and preparing a performance and organizing a public presentation and discussion. In 1978 the IAE organized the first training course—a national workshop for field workers from every district—and hired a full-time popular theatre trainer. These two patterns of training have continued—a) organic, informal training carried out within the context of planning and running a real campaign and b) more formalized training workshops which often have an operational aspect (i.e. a performance is developed with a specific community problem in mind) but which tend to give more emphasis to performance skills. While the IAE continues to provide training support for local workshops and campaigns on request, more and more of this consultation work is being done by experienced people within each region. Recently popular theatre has been added to the pre-service training of government extension workers.

Assessment

The first section was a brief description of Laedza Batanani and other non-formal education programmes using popular theatre in Botswana. This section will attempt to
analyze the work done so far and suggest some new directions which might bring this activity more in line with its original objectives.

Freire’s ideas on education and social change influenced the original conception of the programme. It was meant to be a programme which

* increased participation of rural villagers;
* deepened critical awareness and
* mobilized villagers for community action.

Its actual achievements can be measured against each of these original objectives. What will become apparent is a clear distortion of Freire’s ideas in each case—the result of both inadequate understanding and structural limitations. While a genuine attempt was made to operationalize what Freire meant by “participation”, “critical analysis” and “action”, in practice these concepts have been given reformist interpretations.

**Participation**

Participation is both goal and methodology; the popular theatre programme attempts to increase participation of community members in development projects by involving them in the planning and running of the popular theatre programme. In the case of Laedza Batanani this means involving rural villagers in the community workshop, the organizing committee, the performing team and the community festival itself (joining in the songs and the post-performance discussion).

However, to throw all of these activities into a participation list mystifies the basic issue. Participation is not just “song and dance”. A villager may join in the songs and participate actively in the discussion but this is a different form of participation than selecting the campaign issues and structuring how they are to be presented for discussion. The key question is: who controls the process? Popular theatre may be “participatory” in the sense that local people are involved in producing it, in acting out the dramas and singing the songs but unless they control the selection of content and the whole educational process they may become willing accomplices in their own domestication. (Williams, 1971). Participation as mere performance is no guarantee of progressive change; unless rural villagers control the popular theatre process they may be used as mere mouthpieces for ideas produced by others which mystify their reality and condition them to accept a passive, dependent, uncritical role in an inequitable social structure.

In Laedza Batanani the whole process is controlled by the more powerful members of the community—the government workers and community leaders. They attend the pre-campaign community workshops and decide on the issues. While the additional involvement of community leaders in this process is better than government workers doing this on their own, it still represents a grouping of interests within the village which are not representative of those of the majority. This is demonstrated by the choice of issues—in 1974, for example, this group selected cattle theft as the major problem, an issue which is clearly not a high priority for the majority of rural families who own no cattle at all. In 1976 the choice of health issues—VD, nutrition, sanitation—was clearly influenced by the large and vocal participation of the government health staff. While Laedza Baianani has definitely attracted a lot of interest it continues to reflect the viewpoints and interests of these two dominant groups in Botswana—civil servants and the larger cattle owners—rather than providing a voice and an organizing tool for marginal groups.

In the other popular theatre programmes community participation tends to be token. Government extension staff plan and organize the whole activity with a
minimum of participation from community leaders. They have the transport, the resources and the time and they are expected to get something done—so they usually run the programme on their own with little help from local villagers. Their views tend to influence not only the selection of issues but also the way in which the issues are raised. This is indicated, for example, by the negative stereotyping of the traditional doctor in several plays performed by health educators. (Kraai et al., 1979). It is also evident in plays giving greater attention to technical solutions than to changes in social relations.

One recent innovation in popular theatre practice has attempted to overcome this problem. As an alternative to the community workshop as the source of issues, field workers have been trained to conduct informal interviews with people on a house-to-house basis. They walk around the village, meeting individuals and groups in their homes, at the borehole or clinic, at the shebeen or store, etc., trying to draw out the concerns and opinions of all sectors of the community, rich and poor, male and female, old and young. This practice of field interviewing, of listening to what the ordinary villages have to say is a step forward. It is a giant step ahead of conventional extension practice in which those with no cattle are virtually ignored. It helps in a small way to break down the pattern or problem diagnosis and solution prescription by external “experts” and to make field workers understand problems from the perspective of all sections of the rural community. Of course it is unrealistic “to expect a totally flexible response to the articulation of local viewpoints when extension agents are themselves as rigidly ‘constructed’ as technocrats”. (Johnny and Richards, 1980, p. 23).

Where field workers have used this approach of sounding out broad-based opinion or where initiatives have been taken by community groups themselves (e.g. the Oodi weavers) the issues chosen have been a clear expression of popular concerns rather than the more technicist predispositions of government field staff. For example, a recurring issue in a number of campaigns has been the domineering and bureaucratic treatment of patients by clinic nurses (the most visible civil servants operating at the village level); in a popular theatre campaign planned for the Kgalagadi District, the Basarwa (Bushman) demanded that it deal with the harassment they face from government wildlife officers; other community-controlled campaigns have addressed the issues of negligence by the headman or village development committee members and conflicts between councillors, headmen and villagers.

In all of these cases popular theatre has proved to be an important tool for raising sensitive issues which might otherwise never be dealt with, provoking people to talk about them, and providing a forum to discuss them. It has provided a limited opportunity for oppressed groups to express their grievances. For example, women have praised Laedza Batanani for raising issues that they felt reluctant to talk about in normal situations:

Laedza Batanani is a good way of getting people to talk about problems—easier than wives on their own trying to argue with their husbands. The drama helps to show men what women don’t like.

It has given marginal groups in rural communities a certain assurance that they can argue back, that they can challenge being mistreated, and it has served as a mild corrective to bureaucratic arrogance, local corruption, or inactive traditional leadership. It may lead to increased consciousness of the class nature of rural development.

6. Botswana has a tradition of using songs as an accepted vehicle for criticizing the misbehaviour of leaders.
It has also served to raise some of the contradictions in government development practices—a source of new understandings by extension staff. 

The problem, however, is that community-controlled popular theatre, in the progressive sense, is still in the minority. On the whole popular theatre is being used in the conventional mode of putting across extension messages rather than as a means of expressing popular concerns, a vehicle for challenging conventional practices or ways of thinking. Although it started as an attempt to develop popular education organized by rural villagers themselves, it has become on the whole just a new gimmick for top-down message-oriented campaigns run and controlled by government extension departments.

So far the discussion has been limited to participation as methodology. But what about participation as a goal? The organizers viewed this goal as one of overcoming low participation, of motivating people, of arousing them to take a more active part in development. They accepted the notion that the key constraint was apathy or indifference. While this view seems Freirian—Freire advocates that the consciousness of the oppressed is one of the constraints on social transformation—in practice it represents a distortion.

Apathy in a Freirian sense can only be defined in dialectical terms—as a response to oppressive relations. Peasants are "apathetic" only in the sense that they have been forced to internalize the oppressor's ideology, to accept a subservient and passive role within an exploitative structure. Or as Huizer (1979) and Malik (1977) have explained, resistance to change is often the most rational strategy for peasants in an oppressive social structure.

In the case of Laedza Batanani (and the Sri Lankan and Tanzanian programmes) "apathy" is given a totally different meaning—it seems to be presented as a self-inflicted characteristic of rural villagers. No account is given of why villagers refuse to attend development meetings or take part in communal projects. "Apathy" is simply explained as a constraint on development—a condition out of which villagers need to be "aroused" or "shaken". Without a clear explanation of its historical and socio-political roots, apathy takes on the function of an explanatory cause of poverty/underdevelopment, rather than being understood as a symptom of or a response to an inequitable social structure. In this way the Freirian concept of a "culture of silence" is converted into the "blaming the victim" ideology of conventional development work. Villagers are "underdeveloped" because they are "apathetic" and "resistant to change"; the role, then, of the development programme is "to shake them out of"

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7. In the VD Campaign (Laedza Batanani 1976) the government practice of treating VD through three injections of penicillin over a 3-week period (since health services in the area are once-a-week mobile visits) was questioned by villagers and other methods of providing quicker treatment were suggested. Popular theatre's role as a means of structuring popular evaluations of development programmes, of "generating alternative versions of development problems acceptable to disadvantaged groups" has received excellent treatment in an article by Johnny and Richards (1980). They argue that popular theatre should be used not as a tool for disseminating development messages but as a village-controlled medium for critiquing development policies and programmes—a source of evaluation and a means of educating field workers about the socio-political realities of development work.

8. This programme goal is similar to that of the Sarvodaya movement of Sri Lanka which also emphasizes the motivational factor, the need to arouse people from apathy. The Tanzanian literacy programme has adopted a similar objective: "to shake peasants out of their lethargy".

9. For a detailed explanation of the historical roots of community inertia see page 103.

10. A more detailed description/analysis of this distortion process is given in Kidd/Kumar (1981).
their lethargy'. This different understanding than Freire's of the basic cause of under-development helps to explain why the proposed solution—that of 'consciousness-raising'—takes on a different meaning than Freirian conscientization. This will be discussed in detail in the following section.

The failure to analyze the real reasons for low participation also helps to explain why participation was adopted as a community-wide objective. Clearer analysis would have shown class differentiation in participation (e.g. the domination of women's groups by elite women in the community) which in turn would have called for a more strategic use of *Laedza Batanani* as an organizing tool for the less privileged members of the community.

**Critical Awareness**

Another espoused goal of *Laedza Batanani* is to facilitate critical thinking. This attempt to raise critical consciousness is evident in several aspects of the methodology—

* the initial stage of finding out the concerns of community members;
* the use of analysis in the pre-campaign planning workshops;
* the post-performance community 'dialogue'.

While each of these appears to be consistent with the Freirian method of problem-posing dialogue, in practice it is quite different.

The use of constraint analysis in the pre-campaign workshops is the clearest indication of a shift in approach. Instead of unveiling structural relationships, of identifying historical, economic and political factors to explain rural problems, 'constraint analysis' has tended to focus on technical matters. For example, the analysis of VD is limited to an explication of its symptoms, causes, cure, and prevention. While it is important for people to have a scientific understanding of this disease, it is equally important for them to see how this disease is socially produced. VD is not a natural aspect of life in southern Africa; it is produced as a direct consequence of the intolerable conditions imposed on migrant labourers in the South Africa mines. Forced to live for long periods of time away from their wives, the miners turn to prostitutes and alcohol as a response to the alienating situation. VD is retransmitted to the countryside each time a new group of migrant labourers returns home. This disease, then, is socially produced by the political and economic structures in southern Africa; penicillin treatment at the clinic can only be a partial solution.

The analysis of VD in *Laedza Batanani* does deal with some of the social, non-technical aspects, for example the embarrassment of women as a major constraint to treatment, but the men tend to be blamed rather than the exploitative social system. They are left with a sense of guilt, that it is their 'promiscuity' which is the ultimate problem and not the social system which destroys family life. They are expected to change *their* behaviour rather than the structures which reproduce this disease.

Secondly, there has been no attempt to analyze problems in terms of their different "versions"—the different ways they are perceived by different social classes (i.e. the different class interests they represent). For example in the 1974 campaign some of the villagers produced their own folk song praising a local cattle thief; this song, of course, could not have been very popular among the larger cattle-owners. For the poor, drinking is an outlet from the pressures of a fragmented existence; for the rich (who own the bottle stores and bars) drinking is both entertainment and a way of making money. These different versions could have been dialectically analyzed in order

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11 This is related to the earlier point of failing to produce programme content which reflects the class position of the majority of community members.
to bring out a version acceptable to the majority of villagers—e.g. non-stockholders, cattle-workers, etc.

Thirdly, the problems identified in pre-campaign workshops have been treated as discrete problems requiring separate solutions; there has been little or no analysis of their linkages or common roots in the political economic structure. The process of “brainstorming” problems\(^\text{12}\) may be a useful start but unless it is followed up with a study of the connections between problems, symptoms may be misdiagnosed as the real causes and the economic and political roots of problems mystified. For example, many of the problems listed have their origins in the migrant labour system—e.g. family conflicts, rural unemployment, alcoholism, etc.—yet they are treated as isolated problems and diagnosed in terms of morality or the behaviour of the “victims” rather than the social structures which underpin these problems.

Fourthly, the emphasis has been on solving individual problems rather than on understanding why these problems exist in the first place. This emphasis has been conditioned by the organizers’ preoccupation with technical solutions and an inadequate understanding of what Freire means by problem-posing. By an unconscious sleight-of-hand problem-posing has been converted into problem-solving. “Problem-posing” makes one question the deeper structures; it is a process of challenging commonly accepted ideas, of posing more and more questions to dig beneath the conventional explanations of reality, of raising and analyzing contradictions; its object is understanding. “Problem-solving” on the other hand, is a more pragmatic concern with immediate relief, with symptomatic treatment, and therefore easily falls into the conventional extension exercise of looking for technically appropriate solutions. The post-performance dialogue adopts this problem-solving approach. Instead of focussing on the real causes, on analyzing the political economic and historical basis of material conditions, it concentrates on generating solutions which often represent short-term symptomatic treatment or unrealistic proposals for action which fail to consider the real constraints and possibilities within the power structure.

Fifthly, the analysis is limited to the village rather than the entire social formation of which it is a part. This is evident, for example, in the analysis of nutrition which does identify inequitable food distribution within the family (with the father getting a larger share) but fails to show the larger socio-political context (e.g. structural and class constraints on subsistence production) which conditions this inequity. A “victim-blaming” analysis is produced condemning the migrant labourers rather than the social structures which inhibit subsistence production and condition unequal distribution of income. Migrant labour is mentioned as one of the problems but there is no attempt to show how this institution and the policies behind it produce the “rural slum”.

By looking at the village as if it is an autonomous unit independent of the larger social structures, attention is shifted away from what the dominant class in southern Africa is doing to what the villagers are “doing to themselves”. This narrowly focussed analysis inevitably produces “victim-blaming” explanations of rural problems. We have seen earlier how poor attendance at village meetings was explained in terms of villagers’ apathy rather than the way in which this rural malaise has been historically produced. Behavioural characteristics—illiteracy, low production, poor kgotla attendance, cattle-stealing, alcoholism, etc.—are interpreted as inherent defects, as a “culture of poverty”, rather than the symptoms of exploitative social relations:

> Lacking structural perception, men attribute the sources of their situation to something within themselves rather than to something in objective reality. (Freire, 1970, p. 36)

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\(^{12}\) See the list of problems produced in the 1974 campaign.
Critical consciousness, then, has been given a totally different meaning in the Botswana popular theatre work. For Freire emergent consciousness is characterized by historical understanding, a clear insight into essential cause-effect relationships, and an overcoming of false consciousness (i.e. of ahistorical thinking and misconstructions of cause and effect). In Laedza Batanani critical consciousness has been interpreted in an everyday sense of "being aware of local problems and information needed to solve the problems".

This diluted form of conscientization can be explained by the modernization framework in which it operates. It assumes a dualistic economy in which the modern sector is attempting to transform (read "modernize") the traditional sector. Within this framework the role of non-formal education is to teach "modernizing" behaviour. Over the last two decades this dualistic theory has been seriously challenged. Rural communities are not removed from the modern sector; they are conditioned by and play an important role within the modern sector:

The marked 'traditionalism' of many contemporary African villages is not a product of isolation but of the over-strong relationship between the village as a supplier and multi-national company-dominated mining interests as employers of cheap labour. (Johnny and Richards, 1980).

Rural villages in Botswana have the role of reproducing the labour force for South African industry, without any prospect of meeting their own labour requirements. The "apathy", "lack of unified effort", the "disorganization" of Botswana villages is not a self-induced phenomenon; it is a historical outcome of the social control policies of South African capitalism. Historically South Africa has needed a cheap labour supply and this has required the underdevelopment of rural villages in the countries surrounding South Africa—through taxation, commoditization, the closure of South African markets to Botswana agricultural products, etc. If the rural villages were thriving, well-organized, self-reliant communities villagers would not need to leave their homes to find work in South Africa. The marginalization, the destruction of Botswana's rural economy has been historically induced.

In implicitly adopting this modernization framework, the organizers of Laedza Batanani have accepted that the key constraint in rural development is knowledge or apathy rather than opportunity. They have fallen back into the conventional practice of putting across technical information or of trying to "spark" interest through an unconventional medium—rather than developing critical insight, organizing among the non-stock holders or challenging vested interests. By accepting the modernization framework they are forced to explain what is happening within the "traditional sector" as if it is internally produced, as if all the problems are locally created. Once they accept this view they are compelled to adopt the logical consequence, i.e. that change can only take place as a result of techniques and skills they can bring or prescribe from outside—the so-called "modernizing behaviours".

The key social problems—the migrant labour system, inequities in cattle ownership, insufficient draught power and labour power accessible to female-headed households, etc.—are not addressed; instead Laedza Batanani deals with the "deviant" behaviour of the poor—the bad habits, the attitudes they are expected to change. Freire, of course, also talks about a change in behaviour, but for Freire this means overcoming passivity—challenging inequity, questioning the social order rather than reaffirming it. Conscientization does not mean accepting new moral injunctions—e.g. stealing less cattle, attending village meetings, contributing labour to village development projects—which may simply further one's incorporation into the system. It is to question the exhortations and slogans of the dominant class, examining whose interests are actually being served.
Action

For Freire authentic dialogue must lead to action. In *Laedza Batanani* and the other popular theatre programmes the performances and discussion have lead to very little action. The popular theatre event tends to be a “one-off” activity in which people come together, talk about issues and go home. There is limited follow-up of a collective nature; the event is rarely used to organize people for action nor built into an on-going organizational process. Encalada (1979) has called this type of communication “convocatory” communication, to differentiate communication which simply “calls people together” from more productive modes of communication which are used within a process of building an organization and taking action. The Botswana popular theatre programme to date falls within the first category.

In the first two years of *Laedza Batanani* there was a certain naive expectation that community action would somehow follow from the heightened interest generated by the popular theatre event. When this failed to materialize, the organizers planned a follow-up programme to encourage action. Instead of making this a community-based activity, the organizers built this programme around the regular work of government extension staff. This implied a lack of confidence in existing village institutions but there was no effort to analyze why these institutions were failing.

Community inertia can only be understood in terms of the historical role Botswana villages have played in providing labour for the South African mines and the relationships between various classes in Botswana rural society. During the colonial era taxation, commoditization, and other measures forced large numbers of poorer peasants into oscillating labour migration. This has been reinforced before and after Independence by the increasing monopolization of agricultural resources (e.g. draught power) by the larger cattle-owners. The export of labour has produced a drain on rural production and has exacerbated the situation of rural women who have had to shoulder additional responsibilities for subsistence production and the burden of reproducing the labour force for South African mines and industry.

The migrant labour system and the undermining of traditional authority since Independence have disrupted traditional social organization. In the past a villager’s participation on a communal project could be enforced by the power of the chief: age-regiments (*mephato*) were the organizational vehicle for a range of construction and other village projects. With the withdrawal of labour by the mines and the erosion of the power of traditional leaders there has been less labour available for self-help projects and no authority to compel participation in them. The new structures created since Independence, e.g. the village development committees, have not yet won widespread support. At the same time “there is a contradiction in advocating self-help when government policies such as giving food for work in drought periods and massive provision of physical facilities have encouraged a concept of development that regards government action as a source of change”. (Kraai et al, 1979).

From this it is clear that *Laedza Batanani* started with an inadequate understanding of the power structures within which it was working and an unrealistic expectation of the power of popular theatre. It defined the key problem it was addressing as lack of community participation but failed to see the underlying roots of this inertia. It also assumed, as in most community development programmes, a community of interests, failing to recognize the differing class interests within rural society and the lack of homogeneity for purposes of organizing. Without an insight into the mechanisms of power it set out to “awaken community awareness and action” with no clear organizational strategy beyond that of bringing people together for a performance and discussion. It assumed that people would somehow mobilize for action as long as there was increased motivation and awareness. It therefore ran smack into the problem
it was trying to overcome; nothing happened at the end of the performance and discussion because there was no organizational structure for making it happen. People remained inactive because there was no commonly accepted institutional framework in which initiatives could be taken. The popular theatre aspect—no matter how effective in attracting a crowd or raising important issues—could not conjure up on its own the organizational structure needed or provide itself the driving force for a programme of social action.¹³

This points to the need for a strategy which explicitly serves the more underprivileged groups in rural Botswana—making the resources of popular theatre more accessible to and within the control of these groups, addressing their problems and issues, and, most important, relating to an on-going process of organizing these groups. It also requires a reassessment of the role of popular theatre. Popular theatre can no longer be seen as the driving force for a programme of social action; it must be viewed as one element among others in a sustained organizing process.

**Conclusion**

Popular theatre in Botswana has taken a pseudo-Freirian course, shifting away from its espoused goals of authentic participation, critical awareness, and collective action. This has been produced by inadequate understanding of the power structures at village, national, and international levels and by the technocratic conditioning and modernization framework of the organizers.

A realignment with the original goals would require:

* a shift towards genuine popular participation, by moving away from an undifferentiated community-wide approach (in which the more powerful community members dominate) to a more strategic approach directed to the most oppressed sectors of the rural community (e.g. women, non-stockholders, etc.) and assuring participant control over the programme;

* a shift away from a popular-theatre oriented programme to a sustained programme of group organization, education, and action in which popular theatre is given a more narrowly defined, less prominent role;

* a critical assessment of the social and political context and a more strategic sense of the possibilities and constraints for change.

This case study is one example of how Freire’s ideas have been distorted and used in ways which potentially could intensify the oppression of powerless groups in the Third World. It shows how progressive-sounding development rhetoric can obscure the reality of class stratification and power structures and mystify the actual impact of development programmes. It points to the need on a much wider scale for political economic analysis of development programmes.

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¹³ A certain “media fixation”—a common feature of many media-based programmes for social change—has been a major factor in this mystification of the power of popular theatre as a catalyst for social change.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


