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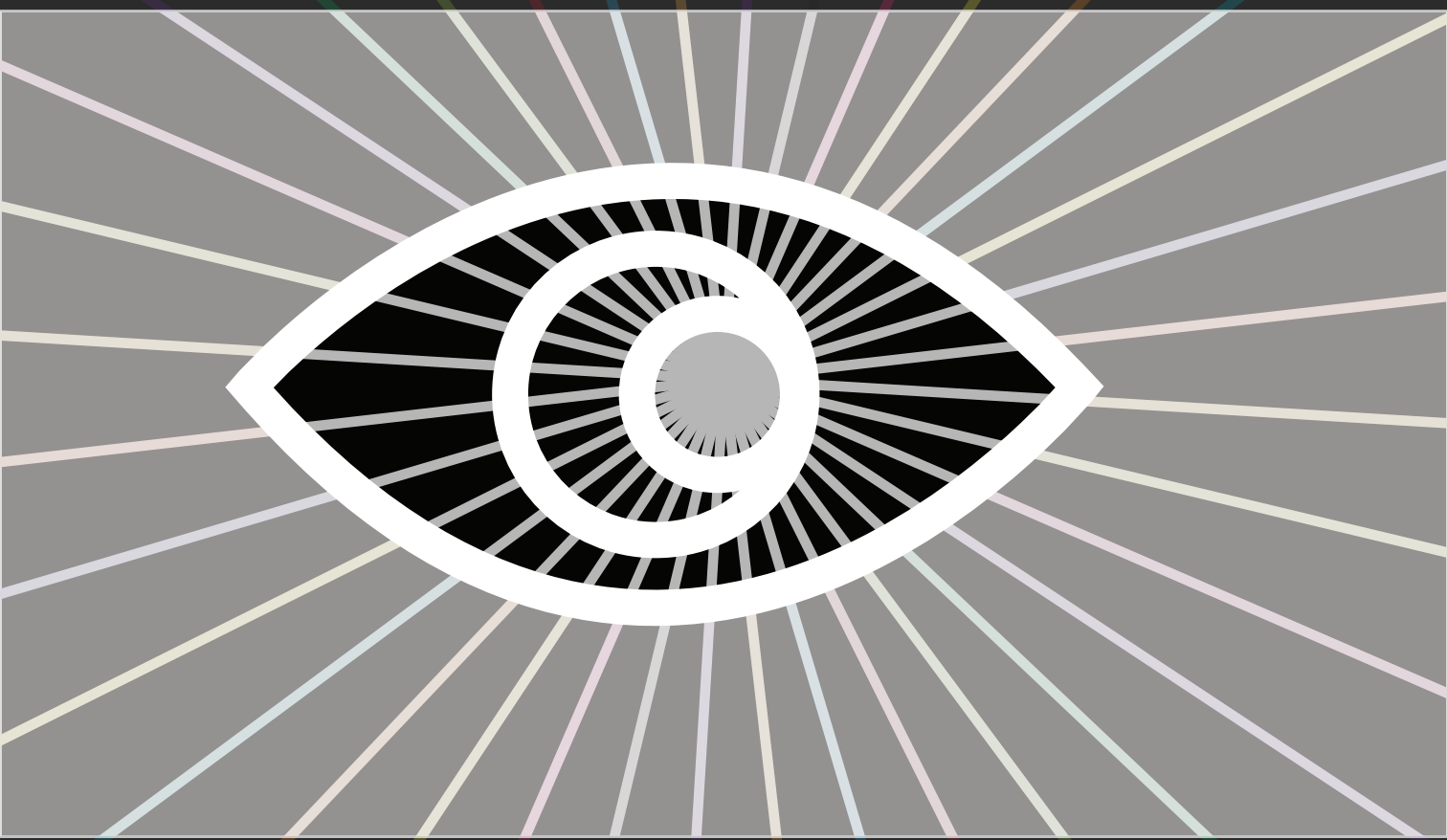

Perspectives on Theatre Practice in Kenya

Jahazi Has It!

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Jahazi Vol 11 Issue 1, 2023

Perspectives on Theatre Practice in Kenya

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The Journal is the result of an initiative by Twaweza Communications - Nairobi, and founding Editor, Bantu Mwaura, to encourage dialogue between academicians and art practitioners. The space is used to capture practical experiences in arts, culture and performance in Kenya and the East African region and suggest theoretical and policy directions.

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From the Editor

This Issue of Jahazi, exploring different facets of Theatre as it is today, in Kenya, has been a labour of love for the Editorial Team here at Jahazi Journal.

First, the great thespian of the ages, one we can easily call the "OG" of Kenyan Theatre, she who stood hand in hand with Ngugi wa Thiong'o to protest the excesses of the Kenyatta I regime during an era where there was no social media, and where the slightest whiff of protest was silenced by detentions and political killings, exited the stage. Prof. Micere Mugo left the earthly plane and went to join the great phalanx of the ancestors. For us at Jahazi, compiling this Issue at a time of such a huge loss was to write the history of theatre and to explore its vastness in the country, to (re)trace its roots, its growing pains, and to see where it stands today – as a tree – deeply rooted, but also with diverse trunks, branches and leaves; branches that are now home to many species of birds and other both flora and fauna.

The first part of this Issue is therefore in tribute to the indomitable Prof. Micere Mugo. Wangui wa Goro's *The Beautyful One Was Born* and Grace Okafor's *She Answers Her Name* set us off, and in many ways follow Prof. Micere Mugo as she settles in the hereafter. Grace Okafor's is an interactive poem that invites the audience to act as a chorus. This is a fitting communal tribute that Micere Mugo would have appreciated, perhaps even blushed about.

Following these opening statements, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's excerpt from Birth of a Dreamweaver become poignant. The connection between Ngugi and Micere is on cemented in the history books, and one that continues to colour the articles in this Issue whose contributors consist both veterans from a post-Ngugi era, into contemporary thespians and thinkers. For instance, Prof. C.J Odhiambo looks at the playwright as a public intellectual, looking at the work of the transcendent Francis Imbuga who gave us everlasting gems such as *Man of Kafira, Betrayal in the City,* and *Aminata*, among many famous plays that have been featured across many stages of our republic, including in national drama festivals. Prof. Jane Plastow, scholar of East African Theatre alongside many authored books and articles on African theatre is also featured in this Issue, looking at Kisumu City as the radical homeland for Kenya's applied theatre movement, a sentiment shared by many theatre maestros such as Oby Obyerodhyambo, also featured here tracing the evolution of the Sigana Art Form. These and many others such as Mumbi Kaigwa's compelling and inspiring story, or Keith Pearson's piece on the performer's journey which offers great insights and personal anecdotes from this veteran of Kenyan theatre, give a solid base where we glean the wisdom and experience from these old hands of theatre.

Would this issue be complete without contemporary theatre practitioners, thinkers, and playwrights? We did not contemplate such an eventuality, and the articles by Zippy Okoth, Fred Mbogo, Kawive Wambua for instance, all scholars and theatre practitioners of note, give us serious bones to chew. For instance, Zippy's piece looks at 'reality' as the new fiction in theatre, while Mbogo critiques a staging of Ngugi wa Thiongo's Ngaahika Ndeenda at the Kenya National Theatre, including the ways it is interpreted and produced by a white director. Kawive takes it further by calling for civic theatre in Kenya, playing with different contexts and times, such as the ones we find ourselves in politically on a global scale.

Many other contributors honour this Issue with their thought-provoking articles. Nkokabi Macharia links the digital space and theatre practice, while Kenny Cupers and Makau Kitata take us back to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's social(ist?) experiment by giving us a progress report of Kamiriithu Afterlives. Wanyonyi Wanyama gives us a history of Nakuru Players Theatre, which has produced thespians and thinkers of note, while Chomna Njeru talks to us about theatre training in Kenya. Mbuka Shitemi gives us a treatise of Wanda Gardens in Kakamega Town, a space established in honour of Francis Imbuga who passed on in 2012, as a budding space for culture and performance. And this is where we end up honouring our departed, where JKS Makokha does a tribute to the late Dr. Wasambo Were, who passed on in June of this year (2023) at the age of 78, having left indelible marks on Kenyan drama. Eugene Skeef's Yet You Are the Song takes us towards the end on a note of hope. We seem to lose the greats, but we also keep gaining ancestors who continue to impart the young with wisdom. We are still the song.

For an Issue on theatre, which is a moving, visual and embodied genre, we are deliberately wordy, topping at over a hundred pages of thought, synthesis, and tributes. Read us anyway. The words move in an ebb and flow that is itself a sort of a theatre production. You will be moved, provoked, and given new perspectives. At least, we hope you will be.

We thank all our esteemed contributors for going on this labour of love with us. To OSF for the Declaration of Restitution, to Edwin Nyutho for taking your time to find the ever-fascinating David Mulwa in conversation, Ogutu Muraya for your thought-provoking article, and Caroline Ngorobi for giving us a glimpse of the Bahari Huru Festival – we are complete because of you all.

To the Team at Twaweza Communications and the Creative Economy Working Group for your endless labours, we honour you.

Enjoy!

Word from the Publisher

Kimani Njogu

Since the onset of colonialism, theatre in Kenya has been a site of struggle between the arts and the state. Prior to the colonial violent disruptions of community life, performances were anchored on people's experiences and their interpretation of the world in which they lived. Through performed narratives, dances, theatre, rituals, music and games, communities made commentary about their conditions and the environment. Under colonialism, these community performances were viewed as subversive and censured. The Kenya Film and State plays Act (CAP 222) which was assented on 22 November 1962 and commenced on 1st October 1963 – is a living example of how the state has sought to censor the arts in Kenya. Although the Act has been amended at various stages, the original purpose of controlling the creative sector remains. The Creative Economy Working Group (CEWG) has been unequivocal in its various Kenyan memoranda to the state: *for the creative sector to thrive, the CAP 222 must be repelled and a more robust and enabling policy and legal framework developed*. Artistic freedom and freedom of expression are core to the realization of inclusion development.

But censorship of creativity is not a recent phenomenon. It had begun with the British East African Protectorate (present day Kenya) in 1912 after the publication of the State Plays and Cinematography Exhibitions Ordinance. The governor, Sir Henry Conway Belfield gazetted the Ordinance to regulate performances and authorized licensing officials to inspect all cinematographic exhibitions and stage plays before issuing a license. Police officers were empowered to enter exhibition theatres to inspect and inforce the provision of the Ordinance. The passing of the Film and Stage Plays Act in 1962 was a stage in the continuation of the colonial project of curtailing culture and the imagination.

The curtailment has always been resisted. Years of struggle, for instance, led to the Inter Party Parliamentary Group (IPPG) and a package of minimum constitutional and legal reforms. They also culminated in the repeal of Section 2A of the Constitution that had criminalized multi-party political participation. The IPPG reforms included the repeal of Sedition Laws in the Penal Code and Section 52 of the Preservation of Public Security Act which empowered the Minister for Security to ban publications if he/she believed they undermined certain state interests. Furthermore, the power of the state to detain without trial was also removed.

But the reforms did nothing to change the practice of the state. The performance license of Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's musical *Maitũ Njugĩra* (Mother Sing for Me) was withdrawn and the Kamĩrĩthũ Cultural Centre was destroyed by the police. Earlier, Ngugi had returned to "the source", the community to develop a grassroots cultural movement. He was imprisoned without trial for one year between 1977 and 1978. A powerful repertoire of song, dance and drama, the play utilizes symbolism and allegory to articulate the struggles over land in Kenya. Prior to detention, he had written the *Black Hermit*, performed in Uganda in the 1960s, T*he Trial of Dedan Kĩmathi* (co-authored with Mĩcere Mũgo) and *Ngahika Ndeenda ("I Will Marry When I Want")* which was staged by workers and peasants in Kamĩrĩthũ in 1977 drawing thousands of people from across the country to Limuru. Ngũgĩ told me recently:

> "What I would want the nation, Africa and the world to know is that the success of Kamĩrĩthũ Cultural and Education Center (KCEC) was rooted in our belief in the collective power of workers and peasants of Kenya, and their

languages. That power awakened can move mountains. At its height Kamĩrĩthũ brought together audiences from the villages and towns, from primary to University students, from Harambe schools to those from Elite schools. People would come in buses from as far as Embu. On the day the ban of the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was announced i.e. November 11, 1977, buses bringing people from Kisumu had to turn back in Nakuru…"

It is not often that Jahazi carries tributes to departed comrades. This issue, however, carries tributes to Professor Mĩcere Mũgo (1942-June 30, 2023) and Dr. Luke Wasambo Were (1945 –2023) because both had a profound effect on the growth of theatre and the anchoring of arts and culture in Kenya. Prof. Mĩcere taught at the University of Nairobi until 1982 when she was forced into exile alongside other intellectuals who were engaged in the struggle against the dictatorship of Daniel Arap Moi. Her intellectual thrust – evidenced through public lecturers on orature, literature and creative writings – was Pan-African and feminist in perspective. A talented performer, her speeches were rendered through storytelling and moments of call-response.

In celebrating her life, activists and progressive intellectuals called attention to her work as playwright, poet, author, activist, teacher, literary critic and public intellectual committed to social transformation. Her plays; *the Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti* (1970) and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (with Ngũgĩ' wa Thiongo, 1976), the collection of poems in *Daughter of My People, Sing* (1976) *My Mother's Song and Other Poems* (1976) as well as her critical essays on *Utu/ Ubuntu* show her unwavering commitment to social justice.

Wasambo Were did a lot for theatre in Kenya. I first met him at a workshop at Mukumu Girls when I served as the Organizing Secretary of the Kericho Secondary Schools Drama Association. At the time, we were strengthening theatre as a tool for social transformation. Wasambo Were was with Ministry of Education and could influence how drama was integrated in the education system. Later he became the first black Chief Inspector of Schools. In that role he was pivotal in the development of theatre in schools and the crafting of a pathway for the Kenya Schools Drama Festival, initially reserved for European and Asian schools only. Once on the driver's seat, Wasambo Were introduced dramatized verse to the festival and the Primary Schools Drama Festival. He was also instrumental in moving the Drama Festival from the Kenya National Theatre to other regions, away from Nairobi.

We hope that the reader will find this Issue worthwhile.

The Beautyful One was Born: A Tribute to Mĩcere Mũgo

Wangũi wa Goro

I have known Mĩcere's name and work since I was ten years old when I read and recited her poem *I took my son by the hand*, a life changing moment. Speaking and listening to others, I realise now through scholarship, and travels that she took many of us by the hand from an early age in ways that would transform our imagination, our being, our thinking about ourselves in our country, our continents, and the worlds that we live in. She achieved this through a stroke of a pen, through performativity, her speeches and through Utu/Ubuntu - being- her. She had already instilled a change-curriculum and critical instinct in us, to look around us for deeper meaning. May Mĩcere Gĩthae Mũgo's legacy, through her phenomenal life and practice, her oeuvre, made up of numerous works of prose, poems, plays, essays writing, speeches, films and recordings endure. She was a genius in her artistry and will be remembered for her deep conviction and knowing, for advocacy, for beauty in the deepest sense of the word, for justice, for liberatory human dignity, for the protection of our indigenous and progressive cultures across the world, for the protection of our environment and climate upon which all life forms depend. We can only say: *Asante Sana!*

As I grew up, I continued to know more about her scholarship and about her as a scholar, and a scholar of exceptional excellence who has won several awards across the world. I consider her an exemplary muse, professional, Mwalimu (teacher), Shujaa (heroine), friend, comrade, companion, older sister, and mother in the African sense of Venerated Ma-itu[1], as defined by Wanuri Kahiu. She was and remains of iconic stature for many, a revolutionary heroine. She will remain a brilliant intellectual, guiding light, a radical and courageous visionary, an indomitable spirit, a pathfinder, and way maker.

I referred to her as in my mind as M5S: Maitu Mũgathe Mĩcere Mũgo's, Shujaa, in short Mĩcere Maitũ Mũgathe to which she protested vigorously initially. I knew how much she eschewed grandstanding, and disliked unearned and unmerited titles, and time- and space-wasting formalities. I respected and admired her humility which best defines her, although this was not to be confused with timidity, which in any case, was the furthest thing you would have ever imagined of her.

We were saddened to learn of her departure a few weeks after a moving celebration at the African Literature Association Conference in May 2023 in Knoxville at the University of Tennessee, which by coincidence was hosted by a Kenyan scholar, Professor Gicingiri Ndigirigi. It is as if the gods knew that this was a final scholarly farewell in her honor within the year of her 80th and final birthday. We are grateful that she was able to attend virtually, to a large live audience, and a few friends and family online. We owe a great debt of gratitude to her and the organisers and speakers for this historical privilege, though unforeseen. I was struck afterwards at the serendipitous nature of events, thinking back on the theme of the conference which seemed to have prophesied the impending loss of two towering giants, Professors Ama Ata Aidoo, and Mĩcere Gĩthae Mũgo: *Crossings: Africans Moving In/Across Time & Space*. We had indeed said our farewell, although at the time we did not realise it. May their beautiful souls rest in peace.

Having failed to find a simple way to title the round table, I had settled for *Mĩcere Gĩthae Mũgo @ 80. Celebrating Excellence in Renaissance African Thought and Literary Practice across the world:* The power of Feminist, Utu-centric Consciousness, and Practice. Generously, the organizers allowed us to keep this title. Professor Mũgo would have protested at its

[1]Our truth

length with a laugh and asked me to keep it simple, given how meticulous she was with words. We were honoured by a world class panel comprising Virginia Phiri of Zimbabwe, Tsisti Ella Jaji (Zimbabwe/USA), Rose Sakeyfio (USA), Carole Boyce Davies (US/Caribbean) Keiko Kusunose (Japan), and Maureen Eke (Nigeria/USA). This demonstrated the historical and spiritual importance and demonstrates the breadth and scope of those she had touched across the world, and the weight of responsibility that she had carried for many years. She was a revolutionary, transformational visionary, a thinker, a practitioner, and a cherished relative, colleague, and friend to many. She embodied the things that she spoke about in her pursuit of excellence[2] and gave us much to look up to and to hope for. She was known in significant circles and by people in her life, as her story reveals, yet she remained modest and humble, despite her fame, social and family status.

However, she could not hide her greatness, because, even as she entered a room, you could tell that she was a great person, and a person with purpose. This purpose was reflected in her every gesture, word, and action. None were wasted. This was not an affective undertaking, but something that emanated from inside. She had trained and retrained her mind and body to speak differently from the haughty, condescending, competitive and hostile ways that are sometimes part of our societies. She practiced kindness and mindfulness and could easily generate happiness. Her infectious laughter would set lightbulbs of joy alight once she tickled out minds from slumber with ground-breaking thought, often shared with kind provocation such as in her poem *Ta imagini!* She wore a radiant smile and would laugh easily, even in difficult times.

Taking a leaf from her own book she taught us that we had to reclaim the world's life affirming traditions, from our indigenous cultures, from positive elements of our traditional cultures, and cultures of where-ever we were. She urged us to refocus and repurpose those to become instruments to uplift ourselves and others.

Taking a leaf from her own book she taught us that we had to reclaim the world's life affirming traditions, from our indigenous cultures, from positive elements of our traditional cultures, and cultures of where-ever we were. She urged us to refocus and repurpose those to become instruments to uplift ourselves and others.

She recognized that she was a first in many ways and grasped the weight of this responsibility. Mĩcere Gĩthae Mũgo taught emerging thinking to others, through direct learning and through deep engagement and questioning. Ever the Professor and Mwalimu, she documented these teachings in the way of the muse, through every encounter, through writing, through orature, through recordings, through performance, through teaching, and through everyday conversations and gestures, and through her kind body language. She consciously built a library of thought through orature. Are you with me? she would ask, as she delivered her speeches, mindful of her listeners. She could read people easily. I have yet to encounter a human being like her, who so gave and filled the spaces and senses.

Shujaa Mĩcere Mũgo was intentional. This intention emanated from her concern about justice and protection of humanity, and life-forms on earth. From that basis, she dared to always speak truth to power through critical engagement aware of the precarity of time once it is gone. Part of the truth was communicated through her performance and orature, such as in her written and spoken works in plays and poetry, and in the delivery of her speeches. These have remained pivotal in engaging the struggle for the freedom of our motherland, Kenya from colonialism and its ravages, our continent, and the world from neocolonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, class oppression and different human exclusions.

[2]This is apt title was used in celebrating her retirement farewell celebratory conference at Syracuse University in 2015.

In this regard, Mĩcere Gĩthae Mũgo remains a *Mutu*[3] of many firsts, too many to enumerate here, and as will be heard everywhere for millennia. It is when she was the first woman Dean of the Faculty of Arts (comprising the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences), at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, that I first met her physically during those exciting public lecture series, and if she had not already convinced me of her significance in childhood, this sealed it. I was in my teens, probably fifteen years old and I do not know which winds led me to the university. Although I was far from being a university student, I would attend those riveting debates on how our country and world could be radically transformed to serve its people. I heard of names like that of Walter Rodney there for the first time. These lectures would be filled to the brim. Although the country was going through a distressing time of decline from the high hopes of independence, it was an exciting time of intellectual engagement with the idea of *becoming* and *freedoming* in the context of liberated zones. This was the time that the country was emerging from the yoke of colonialism and was hardly a decade beyond independence. If I had been fascinated by her writing as a ten-year-old, you can imagine how inspired I was, when I saw her, and heard her speak. Her physical beauty was undeniable characterized by a kind manner and confident manner which enhanced it. Many will attest to her power of engagement and conviction which was argued passionately, cogently, realistically, and knowledgeably in style.

This invited people to engage critically with history, with reality, and to use our faculties to engage with what lay before our eyes. Debate was allowed, and debate was had! These were eye-opening and life-transforming moments of what learning, education and critical thinking can do. It enabled many to recognize the downward spiral of democracy and freedom, and the narrowing of the freedom of thought and expression which became evident to many as the country declined to dictatorship, oppression, retrogressive development. The period witnessed wasted lives and opportunities for what are now generations, some of them departed. And at this time, many made decisions on whether, and how to engage with this narrowing of freedom and development. Professor Mĩcere decided that it was not ethical or right to stop at this critical juncture and chose to stand on the side of justice despite the increasing intolerance from the Moi-Kanu regime.

For her courage in the defense of her country, constitution, and the guarantees of the Bill of Rights, she was stripped of her position at the University, and her citizenship. She was forced into exile in 1982 for this truth telling, for inviting people to be truthful about the lives they were living, what they could see with their eyes and conscience. For this commitment to freedom of thought and expression, she was forced to flee her country with her children Njeri and Mumbi and become an exile where she has died, and where she will be buried. This already speaks for itself and will continue to speak for itself for all time.

For her courage in the defense of her country, constitution, and the guarantees of the Bill of Rights, she was stripped of her position at the University, and her citizenship. She was forced into exile in 1982 for this truth telling, for inviting people to be truthful about the lives they were living, what they could see with their eyes and conscience. For this commitment to freedom of thought and expression, she was forced to flee her country

Recognizing the power that this exile-freedom offered her, Professor Mũgo continued with renewed vigor in her scholarly endeavor, her creativity, her pan-African organising, feminist pioneering work and community organising. She was fortunate that Zimbabwe afforded her this and gave her respite and citizenship at an early stage of its own liberation. She had a great deal to offer from the lessons learned in the preceding decades in Kenya, a former settler colony like Zimbabwe, and her own thinking, especially within the educational and cultural spheres and in engaging with and forming communities of practice. This included work with the feminist and women's movements, and curriculum development and cultural teams. There she worked with the communities, including the exiled Kenyans and South Africans who had fled apartheid.

[3]Person in the Utu/Ubuntu sense.

She became revered and respected all over the world. I remember seeing Mĩcere at a writers Conference later in London in 1984 when our paths crossed for the fourth

time about a decade later, and where the famous language debate took place, at which she, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and several other major writers and thinkers spoke. That moment was to provide another major milestone in my life, as I found the courage to become a translator then, by being truthful to my own knowledge and linguistic calling and translating words to power against the prevalent linguistic colonial grain. Soon, after, I was to translate Ngũgi's children's books in the Njamba Nene Series and the bildungsroman Matigari from Gikuyu to English. This work, emanating from this conference was to give me a passport among the greats of African literature at an early age in my twenties, drawn from the inspiration of *Mĩcere* and other great writers' enduring presence in my life. Our paths have therefore crossed naturally since, over many years, in many settings, to a point that we became known to one another, in the sense that we saw each other more! We became friends, travelers in the same journeys, around the things that mattered to us, our country, our continent, our pan Africanism, our quest for a different social order, women's rights, rights for black and oppressed people in the world, as I continue to grow. And for me like many, it became easier, especially as an exiled woman as I had a strong, positive and radiant light that I could look up to.

A woman's exile is not easy, and nor are the illnesses and stresses that emanate from being away from those whom you love, the country your love, and from the promised freedom and independence that were guaranteed in our constitution. That knowledge and pain that you may never return home, ever. The betrayal and departure from the promise of that cherished path are hard to fathom yet she unraveled them for us, and explained their source and nature, about greed and selfishness, and invited us not to fall to despondency by practicing the opposite Utu/Ubuntu.

Professor Mĩcere Mũgo was not one for self-pity and recognized the mercy of being embraced as a thinker, and scholar, after leaving Zimbabwe, first at Cornell University and later at the University of Syracuse where she became a full professor in 1997, and Professor Emeritus in 2015 which she embraced with passion. I was honored to witness the rapturous farewell that the university and international guests offered her at retirement, with people coming from all over the world, and others sending moving messages of appreciation for her service.

There, as will be asserted for years to come about her, it was clear that she had touched millions of lives, as this period of our mourning and farewell is already telling us. *Mĩcere* was a leader, a colleague, a daughter, a mother to so many children, and an aunt, grandmother, sister, friend, confidante, and problem solver for so many! We learnt that no less than eight parents at the time of that conference had named their male or female children Mĩcere, wanting her magic to remain with them for life, and more will be born yet. Many of us claimed her as our Mwalimu, our muse. We witnessed the love of communities, such as that displayed by the Pan African Community of Central New York which Professor Mũgo pioneered and worked with and replicated in so many places. She taught us that we must always work with what we have, where-ever we found ourselves. We witnessed time and time again the creation of liberated spaces, from her ground-breaking firsts where-ever she went, from her homes to the great publics which welcomed her. She immediately inspires us from among the great pantheons to which she now belongs, and from where we are already experiencing the full life-force of Utu/Ubuntu being which will endure. The outpouring of love has been incredible.

We saw her tireless pursuit to excellence and dedication reflected in her beloved children, and particularly her biological daughters Mũmbi and Njeri. Njeri passed away in 2012 and her spirit will remain with her family, that which accompanies us with her mother as we prepare for this earthly farewell; and as cherished Mũmbi

carries us forward in this realm with the similar grace and courage of her own as her mother and sister, without bitterness, and so full of kindness, courage, hope for goodness and transformation. We wish her great courage as she raises the bar of her own utu-being, for which she is so preciously prepared. We share our condolences with Mũmbi and Mĩcere's families, who will bear the private pain of this departure, which coincides with that of Mĩcere's dearest friend Ama Ata Aidoo. We think of Ama's daughter Mĩcere's beloved niece Kinna, an additional sister to Mũmbi and Njeri. May the mother-spirits rejoice in the reunions in this realm, and the next. and may their children find comfort in their continued sisterhood.

May this Shujaa-praise song of a Pan Africana and utu-centric freedom giant continue to be sung for generations, for her work is more than done. May we find consolation by paying forward the gifts of labour, love, prescience, presence and time that she bestowed on us, with her deep and profound commitment and ethical, revolutionary engagement and practice.

Rest in eternal peace, my own beloved M5S: Maitũ Mũgathe Mwalimu Mĩcere Mũgo Shujaa.

-- London 2023

Professor Wangũi wa Goro is a Kenyan-born translator and translation studies pioneer. She works as a literary critic, editor, writer and publisher, and is the curator of intercultural dialogues through translation and traducture. Through her focus on experimental writing and translation into Gĩkũyũ, she broke new ground across African literature and in advocacy for the protection and preservation of African and indigenous languages. She has lived in exile internationally and been involved in human rights struggles over several decades.

She Answers Her Name

Chinyere Grace Okafor

Who is Micere Mugo? She answers her name

(An interactive poem - The narrator involves the audience to chorus Micere Mugo)

In case you don't know, an angel sits in our midst,
So, we tune our ears to get them ready for the gist,
In this place of peace, ready to hear a story,
About our sister, daughter, mother, and mentor, Micere Mugo.

This serves as my introduction, to our angel, Micere Mugo,
With a smile on her face, and kind words for everybody,
You cannot but cheer our friend and sister, Micere Mugo.

Narrator: Who is (narrator waves hand)
Audience: Micere Mugo?
Narrator: A poet!
Narrator: Who is (narrator waves hand)
Audience: Micere Mugo?
Narrator: A Storyteller!

In case you don't know, the books call Micere a feminist.
And when you see the grand *gele*, the hat that sits on her head,
The *gele* is taller than the crown of Queen and King put together.
When you see the *gele* that sits on her head, my brother, my sister,
The thing that comes to your mind is just the word, Africanist.

Narrator: Who is (narrator waves hand)
Audience: Micere Mugo?
Narrator: A feminist
Narrator: Who is (narrator waves hand)
Audience: Micere Mugo?
Narrator: An Africanist.

So, can we put the words together and say African feminist?
In case you don't know, a feminist begins from the womb,
To fight for herself, her mother, and her children yet unborn,
To fight for all of them, both male and female, tall and short
Lame, blind and of every ability, disability, and physicality.

Narrator: Who is (narrator waves hand)
Audience: Micere Mugo?
Narrator: An Africanist.

With wisdom of the womb, from the womb, for the womb,
This means that Micere Mugo fights for all from the womb.

Narrator: Who is (Narrator waves her hand)
This feminist is a dramatist wanting to tell, a story of liberation,
About children of Mumbi, fighting strangulation, in their own nation.
With Ngugi wa Thiong'o, she created the script, for our liberation,
The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, a good fight to end, our colonization.

Narrator: Who is (narrator waves hand)
Audience: Micere Mugo?
Narrator: A dramatist!
Narrator: Who is (narrator waves hand)
Audience: Micere Mugo?
Fighter for liberation!

With love from the heart, deepest grove of the Kilimanjaro,
Proud mountain that spreads her wings to shelter the people,
Saw the Evil-eye with Evil-hand put a ban on Micere Mugo.
Who put a ban on Micere Mugo? Evil-eye!
Who put a ban of Micere Mugo?
The enemy of the people.

But the angel Nehanda, bold eyes of Zimbabwe who with her siblings,
Led people of their nation in a war of liberation, to end domination.
Beckoned Micere Mugo to their land to massage her determination.
Micere embraced security and wrapped her little ones in blankets of safety.
They made their way to the land of stonewalls and ancient cities.
They had shelter in the bosom of Victoria Falls until the next trip.
Where is Michere Mugo? In Zimbabwe.
Where is Micere Mugo? In Victoria Falls.
America can be persistent and impatient when it wants something.
America sent a metal bird with binoculars eyes to fetch the angel.
The metal bird with orders to take them to a land far from her own.
They crossed seven seas and seven forests and landed in America.
Where is Micere Mugo? The metal bird took her.
Where is Micere Mugo? In America!

She continues the fight for her people, and other people,
To free us from persistent strife.
This is the feminist, dramatist, and Africanist all in one.
Who is Micere Mugo?
She answers her name.

Dr. Chinyere G. Okafor is a Full Professor of English and Women's Studies at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, USA. Poet, playwright, and fiction writer, she speaks and writes about the challenges of ordinary people. Issues of war, suppression, politics, greed, poverty and disease feature alongside love, bonding, creativity, and strength that support the engagement of hostility. Her published creative works include *Zeb Silhouette, The New Toyi Toyi (a play),* ***New Toyi Toyi*** *(Nigerian Ed.), It Grows In Winter and Other Poems, He Wants to Marry Me Again and other Stories, The Lion and The Iroko (a play), From Earth's Bed Chamber (poems), Campus Palavar and Other Plays,* ***as well as others in collections, journals and magazines.***

Performed in celebration of Professor Mugo's birthday at the African Literature Association conference in 2023 in Knoxville (Tennessee), organized by Professor Wangui wa Goro, where Micere and her family and friends were in attendance via Zoom.

Excerpt from **Birth of a Dream Weaver**

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

Pages, Stages, Spaces

I

My tummy was tight the whole day: so many emotions conflicted in me. The stage once denied to a one-act drama, *The Wound in the Heart*, would now open to a three-act drama, *The Black Hermit*. Will it be triumph or disaster? Two lines from the Kipling poem we used to recite at Alliance buzzed in my head: If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster / And treat those two impostors just the same…[1]

The problem was in the uncertainty. I didn't know if I could ever look upon disaster as an imposter or even how to go about treating it as such.

A lot rode on the premiere. Earlier, on June 16, 1962, as part of the Makerere Conference of African Writers, a Kampala-based amateur group, the African Dramatic Society, with Erisa Kironde as the director, had put on J.P. Clark's play *Song of a Goat*. Along with Wole Soyinka, Clark was one of the early torchbearers of African theater in English. The writer himself was going to be present, along with other people of the pen gathered at the conference. The reputation of the director, a local star, and the playwright, a West African star, ensured great expectations for the East African premiere of the play.

The director had a live goat dragged onto the stage on the way to sacrifice. The goat screamed, urinated, pooped beads of shit that rolled downstage, all the time jumping about, trying to get away. Goats have never been the most cooperative of animals. The audience laughed outright. The goat and its rebellious antics stole the show. The disaster left an air of distrust of African English-language theater.

J.P.'s play, built around themes of fertility, infertility, and ritual sacrifice, is a tragedy along the lines of classical Greek drama, the title itself drawing attention to the conversation between traditional Africa and classical Greece. The Greek word *tragoidia* (tragedy) is a combination of *tragos* (he-goat) and *aeidein* (to sing), and in many African communities as in many ancient societies, the goat was a ceremonial animal, ritually killed to appease ill-tempered gods. The sacrifice of such a scapegoat for Zifa's infertility is one of the most compelling images in the play. Whatever interpretation a director may give to the play, the mood is supposed to be somber, reflective.

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[1]Rudyard Kipling, "If—," www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175772.

stage manager, I understood that memories of the disaster of the *Song of a Goat* premiere may have made him reticent. As if making up for his boss's aloofness, the stage manager put his mind and soul into it. He became an ally, one of us.

Among the faculty, the most active support came from David Cook. He read the script and made suggestions. He was also involved in every stage of the process, never once doubting the students' ability to see it through. When it came to set design, he got us much-needed help from the more experienced John Butler, working with the formidable artistic team of Eli Kyeyune. Dinwiddy was his usual boisterous self, interested, curious, and encouraging without adding to the burden of expectations. I knew I had his support, come disaster or triumph. Otherwise, most of the faculty adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

The turnout for the opening night increased rather than lowered my inner tremors. I had never seen so many tuxedos and bow ties in one place before, not even at the socials and formal dances at the Main Hall. Long before the curtain rose, black, Asian, and white Kampala nocked to the reception area, crowding around the bar and milling outside. These social heavyweights were here to see the play? The sight of fellow students was comforting: I was sure of allies in the audience.

But when the lights in the packed auditorium dimmed and those on the stage came on to reveal an African mother in the compound, working outside her hut, my fears disappeared. My tummy relaxed and then tightened again, but this time in excitement. Even I, who had seen Susie rehearsing many times over, was carried away by her total command of the stage. Gulzar Nensi remembers "Susie's superb acting prowess, the chorus, and the mounting tension in the atmosphere." This set the tone for those who followed and for the entire performance.

At the first intermission, David Cook, Miles Lee, and Peter Carpenter came backstage, almost tripping over one another. Even before they said so, I knew by the thunderous applause that things were going well. The excitement written all over the faces of the trio more than confirmed it. They had come to let me know about the media: Uganda radio, the BBC, and the *Uganda Argus*. The BBC wanted a word with me after the show.

The success of the first act energized the cast for the rest, and when the curtain was finally drawn, I felt that the deafening applause would split the theater asunder. The cast bowed to a standing ovation, left, then came back and bowed to even louder applause. The curtain calls went on for some time, almost like an extra performance.

Hidden from view, I enjoyed the applause while adding mine. Then suddenly I heard calls for me to appear on the stage. I hesitated.

Tejani later recalled my vain attempt to cling to my previous anonymity. "Ngugi was most reluctant to appear on the stage," he wrote about the opening night, "and was forced to come out by popular audience demand because they wanted to see their writer. We gave him a standing ovation." My reluctance was not out of false modesty. I truly felt that the evening belonged to the cast. It was a triumph of talents and commitments from men and women of different races, communities, regions, and religions. It was a collective effort by actors, stage and prop managers, financial supporters, and costume makers. Without all these different parts working together, there would have been no theater. It's collective art; that is its beauty, and I said so. If credit were to go one person, it was Peter Kinyanjui, the president of the Makerere Students Drama Society, because he had dreamed up the idea.

The success of the first night set the tone for the rest, ensuring packed houses for all four performances.

The only departure from the routine was Saturday night. It would be a brief ceremony, Peter Carpenter told the audience, after the standing ovation for me abated. He introduced a representative from the East African Literature Bureau, who introduced the minister from the independent government of Uganda. Mr. L. Kalule-Settala presented me with an envelope, an award for "The Black Messiah," my novel in manuscript.

II

The night was filled with ironies: I was still a colonial subject, writing and producing a show about the problems of independence. I had received an award from the hands of a citizen, an African citizen.

But the moment I returned to my room in Northcote, still in a daze, the novelist in me kicked in. I was curious about the award. The results had been so long in coming that I had given up any hope of hearing from the bureau. I thought reading and judging the manuscripts would be a matter of weeks, not months. Sometimes, in my impatience, I had thought the manuscript was lost. But following the completion and acceptance for publication of my second manuscript, *Weep Not, Child*, the intensity of my interest in the fate of "The Black Messiah" had abated considerably.

I opened the envelope. The novel had indeed been the best of those submitted, but the judges, didn't think it good enough for the first prize of a thousand shillings.[2] I was a little disappointed. It was not just the check for five hundred shillings, six dollars at today's rate. I would have understood if they had said that none of the submissions, including mine, had met the literary requirement, but for them to say it was the best, announce the fact to the press, and then deny the winning entry the prize they had advertised in their initial call for submissions—that felt like robbery. But I was consoled by the fact that they had passed it on to a publisher for possible publication.

Looking back, the night was a double triumph for me: a playwright born and a novelist-to-be born. The wound in my heart as a playwright had been healed. Little did I know that more wounds awaited me, that theater would later earn me one year at a maximum-security prison and thereafter many years of exile. The journey to the persecution began in Kampala and Makerere, all in the year 1963.

I didn't let the disappointment over the novel dim the glow of my theatrical debut on the Kampala stage. Nor did I let it diminish what the play had accomplished: a blow to the conception that the East African theater in English couldn't stand on its own on a national stage or that the different races, communities, and regions couldn't come together for a common purpose.

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III

In a brief review, "Theatre in East and West Africa," covering the period since 1960, which appeared in *Drama* (Spring 1963) and was later reproduced in the *Makerere Journal*, Peter Carpenter highlighted *The Black Hermit* as the first full-length play known to have been written by an East African.

In another review of the production, headlined on page 1 of the *Makererean* of November 22,1962, Professor Trevor Whit-tock of the English Department lauded the play as speaking to a continent and the production as the best thing the Makerere Dramatic Society had yet done: "Today Africa is in turmoil. Uhuru lops and reshapes the old ways, and the pains of growth are hard. Sects, tribes, policies clamor to be heard, jostle in rivalry fearful that the new birth will cast them out. Things fall apart, and the center has not yet been found."

[2]Worth twelve dollars today.

Otherwise the reception of the play reflected emerging fissures in the critical tradition at Makerere.

Gerald Moore opened his review piece in the March 1963 issue of *Transition* with the question: "Should James Ngugi's *The Black Hermit* have been given a full-scale production at the National Theater?" Then he savaged the play on account of its verse, concluding that none of the issues—claims of nation, ideology, religion, family, sexual love, the tribe, though immediate enough to the East African world—had been properly explored. The play should have been confined to the Hill, where students' efforts belonged—strange for a man who'd had a hand in my invitation to the big conference of African writers held at Makerere. His conclusion about *The Black Hermit* was diametrically opposed to that of Trevor Whittock and Peter Nazareth.

Nazareth's response in the Transition of June 1963 pointed out that Moore's question confirmed the relevance and right-fulness of the endeavor to make claims on the national space. Nazareth implicitly recognized the politics of the venue and of the content, which Moore had dismissed. Nazareth's responses were the first salvo in the ideological struggle between the dominant formal tradition and the new desire to free literary texts from formal strangulation. Benefitting from their direct experience of colonialism, the emergent critics began to fight the dominant tendency that took Western norms as fixed standards against which to measure other aspirations. Like their creative counterparts, who realized that the story they had to tell couldn't be told for them, emergent African critics realized that the ideas they had to express couldn't be articulated for them even by the most sympathetic person who knew colonialism from the other side.

The emergent critics began to fight the dominant tendency that took Western norms as fixed standards against which to measure other aspirations. Like their creative counterparts, who realized that the story they had to tell couldn't be told for them, emergent African critics realized that the ideas they had to express couldn't be articulated for them even by the most sympathetic person who knew colonialism from the other side.

In particular, Nazareth took issue with Moore's dismissal of the characterization of the priest. While conceding weaknesses, Nazareth countered Moore's claims of lack of depth in the exploration of issues by drawing attention to the play's real-life impact: the conception of the padre led to "a whole series of sermons on Christianity by the chaplain of the St Francis Chapel." However, the sermons about the characterization of the priesthood must have spread beyond the walls of Saint Francis Chapel.

IV

I was in a group of students, most of them ex-Alliance, books in our hands, strolling from the library to the classrooms on the other side of the Main Hall, when I sensed something familiar in the gait of a white man in a gray suit walking toward us.

It was Carey Francis, the principal of my old school.[3] He was on the board of directors of Makerere, but our paths had not crossed here. I was happy, even eager, to meet him, but I didn't think he would make me out in a crowd of mostly his favorites, paragons of behavior, some of them exemplary prefects, often cited as role models. Instinctively ready to give way to my seniors, I looked around. I was all alone. Somehow the others had melted away. Doubts tempered my eagerness. I should just walk past him, not try to remind him who I was.

"James," he called out. I was flattered by the instant recognition.

"Tell me," he asked, without preliminaries, "how did we wrong you at Alliance?" Clueless about what could have caused him so much pain that, four years after I had left the school, it still showed in his tone of voice and cold bearing, I muttered confusedly, "No, no wrong that I know."

"Then why did you say those awful things about us?"

[3]See my In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir (New York, Anchor, 2015).

I couldn't remember having said anything negative about my teachers at Alliance. The school was an integral part of my intellectual development.

I recalled, though, that I had published an article in the *Sunday Nation* of January 6, 1963, on Christianity and colonialism under the title "I Say Kenya Missionaries Failed Badly," in which, among other things, I pointed out the symbiotic relationship between the two. I accused missionaries of producing a people who cared more about the poverty of the soul than the poverty of the body. But in writing it, I wasn't thinking about Alliance, its principal, or the other teachers.

"Are you referring to the article?" I asked.

"What article? You have also written about it?"

"It was about missions in general," I said ignoring his question.

"But we are the only missionaries you knew?"

One doesn't have to experience a historical act in person to write about it. "I was talking about imperialism," I said, hoping that this would end the matter.

It was not the discussion I would've liked to have with my former principal, whom I had not met since I left Alliance in 1958. I felt ridiculous standing there, holding books in my hands against my white shirt and gray woolen trousers, refuting implied accusations of betrayal.

"This mad rush towards Uhuru, James, has brought about a politician who demands service to self instead of self to service."

"No more or less than colonialism has demanded of Africa."

"The settler maybe, but not the missionary and the dedicated government official."

"Can't you see that to us they're part of the oppressive colonial system?"

The mention of imperialism seemed to rile him. He answered with impatient passion:

> Don't become a prisoner of isms, so beloved of the politician. Think of this instead: a company of men, of all races, bound together by the highest ideals of justice and freedom and service. Service above all. A proud member of this company is the priest and the missionary you deride. The missionary has given all—his earthily possessions, himself, his body, mind, and soul—to the service of the least among us. Your politician will demand that the hungry feed him, the thirsty give him water, the homeless build him palaces, the barefoot give him shoes, and the naked cloth him. The more he has, the more he will pad himself, even with the products of the ism he says he is fighting.

His politician made me recall a drawing of an overdressed African gentleman in flashy shoes, an outer jacket over an inner one, a toupee on his head, holding a walking stick, and wearing sunglasses, all under a tropical sun, with the caption "Don't copy this man." It was in the book on hygiene that Francis had written for elementary schools, years back.

Could Francis be seeing "this man" in the nationalists now leading many countries into independence? Or was his reaction a visceral resentment of triumphant nationalism? He seized on my hesitancy.

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"The settler maybe, but not the missionary and the dedicated government official."

"Can't you see that to us they're part of the oppressive colonial system?"

"But why blame it all on priests? Are you saying that we oppressed you at Alliance?"

"No, no." I felt like screaming. He personalized the missionary enterprise, which prevented him from seeing how it fitted into the larger picture of the ism he derided when espoused by me.

"I wasn't talking about you or any other person at Alliance," I repeated.

"Yes, but the priest, your priest...

We parted the way we met: without pleasantries. It was only after he had left that it struck me: Chaplain Payne had probably talked to him about my depiction of Christianity through the character of the priest in *The Black Hermit*.

V

The conversation left me deep in thought about missionaries and colonial ministries. I liked Carey Francis. He could be obstinate, even quick to judge, but there could never be any doubt about his selfless devotion. There was also Reverend Fred Welbourne, different, open-minded, but a Christian missionary all the same. Can one abstract personal good conduct from the system the conduct serves? Or divorce a moral gesture from the context that created the conditions that made that gesture necessary? Is binding the wounds of victims of a system enough to erase one's culpability in that system? Can a moral gesture of an individual wash away the sins of an institution?

Then there were also Payne and Foster, one rather sly and shy, the other boisterous and seemingly open-minded, but both representing a narrow view of the world, again, in different ways. Payne, at least, was too humble to claim a knowledge of the African mind, but Foster had imbibed his worldview from a long line of "experts" on the African who allowed their piety to sanction massacres without letting it lessen their own certainty about their place in heaven at the right hand of God.

I recalled my encounter with a book, *Kenya from Within* by W. McGregor Ross, in which I first read that the hymn "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" was composed by an English slaver. We used to sing it in Alliance High School chapel, and now Ross was telling me that John Newton composed it on a slave ship? Later I would check this, and yes, it was true; Newton wrote it on his very first voyage to West Africa as the first mate on the slave ship *Brownlow* in 1748 or 1749.

Reviewing the hymn in the light of the context of its inspiration made some of the verses sound like pure mockery:

> *How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds*
> *In a believer's ear!*
>
> *It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,*
> *And drives away his fear.*
>
> *It makes the wounded spirit whole,*
> *And calms the troubled breast;*
> *'Tis manna to the hungry soul,*
> *And to the weary, rest.*
>
> *Dear Name! the Rock on which I build;*
> *My Shield and Hiding Place,...*[4]

[4]John Newton, lyrics (1779), and Alexander Reinagle, music (1836), "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds," http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/h/s/hsweetnj.htm

He also composed other Alliance High School favorites, including "Amazing Grace" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," as the captain of other slave ships, the *Duke of Argyle* and the *African*, sometime between 1750 and 1754, or in his vicarage, bought and maintained by the profits from his investments in slavery, which earnings continued even long after, decades later, he denounced the trade and joined Yorkshire parliamentarian William Wilberforce in abolition efforts.

The sounds he heard were those of the slaves as they groaned in the belly of the galley; the sorrow, that of the slaves as they moaned; and the wounds, those inflicted on the slaves at his orders. The hungry souls were the slaves he starved. The rock on which he built was the rock to which he chained the slaves. Blake should have written that hells (as well as brothels) are built "with bricks of religion." The imagery of fear, sorrow, and suffering is drawn from that of the slaves in the *Brownlow*, but Newton wrote as if it were he who were suffering the very wounds he was inflicting on the black bodies he carried for sale. The interest on the wealth from a good sale trumped interest in the health of a good soul. Newton co-opts the suffering of his victims for himself; they become spiritual "wounds" of his disembodied spirit. Abstracting Christianity from the realm of the practical and worldly to that of faith and grace in the realm of glory helped Newton reconcile the two interests. He could sin on earth all his life, but grace abound¬ing awaited him, even if repentance came after a stroke near the end of his life.

Had the missionary similarly abstracted the experience of the colony into the realm of glory, where the conflict between the colonizer and colonized was amicably resolved in allegiance to a common faith? Christianity became the religion of empires the moment emperors realized that they could sin all they wanted all their lives and still have their sins washed away on their deathbeds.

VI

The Kampala Theater was my first lesson in the politics of performance space and the impact of performance on the politics of ideas. In reference to *The Black Hermit*, Whittock had written, "It brings into consciousness the tensions of our continent with humility and compassion." We can substitute "the world" for "the continent." Theater is a dangerous arena.

I could not have known it then, but years later, it would turn out that the struggle for space at the National Theater in Kampala was only a rehearsal for similar struggles in years to come, when *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, a joint effort by Micere Githae Mugo and me, would meet with stiff resistance,[5] with consequences that went beyond the confines of the performance space of the National Theater, into those of prison and exile. That was in 1977 in a Kenya that had replaced the Union Jack with its own flag.

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[1]This excerpt is from Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 2020. Birth of a Dream Weaver. Nairobi: Kenway Publications. We are grateful to East African Educational Publishers for permission to republish.

[5]See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Detained: *A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2006) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (1998; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

Francis Davis Imbuga: The Playwright as a Public Intellectual

Christopher Odhiambo Joseph

Francis Davis Imbuga is one of Kenya's most popular and famous playwrights. In his dramatic imaginaries, he consistently and explicitly explores some of the highly contentious burning issues of the day facing society. Though at a personal level, he did not directly engage with the public to speak truth to power he did participate through his dramatic texts and other forms of creative expressions such as cartoon strips, television dramas and film. Imbuga's use of artistic form does legitimates his role as a public intellectual as this is validated by Said when he affirms that "film, photography, and even music along with all the arts of writing, can be aspects of this activity…That is what intellectuals do, not only to define the situation, but also to discern the possibilities for active participation". (2002:37)

Similar to other often quoted African intellectuals such as Wole Soyinka, Steve Biko, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe amongst many others, Imbuga stepped into the public spheres mainly through his creative works and performances to question, interpret and speak truth to power. Like these other public intellectuals, through his dramatic imaginaries and other creative expressions, he assumes a responsibility and role of unsettling power, troubling consensus and challenging the commonsense approach. Indeed his writings connects and links his intellectualism with the project of socio-cultural, economic and political intervention to the public sphere. The only fundamentally discerned difference in the mode of engagement, from other public intellectuals, is that his, is rendered mainly through the dramatic imaginary and other forms of creative expressions.

Imbuga's dramatic writings defines his role as an intellectual because they are generally dialectically and consistently obsessed with confronting both an 'imposed culture of silence and normalized quiet of "unseen power wherever and whenever possible" (Said, 2002: 25)

As such it can be rightly argued that Imbuga is a public intellectual. Said (2002) who has written extensively on this subject of public intellectuals has in fact argued that during the last years of the twentieth Century the writer has actually taken more and more of the intellectual adversarial attributes in activities such as speaking truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, and supplying dissenting voice in conflict with authority. Thus even a cursory reading of Imbuga's oeuvre of dramatic writings align perfectly well with Said's observation that as creative writer he (Imbuga) is in fact a public intellectual. Said in fact captures quite accurately this role of a writer when he reminds us that:

> …the special symbolic role of the writer as an intellectual testifying to a country's or region's experience, thereby giving that experience a public identity forever inscribed in the global discursive agenda (2002:25)

In a sense therefore, Imbuga's dramatic writings defines his role as an intellectual because they are generally dialectically and consistently obsessed with confronting both an 'imposed culture of silence and normalized quiet of "unseen power wherever and whenever possible" (Said, 2002: 25) as will be discerned later in an analysis of some of his dramatic imaginaries.

According to Antonio Gramsci read in Said (1996), those who perform intellectual function in society can be categorized into two kinds. The first category is referred to as traditional intellectuals and includes teachers, priests, and administrators. These ones continue to do the same things from generation to generation. The second category, Gramsci refers to as organic intellectuals. According to Gramsci, organic intellectuals are connected directly to enterprises that used intellectuals to organize interests so as to gain more power and get more control. Imbuga, though a university lecturer is definitely an organic intellectual as he was always actively involved in the transformation of society through his creative writings, which ostensibly participates in the struggle to create consciousness, unlike teachers and priests, who seem to remain in the same place doing the same kind of work year in year out.

[1]*A Lecture in Memory of Prof. Francis Davis Imbuga Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST)13th Nov. 2014*

But who is Francis Davis Imbuga? Imbuga was born in a small village known as Wenyange in Vihiga County on 2nd February 1947 in the then Western Province of Kenya. Like most children of his time, he attended a local primary school known as Kweye before proceeding to Chavakali Intermediate School (the current Chavakali Boys High School). He later joined Alliance High School where he first encountered drama. From Alliance High School he joined the University of Nairobi where he studied Bachelor of Arts in Education, with his teaching subjects as Literature and English. His love and passion for drama led him to join a group known as "campus playwrights". These were university students who participated in writing, acting and directing plays and scripts for the then Voice of Kenya (VoK) now Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). After the completion of his undergraduate studies, Imbuga proceeded to pursue a master's degree- researching and writing his thesis on- "The Techniques of Improvised Drama" at the same university under the supervision of the Ghanaian scholar, playwright, director and actor Joe de Graft, of the popular political play on Africa's dictatorship, *Muntu*.

As a graduate student, Imbuga travelled widely making academic and research visits to Cardiff University College in the United Kingdom, the University of Ghana at Legon and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. All these were universities with very strong traditions in drama, theatre and performance studies. He became a faculty staff member at his alma mater in 1976 in the Department of Educational Communication and Technology. The Department eventually was transferred to Kenyatta University College, then the education wing of the University of Nairobi. It is here that Imbuga would cut a niche for himself as a creative public intellectual through writing and performing in public. He rose in ranks to become a senior lecturer and a Chair of the Department of Literature before proceeding to the University of Iowa in the United States of America where he obtained his doctoral degree in Drama with the thesis titled: "Theatre Trends and Circumstances in John Ruganda's Drama". On returning home to Kenya in 1992, he was promoted to the position of Associate Professor and eventually rose to the highest level of a professor.

Imbuga wrote his first play titled *Omolo* in 1969 while still a student at Alliance High School which was entered for the Kenya National Schools Drama Festival (now the Kenya National Drama and Film Festival). In fact, he did not only write the play but also acted and directed it.

During his first year in the University, he wrote the play *Sons and Parents* which was later to be published as *The Married Bachelor*. It was staged at the Kenya National Theatre and attracted large audiences. This is arguably the first local play in the English language in Kenya to be aired on Voice of Kenya (VoK). Imbuga later would write many other plays that have been staged in different parts of Kenya and outside the country. These include *Betrayal in the City, Man of Kafira, Game of Silence, The Successor* and *The Miracle of Limera*. Other than the dramatic form Imbuga also wrote some work in prose and poetry. He also contributed as a columnist in *Sunday Nation* with his satire, *"Mashurubu's World"* and was also the creator of the *Daily Nation's* Cartoon-Strip, *Nyam-Nyam*. Imbuga would eventually try his hand at politics but with no success.

Interestingly, it seems that Imbuga has not been recognized neither hailed much as a public intellectual most probably because of the medium he preferred and privileged in communicating his ideas and knowledge to his publics. This might be explained by Said's (1994) description of the public intellectual as one who "discards his academia to speak as a gifted dilettante". Though Imbuga never left the academia, he nevertheless through his plays, satirical commentaries and cartoons, does critically explore and engage with the political, social, economic and cultural issues that are of great importance to his society.

Interestingly, it seems that Imbuga has not been recognized neither hailed much as a public intellectual most probably because of the medium he preferred and privileged in communicating his ideas and knowledge to his publics. This might be explained by Said's (1994) description of the public intellectual as one who "discards his academia to speak as a gifted dilettante". Though Imbuga never left the academia, he nevertheless through his plays, satirical commentaries and cartoons, does critically explore and engage with the political, social, economic and cultural issues that are of great importance to his society. Issues that according to Said (1996), are fundamental to the pursuits of any serious public intellectuals and which are of course a major

threat to the promise of democracy and good governance. Said aptly captures this role of the intellectual that seems to describe Imbuga's role as a creative public intellectual, most aptly, when he explains that:

> ….the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, and articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by government or corporations, and whose *raison d'etre* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standard behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously (1996:11).

Imbuga in fulfilling this role of public intellectual as underscored by Said above, seems to consciously and deliberately adopt, the strategies of the signifying monkey ala Henry Louis Gate Jr.'s remarkable theory of the Signifying Monkey[2], to speak truth to power through the strategies and the antics of concealment and defamiliarization. This strategy is effectively deployed in most of his dramatic imaginaries, for instance it is well accentuated by Osman, one of his artist-intellectual characters, who also seem to act as his mouthpiece in the highly satirical play - *Man of Kafira*- that brilliantly dramatizes the delusions of power exhibited by postcolonial dictators in Africa, when he categorically proclaimed that:

> …This play has been specially written for a specific audience. Now we don't want to preach to them because other people have tried it elsewhere and failed. Our target is the sub-conscious mind, that part of our brain that refuses to be cheated. And our primary weapons are symbols and images not swear words. (1984:8)

In fact, Osman goes further to make explicit, the role of the artist-intellectual in the society, when he declares that: "…Remember that it is our responsibility as free thinking artists to be sincere in our portrayal of what we consider to be truth. And we are using the only language that we know best. Remember, he who sits on truth sits on his pride" (1984:10). A critical unpacking of Osman's statements, reveals Imbuga's understanding of the way a creative public intellectual should speak truth to power. According to Imbuga, as implicated in the assertions of his fictional character- Osman- the creative intellectual must be witty and astute in his criticism and as such should not take an overtly confrontational stance.

This interpretation of the role and responsibility of the intellectual who wants to speak truth to power seems to have definitely influenced the dramatic tradition that he (Imbuga) frames his stage dramas on. He ingeniously situates himself, in what can be described aptly, as the tradition of the signifying monkey, that archetypal trickster, the very trope of figuration and signification, the master of deceit and deception, the embodiment of ambiguity and emblem of doublespeak. Imbuga's choice of dramatic imagination to articulate his ideas as well as critique his society seems to resonate with Said's argument that: "Speaking the truth to power is no Panglossian idealism: it is carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can do the most good and cause the right change"(1994: 75). By locating his stage dramas in the tradition of the signifying monkey, Imbuga

[2]*See Henry Louis Gate, Jnr (1989). The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism for more on the antics of the signifying monkey.*

in a sense, wittingly and cunningly collapses the boundaries of art and politics, entertainment and education, through his signature creative mode: the comedic drama. As John Ruganda has rightly noted in regard to his (Imbuga's) plays (that):

> …this good entertainment, which is couched in caustic satirical barbs, is the devastatingly deceptive hallmark of Imbuga's new dramatic vision. The humour which mollies the target victim as simultaneously condemns him is a strategy that has enabled the playwright to get away with radical implications of his political drama (1992: xv).

Imbuga is obviously in this regard, a different kind of public intellectual. Unlike most public intellectuals, he uses his fictional characters to mask his scathing attack on the political class that seems to have completely lost direction. The medium of stage drama enabled him to participate in public spheres, without necessarily having to foreground or assert, his own persona. It is obvious that characters in his plays assume his voice and agency, and as such created for him a public visibility larger than his own personal image as a writer and an academic. This seems to be consistent with Said's explanation of the role of a creative writer as an intellectual when he asserts that:

> In the language of the everyday use, a writer in the language and cultures that I am familiar with is a person who produces literature,that is, a novelist, a poet, a dramatist. I think it is generally true that in all cultures writers have a separate, perhaps even more honorific place than do intellectuals; the aura of creativity and an almost sanctified capacity for originality(often vatic in its scope and quality) accrues to them as it doesn't at all to intellectuals, who with regard to literature belong to slightly debased and parasitic class of critics…Yet during the last years of the twentieth century the writer has taken more and more of the intellectual's adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority … (2002: 25)

Through his plays, his ideas traverse a wide spectrum of society both as literary drama and performance texts. Given that his play texts have been in the school syllabus for decades his 'publics' are as such very wide and diverse. As Ruganda would remind us, "Imbuga's stage drama has responded sensitively to, and kept pace with, the accelerating social and political changes in Kenya…His scripts are a transparently concealed literary response to the major upheavals and the teething problems of his country" (1992:viii). In deed each of Imbuga's dramatic texts grapples with specific and very particularized issues but which are of universal and topical dimensions affecting the society: *Betrayal in the City, Man of Kafira, The Successor, Burning of Rags, Aminata* and *Return of Mgofu* all which explore and represent the different realities, circumstances and experiences of their moments of creation.

As a creative public intellectual, Imbuga in his dramatic imaginaries, criticizes while fundamentally evoking a vision with the express purpose to effect change and transformation in the society. Imbuga's recourse to the dramatic imaginary is perhaps coterminous with that of Cameroonian creative public intellectual Bole Butake who avows that:

> Having found the effectiveness of drama as a communication medium especially for the disadvantaged grassroots people, I have been able to continue to influence the later through the organization of numerous theatre workshops in the urban slums and villages on such diverse issues

> as women's rights and children's rights (including property ownership, widow, female genital mutilation, early marriages and pregnancies etc.), human rights, and democracy, minority rights, corruption in public life, environmental sustainability, good governance, conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS etc. Thus I have been able to continue with my teaching at the university while using theatre for development techniques through what I call 'People Theatre' and 'People Cinema' to influence and awaken grassroots people to problems with which they deal with on a daily basis (Butake read in Odhiambo; 2008:25).

Akin to Butake, reading or watching Imbuga's plays, one realizes that there is a self-conscious effort to conscientize society and consequently bring change in its various manifestations. Interestingly, there is also a striking similarity between Imbuga's and the Brazilian theatre practitioner, Augusto Boal[3] of the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, who argues that theatre is indeed a rehearsal for real change. This rehearsal for real change is evidently clear in Imbuga's deployment of the strategies of meta-theatre as found in *Betrayal in the City, Man of Kafira* and *Aminata*. The use of rehearsal for instance as a dramatic device in a way, reveals Imbuga's daring courage, to engage with what would have obviously been considered as a taboo subject, the 'un-mentionable' and the 'unspeakable' at the time of the writing and performance of his dramatic texts.

As creative intellectual, Imbuga through his dramatic imaginaries, acts as an interpreter for his society using the possibilities of the dramatic mode to make accessible such abstract concepts as nationalism, corruption, nepotism, gender equality and equity, paranoia, injustice, democracy, and impunity. For instance in the play, *Betrayal in the City*, Imbuga like other intellectuals of his time, explores the problems of post-independence Africa nation-states. *Betrayal in the City* dramatizes how the post-independence leaders have betrayed the aspirations and dreams of their people, leading to a serious sense of disillusionment that is aptly articulated by the intellectual-character Mosese as follows:

> That is why I don't believe in such crap as the last be first and blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven! For years we waited for the Kingdom, then they said it had come. Our Kingdom had come at last, but no. It was all an illusion…It was better while we waited. Now we have nothing to look forward to. We have killed our past and are busy killing the future (1976:31-2).

In Betrayal in the City Imbuga dramatizes how the ideal of the Kenyan nation that had been imagined at the dawn of independence had been unashamedly trashed by the new leaders. The play exposes how the project of nation building, and nation-ness was undermined through the inversion of policies such as nationalisation and Africanisation.

Mosese's tone resonates with that of a number of African writers such as Ayi Kwei Armah in *the Beautyfuls Are Not Yet Born*, Chinua Achebe in *A man of the People,* Wole Soyinka in *Kongi's Harvest*, Ngugi and Micere Mugo in *Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In *Betrayal in the City* Imbuga dramatizes how the ideal of the Kenyan nation that had been imagined at the dawn of independence had been unashamedly trashed by the new leaders. The play exposes how the project of nation building, and nation-ness was undermined through the inversion of policies such as nationalisation and Africanisation. As Mosese observes, "I said everything in mitigation. All I had to say but it did not help. Words have lost meaning to me. Rehabilitation, nationalisation, africanisation. What do all these words mean? What is africanisation in your mother tongue?"

Imbuga also lays bare how corruption, nepotism (selective breeding), dictatorship, injustice, mediocrity and impunity, suppression of intellectualism and culture of silence and inefficiency largely obfuscated the project of nation building and nation-ness. Thus, the play seems to highlight the deferment of the nationalists' dreams that echoes the Yoruba myth of "Abiku", of that stubborn child that is born and dies and visits the mother's womb to be born again just to die again.

[3]See Augusto Boal (1979) Theatre of the oppressed for detailed discussion of theatre as rehearsal for real life

In *Man of Kafira*, Imbuga satirizes post-colonial African leaders. He explores the futility of political change in post-colonial Africa. Through Boss, we are presented with African leaders who become paranoid after losing power; leaders who behave as if they hold title deeds of their nation-states. Therefore Boss is obsessed with desire to go back home even have has been overthrown, still suffering from delusion that the people of his country love him and long for his return. He declares that:

> Boss: Shaka, the great warrior of the South! Of course I am Shaka…And back in Kafira? That I promise them. I shall be back in Kafira. And it maybe sooner than most people think. I can promise them that. But what about the majority? The ones who know that I am still here in Abiara. What do they say? (1984: 28).

Imbuga uses the power of imagination to bring out this state of paranoia that afflicts the African leaders so vividly and convincingly. Because drama is about showing, he manages to aptly capture, through fictional characters these paranoid leaders better than any essay would ever do. As Osman the intellectual artistic-director of the play within a play and, who, as already mentioned earlier, and is putatively Imbuga's mouthpiece proclaims that,

> The point is that you are wearing a uniform. And remember that the cup that is clean on the outside and dirty inside is the most dangerous of drinking cups. This drama penetrates through man's external camouflage right into the remotest corner of his conscience. It is the human soul with all the possibilities of its rottenness that we are now putting to test. Right (1984:9)

Again Imbuga, like most intellectuals in post-colonial Africa such as Thandika Mkandawire, Ali Mazrui, Mahmood Mamdani, Chinua Achebe, Paul Tiyamba Zeleza, Amina Mama, Peter Anyang Nyong'o, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka, is seriously concerned with the problem of leadership in post-colonial Africa.

Other than politics, Imbuga also participated in other intellectual debates of his time mainly through the play *Aminata*, where he makes some of the most daring statements about oppressive patriarchy, gender inequalities and reproductive health. Issues which in the 1980s when the play was written and performed could not be publicly discussed. A few examples uttered by some characters in the play should suffice ass illustrations:

> Scenario 1
> Jumba: What project? To fool whom? Nuhu, that woman conspired with her father to slap Membe in the face and embarrass me and the stool of rule. Yes, she wants to use that thing she calls law to strangle our ways of ages. The blame sits on her father's head. He came, planted the new religion in our women's head and manured it with their ignorance.
> Do you not remember his return with the city people? Do you not remember how he stood there talking for hours on end, poisoning our women's head with is new wisdom. (1988: 17)

> Scenario 2
> Ngoya : … Our mission here is, as has been demonstrated by my brother, the Right Reverend Abu-Steiner, is as clear as the rainwater that falls freely from the skies. God meant us for life. We must therefore walk into the future with only those children that will make our tomorrow worth looking to. I agree with Reverend Abu-Steiner that every fourth child in every family should be seen as an extra mouth. (1988:19)

Scenario 3

Ngoya: Then why is it a taboo for you to eat from the same bowl which your menfolk eat? ... The truth my dear sisters, is that your menfolk have been fooling you over the years…To break away or stay still rooted to the same spot? That is why today, the church is pleased to offer you the symbol of all that has been denied you to this day, chicken. (1988: 21)

These three examples all address issues that were taboo to talk about openly in the 1980s. For instance scenario 1 insinuates the empowerment of women and transferring of agency through Christianity and Western Education. This is a direct affront to patriarchy. That explains why Jumba, a self-proclaimed male chauvinist is extremely agitated. He feels that his powers as a male are being eroded. In scenario 2, Ngoya who is one of the new converts to the new religion creates awareness about reproductive health and family planning. He thus encourages the families in this community to embrace family planning and have few children. While in scenario 3 Ngoya is a challenging patriarchy by creating awareness among women and mobilizing them against patriarchal systems that denies them from enjoying certain things in society just because they are women. From these examples, it is obvious that Imbuga was using drama as an intervention tool to challenge and subvert patriarchal hegemonic practices that were oppressive to women's freedom and development. The play therefore explicitly sets out to debunk cultural myths that marginalize women such as those that restrict women from eating certain food such as chicken's gizzards; from holding positions of leadership; those that deny women rights to inherit land from left by their fathers.

For instance, he uses the joker as a dramatic device to confront taboo and other sensitive subjects; he also uses play-within-a-play as technique to rehearse what is perceived as unspeakable and unachievable in real-life situations. For instance, the coup in Betrayal in the City is framed as a rehearsal and the transfer of the land title in Aminata is also framed as such. This resonates well with Augusto Boal's ideas that drama/theatre is indeed a rehearsal for real change.

In the play *Aminata*, Imbuga deploys the characters Aminata, Pastor Ngoya and Mulemi to demonstrate that given equal opportunities, women can engage meaningfully and significantly in contributing to the project of the nation-building. Imbuga addresses several issues that even in the present moment still fall under the ambit of the culture of silence. For instance, he directly confronts the controversial issue of reproductive health and family planning that most people as well as institutions would prefer to keep silent about. But more importantly he transfers the burden of family planning from the responsibility of the woman to that of the man. It is the male character Mulemi who chooses opts for vasectomy as a method of family planning instead of his wife Aminata. Mulemi a medical doctor vehemently puts a case for family planning when he argues that:

Mulemi: Auntie, I will not exchange words with you on this issue. Family planning is a topic that is dear to my heart. It is my now and tomorrow. I have spent a lot of time finding answers to a lot of questions in this field. A healthy future, a healthy nation for our children and their children that has always been my concern. The fact that Aminata's father was equally concerned with the same dynamite is purely coincidental. ..We planned for two children and we are happy. Happy because the children's future well-being is partly guaranteed by their number.

Kezia: God put Adam and Hawa in the Garden of Eden and said, "Go ye and multiply." He did tell them to go ye and play darts! (1988:35-6).

The advantage that Imbuga has, as a creative intellectual, especially as a dramatist, is that he can use various dramatic techniques to say and show what other intellectuals cannot dare say. For instance, he uses the joker as a dramatic device to confront taboo and other sensitive subjects; he also uses play-within-a-play as technique to rehearse what is perceived as unspeakable and unachievable in real-life situations. For instance, the coup in *Betrayal in the City* is framed as a rehearsal and the transfer of the land title in *Aminata* is also framed as such. This resonates well with Augusto Boal's ideas that drama/theatre is indeed a rehearsal for real change. Interestingly, a number of

Imbuga's rehearsals have been prophetic and have come to pass. There have been numerous coups in Africa; the new Kenyan Constitution promulgated in 2010 has vindicated Imbuga on the desire to have women occupy significant positions in the society and to own land in paternal homes. Imbuga's role as an intellectual but more importantly as a creative public one is well summarized by Thandika Mkandawire assessment that: "Intellectual work is quintessentially the labour of mind and soul. Not surprisingly intellectuals have played a major role in shaping passions, ideologies and societal visions". (2005:1)

In conclusion Imbuga as an academic, creative writer and a performing artist can correctly be described as a creative public intellectual. This is because his writings viciously and overtly explore similar problems pursued by other public intellectuals even if these others use other platforms such as radio, television and the new media. The societal concerns that he explores in his writings in various ways therefore define him as a public intellectual. By adopting the strategies of the signifying monkey, he dared the public space to speak truth to power.

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Tracing the Evolution into Sigana Art Form

Oby Obyerodhyambo

Coloniality and decoloniality are often mistaken to mean the same as colonialism and decolonisation respectively. This confusion could well be deliberate since the former concepts are exceedingly radical ideas in the present global power discourse while the latter, especially in the context of culture and performing arts, have been overused to the point of meaning very little. Gatsheni (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) offers a definition of coloniality that is derived from a description of the trauma arising from the injustices the African continent and other post-colonial nationalities have endured. Gatsheni's definition cites the slave trade (and of course slavery), imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, neoliberalism (including the Washington Consensus and Structural Adjustment Programmes- SAPs), and today globalisation, as ongoing shocks despite the end of colonialism. This description traces current neurosis to periods well before colonialism which in the case of Kenya ended with the lowering of the Union Jack in 1963. Gatsheni goes on to explain that coloniality is really about the current global power structure that sustains an asymmetrical power relationship between the Global south ex-colonies and the dominant Euro-American hegemonies.

Coloniality continues to exist and exert influence and dominance, and cultural expressive forms are used to entrench this hegemonistic reality. Coloniality is the insidious psychosis that remains in the minds, lives, languages, dreams, imaginations, and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa and the entire global South ((Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 10) Coloniality continues to affect those who survived colonialism and who bear the brunt of neo-colonialism and nowhere is coloniality more apparent than in cultural expression. Coloniality is perpetuated through the systems of socialization such as schools, colleges, universities, churches and the media that produce a self-deprecating, alienated African terrified of the power of coloniality. At another level coloniality functions at the level of epistemic capture ensuring that the processes of knowledge generation as well as who generates knowledge, the codification and dissemination of knowledge is closely manipulated so that the knowledge does not challenge the status quo – what has been referred to as epistemicide. This level of coloniality assists imperialism and neo-colonial thinking by ensuring that Euro-American epistemologies remain dominant and frame knowledge generation. Lastly, coloniality defines identity at both the ontological and axiological level. The concept of being – of identity and autonomy is central to self-determination and the capacity to craft own and narrate one's story. Framing the self takes the form of determining what values and principles are reified and those that become definitive of a people.

Decoloniality is the conscious effort to rid oneself and others of coloniality. Decoloniality is a political-cum epistemological liberatory project (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Decoloniality is premised on subverting the three concepts of coloniality cited above, the coloniality of power, of knowledge and coloniality of being. The 1976 battle for the Kenya National Theatre space to perform Betrayal in the City and The Trial of Dedan Kimathi both which were entrants to the FESTAC 77 has been described by Ngugi wa Thiongó (wa Thiongó , 1986) as emblematic of an attempt to assert the authentic Kenyan theatre in the face of the colonial cultural hegemony. Ngugi has questioned how foreign performances could be accorded prominence over what was authentically African and Kenyan. Ngugi's

dichotomization of Euro American theatrical traditions versus the authentic Kenyan theatre has received acceptance as descriptive of the struggle between colonial and neo-colonial forces in culture. Kenyan theatre historians have acceded to this narrative without questioning the fact that both these plays though written by Kenyan writers were in the western tradition.

African and Kenyan theatre scholars create a chronological divide that betrays the embedded coloniality in their construction of the performance continuum. The theatre studies begin with the colonial or post-colonial era and into contemporary theatre. In most cases, the pre-colonial creative performances are described as, 'drama' not theatre or are identified as distinct incoherent art forms such as narration, dance, music, proverbs, riddles. Sometimes, 'dance drama' is used as a descriptive term that though not used pejoratively suggests a mish-mash of performance genres but not theatre. There are scholars who have explained overlooking the creative art forms using the excuse that these elements of expression are covered under Orature or oral literature studies and therefore do not need to be included in studies on theatre (Komu, 2016). Such an assertion could not be further from the truth because Oral literature studies seldom go into the performance or performativity of these genres and often confine their examination to form. In very few cases have the performances been acknowledged as theatre.

To my knowledge, a study by Dyer (2017) on the role of theatre in the political history of Kenya is the first to examine theatre in Kenya as theatre as far back as 1895. Dyer without calling it out as such asserts that cultural subversion was an active strategy by the colonised while colonial domination still held sway. She argues that colonized people used artistic expression from way back to sound like they accepted the language and ideology of the colonizers while simultaneously adapting British performance idioms to mock and undermine colonial authority. Ngugi wa Thiongó while making a contribution to the debate about space in African theatre makes the following remarks,

> Drama in pre-colonial Kenya was not, then, an isolated event: it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities. It was also entertainment in the sense of involved enjoyment: it was moral instruction: and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival. This drama was not performed in special space set aside for the purpose… 'The empty space', among the people, was part of the tradition (Ngugi, 1981:37)

Note that Ngugi tellingly speaks about drama and not theatre forcing us to conclude that despite his assertion, Ngugi himself was using the Euro-American definition that separates drama from theatre.

Dyer articulates what is central to this chapter - that is to debunk the notion that theatre in East Africa is associated to and only emerges with colonialism. Dyer (2017) states that by uncritically accepting this categorization the earlier researchers such a David Kerr, Martin Benham, Evan Mwangi and Ciarunji Chesaina reinforced this idea that theatre began with colonialism. Theatre scholars and critics who limit the history of Kenyan theatre to post-colonial performances while failing to consider traditional theatrical forms, performance techniques, styles and traditional art-forms unwittingly show evidence of coloniality.

Studies of Kenyan theatre has largely relied on foreign Euro-American theories and hence the Euro-American epistemology defines what constitutes theatre. My contention is that this Euro-American framing of what is and what is not theatre has fundamentally narrowed the theatre discourse in Kenya and indeed other African spaces. In an attempt at presenting an alternate epistemology, this chapter traces the evolution of Siganas - a theatrical art form that draws from the well of traditional Africanist cosmology, epistemology, ontology

and axiology. Sigana questions the western Euro-American epistemology, ontology, axiology and aesthetic and argues that by perpetuating the Euro-American conceptualization of theatre it falls prey to the movement to ignore, revile and misinterpret and engage in effort of a cancelling strategy by agents of coloniality. Two studies on Theatre by Odera Outa and Amadi Atsiaya represent two Kenyan theatre scholars who have delved into the evolution of Sigana. Odera Outa concentrated his analysis on the issues that the art form dealt with and the way that these issues fitting within the political discourse of the day while Amadi Atsiaya (who was himself among the pioneers of Sigana) limited himself to examining the form, and used two illustrative pieces to discuss the Sigana form.

Evolution of Sigana Art Form

Odera Outa's opening epitaph of Chapter 2 is a quotation from the Black British Stuart Hall that says,

> …sometimes national cultures are tempted to turn the clock back, to retreat defensively to that lost time when the nation was 'great', and to restore past identities. This is the regressive, the anachronistic element in the national cultural story. But often this very return to the past conceals a struggle to mobilize 'the people' to purify their ranks, to expel the 'others' who threaten their identity and to gird their loins for a new march forwards… (Stuart Hall 1992: 295. cited in *Performing Power in An African Postcolony; Drama and Theatre in Modern Kenya*, 2002)

This quotation succinctly captures the effort of the initiators of the Sigana art form. The blurb of an online touristic information wall describes Sigana in these words *'Sigana is a traditional performance art which contains elements of all the major Kenya art forms: storytelling, song, music, dance, rituals etc. Active participation is a key feature of sigana. The line between performers and audience is less clear than in many other Kenya art forms* http://www.kenya-advisor.com/kenya-art.html.' This description carries within it several fundamental elements that guided the evolution of the form and which separated it from the dominant western tradition of theatre.

The evolution of Sigana art form is a complex interface between repudiation of the western art forms and re-discovering and inventing ways in which the form could be useful in engaging the audiences. The very naming of the art form as, Sigana was significant. Sigana is a Luo word that means narrative, it is an orally rendered communication that is fully factual, partly fictional or totally fantasy. Essentially, narrative exists as a performed piece of communication and one cannot envisage a static narrative that is un-told. Sigana dispenses with the artificial separation between a script and the performance of a script which is a significant feature of western theatre tradition. By adopting this term, we were elevating performance and orality as the key part of Kenyan theatre. Separately the performer and the Sigana have potential energy that is transformed to kinetic energy the moment that the narrator breathes his or her life into a Sigana. The Sigana performance is the combined energy in motion, such is the dynamist of the two elements coming together. One does not exist without the other the way that a script can exist independent of the performer in the western tradition.

The second element of the Sigana is the setting. Sigana takes place in a certain space that is both real and virtual. The Sigana story-line has its locus, for example the way that Nyamgondho's story is based in Gwassi, but in Sigana the narrator locates the story within a physical space of choice and a virtual space that is created in the mind of the Sigana participant. Just as Amadi Atsiaya (2002) notes, the narrator paints a picture in the mind of the participants and this picture is not dependent on setting as happens with western theatre. Indeed, the set in Sigana is non-existent outside of the mind of the participant. The role of the narrator includes bringing to life the setting of the narrative, the vivid description of this space includes all the living and non-living elements, it includes the weather and terrestrial and extra-terrestrial beings. These setting is not fixed and is left to the discretion of the narrator what elements to include based on their assessment of the participants.

In Kenyan theatre, thanks to Ngugi wa Thiongó, language of performance is among the most interrogated and debated issue on decoloniality. Ngugi says, 'I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples' (1990, p. 74). Ngugi is asserting that the replacement of the western, European language with Gikuyu is part of decoloniality. On this Sigana and Ngugi are on the same page. Sigana sees language as part of the ontological imperative where the narrator and the Sigana maintain a language that identifies them and bestows upon them an identity. In the context of Sigana, the mismatch and contradictions between the participants' identity in real life and their language would not arise. Ndigirigi explains an encounter he had with an ex-Kamirithu member,

> While the Kamirithu plays facilitated a whole new set of social relations among the diverse participants in the project who were confronted with their material positions, the conditions for transformative change were not ripe. Paradoxically, the participants' hyper consciousness of class relations and their adoption of fairly Marxist language in my interviews with them sounded contrived… (2014, p. 55)

What this reveals is that the language struggle that Ngugi describes is actually his personal struggle as a writer within the western tradition. In real life the individuals who were part of the Kamirithu experiment consumed a script in a language that they did not internalise and whose ethos did not rub off their concept of identity. So while Ngugi was struggling to divest himself of English as a foreign language, the use of Gikuyu still carried with it the European Marxist identity. An effort in decoloniality seeks to affirm a new understanding of identity that does not align one to coloniality which makes them adopt an identity that they believe is superior to their own.

Whereas western based theatre performances of opera or dance drama conceptualises these as separate but fused artistic creations, the use of sound - be it song, percussions, wind instrument, onomatopoeic sounds - in Sigana is a mimicry of life. Every song has a melody a rhythm and with it comes a cadence and movement, song is narration rendered to melody and thus there is no distinction between song and dance and music in Sigana. Part of the decoloniality is the debunking of the Euro-American notion that these elements can be separated. The performer of Sigana seamlessly weaves the movement, song and dance in the narration so that total harmony is achieved. Thus, the western European proscenium notion of an orchestra pit where musician wait for the musical bits while the spoken ones are presented is untenable. The evolution of Sigana re-casted movement dance and music back to the core of the performance.

The position of the narrator in the unfolding of a Sigana has been exhaustively described by Amadi Atsiaya (2002) when he describes the commentator role of the narrator who also doubles up as the voice of reason or the conscious of the society. In the narrator is explored the axiological significance of performance. The narrator questions the values, principles, ethics and morals in a performance. The moral and ethical dilemmas are presented to the audience and they are called upon to engage with the issues. The narrator closes the distance between the perfomers and the participants, there is an engagement between these two parties and hence the audience actor binary ceases to exist. Odera Outa traces the evolution of the narrator from the performacen of *La Femme Fatale* an adaptation of Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*. Outa (2002) analyses the role of the narrator and concludes that it was *LaFemme* that premiered the Sigana mode in the 1990s, by providing an omnicsient narrator (the story teller conditionality), imbued with powerful performative skills (Outa, 2002, p. 44). The role of the narrator is central to the Sigana form as it is crucial in maintaining realism in the performance and acting as a constant reminder that there is no space for suspension of disbelief (Atsiaya, 2002). This is yet another element of decoloniality and dispensing with the Greco-Roman tradion that allows for

audiences to float into a haze of fantasy. The Sigana narrator ensures that the engagement between the narrative, the narrator and the participants remains at the realism realm. The probing questions by the omniscient, omnipresent narrator serves to remind the participanst that there are dilemmas to be unravelled.

Turning to the evolution of the creative process, Sigana embraces the joint or co-creation approach which, while not ruling out a lead-creator, leaves space for collaborative work. Members of the creative team engage in researching the material and building the story together. As the story takes shape more material is added to it as the production matures. This is a fundamental departure from the autocracy of the script that is consistent with Euro-American theatre traditions. In the most evolved state Sigana would have not fixed scriptwriter since individual renditions of the ever evolving narrative would be tested and re-tested. As circumstances change the narrative gets remoulded to align to the emerging reality and truth. Outa acknowledges the versatility of Sigana and its ability to engage with issues as they emerge (Outa, 2009).

Conclusion

Sigana as an art form cannot stop evolving. As is matures it gets embedded deeper into the performance traditions of Kenyan communities and moves further from the Western tradition of theatrical presentation. If more and more research oriented engagements are initiated to interrogate the form and its influence on epistemological directions, it will reveal nuances of Sigana that to-date are unexplored.

Oby is an all-round theatre practitioner, an award-winning playwright, director, actor and dramaturg, storyteller who evolved the sigana art form. This contemporized narrative performance seamlessly weaves a tapestry of narration, banter, riddling, interactivity, music, dance and movement. Oby is a Health communications researcher and strategic communications in health specialist.

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Participative Storytelling for Integration of Urban Refugee Children – A Pilot Study

Oliver Mbayi & Habil Otanga

Abstract

Children of refugees encounter stress associated with their families' new environment and cultural systems. Since people live in a language, the feeling of exclusion in school and social activities are marked with stereotypes and discrimination. This pilot study sought to establish the efficacy of participative storytelling in helping the children tell their stories– experiences, conflicts, fears, hopes, among others. The study sought to pilot the use of participative storytelling in mapping psychosocial adjustment difficulties among the children and improving psychosocial adjustment. Using purposive sampling, one school serving both refugee children and host communities from Nairobi's Mathare informal settlement was selected. A total sample of 45 children aged 12 to 14 was drawn including 25 girls and 20 boys. The findings show the potency of participative storytelling in cultivating assertive and supportive behavior among the children without taking advantage of their vulnerability. We recommend a study on establishing the efficacy of participative storytelling as an alternative approach to enhancing psychosocial support among refugee children.

Key words: *Participative storytelling, integration, psychosocial support, urban refugee children.*

Introduction

Kenya remains a haven for people fleeing conflict in neighbouring countries. According to the UNHCR, up to 81,000 asylum seekers and refugees are catered for under the Urban Refugee Program. However, urban refugees remain a hidden population, exposed to legal hurdles, difficulties in integration with host communities, discrimination and stereotypes (including xenophobia) and protected by minimal or non-existent support systems (Pavanello et al., 2010). Whereas the UNHCR and its partners prioritize community engagement in dealing with gender-based violence, access to education, foster care for separated children and unaccompanied minors, and access to healthcare, the welfare of urban refugees and asylum seekers could be better improved through closer engagements with host communities.

Children of refugees encounter stress associated with their families' adaptation and acculturation, family conflict, use of new language in school and experiences of social exclusion, stereotypes and discrimination (Anderson, 2020). Therefore, helping such children integrate by connecting them to other children within host communities ultimately creates another layer of support system. This can be done by allowing children/minors to tell their "stories" – experiences, conflicts, fears, hopes, among others. Participative storytelling will enable children of refugees/asylum seekers to communicate in the local language of instruction that ultimately increases their sense of belongingness and self-worth, deal with underlying trauma and enhance harmony with self and others.

In line with Plummer (2004), participative storytelling provides children with the means to foster creative use of imagination to help them build a unified sense of their inner and outer worlds; to enable them to see events, problems and challenges from a different

perspective; and help them to find the most appropriate way forward for their individual needs. Storytelling is the most appropriate approach of eliciting children's expression and hence the most likely to ensure cross-community dialogue between refugee children and host communities.

Therefore, the study hypothesized that piloting a participative storytelling intervention would facilitate the creation of safe spaces for refugee/asylum seekers' and host communities' children by sharing their experiences, conflicts, fears, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. By developing better adjustment and coping skills, integration would be achieved.

The study therefore sought to:

1. Pilot the use of participative storytelling in mapping psychosocial adjustment difficulties among refugee children.
2. Find out the efficacy of participative storytelling in improving psychosocial adjustment.
3. Determine the effectiveness of storytelling as a therapeutic tool in self- regulation among children.

Methodology

Participants for the study comprised 45 Grade 6 and 7 children from an international school catering for refugee and local children in Mathare informal settlement, Nairobi, Kenya. The slum is one of the largest in Africa. The sample consisted of 25 girls and 20 boys (age range 12-14 years). Sessions lasting an average of 1 hour were held in groups of 15 children each. A total of 15 sessions were conducted between February and April 2023. All sessions were conducted within the school premises. The researcher sought written consent from the school administration before commencement of the study.

Setting the stage

The study sought to pilot the use of participative storytelling to map psychosocial adjustment difficulties among the children and improve psychosocial adjustment. To establish a safe and non-judgmental space, which is essential in self disclosure, we employed creative imagination tasks including games, short stories, short skits and group-based facilitator-directed activities. This intervention was highly interactive. Games accompanied by dance and chanting sought to warm up the children before sessions, and to explore and nurture children's bonding abilities.

Warm up

To help children feel at ease, raise mood, lessen fatigue and in line with the principles of expressive techniques in therapy, warm up activities preceded sessions. These activities that took a maximum of 15 minutes comprised song and dance, or creative games. This was significant in cultivating principles of creativity, sponteinity and surplus reality; thus, enhancing genuine encounters with the children. This cultivated a cooperative environment in which participants were able to develop their stories based on their daily case stories. An example of a creative activity is as follows:

Imagine you are in a horse racecourse. You are riding on a horse along the racetrack. Mount the horse. (The participants mount an imaginary horse). Start riding. There are hurdles along the track which you would need to evade by jumping… so…jump! (Participants jump). There is also a water pool that you will pass through as well, and you would have to bend your knees to pass through the water and make the splash sound "Whoosh" while at it.(Participants do so) The facilitator tries it again with the same instructions and from time to time goes from the hurdles to the water pool and the participants have to jump and bend their knees making the splash sound as they run along the imaginary track mounted on the imaginary horse.

The fun process informed a debrief session with participants pointing out to the challenges that come with every moment of their daily life that calls for growth and development. That

every stage of life is marked by success and failure; and therefore, we should not be discouraged when things go wrong. With the participants energized and intimate, the stage was set for participative dialogic activities.

Storytelling in a session with children

2.0 Mapping psychosocial adjustment difficulties

2.1 Games

Participants were taken through a process of empowerment to discuss and share their encounters with self and others in school and home environment. The participative pedagogical approaches that inform storytelling were made attractive to encourage the children to share their dominant and problem saturated narratives. A wide menu of spontaneous games was provided to elicit various reactions and talking points among the participants. They were involved in theatre games, body movements, collaborative tasks, role encounters, communal dialogue; creative activities that enhance participative storytelling. The following three games are highlighted:

Game 1: Concentration is the game

This game involves the students and facilitators to stand in a circle. Having 15 participants, the first three were the "executive committee" which comprised of the president (Prezzo), the vice president (Vicey) and the secretary (Secre). The rest of the participants took number from 1-13. It was then decided that from number 7-13, belonged to the *"Mashinani Group"* also known as grassroots level.

Following the rhythm from the beginning, when one participant failed to keep the rhythm or stuttered, they were required to move to the number 15 (the last number), hence making every student acquire a new number.

Game 2: Dancing Chairs

This game requires seats to be arranged in a circle facing away from each other. The chairs have to be one less than the number of people. Music is turned on and everyone

participating in the dance is expected to dance. Once the music is turned off, the participants are to find a seat. The one who misses a seat is out of the game. The game is to continue until we have a final winner.

OR
In an inner circle, arrange chairs with one less number compared to the participants of the game. In another circle, one step away from the chairs (This is the outer circle) you will be dancing to music and once the music stops, you must be seated on one of the chairs in the inner circle. Of course, there won't be enough seats for everyone, so whoever is left standing when the music stops would have to leave the circle. One chair is taken out of the inner circle for every interval so that the number of chairs is always one less than that of the participants. You must keep on dancing as long as the music keeps on playing.

Game 3: Yes Game
Participants get into pairs. One to ask the other a question/ favour and the other to respond in the following ways:

- For the first round: YES.
- For the second round: YES BUT…
- For the third round: YES AND… *(Adapted from: Tauber & Mester, 2007)*.

The same question is to be asked through each of these three responses. The roles are to be reversed for the second part of that game. The person who was answering the questions would now be the ones to ask for these favours.

2.2 Facilitator-directed activities
Facilitators provided instruction and/or led activities in groups which aimed at sparking spontaneity and surplus reality in subsequent discussion/responses.

Activity 1: Tapping with Eyes Closed
The participants were asked to close their eyes, and the facilitator had to tap them. The instructions were as follows.

When tapped once – the participant was required to open their eyes;
When tapped twice - the participant was required to open their eyes and stand; and,
When tapped three times – the participant was required to open their eyes and do anything they wanted.

Activity 2: Doing, Saying and meaning activity
Participants are asked to sit in groups of three. In the first round, the groups were to choose a cooperative activity to be done by a team of three in a conveyor; for example, washing clothes, washing dishes, constructing a house, cultivating land etc and carry out the activity silently. In the second round, the same activity was repeated accompanied with talking about what they were doing. For example, if washing clothes, they are to talk about washing clothes. In the third round, the same action was carried out while talking about something different from what they were doing. In the final round, participants were to maintain the action, talk about something different and then make sure to cut off/ignore/isolate one of the group members (Adopted from: Tauber & Mester, 2007).

Activity 3: Trust Exercise
This requires a group of two members. One member is required to close his/ her eyes. The other partner is to take their hand and walk with them across the room. The member who has closed their eyes is supposed to trust the one leading the role. The exercise is to be done in turns.

2.3 Short skits/Spontaneous scenarios

Participants were allowed to act out spontaneous scenarios. As facilitators, we made significant observations about key enactments that established psychosocial adjustment difficulties among the children as discussed herein.

The following were recorded:
Scenario 1: Participants acted a scenario where all the students in the class had scored high grades apart from one. The teacher read out the marks loudly to the whole class. What follows is a mockery of the student. They jeered the student who had recorded low marks and laughed at him, calling him names and making funny faces. This habit of mocking and laughing at the student continued after class sessions.

Scenario 2: A group of boys were chatting. A girl passed by and one of the boys boasted to the rest that he knew the girl and she would respond when he called her over. The boy then catcalled; the girl totally ignored him and continued her way. The rest of the friends laugh at the boy. (The facilitator asked what they would do)

Scenario 3: A boy was bullied by his classmates. He went to report to the teacher. The teacher questioned the classmates who denied involvement in the bullying. The teacher then yelled at the bullied boy. (The facilitator asked what they would do if in such a scenario).

2.4 Short story: Hare and Tortoise

The Hare challenged Tortoise to a race. Of course, Hare runs faster than Tortoise and was quite confident that he was going to win. Asked if they would dare compete with the hare, (if they were in place of the Tortoise) all the participants said they would not because it was obvious that the hare was the fastest.
However, in the story, the Tortoise took to the challenge. The hare went well ahead of the Tortoise. He constantly stopped to laugh at Tortoise. Since he was near the finish line and Tortoise was still a long way off, Hare decided to wait for the Tortoise to have one last laugh before finishing the race. Alas! Hare napped off! Tortoise did not stop. He continued slowly and went past sleeping Hare and towards the finish line. Tortoise won the race to the disappointment of Hare. Hare was woken up by celebration and jubilation from other animals. Hare demanded for a repeat race. Asked if they would accept a repeat were they Tortoise, the participants collectively said no.
However, Tortoise took to the challenge and this time Hare did not fool around. He went all the way and won. Tortoise came in after a long time but finished the race. He went ahead to congratulating Hare.

3. Psychosocial adjustment challenges

Exclusion

In the "Tapping with eyes closed" activity, students who were not tapped reported that they felt left out, abandoned, forgotten, nervous, anxious, curious and became inquisitive. Additionally, students who were not tapped felt "hopeless" because of unfulfilled expectations of being tapped.
In Activity 2, the ones cut off said they felt ignored, angry and rejected.

Emotional Self-Regulation

In the "Tapping with eyes closed" activity, it was recorded that some children who were tapped multiple times tapped their friends in a show of kindness. However, those tapped in most cases did not say "thank you" and hence lacked gratitude.

Children reported feelings of "helplessness" and "giving up" and of "being demeaned" when they failed to keep the rhythm or stuttered and were required to move to the number last number in the "Concentration Game". When this happened and mates laughed at, mocked or pulled faces at them, some children expressed feelings of

shame, embarrassment and anger. Some also felt "bad" when mates failed to acknowledge them or "when someone yawns while I am talking to them".

Other children's reactions were also responsible for emotional disturbances. In the acted scenario where the teacher read out marks loudly in class, it was evident that mocking and laughter made others "feel bad because I feel like I have failed". Therefore, others' reactions were a marker for success and failure.

Creating Safe Spaces

The role of the teacher came under scrutiny in the creative activities. For instance, in the scenario where the teacher read out marks loudly in class and a student was mocked and jeered, such odd behavior was not reported to the teacher because "the teacher will call out the bullies, and the bullies will come to finish you and deal with you". It was therefore evident that the teacher does not create conducive spaces for interaction by passively allowing bullying in school.

Bullying also emerged as a major theme in Skit No. 3 where a child is bullied by classmates and reports to the teacher. It was reported that bullies use a variety of insults including "you stink", your uniform is torn", or "your head is misshapen". Interestingly, bullying did not stop when the skit involved the school Principal.

It also appeared that such children rarely reported bullying to their parents or guardians. Varied reasons were provided for the reluctance. Some parents did not want to delve into school "problems" instead advising their children that "when you are out of the school gate, leave your school problems there". Others had more pressing personal/family issues and did not want to be involved while others openly denigrated their children by saying that "I sold a cow to take another cow to school". However, parents retained a sense of authority in dealing with cases of bullying. In the skit where a child was bullied and found no help when the case was reported to the teacher and the school Principal, the appearance of a mother to one of the bullies resulted in humility and apology to the bullied child.

Friends were the most important point of reference for the children. Unfortunately, some children did not have any friends. For instance, when told to advice the classmate who had been mocked and jeered in class when the teacher read out marks loudly, one child suggested getting friends that one can trust and talk to. However, the mocked child reported that he had no friends because he feared that friends would spread false information to others.

Contrastingly, in the "Tapping with eyes closed" activity, some children who were tapped multiple times chose to tap their friends to show kindness. Similarly, friends expressed pity, sympathy and annoyance at their friend who was ignored by a girl he was sure would respond to him in Skit No. 2. This solidarity is a confidence booster for children and enables them to make further attempts in communicating to others. In yet another case, in the "Dancing Chairs" game, one of the participants who had lost in the first round was given a second chance to play by a fellow participant and "was very excited to get another chance and be the first runners up". It is evident that care for the other promotes feelings of inclusion because "being excluded wasn't a good feeling".

Fear of Negative Evaluation

One barrier to effective communication is inflexibility in the tendency to commit

to one perspective. Ultimately, such thinking bred unhealthy competition. This was manifested in the "Hare and Tortoise" story. Children said that Hare's parents would be very angry at the result, that Hare would be angry and should ask for a re-run. To the question whether Tortoise would accept a re-run, children were adamant that they would not accept, and Tortoise's parents would wonder whether Tortoise was "stupid". However, Tortoise remaining in the race despite losing in the re-run showed hard work, high self-esteem and not allowing Hare's win to have an effect.

During the discussion, one child intimated that he stopped participating in athletics activities because he was once tripped, fell and had to undergo surgery. Another child told of how he ran for election he was sure to win and failed to receive any votes from his friends.

Further discussion revealed that children fear negative evaluation because of the conditional acceptance prevalent in homes and the practical consequences that follow. The participants noted that poor performers are subject of mockery in school and at home, but unlike the tortoise, many lose self-esteem. For instance, one child told of poor relations with the mother when they failed an exam because some "privileges" would be withdrawn. Furthermore, feelings of exclusion were always accompanied by anger, bitterness, abandonment and worthlessness. They lack self-efficacy as a result, leading to continued poor performance.

Social Connectedness

This "Yes" game explored aspects of friendship where vulnerability and intimacy were involved, but also provided insights into adolescent intimacy and relationships. The children asked favours that revolved around boy-girl relations. With heightened mental, emotional and physical growth, adolescents require guidance concerning how to navigate feelings and communicate with the opposite sex. When the game was further tweaked by facilitators, themes of conditional acceptance emerged. For instance, participants felt that adding "but" or adding conditions to the response "yes" indicated the lack of "genuine friendship".

4. Efficacy of intervention

Bonding emerged as an important outcome when children were allowed to work in groups. In Activity 2, group members loved when they performed the agreed action while talking about something different. This is because the work was done faster and with less effort. Therefore, collaboration led to seamless action.

The concept of resilience emerged as a solution to navigating difficult situations. For instance, children understood that Tortoise remained in the race to the end despite Hare's win in the re-run was a good example of hard work, self-esteem and refusing to allow others' success to define one. Therefore, children understood the value of resilience in relating with others especially in competitive situations.

Group activities enabled children to understand others' pain, needs and perspectives. In response to what they would do if/when one is angry, some said that they would "accommodate them", or "ask them if they are comfortable when you sit next to them". Children also demonstrated understanding of the bad effects of isolating peers through expressions of sympathy. Group activities also enabled multicultural understanding. Children understood that appreciating other cultures entailed singing and dancing and wearing outfits associated with cultures.

Conclusion

Findings of the study show the difficulties in creating requisite safe spaces for children of refugees/immigrants. First, parents are not emotionally present in children's lives which has bred frustration, with implications on communication. This is evident in two ways. Parents are apathetic or simply unconcerned about what happens in school or are self-absorbed in their own struggles. Parents are also more likely to validate their children conditionally. Secondly, teachers are either unable or unwilling to maintain privacy on matters touching on children's sense of self-worth; and are unable to handle bullying directed at some children. Their acts of omission increase the likelihood of cases of bullying being repeated. Children cannot trust their peers with their troubles as they are afraid they will publicize them. They are also more likely to fall prey to bullies while in school. The inability of school and home environments to create safe spaces has resulted in negative emotions including anger and frustration.

Finally, expressive activities aided in exploration of feelings when faced with challenging situations that bred loneliness and exclusion and responses to asymmetrical friendships where one was taken advantage of. Activities therefore helped children be both assertive and supportive of others without taking advantage of their vulnerability. Enabling children to form and maintain meaningful connections as they develop into intimate persons is an important outcome of these expressive activities.

Recommendations

1. This pilot intervention is a good launching pad for dynamic integration initiatives among refugee children who need a safe platform to have their voices heard.
2. We recommend that a full study be carried on establishing the efficacy of participative storytelling in integrating refugee children.
3. We recommend the exploration of arts approaches for psychosocial support among children as an alternative medium in schools.

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Kisumu; the Radical Homeland for Kenya's Applied Theatre movement

Jane Plastow

The Origins of Applied Theatre in Kenya

When we talk about theatre in Kenya the discussion is normally dominated by what has been happening in Nairobi and its environs. This article, however, takes us right across the country, to Kisumu and the west of the country. It argues that while commercial, international and political theatre have been centred on the capital, it was from the west that the form first known as Popular Theatre, then Theatre for Development and now Applied Theatre, was experimented with, developed and theorised. This is important because outside the Kenya Schools' Drama Festival[1], since the 1990s, by far the largest amount of theatre made across the country has been drama made for social purposes, most often funded by local and international development agencies. This is the art this article is discussing.

Two names are important to the beginning of the story. These are Lenin Ogolla and Opiyo Mumma. Both had been heavily involved with the universities Free Travelling Theatre Movement; Ogolla as a student at Moi Univesity and Mumma as a lecturer of Theatre Arts at University of Nairobi. These theatres were radical, experimental and committed to reaching out to *wananchi* (Plastow, 2021, 138-143); their influence can be seen in the work the two men subsequently engaged in.

Socialist-inspired, people-centred theatre, aimed at empowering ordinary people to debate issues close to their hearts and look for community-based solutions to local problems had been spreading up from southern Africa since the 1970s. By the early '80s the form was being enthusiastically taken up by Tanzanian intellectuals and later that decade it also began to influence leading artists and activists in Uganda. Ogolla interestingly acknowledges the Ugandan pioneer of Theatre for Development, Rose Mbowa, as his 'teacher' (1997, vii), showing how important inter-African vectors of transmission were in spreading the new form. Of course, during the same time period Ngugi wa Thiong'o was experimenting with his own people-centred, highly political theatre in Kamiriithu, with the political backlash to that work leading to a state-level suspicion of theatre that caused not only Ngugi's flight into exile, but also the persecution of many politically engaged playwrights, and a failure to develop opportunities for theatre training in Kenya's universities which has hampered the sector to this day. Unlike Ngugi's work, the new popular theatre would not be overtly political, though inherently, with its commitment to giving a voice to the disempowered, it spoke to a left-wing, rather than a capitalist, perspective.

Early Experiments

Mumma argues that the first such work in Kenya came out of the Nairobi University Free Travelling Theatre (NUFITT) in 1983 (Levert & Mumma, 1997). Tellingly this was just a year after Ngugi had been forced to flee the country, which might explain in part why the work took place well away from prying eyes in the capital, on the shores of Lake Victoria. The project was seeking to promote adult literacy classes and the student animateurs experimented with involving local musicians, drawing and a number of innovative workshop techniques. Mumma took part in this project in Siaya County in 1989 where he was involved with twelve local schools investigating issues

[1]*The Kenya Schools' Drama Festival, which has been going since the 1950s, nowadays annually involves an estimated 5 million young people and is the largest theatrical event in Africa.*

of child labour and underage sex and eventually built on it after he graduated. These initiatives were time and money constrained and so made limited impact. But in 1994 The British Council and INGO Care-International brought together UK theatre and TIE practitioners Roger Chamberlain and Mindy Chillery working with Lenin Ogolla and Ochieng Wandera to undertake a much more significant piece of work around Kisumu, using what they developed as Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) which combined Boal's ideas of Theatre of Oppressed[ii] with international concepts about Theatre in Education. This was part of CARE Kenya's Communication Resources for Under 18s on STDs and HIV (CRUSH) - project on HIV/AIDS in Kisumu District, Kenya. Working with two local theatre groups, Kama Kazi based in Kisumu and Apondo in Ahero over a six-month period, workshops were held to develop performances around the then terrifyingly untreatable and fast spreading scourge of AIDS. These performances were toured around various villages in the region. A story board of nine possible scenes was created and at community events, participants could choose which stories they wished to engage with and interrogate using open-ended inclusive discussion. The methodology was domesticated by Ogolla who in the following year persuaded the Ministry of Culture to fund him to pilot a project called Family Life, seeking to understand the roots of familial dysfunctionality. Further educational theatre was experimented with in these years in Sigoti and Mukinya, and the region began to gain international notice (Ogolla,1997; Levert and Mumma, 1997).

In July 1998, Opiyo Mumma was instrumental in hosting the third International Drama in Education Association (IDEA) conference in Kisumu. Some five thousand people from eighty countries flooded in over a ten-day conference and workshop period. Others had also noticed the energy and activity of Ogolla and Mumma, who along with Christopher Odhiambo and Gichora Mwangi played leading roles in a series of seminars and workshops on Theatre for Development hosted by The British Council in 1997 and 1998. It might have appeared that western Kenya was becoming a regionally important hub for progressive thinking about arts and education in Africa.

Magnet Theatre

However, after the conference, as fickle funding priorities changed, there was a fall-off in international funding for, and engagement with, ideas around Theatre for Development and many local groups folded or struggled to find work. The baton was taken up, again in western Kenya, by Indian and Kenyan development arts practitioners; C.Y.Gopinath and Oluoch Madiang, at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Interestingly, the practice they developed in Kisumu, which they called Magnet Theatre and subsequently exported around Africa and India, acknowledges a debt not only to Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre but also to Lenin Ogolla's western Kenya practice. The Indian guide to the form says in its acknowledgement section:

> Special thanks go to our PATH colleagues in Kenya for their technical input and for writing the Magnet Theatre Guide, which forms the basis of this toolkit. We would also like to acknowledge the late Lenin Ogolla and Ochieng Wandera, who developed Participatory Educational Theatre for HIV, from which the practice of Magnet Theatre evolved. (2007)[3]

The agency through which Gopinath and Madiang worked was American International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) PATH International. These arts activists recognised that many local groups were producing simplistic dramas with poor audience interaction, largely for lack of training

[2]Brazilian Augusto Boal developed his ideas of Theatre of the Oppressed in the 1970s as he sought to find ways to enable theatre to become a tool for radical debate and a 'rehearsal for revolution'. His work has been taken up and profoundly influenced many involved in Applied Theatre worldwide.

*[3]https://media.path.org/documents/CP_india_mt_toolkit.pdf?_gl=1*p9o7na*_ga*OTQyNDA3NjUwLjI2ODMwMTc1NjA.*_ga_YBSE7ZKDQM*MTY4MzAxNzU1OS4xLjAuMTY4MzAxNzU1OS4wLjAuMA.. Accessed 02/05/2023*

and because aid agencies were essentially asking them for what Madiang described to me as 'illustrated lectures' (Madiang, Interview, Kisumu, Kenya, July, 2017) .

Working in relation to the HIV/AIDS on-going crisis (western Kenya has been an area of exceptionally high prevalence in the country for decades), the PATH team developed a model that sought to break from the idea of crude 'messaging' by instead going for a series of dilemma-based short plays. The idea was that theatre teams would build up a rapport with local groups of youth by regularly going to the same places and opening their work with popular music and ice-breaker activities, before showing their play and using a Boalian style facilitator to promote meaningful debate about the events shown. Feedback from audiences would then be used to create the next in a series of responsive dramas which could gradually build trust and impact. Crucially, all theatre groups taken into the programme would undergo an initial 10-day intensive training programme and would then be regularly monitored and mentored by PATH staff.

Early results were very promising. In the first three years some eighty groups; semi-professionals; church groups and youth organisations, took the training and Madiang told me they were supported by a committed group of supervisors (Interview, 2017). Independent observers also gave strong evidence of meaningful behaviour change around sexual practices (Schiavo, 2013, 196-198). PATH then wanted to expand the programme, across Kenya and abroad; and this appears to have begun to affect the quality of at least some of the work. With 430 groups by 2006 in Kenya alone, Madiang told me that it became impossible to find enough skilled people to support all the groups effectively; monitoring became increasingly simply a quantitative counting of attendees and condom distribution and groups began to relapse into crowd-pleasing comedy and intellectually less rigorous messaging. In various forms PATH continued to support the Magnet work until 2014, and the programme has had an afterlife that has extended into the present day.

When I first began working with groups in the region in 2017 both performers and NGO funders claimed that the form of development theatre they were making was Magnet. That year I was invited by one of the groups that had worked with PATH and continued making plays for many NGOs, Lagnet, in the western Kenya small town of Ahero, to see one of their so-called Magnet-form productions. Blaring music on a loud-speaker was used to attract a crowd and crude clowning was the warm-up, before a 20-minute comic drama on gender relations and a very cursory concluding discussion. Lagnet was by no means unique; comic messaging of plays rehashed from previous performances in ten minutes before going on had become the staple of Kisumu area theatre troupes, where the low rates of pay offered by commissioning charities did little to encourage any more in-depth work. As I dug deeper into contemporary Applied Theatre practice I found that most young actors had had no meaningful training in the form. The semi-professional companies operating in the region would do whatever a commissioning organisation required in order to make a few shillings. The NGOs employing the groups knew nothing of Applied Arts theory, and generally used theatre simply as a cheap means to energise an audience and then deliver a quick, crude piece of messaging around whatever topic was to be discussed, prior to the agency bringing in its own people to deliver a lecture.

Problems in Applied Theatre

The commitment and effort of Mumma, Ogolla and Madiang; plus a number of less well-known associates, is to be hugely admired. And, of course, the effort to embed good Applied Theatre practice has by no means been confined to western Kenya. However, despite all the good practice, ever since the form – under whatever nomenclature – came to Kenya, the mass of work made has been of unacceptably poor standard. Back in 1995 it was reported that much of the work; 'consistently assumed a non-participatory, didactic, message-driven approach that has been predictable

in nature, hence lacking in attracting and sustaining audience/participant interest' (Chamberlain et al, 1995, 99). While Christopher Odhiambo wrote in reference to a 1998 British Council workshop where groups shared some of their existing work:

> The skits on hygiene and reproductive health, for example, had messages pre-packaged for the audience(s) and were largely didactic, sermonising and moralising. The dialectical aspect of Theatre for Development […] was non-existent. There was absolutely no effort by the performers to involve the audience at any level. (Odhiambo, 2008, 145)

The various workshops conducted by both Kenyans and agencies like The British Council simply did not reach the large number of would-be TfD groups that proliferated across Kenya in the 1990s; mostly made up of school leavers who had participated in the Schools' Drama Festival and in a context of mass youth under-employment were desperate for any chance to make an income. These groups were responding to an influx of money from agencies urgently seeking to reach populations affected by the new HIV-AIDS epidemic, which saw theatre as a good way to get to hard-to-reach populations. However, the commissioners knew nothing of best practice in the area and would often give contracts simply to the cheapest company available - hence the dire quality of much of the work.

Sadly, in my discussions with Madiang he asserted that he found just the same situation when he was working in the early 2000s; and then, again, I found it repeated following my engagement in the area from 2017. Despite all the initiatives pioneered in western Kenya, it appears that as soon as the movers and shakers go away, local groups are reverting to crude, ineffective models of practice.

It is not that Kenya is alone with this problem. My own research across East Africa has found that lack of training and expertise, coupled with a desire, and often need, to earn money by performers, has frequently led to sub-standard work, with commissioning agencies failing to invest in the kinds of support, monitoring and evaluation that would be necessary to significantly improve the situation (Plastow, 2021, 240-242). If Kenya has a particular problem I would see it as having two country-specific causes. The first is ironically the great success of the Kenya Schools Drama Festival. Every year millions of young Kenyans fall in love with theatre. They spend many hours honing their productions and then take them on the road competing for glory and national approbation. When they leave school all too many can find no work and turn to semi-professional theatre in the hope of finding at least some income. These young people have had no real training in theatre and certainly none in Applied Theatre. How can we expect them to make good, impactful work?

Secondly, Kenya is very poorly provided with tertiary education in theatre. Whereas neighbouring countries; Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania, have long-standing university and vocational training courses available, with experienced teachers of often national and even international status, in Kenya the government has spent most of its time post-Ngugi trying to suppress meaningful theatre making and teaching for fear it will be politically critical. At Nairobi University currently, there are only two theatre lecturers and no free-standing department with the lead lecturer, Dr Simon Peter Otieno, focusing on film and working with young people in some select government schools. He enables them to create their own films, making it possible for a significant

number to gain careers in this burgeoning industry. His work outside of the lecture halls is driven entirely by personal commitment with no support from the University. There is one university that claims to teach Applied Theatre. At Eldoret that programme is led by Professor Christopher Odhiambo who has written extensively on his subject, but his students get very little hands-on experience. Staff at Eldoret blame a lack of funding, another indication of a general lack of government commitment to the arts. Unfortunately, the current lack of energy and activity at Eldoret means that graduates are making little or no impact on the national Applied Theatre scene.

Back in Kisumu County there are currently some 8-10 semi-professional theatre companies vying for work from local and national NGOs. I recently conducted some training for young actors who all agreed that they had had little or no training in Applied Theatre and were hugely keen to engage with whatever I and my local collaborators could offer. Those collaborators were Equator Ensemble, a group I and my colleague, Matthew Elliott, recruited and trained after realising that the existing companies all ran in a very top-down, hierarchal, and patriarchal mode that is completely antipathetic to the values our work seeks to espouse. Last year Equator Ensemble, an egalitarian collective of three women and two men, undertook a gruelling performance/workshop programme taking a series of four productions discussing issues of sexual and reproductive health and behaviour around 40 villages. We are planning a further partnership, working with a number of NGOs to help them understand and embed best practice in Applied Arts usage across their work; and are currently waiting to hear if we have secured funding. Our hope is that if both commissioning NGOs and artists can develop skills in, and understanding of, Applied Arts, maybe change can take place at a structural level. I am not sure, given the problems with sustained impact of so many committed predecessors, how optimistic I am that our initiative will succeed; but the struggle continues.

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Syncretic Hybridity: A Case for 'Civic Theatre' in Kenya

Kawive Wambua

Abstract

Theatre – both proscenium and community theatre – has been practiced in Kenya over the years. In this paper, I argue that popular theatre in Kenya was used in communities as a platform for interrogation of the challenges of the post colony and the attendant obtaining problems of governance. Using the examples of Kanzala and Before the Storm, I posit that this was accomplished using forms borrowed from the colonial archetypes and infusing them with community performative lore and cultural idioms to deconstruct the ills of colonial hegemonic dominance and oppression hence its syncretic hybridity. The paper interrogates patriarchy, constitutional dispensation, elections integrity in leadership and labour. In community spaces, this theatre caricatured leadership while interrogating relationships between communities and the organs of state, including the police and the local administration, thereby providing safe spaces and opportunities for citizens to vent and cultivate national or local dialogues on governance. I argue that subsequently, the theatre carved a niche for itself as a civic engagement tool, creating a new genre of theatre – Civic Theatre.

Key words:
Hybridity, Syncretism, Civic Theatre, Hegemonic, Popular Theatre.

In this paper, I focus on popular theatre, both the proscenium and community theatre in Kenya and how it has manifested as a new genre. In Kenya there has been a proliferation of performances in community spaces of a form of theatre variously called "popular theatre" (Desai, 1990), "theatre for development" (Mda, 1993), "educational drama" (Mumma, 1994) "participatory educational theatre (Ogolla, 1997)" "community theatre" (Byam, 1999), among other titles. C J Odhiambo (2004), commenting on the many typological variants, observes that the variants in the nomenclature are not significant since the referent is the same – a theatre that leads people to a "new consciousness and a new understanding of their reality" (p.6). Popular theatre in Kenya has taken root in matters of governance, development and health education. There have been many projects on governance, human rights, electoral issues, democratisation, religion, development and health, in both proscenia or community based popular theatre.

Popular theatre may not necessarily be categorised as traditional or modern – it is contemporaneous. It takes such forms as masquerade, mime, pantomime, puppetry, role play, rituals, narratives, songs, dance, incantations, circus, cabaret, burlesque shows, and minstrel shows among others. I purpose to argue that this theatre exhibits syncretic hybridity. Philip Nel (2018) states that syncretism describes the fusion of beliefs and purposes to determine the most "original and purest expressions in contradistinction to variant or analogous forms of religious and cultural expression" (p. 2). On the other hand, as Nel argues, the concept of hybridity is employed by Homi Bhabha (1994) to deconstruct the narrative

of colonial power, but simultaneously it also exposes uncertainties of the power of the coloniser in a space where the colonised 'other' is allowed in the 'house' of the coloniser. (p. 4). I argue that this theatre uses traditional African modes and cultural artforms to address the present-day challenges of the post-colony. Such artforms draw from orature – songs, dances, narratives, riddles and proverbs that are elevated to become the mainstay of the artistic expression as opposed to being choruses as it is in Western theatre.

In Kenya, theatre moved from the colonial construct of Eurocentric proscenium arch spaces and took to school halls, churches, market centres and other community spaces – and as it did so, it borrowed a form and infused it with community responsive artistic expressions and nuances. Commenting on this move that gained currency in the 1960's and 1970s, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* argues that:

> ...it is clear that Kenyan theatre in the early seventies was trying to break away from the imperialist colonial tradition whose symbols were the European dominated Kenya National Theatre (albeit aided by the ruling regime), the Donovan Maule Theatre in Nairobi and other similar centres in major towns. Its main handicap was still its petty bourgeoisie base in schools and university colleges from where came the majority of its actors, directors and plays (p.41)

He notes that the free development of theatre from the national traditions 'rooted in the ritual and ceremonial practices of the peasantry had been stopped by imperialism, colonial education, occupation and violation which had destroyed the culture (language being its pillar). In this book, Ngũgĩ builds a case for Kamĩrĩĩthũ becoming the prototypical home and location of theatre which he sees as "not an aberration, but an attempt at reconnection with the broken roots of African civilisation and its traditions of theatre" (p42). Further, Evan Mwangi (1988) attests to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's play (co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii) *Ngaahika Ndeenda* – being overtly influenced by oral literary forms such as music, dance and narratives. The persuasion that Mwangi identified in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's plays is one that goes beyond the use of drama as a form of awareness creation or entertainment to the deployment of the theatre in the creation of a national consciousness:

> Ngũgĩ, together with his collaborators, seems to be aiming at achieving two major objectives: first, he wants to create a theatre that is different from colonial drama by incorporating African methods of theatrical performance such as song and dance, proverbs, and oral narratives that Western theatre in Africa tended to denigrate; second, he wants to establish a national theatre of plays by Africans that would not only replace colonial performances, but also promote socialist nationalism. (p96)

Thus, there was already an emergent form – one that could be called Kenyan theatre. It is critical to study the emergent theatre to find out whether it continued this trend or took other forms 'compliant' to the forms favoured by new patrons of theatre (whether by design or default) in organisations advocating for social justice. In this paper, I argue that even when the theatre moved away, it took with it forms from the Western epochs and fused them with other community artforms to create a new form – a hybrid one.

Popular theatre in Kenya suffers this hybridity - it is deriving form from the West to address social maladies and governance problems wrought by the West – including electoral governance, human rights, religion, constitutionalism and democratisation. This ambivalent multivocality – where the plays seem to be adopting or praising western models, attitudes and community forms but in fact are subverting them. This is consistent with the carnivalesque theoretical framing advanced by Mikhael Bhaktin.

The theory of the carnivalesque speaks to using the carnival as the platform for 'enacting the revolution' while seemingly providing public spectacle and entertaining. This, it is believed, is the only way after other avenues of protest and organising have been taken over by the oligarchs. The multivocality I refer to is not only one of language, but that of narrative and the curation of "an international culture" of democracy and governance – itself a functional utility employed by the coloniser to keep the subject caged.

The functional utility of theatre for social justice is a character of what Prendergast and Saxton (2016) called "applied theatre", which is a "part of a grassroots arts-based movement committed to community reflections and social change"- a theatre that "offers a seeing-place where people can gather to share their stories; a doing place to enact new possibilities of what-s, not-yet…" (pxxi). They articulate the purpose of this theatre as its overt work to either:

> …reassert or to undermine socio-political norms, as its intent is to reveal more clearly the way the world is working. Reassertions or undermining intentions are both ways by which we can re-examine the world to discover how it works and our place in it; they hold within them the potential to be educational, reflective and/or rehabilitative (p.8)

According to them, the various categories that they identify - Reminiscence Theatre, Community-Based Theatre and Museum Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Popular Theatre, Theatre in Education, Theatre in Health Education and Theatre for Development - are most often 'reassertions and celebrations of memory and history' or purposed towards 'undermining the status quo in order to promote positive social change'. (p.8) Although they categorise 'Popular Theatre' as one of the many forms of applied theatre, my take off point is that 'popular theatre' encompasses the various typologies from a perspective of community application, of use and appreciation. That notwithstanding, I find their arguments about the role of this theatre as a space (or provisioning a space) for reassertion or undermining of social norms with a potential for education, reflection and rehabilitation as critical in the analysis of the role theatre has played and can play in Kenya today. The 'popularity' in the definition may mean that it is 'free of outside influence' and that the community 'holds ownership' of the theatre production. Prendergast and Saxton argue that the reality "can be very different as economic and political agendas may mean that popular applied theatre projects may be for 'the people' but not necessarily be by them or of them". (p.44)

Theatre, in the words of Bertolt Brecht, 'alienates' and 'defamiliarises' itself and the actors from the audience to the extent that it exists as an item. This alienation makes theatre able to 'talk' on its own behalf. These Brechtian views were crystallised in his 'Epic Theatre' in which theatre practice had to have a social function: to re-awaken people to take specific actions to change the world around them. It's the ideas of Brecht that have influenced such practitioners as Augusto Boal (1979) and many other theatre movements around the world to develop a form of theatre that seeks to empower the audience.

In post-independent Kenya, just like with the Mbari Literary Movement in Nigeria and the South African 'African' theatre development, the use of African theatrical forms – including language – had already taken root. In South Africa especially, the struggle against apartheid saw the emergence of unique theatre traditions – as Blumberg and Walder (1999) argue;

> In South Africa, the hybrid and syncretic nature of theatre has been apparent since at least the time of Herbert Dhlomo (1903-56), a

> believer in drama which addresses the present by means of the past, involving a merging of indigenous and imported approaches to create national regeneration (pp2-3)

This regeneration meant that the theatre was in direct conflict with the status quo. As a result, it took another form, a subaltern form – in both content and character. I argue that after the failed 1982 coup in Kenya, there followed an installation of a state with the singular narrative of one party (and therefore one voice) and therefore theatre went underground. This happened in two significant ways – the spaces of performance and the form. Performances started happening in social halls, churches and at community gatherings. The impact was that the social dynamics of the spaces were infused into the themes. Thus, theatre took to interrogation of biblical scenarios and the messianic parallel. The other impact was that the form it took was by and large dictated by the psychological orientation of the audience – the space for social and political interaction was corrosive and therefore – just like the development of the blues in the face of oppression in the Americas – the preponderance of song and music as the bearer of the themes became common.

As a result, there exists a corpus of other plays and productions that originated from a programmed education and advocacy agenda for social justice by organisations and individuals in Kenya that merit study in regard to how their purpose influenced their form. From this corpus, I chose to analyse Kivutha Kibwana's *Kanzala*, and Wakanyote Njuguna's *Before the Storm* in trying to find out how the texts demonstrate this syncretic hybridity.

Kivutha Kibwana's *Kanzala* was produced by Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION), a non-governmental organisation that had been formed by University of Nairobi dons as an avenue for promoting civic and alternative community education. A councillor (parodied in Kanzala) was the face of oppression and duplicitous political skulduggery at the time. Acting as the henchmen of political bigwigs, councillors were the local bosses: ruthless and exploitative. *Kanzala* depicts the political campaigns of this stultifying misogynistic philanderer who is pitted against the noble Mama – a widow depicted a paragon of virtue as a mother and aspiring leader. The play that was produced early in 1997 with the elections coming up in December of the same year, where a "Mama" – Charity Kaluki Ngilu – was running for president.. It was aimed at infusing some morality in the leadership and providing voter education to citizens. *Kanzala* addresses the sub themes of intimidation of voters, securitisation of campaigns, denigration of women, voter bribery and use of public servants and goods in campaigns. This makes other aspects of the dramaturgy such as the development of characters, language and style suffer. In my assessment, the play's characters are flat and predictable and there is little employ of stylistic features or depth of language and nuance. Also, its multivocality is evident in that Mama, by her own admission, embodies the African conception of "a mother as a maker of the home" and only second as an aspiring leader – this subverts feminist ideology while seeming to advance the idea of women as being equal to or better than men in matters leadership

Wakanyote Njuguna's *Before the Storm* – commissioned by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) - was performed by theatre artists contracted by CLARION. The play examines the impact of ethnicity and ethnic clashes on politics and political party organising. By 1998, the country had experienced ethnic clashes twice (1992 and 1997) and the play was a mechanism to discuss the issue and bring about healing. *Before the Storm* is largely a regurgitation of the rights to property and its protection, the right of assembly, association, freedom of speech, freedom of political participation, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and the supremacy of the constitution.

The plays' special purpose and urgency in the communication of the right or social justice agenda has redacted their literariness and reduced them to 'campaign' materials. But something special happens in the plays: both are written and published as full proscenium pieces – they were indeed performed at the Kenya National Theatre (KNT) in 1997, but they are conceptualised and written as community theatre – *Kanzala* with a narrator and an enrolled audience and *Before the Storm* in what can be called theatrical sketch. This is syncretism at the writing and performance levels. The plays were therefore able to function both in the proscenium and community space flawlessly.

Kanzala and *Before the Storm* exhibit a peculiar bluntness in the presentation of the subject matter. Their special purpose and urgency in the communication of the rights or social justice agenda has, in some instances, redacted their theatricality, and reduced them to 'campaign' materials. This is different from what the academia is considered 'good theatre' and that may be the reason why the plays have received very little academic attention. The theatre that emerges from this is a combination of three things: the performance models of the proscenium theatre, the Boalian methodology (derived from the Frerian pedagogy) and the epic/spectre theatre advanced by Picastor and Brecht. It is the intent and the impact on society that becomes more important and underpins the theatrical experience. Owing to the purpose for which this theatre was conceived and performed, there are certain peculiarities of content, its presentation and the emergent style that pander to the development, albeit unwittingly on the part of the artists, of a different kind of theatre. My contention is that the plays analysed here (and may be many others) present to us a new genre of popular theatre: civic theatre.

Although the term 'civic theatre' has been used in the past to refer to professional or amateur theatre that was wholly or partly subsidized by the cities it happened in, or to mean theatre spaces for community performance, this is a 'place'' or '' space' name code, and does not refer to the characterisation of the theatre. I use the term to refer to a sub-genre, the kind of theatre that is sponsored for educational purposes and is created (whether by professional playwrights or through artists' workshops for purposes of performance in communities in the pursuit of social justice. *Civic Theatre* is therefore, for me, a utilitarian theatre developed as part of a particular civic oriented programme, commissioned to be written or workshopped by professionals or semi-professional artists. Its drama is linear or episodic in nature, borrowing from the art forms of the community it is presented to communities for education and civic engagement/action.

In conclusion, theatre is versatile and epochal. The theatre that was developed in Kenya in response to the narrowing of the democratic space, the persecution of artists and the militarisation of the state from the 1970s to 1990s, borrowed from the proscenium and from traditional artforms to create a unique new form that I call Civic Theatre. This theatre could function in a multiplicity of settings and resonate with the audiences' social circumstances while enabling them to reimagine the state and governance in the country.

Kawive, Wambua is an educationist, a writer, a literary scholar and human rights defender. He is a researcher on theatre, culture and education as tools of transformation and social justice. His published works include The Ridges Across River Kaiti - a novel, and Conversations on Political Education in Kenya: A Citizens'Action Manual.

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Theatre, People & Environment: Bahari Huru Festival

Caroline Ngorobi

After a show, a member of the audience brought me a gift, a bag full of '*kienyeji*' [local] vegetables from her farm. She was pleased with the play we had put up, and that we were giving them a platform for dialogue. She spoke to me in her Giriama language and thankfully, since Bantu languages are co-related, I picked a few words and responded in Kiswahili, mostly smiling through the conversation. She smiled too.

We communicated. This was not a usual gift from an audience. We are used to claps and applauses. I went into our van and my colleagues were quick to say, 'Only at the Coast!' The old lady received us as her own and she has also gifted me several times after that, including giving me a live chicken after a play we staged in her community. Community, culture and theatre, a beautiful intersection that makes our work so meaningful.

I stumbled into community theatre by circumstance.

When I began my journey in theatre in Mombasa in 2015, I was safely confined within the walls of the officially recognized and acknowledged theatre spaces. Perfect plotted love farces watched by organized audiences, through beautiful set designs. What I did not know was that this was a short-lived 'safety' space as the only public theatre space in Mombasa, the Mombasa Little Theatre, was closing for renovations indefinitely. Consequently, since as theatre practitioners we have to continuously reassess our structures, systems and relevance within communities, the need arose at this moment in time. Seeking alternative performance spaces and audiences was inevitable if we had to remain relevant as part of the social fabric of society.

The coastal culture in Kenya is very communal and as such there are many public spaces where people gather for meetings, events and sometimes, just to sit and chat. We began to experiment with these communal spaces as alternative performance spaces.

Away from the confines of our conventional spaces, we became more aware of the issues facing the community we were living in and a budding interest in addressing these issues through theatre was born.

Social work and theatre work

As a result, I am reminded of my intrinsic role as an artist. I belong to this community, thus, this social issue is my problem too.

In our practice, we have learned some fundamental principles in the work - the need to focus on local communities and their needs and the importance of the influence of local culture in the creation of theatre. As we use theatre to tackle social issues and help transform our communities, the question of accessibility comes to play. How accessible is theatre work when confined to conventional theatre spaces? To reach more communities, we have taken theatre to the people, into the spaces where people commune in order to reach the intended audiences and have greater impact.

Community theatre and theatre for development is not new amongst the coastal people. Many civil society organizations have over the years, explored the tool of theatre to pass information on health in community spaces. Building up from this time-tested and successful intervention, we began to explore different thematic areas: cultural identity, change management, gender and environment.

Living and working as a theatre maker on an island, the issue of climate change is a constant reality in your everyday life. Despite this, many people remain unaware of the issue and impact of climate change on their lives, or the impact of their human behaviour on the environment. For us, theatre provided a tool to bridge this knowledge gap.

The question of environmental protection is one that concerns everyone, hence work geared towards this should be able to reach the intended audiences without institutional barriers.
With these factors in mind, the Bahari Huru Project was born.

Bahari Huru Project

Bahari Huru (Kiswahili for 'Free Ocean') is a socially conscious art project advocating for protection of the marine environment. The project works towards building

a coastal community that is more aware of the effects of pollution and climate change and points out the urgency of preserving the life and beauty of the marine environment as they live by and off the sea. This project started as an idea of Jukwaa Arts Mombasa in 2021 as a platform for artists working with communities to create provocative performances and art installations that speak out against ocean pollution, ignite conversations, and as an urgent call to action. The model of the project involves artists being in residency for three months to research the subject and create artwork in different forms - theatre performances, poetry, music, dance, visual arts and installations. This artwork is then showcased in the Bahari Huru Festival, an annual community festival that targets communities living along the Kenyan coast. The residency runs from July to September every year and the 2023 festival will run from 7th to 15th October travelling through Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale counties. This community festival travels to reach diverse audiences, ranging from children, youth, university students, indigenous fishing communities, blue economy stakeholders, policy makers and local leaders.

Collaboration with local communities in creating and presenting art is key in ensuring that the artists remain relevant to the society and also work towards social development in these communities. Scientists engaged with the project play a critical role as they share their research studies with the artists thus providing content for play production. The local communities are instrumental in sharing indigenous practices on conservation and living with the ocean. This information is then used by the artists in residency to create performances that speak to a diverse audience.

Community theatre, has had its fair share of challenges, a main one being lack of funding. The project is currently sponsored by Mombasa based organizations mainly from their community Social Responsibility (CSR) budgets. Last year, most organizations cut down their budgets due to the adverse economic situation in the country and this greatly affected the festival. But it is not all gloom, as we have continued to reaffirm that art practices are key in community building as these very receptive communities have brought huge audiences to the festival. The project was also presented and recognized as a model project at the International Conference for Young Marine Researches (ICYMARE) 2022 in Bremerhaven, Germany. Locally, the project efforts have been featured in the media.

Caroline Ngorobi is a theatre producer and performer based in Mombasa. She founded Jukwaa Arts Productions in 2015 - a creative greenhouse which voices social issues through creation and presentation of performing and visual arts.

'Why' as a Responsibility to Awe

Ogutu Muraya

The writer Ben Okri in '*Birds of Heaven*' describes creativity as 'a form of prayer, and the expression of a profound gratitude for being alive'. I used to have a hard time agreeing with and accepting Okri's description. I was introduced to creative labour as a function of struggle – creativity as protest. Within this dynamic, it has always felt to me like there was no room for feelings of profound gratitude. In fact, having such feelings felt like a betrayal to the struggle. With this model, the only path out of dysfunction is through the expression of what is wrong with the world, what is negative, what is corrupt and what is broken. Under such a mindset, it is decadent to indulge in what is beautiful, miraculous, enchanting, and wondrous with the world. Even the choice of words is telling, we 'engage' with struggle but we 'indulge' with beauty. There is, in a sense, a lack of seriousness when you honour your responsibility to awe.

I borrowed the phrase 'a responsibility to awe' from a collection of poems by the astronomer Rebecca Elson. For Elson …'Facts are only as interesting as the possibilities they open up to the imagination.' Now, it would be naive to ignore the fact of social, political, economic and ecological struggle, but can such facts interest us in the possibilities they open up to the imagination? Perhaps sociologist Ruha Benjamin has a more elegant way of addressing what I am attempting to articulate. She says 'Remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within.' The balance within creativity as protest is often titled towards dismantling the worlds we cannot live within. For a long time, I was stuck with this model of creative labour, and I could not find compelling reasons for gratitude nor open up my imagination. I started to slide into cynicism and nihilism, especially because it seemed difficult to find sufficient perceptible positive changes within the grand dysfunctions of the world. This slip sliding away produced in me a perpetual state of existential angst. Only recently did I start to question creative labour and in particular my artistic practice as a function of struggle. Theatre as struggle was no longer satisfying my desire to create.

With my angst, I initially regarded this question 'Why theatre?' with suspicion. I wondered cynically how strange that as theatre practitioners we often seem to be caught in situations where we have to validate our existence. I cannot imagine such a question ever being posed to musicians. No one second-guesses the existence of music. I also struggled because 'why' questions are tricky questions to answer – especially when you are under a fog of existential angst. 'Why' questions demand we delineate the cause, reason or purpose for which something occurs – 'why' seeks out motive. For me, there are three areas in which why questions become indispensable. When a tragedy has occurred, when there are excesses, and when confronting an existential crisis. An explanation is established in order to rule out the uncertainty of chaos; the randomness of life. By knowing why, we can rest that there is order, that there is a pattern to the madness. Nothing is more unsettling than the existence of something without a reason. We must know why, it is troubling to experience happenings that are in violation of causality. Answering why gives relief. To know why is to give closure. To know why is

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to motivate action. To lose why is to invite angst. To lose why is to oscillate with uncertainty. To lose why is to motivate inaction. However, answering why can also give a false sense of security – a false sense of understanding.

This falseness when looked at under the politics of memory – reveals periods in history where grossly formulated and incorrectly answered why questions gave justification for mass occupation, massacres and genocides. History is full of perpetrators with sufficient means blinding their atrocities by answering why from a perspective of intoler-ance towards differences. These atrocities are not only relegated to history, contemporary societies are still full of countless cases where whys are based on damaged reasoning and incorrect causation. These flawed ways of thinking extend to the multiple ecological disasters facing the world. Other life forms and ecosystems are assessed based purely on human interests. What fails to align with human interests is seen as being unimportant, insufficient, non-essential, and therefore disposable. Under such scenarios asking why can also be subversive. 'Why' is despised by hegemonic systems however they manifest. This hypersensitivity to why arises because everyone knows there is no sufficient reason, cause or purpose to justify violence, oppression and suppression.

So now, 'why theatre?' This is the question asked to justify existence, resist suppression, seek truth, alleviate uncertainty, gain approval, to align with reality? For a long time, since my first encounter with the dramatic arts, I thought theatre was the space where you found ways to frame 'why' questions, a space to doubt and question and seek the truth. The only failing, in my thinking was that this space with its why questions, its doubts and its search for the truth was only oriented towards a limited understanding of political, struggle and protest theatre. It was about pointing at and towards what is dystopian and dysfunctional in society – what is negative, what is corrupt and what is broken. And so when I slipped, sliding away into nihilism, into nothingness, unable to answer why – I almost lost all interest in theatre. I am starting to accept there is more to struggle than just struggle; this acceptance came from reconnecting with my responsibility to awe.

To quote Ben Okri 'It is precisely in a broken age…' and I would also add a broken personhood, 'that we need mystery and a re-awakened sense of wonder: need them in order to be whole again.' A responsibility to awe is a duty, an expectation, an obligation, a commitment towards awe. When all arrows point to doom, despair and disaster, it can be easy to become indifferent to this sacred responsibility. But it is precisely in this orientation towards doom rapt in political disturbances, environmental tragedies, social instabilities and economic deadlocks; it is in these precise times that we must reclaim our responsibility to awe. Rather than abandon and neglect this duty - we must embrace this duty. A literary scholar, Keguro Macharia, once said … 'Freedom isn't freedom if it has no room for pleasure' … no room for wonder, no room for awe, no room for beauty, no room for enchantment. The struggle is real but we must not in the process of struggle misplace, forget and neglect our responsibility to awe. Understanding this helped me to reclaim my interest in theatre and reframe my 'why theatre?' as a responsibility to awe.

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Reality is the New Fiction in Theatre

Zippora Agatha Okoth

The Kenyan theatre in the post-colonial era has greatly evolved in the last 60 years. This does not only refer to the stories that were told but also to the performance techniques which have greatly moved from the melodramatic Shakespeare-influenced type of acting, which involved a lot of poetic recitations and robotic-like movements that were aimed at magnifying the actor and the voice (Wilson and Goldfarb, 2019). This style was highly influenced by the British theatre culture. The Kenyan theatre scene has now embraced more of the Stanislavsky style of realistic acting where an actor has to seek clarity of the norm, using the tenets like seeking the thorough line of action and the resolved focus on "what if" with emotional recall and movement that emphasizes the thoughts of the actor in truly being and living the real character (Wilson and Goldfarb, 2019). Stanislavski founded these tenets centuries ago, but their practice is currently very popular.

A lot of shows have evolved from crowd and chorus scenes to more limited performers on the stage. This could be due to the fact that most thespians are able to look at theatre as a business and not just a hobby. The use of theatre for rebellion and to speak against colonial oppression in the pre-colonial and early post-colonial era evolved into the use of theatre for community outreaches by NGOs in the 90s and early 2000. Women and youth were the main target audience for the NGO campaigns on reproductive and community health. Theatre further evolved in the 2000s from being an NGO campaign tool to a business frontier and this led to the growth of an industry that was previously relegated to be a career for 'sluggards' and 'losers'.

In my opinion, the future of the theatre industry seems to lie in more realistic and methodical productions. This is an era where real stories are told. Most writers today write from their real-life experiences, trending issues and current political affairs, stating realities, and enacting tales and stories that were initially metaphorized in plays to avoid social stigma and prosecution. We are moving from handling topics as satire to the production of real dramas with glaring pain and no imagery.

Plays that were largely focused on the fight for colonial freedom have turned into plays that focus more on love and daily life challenges. The productions in Kenya today reflect a lot of reality in them, from the story to the plot and the production design. The use of imagery is becoming less and less in the theatre scene. It is said we live in an era where reality is stronger than fiction and this is reflected in the plays. Drama is all about spectacle, and the spectacle needs to be an imitation of life. If we truly live in these times where we do not have qualms about hiding the truth, then the theatre scene has well adapted to this reality. For instance, the play *Market Price* written by Saumu Kombo and directed by Wakio Mzenge, which was showcased on May 2023 at the Alliance Française in Nairobi, is a clear depiction of reality brought on stage.

Market Price talked of the misery and agony of women of different ages who live in the slums, and their fight for survival to get just Ksh.20 for a meal or to pay rent. It showed Zam's journey, who at the age of nine decides to fend for herself and take care of her ailing and drunkard mother. She gets into prostitution and hire of guns. Despite the hunt and chase by police, she remain elusive through sheer luck but in the end, gets pregnant as a teen and her mother's warning becomes her reality. Narrating

her story as an adult to an elite blogger helps the audience see the disparity of realities of the haves and have-nots in a country where equality is the word for the day yet the government takes no serious measures towards poverty alleviation. The play brings to the audience an awakening that some of the atrocities committed are desperate measures for survival in the slums. This is not the only recent production that brings such brutal reality onto the stage.

Today there are more theatre companies unlike in the 90s when apparently most were registered as welfare groups. As the older theatre companies still focus on satire, the new theatre groups and companies are focusing more on original reality-based stories. Many of these stories are presented in the theatre in the rawness of their reality. The writer and director take the raw information and this is what is enacted to the audience who in disbelief watches the pain, anguish and exuberance of the characters, believing it is fiction.

The theatre audience in Kenya has grown in numbers and with good marketing a lot of theatre shows are able to sell to full house capacity. Just as in any business or industry, there are low seasons but almost every theatre company is making at least 50% to 100% more sales than they did 10 years ago. ome of the new theatre companies

make better sales than the older established companies as they introduce alternative theatre genres beyond the timeworn satirical comedies. One of the vibrant theatre companies that was founded by a group of young theatre graduates from Kenyatta University was proof that the audiences wanted alternative choices. Kenyan audiences crave deep stories and plots, including thrilling drama and idealistic tragedies. Kenyan legends, while weaving storytelling with Kenyan modern slang, creating shows that are engaging for both the younger and older generations. Their shows are not only entertaining but informative. To say the least, they have brought people back to the theatre in a movement that felt like a renaissance not just for theatre but for the revival of Kenyan Political History. The in-depth research and team of writers that enabled building the stories, the cast of actors with two main narrators was a thrill to the audiences, as it intertwined various theatre forms and techniques.

With growing audiences, theatre practitioners are beginning to receive better payments with a growing number able to make this their main source of income. However, we have limited professional and public theatre halls with less than five located in Nairobi the capital city. We refer here to spaces with good professional lighting, sound and stage created purposefully for theatre performances and available for hire. The government has only two theatre halls in Nairobi, all held within one space: the Kenya National Theatre. The other government-owned spaces are the Bomas of Kenya and Kenya National Museum auditorium. However, these two halls are not accessible for use as the cost of hire is unaffordable for most theatre companies, and further, they offer services for conferences and other fora by corporates and non-profit organizations in the culture sector. This scarcity has led to theatre producers seeking to hire theatre theatre spaces in the International
Schools.

It is inevitable that in the near future, theatre shows in Kenya will be taking place in non-conventional theatre spaces. Thus, taking us back to where we began pre-independence albeit the audience paying and not watching the shows for free as in the olden days. Taking theatre to the people instead of the people going to the theatre hall is one of the future directions that most producers have to take. This already exists with some restaurants constructing raised podiums for the performers. Most of these spaces do not have professional lighting, but they set up good sound and the shows, which are often in vernacular languages have great stories which the local audience love. The spectacle in the production design gets lost in these spaces and the Directors also have to deal with some of the rowdy revellers and noise control can hamper the production.

The future of theatre lies in the private investors who can construct theatre conservatories with smaller theatre halls that can be hired for use by production companies. This will in turn mean, productions can run for longer days for smaller audiences of say 50-100, while the producers are also able to make economic sense out of the theatre runs. Access to funding by theatre practitioners is also evident in the number of co-production initiatives that are coming up. With social media networks, there is a great enlightenment on new theatre forms coming from experiencing different cultures, histories and imaginations. With the global networks, fiction and reality struggle to find a balance.

The current Kenyan theatre landscape is growing very fast, and it would be right to attribute this to the training of theatre practitioners in institutions of higher learning. More theatre practitioners are seeing the business in the theatre unlike prior when theatre was just a hobby, a pastime. Today, rehearsals take place during the day because we have full-time performing artists. This professionalism and entrepreneurship in theatre can be attributed to education and empowerment. Despite this growth, it is noticeable that a number of upcoming theatre productions are taking a minimalist approach. The crowd scenes are being reduced to a handful of functional actors, and

more two-handers and three-handers are getting more popular. This minimalist style means fewer people to pay, but more to invest in the story and plot so as to intrigue the audience more. With Education, there is now more research on theatre stories so as to get the gist to be as real as possible, to wound and tickle the audiences. For great theatre is felt when it does evoke all the three deep emotions of joy, anger and sadness in equal measure? For to evoke one emotion in its extreme is great, but to evoke all three in one piece is even greater.

With Artificial Intelligence swarming the world, for us the future of the theatre industry lies in our ability to re-imagine our African stories to today's reality. The future of theatre will have lesser rules as it calls for more breaking of the fourth wall and more audience involvement. Fiction is a reality we have not yet experienced and imagination is a reality of the future. Theatre is the world of all possibilities.

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Conversation with David Kakuta Mulwa

Edwin Nyutho

Edwin Nyutho:
My name is Edwin Nyutho and I am in conversation with David Kakuta Mulwa who has been a pillar of theatre and theatre education in Kenya. Maybe David, you could begin by telling us when you started training people in theatre.

David Mulwa:
The actual training where I am like the main trainer started around….1970? Because that is when I began actual teaching. Okay, let's say, from there to this time. Before then ... I was also a practitioner in the theatre.

Edwin Nyutho:
Absolutely. The idea is ….when you as a theater artist, no matter how young you are, no matter how limited your knowledge was?

David Mulwa:
I guess this is all bound up with the experience in my family. My father was one of the most 'theatric' people you would ever have met. Pastor John Mulwa. ... And I remember, I actually got my teaching skills, my very first teaching skills, meaning gestures, expression and so on (not so much the word, I got these from my father. So you may say I began being in the theatre from the year 1952, and I was seven years old then. Yeah.

Edwin Nyutho:
OK. But there came a transition, between whatever you got from your father; which was perhaps inheritance of the performance talent and the mentorship from him. But there came a point at which you now started training others - to learn from you. I think that that's a good beginning for this discussion.

David Mulwa:
You would say that this transition happened after my graduation from Nairobi University going to UCLA sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation then then I came in 1973 to teach theater in Nairobi University. But when I came from UCLA…something happened there that I would not care to talk about.

I was kind of a very proud young man at that time. And it was also then that Ngugi wa Thiong'o was our very serious teacher in literature and the theatre. He was very interested (passionate??) and he was actually a very forward looking lecturer. In those days, if you remember, that is the time they were talking about Africanization. So they wanted the Department of Literature established, wanted somebody to go study, come back and start teaching theatre arts in the university. Now I said I was a rather proud young man. So when I went out and my experience in UCLA taught me - heck I am not you, you know, I can act, I can direct, I can write and actually… I was a little bit hesitant in, you know, when I went out there, because it was a field I didn't know

anything about. But then in my training there, I realized, *hapana*,[translated No!] I have the aptitude and, you know, I actually knew a lot.

Well, again, here comes my boasting among the American students that were my colleagues. You know, I found out that I already knew a lot from what I had learned at BA level in Nairobi University. So when I came back, I was kind of cocky, you know. And so when we had the first staff meeting and Ngugi introduced me and so forth, and then he told me about what I was due for - `we are going to give you a tutorial fellowship'.

I said no. After all our training? So I said, no, I was very hotheaded in those days, and I walked out. Now, here began my training people because I went out there. I was having coffee in town and I met this choreographer, Eileen Waso, who was then working at the Bomas of Kenya, whom I had met before I got my scholarship.

'So you said you're back here? So I am back. Hey, what are you doing?' I told her, she told me she's working at Bomas. So I said I would go and see what they are doing and then she said, `well, look, we do need a producer. We do need somebody to guide this young Form Four-leavers who are now that dance troupe, right?'

So I went out there and sure enough, I had known a little bit about theatre production and so on.... and I found that there was need. At least what I knew I could easily apply there. Right. So I was employed there. But then, you know, teaching a dance troupe, you are teaching well, Form Four leavers. I'm not knocking them on the head, but I'm saying, er, that is not what I had bargained for, not to mention there were *wazees* [translated: old men] as dancers.

And I realized no, my place is (not??) at the university but the Bomas, I did quite a number of things because that's where I used a few skills, like writing all the dance dramas, short skits that are actually extant even today at the Bomas, you know, based on our culture. And then, I got wondering, why would you want to train to get somebody, let's say from Tiwi, or some such place, to teach the Digo dance to Form Four leavers? Hmm. Then you ask the public to leave Nairobi, the city, to go to Bomas, eight miles away, to come and pay. They pay at the door to see their own dances which are learned from the masters. When, in fact, on all festive days they could see this for free. So I told the directors `you do need for Bomas to be a bit different'.

So what about the dance? It's not just the Giriama dancing. What was that dance about? It is the story that our people do not know about that particular community. I mean, as a Kamba, I don't know anything about Digo culture. So when I see the Sengenya dance it is so fantastic, it is beautiful. But what is it all about? It's not just a spectacle. And then they now told me and I …really Edwin, I was just a floored and I realized dance is not just going out there, and copying and shaking the bottoms. No, there's a lot to dance and every gesture means something. Every bit of costume, including color has something to say traditionally. OK. So what was this? So that is what, where I begin now instructing the young dancers particularly in movement. And so we started what we call the little dance dramas and we did quite a number of these.

The idea of the board of directors was to form in Kenya, a dance troupe which would rival all other dance troupes, right? OK. So, you know, we started, then I told them to have a dance expressive of the story. You do need a lot of training, not just getting there shaking your shoulders and that's it. So, essentially the whole question of getting a structured story which begins somewhere as an

idea, develops and is concluded. Yes. And all know what's there, right? It is music and the movement to go with the story as it unfolds. So, that's what we did. And I was very lucky because there were these *wazees* who had come to teach their young people just a movement, and they were really thrilled now to begin helping to instruct where the dance comes from. And the first of these was a dance with a simple story about the Luo drinking party.

No way you would go out there to have a drink with these *wazees* without being escorted by the dancers of his own region and zone. So what happened? So actually it was not I who was teaching them that story. It already was there. OK? But mine was to shape it – to ask - and why, where are you going to go down? Where are you going to a large movement, elaborate movement? OK. Cut down… and so on.

Edwin Nyutho:
So producing the entire structure and presentation of the story within a time limit?

David Mulwa:
That. That's what I was doing,

Edwin Nyutho:
And after that, you moved into Kenyatta University because I remember I was among the people who used to come to Bomas of Kenya to watch you coordinate the choreography and to ask you to come and join the Professor, the late Kemoli …to come and join us at the university.

But before we get there, can you tell us what motivated you to get into theater?

David Mulwa:
I think this is inborn. I'm sure you bear me witness in the class. I never was a teacher of, on the black board and just stuck there, you know - you're writing here and you're talking to the board, you are not talking to the students. No, expression. I actually, even today – I'm now 78 but any time I want to get an idea across, I would rather do it than lecture it.

There's a lie in lecturing the mind can create all sorts of idiocies, you know, in order to come out your life. But if you go emotionally you tell a guy, look, do it right there and then, the idea gets across because there are gestures, there is emotion, there is everything. So it is inborn. It is. Yeah, it is actually a whole way of communicating, which I'm sorry, our schools do not even get anywhere near there.

And you, I mean, you are learning to be a teacher, you remember? Yes. And, we tackled that and other things. That is what we later got into it, talking without voice, you know, or without having to use words – working with emotion. So it is an inborn nature for you too, it is an inborn nature.

Edwin Nyutho:
OK. So now in terms of your theatre training, you've mentioned Bomas of Kenya and then after that, you got into KU in 1973. And I remember I was amongst your first lot of theatre students. What, would you say are your most memorable experiences in theatre?

David Mulwa:
The first memorable thing was you ... actually, now let me be very honest with you, Edwin. Well, you are kind of reticent, and you remember the first play we did - Kongi's Harvest - and you came and into that audition, you just read and I said, look you are cast as Daudu? ... Yeah. Hm. Then we got into it and actually I saw the evolution of an actor.

I don't know whether this… that's how you felt. But I saw you change. I saw you grow into and there before me was actually a Daudu, Prince Daudu, which I had not envisioned before. As I read, you know, as a director preparing the play, I was the degree that even the words we use today, those words are still memorable since 1972. Hm. Oh yeah. And you made that possible.

So the first memorable thing was the artists. Again, remember that time, I was very young. Yes, actually, you are all my age mates, right? Uh some of you are older than …But quite a number of your colleagues were older than I was, people like Abdullah Maloba, so I was in a kind of quandary. How do I relate to these people? If I remember, I told at bomas you I was kind of uneasy because I was wondering, 'how do I teach these old people how to move?' But here it was different because now I am in charge of the project. I am not asking for traditional wisdom. No, I am is what I know. And I was kind of humbled, you know, to see these young, very energetic and very mentally effervescent young people.

Edwin Nyutho:
I will never forget my experience with you when I was learning, especially enunciation and expression. And being able to not just project, but change the intonation I learned so much about human communication from the theater experience.

David Mulwa:
I will tell you even then, it was a two-way kind of thing because ... that's why I was saying I saw transformation right there, right? How does a vibrant, young man and young woman… how do they change their intonation? And right there before you, you see an old man or an old woman! Amazing.

How do you train an actor? Right? And it's not just Stanislavsky and doing all sorts of little gimmicks. No,it has to start from in there and it is there, inside the actor, it is where you have to get into in order now to enable him actually use what he knows of himself to transform into anything he wants to do. Even if you ask him, you are a rabbit. Yeah, you are a rabbit, get into all those steps of becoming a rabbit, right? And you do it and you are comfortable with it ... And if a person can be so and so at that particular moment, we will believe you. *Kabisa!* [Translated: Completely!] and you will carry that audience.

You remember when you you did Redemption? You remember that day? It was a *Saba Saba* day and there were riots all over Nairobi and we were at the Kenya national Theatre. Yes? And that day, we had only about seven people in the audience. An old man, his wife and a family and one or two sprinkling of people out there. The cast was larger than the audience! And Rebecca, the star of the show, she was very good. You remember?

Edwin Nyutho:
I remember. Yeah.

David Mulwa:
And you know people sympathized with us so much. It was so involving that this *mzee* as he got out after the show, he found he was crying. Mzee actually cried because he himself had been doing what Pastor Motema the father, was doing - crippling the little, innocent girl instead of teaching her right and so on. So Rebecca, she really gets into her role, goes haywire until the pastor redeems her.

Edwin Nyutho:
How did that touch you? How did that impact on you?

David Mulwa:
The power of theatre, my friend. When the mzee gets out of the theatre the wind blows across his cheeksthen realizes he was crying, he tried to explain why he was crying. It is taboo in Africa *mzee akilia* [Translated: when an old man cries]. So he was constrained to say, 'I don't know what is in this child. I have not cried since I achieved adulthood. What is in this child?' It is that statement that really got me thinking about the power of theatre and what you can do with it.

By the way, it can be very dangerous. Moi's government - did they know what they were saying when they called artists, people like the late Joni Nderitu, to the 24th floor of Nyayo House to be questioned about these plays they were doing? Why would the government have been afraid of these? Because theatre, it can actually transform you, right? Look at history, look at the Greeks for example, theatre was actually part of the administrative process. OK?

Edwin Nyutho:
But looking at your own personal experience, there were the 70s where I was one of your trainees, then you came into the 80s. Do you have memorable experiences perhaps like my memorable experiences of the 70s? You mentioned the 80s, 90s, 2000 you have such a rich history in terms of training and I don't know whether you can remember some of those highlights over the decades that you've been a trainer.

David Mulwa:
Let me see the eighties, what happened in the eighties? When I go down memory lane there were those students like in the seventies, I mean, you had the unique cast of students. Like I've mentioned you, Abdullah Malova, Mureithi and Francesca Cola. Sophie Oguna, you know of these casts of students, brilliant. 80s you are beginning to have younger and more 'obedient' students, which by the way, in theatre, you cannot afford. Yes, there is a respect you need, but obedience, which the education system keeps drumming in our ears, 'you've go to obey the teacher, you've got to obey!. No, the eighties, the nineties I was now becoming 'a teacher' and that camaraderie with students began to fall, it began to get away.

What did I do in the eighties? Yeah, I must own up. I was rather negligent. I should have been writing in my diary. We did this, we did this, we did this.

Edwin Nyutho:
The interesting thing is that even after the 80s, those of us whom you taught in the 70s interacted with you a lot. I think I was involved in almost every production that you had all the way to the nineties. So I can see how hard it is for you to delineate between the seventies, the eighties and the nineties.

David Mulwa:
It was about all of us as friends. Not only that, but it was also bound with evenings at the Kenya National Theatre after teaching. Most of the time we were with either John Ruganda, Wanjiku Mwaotia, Tirus Gathwe and you know, those young men and women actors on the stage of the National Theater.

Edwin Nyutho:
Perhaps this actually explains the difference between your teaching in the 70s and the 80s because I remember in the 70s when you are directing Kongi's Harvest almost immediately after we got into other productions… there was Muntu in 75 where we were interacting with professionals from all over, and all this was part of learning for somebody like myself, I got the benefit of being exposed to very rich learning experiences. ...

David Mulwa:
So in the classroom in the 80s, like I said, we kind of very subtly changed from classroom theater teacher, right? Non- theater practitioner to theater teacher. OK? Because now it was, 'what are they doing? Have they understood what you taught?' Whereas in the 70s, with you, Mureithi, akina Abdullah Malova and others, because we are about the same age, same intellectual level - all I needed to do and say was – 'well, you are learning theatre today. You, so and so, are directing the play.' You guys were not quiet, a question popped in your mind or if I said something that you could not agree with, you would very easily say, `Mwalimu, I didn't get that.' And then if I had not done my research and I tried to lie…!

Remember the theatre set pieces for training? I still remember those productions, very high-class productions. Yeah. But what happened? In the eighties, the quality kind of went down a little, you felt you were in a classroom, it was not so much an experience as the eighties.

Edwin Nyutho:
And do you think that this could have been influenced by perhaps the wider Kenyatta University community? Because my memories in the 70s remind me that there was very little choice for entertainment, for families who used to live there and they would all come into the open-air theatre provided. You know, the cultural point from which they learned and enjoyed themselves. And yet I think perhaps by the 80s there could have been more choices in terms of people watching television, nineties, et cetera. But the open air theater was the focal point.

David Mulwa:
At that time, actually, theatre was more like the thing, it was a new thing, right? Also for for the public to go to the National Theatre and pay through the nose to see *Pack Your Gun* or something like that … Or *Joseph and the Dream Colour Coat*, or something? It was very alien to them, right? And the payment to the theatre actually cut off a lot of our people. So when they say, 'here is a university… this is where our children are learning…they have invited us to see a play', or they come and… 'the play is something to do with us'. Like when you go there and perform *Muntu* or *The Redemption* and they say 'Yeah. That is us.' So you are right. It had also to do with the fact that you are opening the theatre to a much wider audience. And so you could say peripherally that training or teaching of theatre actually widened out through the public.

Edwin Nyutho:
And I remember as an actor in the 1974 production of the Rhythm of Violence by Lewis Nkosi and me acting against a white lady who was my lecturer's wife… that ability to engage the entire Kenyatta University community in a production. Really amazing.

David Mulwa:
Which is something that we need to bring back because what we are now doing is exactly what theatre in the west did way back – it was for those who could afford it. And so it was not a religious, administrative kind of instructional thing that the Greeks used to have.

So in the 80s there was more interaction with parents, with our public in a place that is not forbidding, right? We are out there. Also remember in the 80s (you had already left KU) politically the universities, especially Kenyatta University, were the hub of politics.

I also was the Director of Performing and Creative Arts Centre for 11 years and we used to produce the shows to be shown on the open - air theatre with all the public coming in there. Our audience has included the President, members of the cabinet and sand various other political leaders. So actually that was the highest point, where we,< as it were, opened the doors of the university to the universe, to the public, to come and see what we were doing.

Edwin Nyutho:
In fact, that that was going to be my next point. The setting up of the Creative Center at KU. What motivated the its creation and what do you think it actually achieved?

David Mulwa:
First of all what motivated its establishment is that when Kenyatta University was a college, all the Humanities were supposed to service the teacher training course. Do you remember? You learned literature? Actually, theatre was like the little bastard son out there peeping into what was then the 'real curriculum' which you trainees were going to teach.

Edwin Nyutho
Yeah. Ok. Literature. Hmm. Because theatre came out of literature.

David Mulwa:
At that time, the late Ishmael Omondi became the Principal at Kenyatta University College and he looked at our curriculum said, 'look, there is too much overlap of courses. This new thing called the theatre arts… they have something called costumes in the fine art'. They have designed their costumes or textiles in that. Then what did they call it? Then in the home economic department where also they had costumes, design and so on. 'So why don't you find a centre to teach all these at one go? So that's where the idea of the centre began.

Edwin Nyutho:
So it was a kind of a convergence point for different departments?

David Mulwa:
It was to be like a faculty on its own, that is why when Dr. Valerie Kibera came it was supposed to be at the level of a Dean in charge of a faculty. I was appointed the director to begin with until they realized this young man is not a Dean so how can he head a whole faculty by himself? Because you are in charge of different members of staff? But then after that, we had not gone very far.
...
Edwin Nyutho:
Looking towards the future. Where would you say that theater education is headed given the growing competition with film, television and the proliferation of short videos of short videos on social media platforms such a Tik Tok?

David Mulwa:
Given all the stuff from outside, we are all part of this proliferation as we are watching it. And even as we watch the soap operas, we complain about the poor quality. The government promised to increase local content by a large margin but have not seriously followed through. With the new constitution, they have to pay attention to building creators – we have to get away from being entertained to being entertainers. But there has been some progress. I watch one soap opera and was amazed at how the older actors are getting on stage, and I don't think its only because of the payment. I think its inborn in us as theatre artists to want to communicate a particular idea through action. I am very keen to observe these older artists and see how they up with

in these times. If the government is serious about following through with increasing local content, they have to consider the fact that people actually want to express themselves and take on what is happening at the county level. Start your theatre there, start your film there and let us know our stories, our experiences! And believe me, the amount of information you will get and cross fertilization of ideas, from even the actors themselves, will be amazing. This country will change.

Edwin Nyutho:
Would you say that we are doing enough in terms of integrating the Kenyan cultural performances into, for example, Tik Tok and other new media?

David Mulwa:
No, no, no, no, no, it is not enough. If we were doing enough the power of this inundation of technology and what have you would not be so major. Why is a Japanese a Japanese? You meet them at an airport during the day wearing a business suit … what makes them Japanese? What makes you a Kenyan considering that it was like primitive to use your African name? As an example, I look at your face and you think 'why do you insist on calling me Eddie?' Now, that is good. Who of your grandparents was called Eddie? And what history do you profess – your name and where it comes from? Yes, that is your history. For example, why was I called Wayua? 'Well, you named after your great grandmother who was called Wayua and she was born in the famine of Ngetele in 1836 which killed a lot of our Kamba people…. You learn history, right? And you learn what was then there and what was wrong with that, with us, that we need to correct now in order to be a better people.

I've been seeing a debate going on in the papers, TV and social media –'what does your name mean?'and its very interesting. I began to ask myself the same question. If a child of Israel is called David – a king of Israel, why I am I not proud to call myself Mutendemi – the chief of all Kamba? But the colonialist came and told us our names were primitive and made laws around this.

Edwin Nyutho:
So what do we need in a nutshell? What do we need to do to, to change the settings?

David Mulwa:
A name is a label,, it carries a lot of information. For example, my name is Kakuta wa Mulwa, son of Mulwa Mulwa wa Mulwa. That is the lineage. I am also a professor but how is my mother going to call me professor? Remember even in schools as part of instruction, there was music which taught us about certain ways of living families. There really is no civilization without the interrogation of history.

Edwin Nyuto:
Ok. My final question, what advice would you give to theatre education of the future in this country?

David Mulwa:
We have actually been answering this question right through…First of all, I would very seriously advocate, that we know and define what theatre is. You will realize it was always there. You had the fear of the moment when a man or a woman or a child stood to tell us a story, right? And they thought, 'it doesn't seem like I'm getting through to you. Let me show you.' And at that moment, the storyteller becomes an actor.

In so far as there is an audience, even if it is an audience of one, theatre is there, right? That is basically your definition. And in any community you did have theatre, it did

not come from or start in Greece. It was always there. People want to communicate and use the best method of communication. Actually, theater, it's not just the vocal. No, no…

Edwin Nyutho
So we need a lot more doing other than saying?

David Mulwa
A lot more doing. And in our education - I understand they are going to teach drama from primary schools - I would actually advocate that this goes deeper than that. Don't just teach drama, That is Greek. Teach theater. You are actually teaching communication in a very, very broad level up the academic tree. And then you realize you have been talking about theatre throughout.

Edwin Nyutho
Because then you are enabling the learner to start self-expression in a richer more meaningful way?

Daid Mulwa
Exactly! And it's more meaningful. It is more. You have been in the classes where the lecturer, including myself, when I'm absolutely in my dullest moment where I'm talking like I'm going to sleep and the pens are held there, and some students are nodding over their notes. What happens when you say, 'Now'? They begin to look and you begin to see a few smiles, huh? And from there on your lecture changes and they are going to try to find some meaning and write notes. ...

Edwin Nyutho:
Ok. Thank you very much Kakuta wa Mulwa. ... I will start editing David out.

Dr. Edwin Nyutho was among the first lot of students who studied Theater Arts in Kenyatta University under David Mulwa in 1973. He later taught at Nairobi School where he adapted Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart before joining KIE where as head of Film and TV department he adopted and Produced Elechi Amandi's The Concubine at Kenya National Theatre.

He joined the School of Journalism in 1995 from where he retired in 2020. He has a keen interest in Film and the Performing Arts and has performed, directed, produced many plays in Kenyan theatres. His PhD thesis was on Critical Evaluation of Kenya's Film History.

He's currently a media Consultant working with Benwide Media.

The Performer's Journey

Keith Pearson

Creativity is not a comfortable land to live in.
Kristin Linklater

The Theatre Company began its Performance Skills Training Programme in 2006 in response to demand from Kenyan practitioners who wished to develop their skill levels in a progressive, supportive environment. We are grateful to the DOEN Foundation, The Ford Foundation and HIVOS for their support in helping us to develop a comprehensive and popular programme which assisted the professional development of over 300 performers until 2019. Through this programme practitioners were able to learn new ideas, improve their performance skills through focused, sequential training, have access to archives and materials and form links with other performers.

This article considers the importance of such a programme and describes its content and structure.

The full content of the programme is contained in the Performance Skills Training Manual which is available from the company.

We like to compare our professional performance culture to a train journey.
The train is the entire cultural progression; the carriages are the groups and individuals who are part of that forward journey. Practitioners are on that journey, and may spend some time in many carriages; they may travel alone, they may even step out of the train for a while and pause for reflection.

To Train….or not…..

As a starting point, we must consider if formal training really does make any meaningful difference to a performer. After all, many cultures have vital forms of performance where training is entirely informal, yet stories, songs, dances and skills have been passed on over many centuries. In which case, why should a need for formal training arise? Our observations have led us to believe that performers in contemporary Kenya need to have sense of doing the "right thing" and to follow some kind of cohesive, consistent pattern, even if they end up rebelling against it! Performing is a bit like driving a car, adrenalin might get you through once but it's a pretty good idea to learn what you are doing!

Structuring the Programme

The Theatre Company training is based on the premise that unlike other disciplines, performance training does not lend itself easily to a logical, step by step form of learning in which the outcomes are clear from the outset. A training programme needs to offer a clear set of experiences which will be of general use to the practitioner, then he or she will go on to identify their major areas of interest on which they will want to concentrate as they work through the programme. In order to genuinely enhance the work, it is important that practitioners are assisted in the process of focusing their interests by teachers, directors and mentors.

We therefore developed a dynamic approach to performance training that took this into consideration. We began with the discussion of 20 key areas which form the bases of practical work throughout the programmes.

1. Commitment to Performance
2. Lifestyle Management
3. Build Vocal Strength & Clarity
4. Can express the performance through physical performance
5. Ability to create Text as an Individual
6. Listens to Others
7. Respond positively to new ideas & people
8. Observe Dietary and Rest Care
9. Ability to Report & Analyze the Project
10. Respect Gender
11. Interested in Other Cultures
12. Communicate Comfortably
13. Use Yoga effectively
14. Prepare Materials
15. Punctuality
16. Able to Work with Others on stage
17. Commitment to Individual Development
18. Use Voice with Confidence and Support
19. Maintain Energy Level
20. Able to create Text as a Group Member

In order to explore how we might work in detail with a performer as part of a group, let us examine two fundamental acting skills: voice and body then consider where the training material can be drawn from, and how to pass on our skills and knowledge.

Voice and the Performer

The preparation, use and strengthening of the human voice is central to the work of The Theatre Company. As in most of our training work, the development of vocal skill takes place in a circular motion, rather than through linear development. The voice is strengthened, educated and developed through a repetition of exercises supported by an increase in physical strength and stamina based on the Yoga programme outlined in the Manual and then put into regular practice in performance by the practitioners.

In our ever-moving journey as a performer it is vital that we ask ourselves the questions, 'why do we speak as we do?' and 'how do we want to speak?' As Kenyans, we have a wonderful, rich culture of languages to draw on. On any given day, it is likely that we will hear between five and ten different languages being spoken, as well as endless variations of dialect, slang and accent within those languages. Our ears are naturally attuned to interpreting those different sounds and it is likely that we will be able to communicate comfortably in at least three languages. Because we are used to this multi-cultural lifestyle it is quite likely that we make regular, if subtle, shifts in the way we speak, according to whom is being addressed, and we base those changes upon our understanding of which words and accents are likely to be the most comprehensible. It is also likely that we will make certain shifts in communication which are decided by the social status of the person with whom we are conversing. We talk to our grandparents in one way, to the infant neighbour, another.

As a performer, it is instructive to examine your attitude to your own voice. Do you speak freely and enjoy the give and take of conversation and constructive argument? Or, are you restricted by self-consciousness, often unable to find the correct word or phrase, even though you know you will think of it later, when you are alone? Where does spoken confidence come from? Examine your own upbringing. What sort of

Performers at the MauMau Caves Waterfall

communicator are you? How do you feel about words? How do you shape them into phrases? What kind of listener are you? Do you only hear what you want to hear? What challenges do you face when you translate your spoken words or thoughts onto the written page? When somebody listens to you, a friend, a colleague, an audience member, do they really understand what you are trying to tell them?

As a performer, you enter a rehearsal with complete freedom to choose how you will communicate. Of course, it is difficult to explore this freedom if you are not connected to the words or thoughts that you are using in the performance. Similarly, if you do not understand or empathize with your character, you will always hold back from a complete vocal expression.

Music is usually a seamless part of our performances, so one could say that each performance is a 'musical'. Some stories are told primarily through music, (our 2011 production Shungwaaya, for example) and training usually begins with yoga to awaken the voice, then the sharing of songs, the learning of new music and sometimes the playing of instruments. Although most trainees were reasonably adept at the use of percussion instruments, we begun to see some of our key performers working towards learning string and brass instruments as well.

Above all, a sense of musicality gives the performer an innate sense of rhythm in their work, which is, in turn, part of the subconscious communication that is shared with an audience during performance.

All positive training work begins with self-assessment and awareness. Once the practitioner has a clear idea of their current capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, they are able to focus on these areas and make clear progress.

Development of Physical Technique

The questions of how the body of the performer should be developed, how important a part of the performers' work should physical development be, and what exercises are used to promote such development, have fascinated performance practitioners

for centuries, and continue to fascinate us as we search to develop and define our unique Kenyan performance style. Techniques we developed to support the work of performance professionals came about in response to challenges posed by performers as they enter the training programme. We sought to find answers to such key questions as:

- Why do I feel under-energised in performance?
- Why do my mind and body seem to battle each other in my work?
- Why am I unbalanced or inflexible?
- How can I allow my body to become free in its interpretation of the story I am performing?

In our Kenyan traditions of dance, music and performance there are many varied influences on the shape of the body and the voice but we can say that, in general, they tend to require the body to be open in shape, thrust forward and explore flexibility in the waist and the hips. They can also be said to be extremely repetitive and lacking in time constraints, so the performer needs to have a high level of stamina, in contrast to other performance cultures where the time frames are more predictable and structured. So the challenge for our physical work is quite clear, namely to counterbalance the effects of normative practice, without doing away with the form and beauty created by the emphasis on specific parts of the body.

> *Instead of asking, "What's next?" I just went with the others. My eyes saw, my body did. No translation. Just eyes to muscles.*
> *Schechner (p.231. 1990)*

Creating material for performances

Throughout the period of the training programmes, we encouraged both work by playwrigths and devised work by the company. We called our writers workshops, From Pen to Page, from Page to Stage. Writers were encouraged to:

- Engage all of the Senses
- Trust their Observations
- Distil their Observations
- Use their Natural Voices
- Feel confidence in the language in which they choose to write

Helpful questions for writers

- What are the exceptional qualities of the main characters?
- Why would audiences be drawn to spend time with them, to be fascinated by their presence?
- What am I giving the actors to play with?
- Am I giving the audience a clear, overall sensation to take away at the end of the piece?
- Will they leave having felt the Aristotlean fear and pity, and undergone catharsis?

Devising and Improvisation

We are often nervous about the use of the word improvisation as it can sometimes imply a sense of anarchy. However, I have found that truly satisfying improvisation, one that develops a clear sense of the experience we are bringing to the audience, has its own balance and structure. Although performers are not speaking lines they have said before, or making known moves, they certainly have a strong knowledge of character, place and purpose.

It is also possible that a piece of work which has been devised through improvisational work can be recorded as a formal text and be kept in an unchanged form. Rules are there to be challenged!

Mentors and Protégées

Those of us who live within the world of the creative arts need to pay close attention as to how we pass on our artistic skills and encourage the development of those skills in developing artists.

Both from my own experience (thank you James Falkland) and from observations of others, those who have the beneficiaries of a **mentoring** relationship seem to have an extra level of confidence and an understanding of how they want to develop their art and their skills.

It is with this in mind that I developed the approach used during The Theatre Company's **Performance Skills Training Programme**.

I use an image from my other great passion, gardening, to describe this process. The artistic mentor is a **Talent Gardener**. He/she feeds and waters the talent with new ideas, observations and connections. Occasionally he finds it necessary to prune the work of the *protégée/shishya*, cutting out the excess, or advising against a particular project which may not be to the *protégée's* advantage.

Outside of the formal context of a training programme, however, it is not easy for a promising artist to find this sort of support. Either the *mentor/guru* figure has to advertise his or her willingness to fill this role, or the *protégée/shishya* has to go in search of someone who is willing to do this, a brave step for someone who is just starting out but one which experienced practitioners must really encourage.

As we have seen with the history of *The Theatre Company*, committed leaders and performers can produce truly original and exciting work.

Unique aspects of Theatre Company work

- Dance and music are fluidly combined with stories to produce a unique and satisfying performance.
- The stories are drawn from the performers, and the performers are rooted in and connected to society, therefore public audiences find there is a strong connection to our material.
- Improvisation is encouraged, so audiences are further attracted by the lack of formality.
- We have produced a performance style by the people and for the people.
- We recognise that Kenyan performers are comfortable in many languages, so we encourage multi-lingual communication in performance.
- We encourage the combinations of varying techniques and styles, both traditional and innovative.
- We use the words, "performers", or "practitioners" to describe those with whom we work, seeking to avoid such descriptions as "actors" or "singers" or "dancers" as these names seem to carry assumptions that those using these descriptions will only be comfortable with certain aspects of performance.
- We offer support and training which develops performers' creative instincts into clear, disciplined, professional theatre work patterns.
- Our "performers" are adventurers, able to explore all aspects of Art!

My advice? Take every opportunity to learn about and develop your craft. Then share it.

Society is a woven picture.
Culture is the warp and weft of the tapestry.
Performance is the picture of the weaving,
And the thread that mends the tears and holes.

Keith Pearson (2006)
Director and Actor

Keith Pearson has been the Managing Director of The Theatre Company over the past 25 years. He is a Director and Actor and has been active in the TV and Film and industry locally and at the international level. He is the proprietor of the Karichota Arts Centre in the Mt. Kenya Forestinternational levellForedt.

TTC Actors with The TiNaNiNaNi Company

Theatre Training in Kenya

Chomba Njeru

The introduction of the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) is perhaps the closest we have come to abandoning the traditional method of education and installing a liberating system similar in philosophy to the *pedagogy of the oppressed* proposed by Paulo Freire. The traditional form has been compared to a 'banking' system where students are seen as containers into which educators must put in knowledge. Freire argued that this model reinforces a lack of critical thinking and knowledge ownership in students, which in turn reinforces oppression, in contrast to Freire's understanding of knowledge as the result of a human, creative process.[1] The inclusion of the arts in education has been one of the strategies towards freeing the creative process in humans - where one becomes a creator, and through a process of critical thinking, develops ideas to communicate complex issues affecting or experienced in society.

Perhaps the biggest incorporation of the arts in education has been evidenced through *The Kenya National School's Drama Festival* which began in 1959 in secondary schools. It was adopted from the British school culture and has evolved over time to include primary schools and colleges. Its aims have evolved over time and its linguistic scope broadened to include Kiswahili and vernacular languages. Kwamchetsi Makokha, a multifaceted writer and performing artist, notes that in the 80s and 90s, the festival became a channel for calling out the KANU regime and its repressive policies, with teacher-scriptwriters and directors becoming agent provocateurs. This was of course, until the head of state enhanced the subjugation of theatre by making the highlight of the festival a gala performance by the winners. He thus effectively installed himself as the silent censor of festival performances. Consequently, most plays were written and adjudicated aiming to be presented to the president of the time. Under the regime of Daniel arap Moi, a mercurial dictator not averse to detaining artists such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, performances critical of the state needed to be cryptic to get past the censor.[2] By and large, *The Kenya National School's Drama Festival* continues to be an annual event where students, as budding artistes, can get an opportunity to showcase their skills in drama, dance, poetry, dramatized oral narratives and other performance genres. UNESCO has recognized this festival as a 'landmark step for including culture in education'[3].

Currently, one key question arising under the introduction of CBC, is whether the incorporation of Performing Arts as a subject in Junior Secondary School (JSS) will turn out to be a milestone in the development of theatre in Kenya. The proposed curriculum for this level aims to offer a broad opportunity for the learner to explore talents, interests and abilities before selection of a course pathway in Senior Secondary education level. In essence, enabling them to lay a foundation for a talent-based career.

The hiccups witnessed nationally in the inauguration of JSS have left much doubt as to whether the future is as bright as officials in the Ministry of Education, led by the Cabinet Secretary, including those from the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (KICD), have been wont to reassure the public. Therefore, the question remains as to whether the developed designs will actually be effective in the implementation of CBC at JSS level. There is dire need to monitor and evaluate the situation on the ground as schools and their teachers bring this curriculum to life in the classrooms.

[1] *http//.en.wikipedia/wiki/pedagogy of the oppressed*

[2] *Interview wih Kwamchetsi Makokha 4/04/23*

[3] *http//.UNESCO..org*

The (mostly) newly constructed JSS schools and redesigned curriculum seem to be facing an uphill task in implementation according to continued media reports. First, the intended function of the curriculum is 'to guide effective and efficient implementation of the learning activities as well as provide relevant feedback on various aspects of the curriculum.'[4] However, by the first term of inauguration in schools, the curriculum design for Performing Arts had yet to be published by KICD, the key implementation institution. Hence, a new overall curriculum was launched without a clear national strategy for content development or the requisite accompanying comprehensive teacher training programme. At the time of writing this article, teachers are yet to receive a policy or implementation plan document whose effectiveness can be interrogated. Despite all this, the teaching of Performing Arts as a subject in schools has commenced.

Then there is the question of availability and access to facilities required for teaching performing arts. "Every performance practice has its required facilities. The basic ones would be a dedicated space for creative processes (including work shopping and rehearsals, and a space for communing with the broader public. Performance is make believe and so there are facilities that enhance theatricality; props costumes and make up. Instrumentation is also key."[5] These crucial facilities are yet to be built or resources strategically allocated and utilized.

With regard to the essential teaching personnel, since performing arts did not exist as a subject in the curriculum previously, it is safe to conclude that there are no specifically qualified teaching personnel to deliver the demands of this subject. It is important to note here that of the universities in the country that offer a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) degree course, none provides the option to study theatre, film or the performing arts. These are only offered under the Bachelor of Arts course across the universities in the country. Within the B.Ed course, Drama is taught as a unit under the literature class. This begs the question of who really is currently qualified to teach performing arts in our schools. The present crop of teachers are trained in delivering myriad subjects that were offered in the outgoing curriculum. While acknowledging the in-service training currently provided to teachers on the new learning areas in CBC, the performing arts are not included in programme. "Nothing is being done by the Ministry of Education to address this anomaly but schools are having their own initiatives to ensure performing arts is centred in the curriculum implementation."[6]

Despite these shortcomings, there are initiatives taken by the English, and Kiswahili teachers to" incorporate drama in way of skits, solo and choral verses as well as oral narratives within the framework of teaching languages"[7]. In fact these teachers are not working blindly but have a published text to guide them in various topics.[8] The music curriculum has been in place and the teachers continue to instill these skills in the students in the meantime. Some schools have gone ahead and began "hiring performing arts instructors with knowledge and experience in the area. "This is a positive move that requires action from the Ministry so that practicing artistes who do not have formal teacher training can be integrated into the system as mentors whom the students can then learn from. Oby Obyerodhyambo, a theatre practitioner and scholar, posits that Performing Arts "is a skill, a science that can be shared (not taught) and honed so the Griot can share personal techniques through mentorship and a smart fellow can grasp and develop a personalized style"[9]

A tutor in Junior Secondary School opines "The Ministry of Education should take over from schools and provide the necessary support through funding and employment of instructors."[10] The onus is on the hiring body either the Ministry or the Teacher' Service Commission to come up with parameters for hiring practicing artistes to work in schools to drive the Performing Arts curriculum to the desired destination.

[4] ibid

[5] Interview with Oby Obyerodhyambo 4/04/23

[6] interview witn Mr. Gachoki JSS Teacher Naiobi County

[7] interview with Mr. Njiru JSS. Teacher Kirinyaga county

[8]. Atsyaya, George et al,Performing Arts a Learners Book for grade 7

[9]. interview with Oby Obyerodyambo

[10] interview with Mr. Gachoki JSS teacher Nairobi County

The education sector in spite of all the current mishaps in implementation of JSS, has taken a huge step in mainstreaming the arts in the education system and we therefore agree with UNESCOs observation[11] that "This move is likely to encourage study of arts subjects and will improve the quality and standards of creations showcased at the (drama) festival. Further the reforms will support study of the arts at higher education levels thus increasing the professionals in the field as well as provide skilled manpower for the creative and cultural sector."[12]

Chomba Njeru is a teacher of English, literature and drama. He currently teaches Gikuyu online and is a theatre practitioner who enjoys working with in-school and out-of-school youth.

[11] *JSS life skills curriculum design.*

[12] *http//.UNESCO.org*

Kamiriithu Afterlives: A Progress Report

Kenny Cupers & Makau Kitata

The Kamĩrĩĩthũ open-air theatre is a world-famous initiative in African decolonization. In 1976, Kenyan workers came together to build an open-air theater and stage a play that soon attracted vast audiences from across the country and beyond. Written by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, the play 'Ngaahika Ndeenda' ('I Will Marry When I Want') became a powerful means by which the community of Kamĩrĩĩthũ confronted land dispossession, industrial pollution, gender disparity, and (neo)colonial injustice. Soon after its establishment, however, the Kenyan government imprisoned Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and demolished the collectively built and managed open-air theatre.

Kamĩrĩĩthũ Afterlives is a collaborative project to commemorate and reactivate this heritage and to support struggles and debates about social and environmental justice in Kenya today. Led by Kenny Cupers and Makau Kitata, it brings together the original performers with community stakeholders, institutional partners, and performance-based initiatives for social and environmental justice. The project is ongoing and consists of four interdependent elements: an open-access archive with the voices of the original actors and others involved, a digital model of the original open-air theatre, a documentary film, and a future reactivation of performing arts in Kamĩrĩĩthũ.

Kamĩrĩĩthũ Afterlives was launched in 2020 by Kenny Cupers as part of the Swiss-government-funded research project 'Governing through Design'. This framework facilitated an interdisciplinary collaboration with African literature and performance studies scholar Makau Kitata. Our aim as researchers is to better understand decolonization in the built environment through the lens of Kamĩrĩĩthũ's community theater.

As we embarked on this project, our requests for interviews were met with a pressing question that fundamentally shaped the course of our project: 'We have been interviewed by many academics over the years. They come and take our story and then never return. How will you be any different?' (Kamĩrĩĩthũ actor James Githiga Mwaura) We believe our project is different because it is rooted in an ethics of collaboration and dialogue, following the spirit of Kamirithu theatre itself, and the pedagogical orientations of the Critical Urbanisms program. Starting from an awareness of epistemic injustice, we aim to build spaces for reflection and empowerment through creative and transformative research approaches.

In the course of this project to date, we have had the privilege of meeting the inspiring people behind the theatre and other members of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ community. Together with filmmaker Gitonga Mwangi, we organized group meetings and then conducted individual interviews with the original actors, their families, and the other stakeholders in the community. These life stories form the basis of a long-term collaboration with the actors' group and have led us to launch the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Afterlives project. Translation is central to this collaboration; we are currently working on the Kiswahili and Kikuyu versions of this website, and aim to translate Kamĩrĩĩthũ's voices into English.

Kamĩrĩĩthũ Afterlives aims to mobilize the heritage of Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre in debates and initiatives for a more just future. Together with our collaborators, we do so by remembering, archiving, translating, democratizing, reactivating, and reimagining Kamĩrĩĩthũ, and by supporting conversations about and initiatives for social and environmental justice in Kenya and beyond. Our project is still very much ongoing, and what follows is a progress report.

Figure 1: Researchers, original cast members and community meeting and video screening event, 20 May 2022 (Photo: Gitonga Mwangi)

Figure 2: First community meeting, in preparation of the documentary interviews, 8 April 2022 (Photo: Gitonga Mwangi)

Figure 3: During one of the interview sessions, Mbothu shows one of the few remaining photographs of the play, with him as a young man performing the role of Kioi (Photo: Cupers & Kitata, 2022)

Research

By analyzing the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre not only as a cultural or political event but also as a specific architectural intervention within a complex historical environment, our research contributes to scholarly efforts to develop more African-centered understandings of the continent's architectural history, one that looks beyond the colonial and developmentalist world of professional architecture (and its racial renderings of African vernaculars) in order to foreground the agency, experience and meaning-making practices of non-elites. We do so by exploring collaborative processes of architectural and spatial production. As open-air theatre aimed to foster political consciousness amongst its players and audience, we foreground the role which the built and natural environment played in this pedagogical process.

The village of Kamĩrĩĩthũ is located in the semi-rural district of Limuru, in the heart of what was once called the "white highlands." This part of Kenya is the ancestral homeland of predominantly Kikuyu communities. Many of these communities were dispossessed by the British colonial regime to make space for tea and coffee plantations and lavish plantation homes. Kamĩrĩĩthũ was established by the British colonial regime in response to the anti-colonial uprising led by the Kenya's Land and Freedom Army during the early 1950s. British armed forces rounded up people and contained them in tightly controlled camps dispersed over the central Kenyan countryside. The site of Kamĩrĩĩthũ was originally inhabited and cultivated by Kikuyu families, and the village owes its name to this nearby swamp. In the course of the British colonial war, these families were dispossessed to make space for one of the many forced resettlement and detention camps that dot the region.

Kamĩrĩĩthũ was one of these forced resettlement camps. Its land ownership map, from the Kiambu district archives, shows that each plot is a roughly standard size, with an open space at the center. The British had left this space as a community area to provide otherwise bare camps with minimal amenities. People in Kamĩrĩĩthũ refer to it as the "social hall," and they used it for community gatherings in the years after Kenya's independence. On one end of this open space was a hut, likely built by the British.

In 1976, a Community Educational and Cultural Centre was established here to offer literacy classes primarily to local women. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o himself reported, it was a local government official, Ms. Amoni, who informed Ngũgĩ in 1976 that this piece of community land could be grabbed at any time, and should be claimed permanently for community use. Together with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii they conceived the establishment of the theatre on the site as a collaborative process of construction that would involve the villagers.

Figure 4: Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre (Photo by Sultan Somjee, courtesy of George Kabonyi)

The villagers built the open-air theatre themselves, reflecting a shared sense of ownership and purpose of the project, and the close relationship of the play with the social environment through which the performance space emerged.

In contrast with the bourgeois theatre performances in Kenya's National Theatre, Kamĩrĩĩthũ's open-air theatre design imbued a sense of openness and freedom, and the proximity of the players to their audience and to the surrounding environment contrasted with the prison-like working conditions in the factory. In this context, the actors themselves acted out their own local conditions of exploitation.

The play directly addressed the exploitative conditions of the local agricultural and manufacturing industry, epitomized by the Bata Shoe Company and the nearby tea plantations. It effectively showed ordinary Kenyans not only the conditions of their exploitation, but also gave them role models for defiance and revolutionary action against what they experienced as an oppressive system not much different from British colonial rule. The intimate relationship between the built environment of Limuru district and the performance space of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* shows the forces that define the lives of Kamĩrĩĩthũ. It gives a sense of the social and environmental injustices which the community theatre sought to contest.

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What follows is well known. After the government prohibited the performance of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, and imprisoned Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o without trial in 1977, the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre stood empty for several years. Yet by 1982, the performers had regrouped and rehearsed for a new play by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Maitu Njugira *(Mother Sing for Me)*, this time at the National Theatre in Nairobi. Shortly before the performances were to take place, however, the government withdrew the performance license, and soon after, ordered the demolition of the open-air theatre at Kamĩrĩĩthũ village. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii went into exile. On the site of the demolished open-air theatre, the government erected a polytechnic. While this provided educational opportunities, it also silenced the community and erased the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre experience.

Since the 1970s, Kamĩrĩĩthũ village has become increasingly densely occupied, and the informally built structures around the polytechnic speak of the enduring legacies of injustice. The scarcity of land in the village is an enduring consequence of colonial and postcolonial dispossession. The site of the former theatre also housed some squatter homes. After the demolition of the theatre, the government moved some of these squatters, while others moved to nearby spaces reserved for roads and were joined by other migrants. The contemporary village is strewn with semi-permanent iron sheet structures, on road reserves and otherwise unclaimed land. These structures form a large part of Kamĩrĩĩthũ housing environment which residents refer to as *shauri yako*, Kiswahili for 'it is up to you'.

Architectural scholarship on decolonization continues to be limited by inherited modes of academic research and publication. Grounded in collaborative work and community engagement, this project aims to expand the epistemological basis of architectural history, so that an alternative architecture for decolonization can become visible.

Film

Told through the voices of some of its original performers and other community members, our ongoing documentary film project explores the many afterlives of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre. After its establishment in 1976, the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre was almost immediately demolished by the Kenyan government because of its revolutionary content. It is best known for the involvement of the world-famous

writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who was imprisoned and later exiled. This documentary film project looks beyond the world-famous writer and the spectacle of government repression to foreground the community's enduring struggles for social and environmental justice. It aims to situate these struggles in the history of land, the politics of decolonization, and the urban transformation of the region since the colonial era. The project aims to offer a portrait of struggle, memory, and everyday life amongst the lasting infrastructures of colonialism in a rapidly changing Kenya.

We have currently collected over two dozen life story interviews and many hours of footage in Kamĩrĩĩthũ, Limuru, and the surrounding area, and are currently fundraising and looking for production partners to complete this documentary film project.

Model

The Kamĩrĩĩthũ Virtual Reconstruction reactivates the heritage of Kamĩrĩĩthũ by creating a three-dimensional model of the original open-air theatre. In collaboration with African Digital Heritage, we developed a collaborative process for the virtual reconstruction of the vast wooden structure that once stood in Kamĩrĩĩthũ and hosted thousands of people. This process is rooted in the spirit of Kamĩrĩĩthũtheatre itself, and in alignment with the collaborative ethics of Kamĩrĩĩthũ Afterlives and the values of African Digital Heritage. The process relied heavily on consultation with the original performers and primary oral and visual history research.

Figure 5: The final 3D model (Images by African Digital Heritage for Kamĩrĩĩthũ Afterlives)

To date, there are very few photographs of the original open-air theatre and its surrounding environment available, and no technical plans of the original structure exist. This lack of visual evidence compounds the state-mandated demolition and erasure of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre in 1982.

The team employed a mix of approaches and sources to build the virtual reconstruction. The principal researchers Kenny Cupers and Makau Kitata shared previously unpublished photographs and oral testimonies which they had gathered from their research. After an initial study of secondary and primary visual sources, Mutanu Kyany'a, Muthoni Mwangi, and Michael Khakame created a draft model and formulated a set of questions about the stage itself, the changing room, the space and the materials used in the construction for the actors. Kenny and Makau brought these questions and images of the draft model to the original performers to get their detailed feedback, which allowed the team from African Digital Heritage to tweak the initial draft.

During the meeting, the performers suggested that the theatre space was inspired by the theatre space in the Education building of the University of Nairobi, called ED II. Makau and Mutanu then visited this space, referred to as "ED II," in order to get a better estimation of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Auditorium layout and dimensions.

Figure 6: Muthoni Mwangi and Mutanu Kyany'a discuss the second draft with Githiga Mwaura, Njaramba Kiguura, Wangari Hinga and Lucy Wangui Ng'ang'a on 25 March 2023 (Photo: Cupers & Kitata)

After revising the model, a second meeting with the Kamĩrĩĩthũ performers and the whole project team followed. The actors provided for final comments and approval. We all subsequently visited the polytechnic, in order to virtually imagine the built structure on site and ascertain its former placement on the site. This allowed us to arrive at the most accurate model of the theatre. The vivid and emotional response of the original performers during these meetings conveys the power of virtual reconstruction projects such as this one. We plan to mobilize this virtual reconstruction in our project to reimagine performance arts on the site.

Future

Together with community stakeholder and institutional partners, we are currently developing a collaborative project to reimagine the open-air theatre and reactivate performance arts in Kamĩrĩĩthũ. Our research and filming has led to an increased awareness of the importance of this erased and demolished heritage amongst a range of stakeholders, and is now instigating efforts to create a community-based organization in Kamĩrĩĩthũ. Based in collaboration with these stakeholders, our project may include a combination of fragmentary reconstruction of the original theatre, a space to memorialize struggles for social and environmental justice, and the programming of new performances and events in Kamĩrĩĩthũ.

Our starting point for this project is to recognize the capacity of collectives as both history-makers and future-makers. We aim to engage these capacities to build a project that activates the past as a way to chart a more just future. Following this ethos, our project will be guided by a participatory process to support the

community to develop the appropriate strategies for honoring the heritage of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ open-air theatre on its original site. We understand community participation as emerging through dialogue and exchange of knowledge and experience amongst diverse actors—across generations and lines of class, gender, and race. This process will form the basis for reactivating the site. Mobilizing the digital reconstruction of the theatre in conjunction with new design practices will help us develop a range of potential scenarios. This open-ended, creative process will be crucial for the project to be sustainable over the long term.

Kenny Cupers is professor of architectural history and urban studies and head of Urban Studies at the University of Basel, where he cofounded and leads the Critical Urbanisms program. Publications include *What is Critical Urbanism?, Coloniality of Infrastructure, The Social Project: Housing Postwar France, Neoliberalism on the Ground, and Use Matters: An Alternative History of Architecture.*

Makau Kitata teaches at the University of Nairobi. His publications include *'The Challenges of Naming in the Kenyan Fictional Narratives;' 'Sexualizing the Dance, Objectifying the Performer: The Twerk Dance in Kenya' and 'Re-narrating the Eastern Africa Coast through YouTube: Vitali Maembe's Little Town Bagamoyo'.*

Staging Ngaahika Ndeenda at the Kenya National Theatre: A Critique

Fred Mbogo

Abstract

Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want) a play by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii is arguably Kenya's most travelled work of drama, at least in terms of academic discussions around, publications on, or even as a site for critical case studies with Kamĩrĩĩthũ , its source, in mind. Its place as part of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's creative oeuvre is constantly brought to the fore, not least with the narrative of how it came to be as detailed in Decolonising the Mind. So, why does this article argue against the suitability of the play's recent staging at The Kenya National Theatre? Why shouldn't the play be accorded some measure of pride of place at that theatre's hallowed grounds?

Introduction

There is nothing as problematic as the staging of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii's play *I Will Marry When I Want* at The Kenya National Theatre in present-day Kenya. This was best reflected in the myriad issues that were at play from the most recent staging of the play at the Kenya National Theatre's main stage running from May 12 to 29, 2022 as directed by Stuart Nash under Nairobi Performing Arts Studios production house. First, there is the issue of the poster, or advertisement selling the show, and what that might mean. Second is the question of the play itself and whether it got the life it deserved in a 2022 staging, away from the 1977 realities. Third is the problem of symbolism, especially given the difficulty this play has had with the space that is The Kenya National Theatre – to the point of wondering who should own the theatre! There is, finally, wrapped in the difficulties of identities and, by implication, gazes, the concern regarding whether *I Will Marry When I Want* is a play that can be mounted under the directorship of an expatriate director of British extraction and still find its soul!

The selling of the show

The main poster pinned on the Kenya National Theatre noticeboards, and whose electronic copy was shared on social media and on ticketing sites and other websites, bore the face of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Perhaps that was a tribute to one of the play's creators, which in a sense is commendable. Yet, in practical terms, Ngũgĩ's face stole the show, to use that dramatic expression mildly. The play is sold more as a valuable artefact under "works of Ngũgĩ" and less as a story of Kiguunda's dispossession of land, or Gicaamba and his fellow workers plight in the face of owners of capital (factories) that "…are real scorpions" and who "know three things only, to oppress workers, to take away their rights and to suck their blood." In the poster, the price for a ticket at the door is 1,600 shillings, which undoubtedly would cut out a large part of the populace that may have watched the 1976 "rehearsals" of the same play in Kamĩrĩĩthũ. It seems the poster, with its claim that the production is sponsored or is in "partnership" with Royal Media Services, East African Educational Publishers, Citizen Television, and ViuSasa, is a product placement site. The staged production in reality has hopped onto a bandwagon that one might refer to as "The Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o industry", where Ngũgĩ's brand can be exploited for maximum profits. This is in contrast to how Ngũgĩ tells of the play cominng to be; how it was made by ordinary Kamĩrĩĩthũ dwellers, workers and peasants, in the socialist lingo of the time. The poster's commercial zeal with its brands of 'sponsors' hoping to cash on the publicity of a highlight in Ngũgĩ's oeuvre, departs considerably from the intention of

those gathered in Kamĩrĩĩthũ to prepare and stage the play to busloads of spectators who essentially came to watch 'rehearsals'.

The argument in this essay is that the play's origins come with a certain hallowedness, given the emancipatory nature of the stories told. It sought to conscientize the classes against exploitation, especially coming at a time when uhuru was seemingly seen as having been hijacked only a few years after the euphoria of 1963. The play's sacredness is massacred at the altar of profits in no less a place than the Kenya National Theatre – the symbolism eats into the soul of the intention of the creation of the play in the first place.

What about the material on stage?

An interesting problem that confronts the director of the published I Will Marry When I Want is whether to make the play speak in a language less of the 1970s and more of the 2020s. Under the Stuart Nash direction, the play was stuck with the 1970s language at least in terms of dialogue and speech delivery. For instance, Gicaamba still refers to a salary of Kshs 200 and five shillings for a kilo of sugar which is not in tandem with current prices. Of course, a literal understanding of the play should not be encouraged, yet, what can be done about references to KCA (Kikuyu Central Association) and references from Kiguunda about detention at Manyani? There is an old-fashioned world view in which "platform shoes" as desired by Gathoni, Kiguunda's daughter, are seen as part of the accessories to current trends – that is more of the styles of the 1970s than of 2020s. There is a way in which the play is seemingly stuck, particularly with workers' rights and interests that aren't in tandem with present-day realities. This remoteness that transports us to a world where exploited workers are compensated with 25 cents when they have been harmed with chemicals, and which have Britain, America and Japan as neo-colonisers, is interesting. What about China?

The play's socialist credentials are stuck in a time where China and Russia are seen as "big brothers" and are blameless, and the West, including Britain and the United States of America, are to be watched for their exploitative tendencies. Many African countries have since looked East, towards an emerging powerhouse in the form of China, which has now embraced new capitalist trends. China has now become a big investor in many of Africa's infrastructural projects. In many places, the Chinese have overtaken the Americans and Britons and French in terms of influencing the 'development agenda'. But the play is stuck within a 1970s romanticization of socialism, how could a 2020s interpretation speak to the realities 'on the ground'?

This problem becomes voluminous when one imagines that the play is more like an artefact in a museum, stuck in time, and audiences become the spectators in museum halls reaching out to touch historical happenings. In a sense, I Will Marry When I Want has lost its sting. No longer do the issues it raises seem as anxiously urgent as they seemed, at least not in the way they are mentioned. Yes, we still need to confront neo-colonialism, but now it has new faces, and newer ways of reaching us, what with mobile telephony, computer technology and its cyber-implications, as well as the constantly nagging effects of The Bretton Woods Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) – these keep being pushed by these institutions towards African countries in other subtler ways, thereby creating newer exploitative channels. Can Ngaahika Ndeenda be directed in a way that allows these realities to come alive, or must it be stuck in a time warp?

The Venue

The Kenya National Theatre sits on haunted ground. It has a difficult history, as a space on which a group of rioters in 1922 were mauled down, some shot from the balconies of The Norfolk Hotel, for merely demanding the release of Harry Thuku. Indeed, it is interesting that the street is named after Harry Thuku, who eventually turned into a collaborator with the colonialists, rather than Muthoni Nyanjiru, who was killed while leading a group of protestors in a call, ironically, for the release of the said Harry Thuku! When The Kenya National Theatre is erected in 1952, there is a Mau Mau uprising, which would lead to declaration of a state

of emergency. Historians have argued that the Kenya National Theatre was part of a group of buildings made to showcase the Kenyan colony as capable of going its own way, but only under settlers in the Rhodesian fashion. Of course, the settlers did not succeed. Within this scenario of a haunted past, and its erection at the height of freedom struggles, and the many years in which the Directorship of the National Theatre was under settlers and their scions, how could the indigenous Kenyan ever claim any ownership of the space? How could people from Kamĩrĩĩthũ ever hope to stage a play voicing their dissatisfaction with the state at that Kenya National Theatre? The independent government under Jomo Kenyatta did not take kindly to what it perceived as the play's subversive messaging, so the play was banned and its stage at Kamĩrĩĩthũ burnt to the ground. People only watched it under the guise of 'rehearsals' but never as a substantive piece of work. Its two co-writers ran for their lives to exile. Its many actors and actresses were left with lingering questions in their minds, as Gichingiri Ndigirigi reminds us in his essay.

With the play's discomfiture at the Kenya National Theatre of the 1970s, and the decades since, how could it ever hope to carry its soul peaceably onto that stage in 2023? Perhaps when we look at the venue, we are reminded once more that Ngaahika Ndeenda was not merely a play, but a communal emancipatory process – that is, it was beyond mere aesthetics. How then could the play ever hope to live up to its raison d'etre by inviting non-Kamĩrĩĩthũ actors to play in it? These latter actors' motivations would be different from the original cast of Ngaahika Ndeenda in Kamĩrĩĩthũ. In any case, there isn't the same political skirmish in 2023 as there was in 1970s. Audiences in 2023 don't feel the same notoriety of sharing in perceived subversive conversations as they would have had in the 1970s shows. And the plays' eventual staging at The Kenya National Theatre in 2023 seems to be non-threatening; the theatre seems to have flattened the plays' tyres, if one could use that expression! It can't move with the speed it did in the 1970s. There is a sense of sanitization of the play at The Kenya National Theatre. A laundering that sheds the play of its thorns against the state, and now makes it fodder for commercial entities that cash in on a "Ngũgĩ industry"!

But one can also look at the venue's hindrance to a full realization of the essential performance of Ngaahika Ndeenda when one re-interprets Ngũgĩ's chapter on "The Language of African Theatre" in his Decolonising the Mind. The interactive nature of the play seems most suitable in an open-air space without the physical barriers that create a stage versus auditorium situation as one finds at the Kenya National Theatre. In line with this argument, how many more plays which can be considered "indigenous" in nature have had to be redesigned to fit the Kenya National Theatre stage? This is simply a sign of the ownership problem that The Kenya National Theatre space. The physical space gives very little room for play where a designer wishes to inject a feel of interactivity between players and audiences; in the languages of 'spectatorship' as many community theatre scholars borrowing from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed seem to suggest. Nothing, in fact, emphasizes the ownership problem of the Kenya National Theatre more than the stage design issues – it becomes more about fitting 'African' in 'European' settings.

Personnel

The thesis held in this essay is that *I Will Marry When I Want* is a community process, not a mere play. It is based on 'reactions', to the disillusionment of independence, and should be a conscientizing process for the people in Kamĩrĩĩthũ in 1977. The question becomes whether in a restaging of the play, within a Kenya National Theatre whose ethos, histories, and ideas are at loggerheads with the play's running themes, there can ever be a recapturing of its essence. Indeed, the play has been staged elsewhere, for example, in 1982 at The University of Zimbabwe with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii as one of its directors, in 1993 by Kamĩrĩĩthũ Cultural Group in Nairobi, in 2000 in Asmara as translated into Tigrinya by Alemseged Tesfai and funded by the Eritrean government, in 2003 as directed by Conrad Makeni in Nairobi, among many others as noted in Gibbs and Muhia's essay on 'Wole Soyinka and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: Plays in Production'. The uniqueness of these productions is that they were interpreted by directors working either within Theatre for Development arenas, or who lend a Socialist/

Marxist critique of capital and dehumanization of workers, or who have lived within the reality of similar Kamĩrĩĩthũs, where the aesthetics of theatre (as sometimes practised at Citrus Whispers' Theatre) would find the Kenya National Theatre's space alien.

But the Stuart Nash directed I Will Marry When I Want of 2022 has been 'strangled' to fit within the Kenya National Theatre aesthetes. It no longer feels urgent as a point of political discussion. Indeed, an audience paying between ksh.1300 and 1600 at the Kenya National Theatre to watch the play, is far removed from the realities of the discussions that Gicamba and Kiguunda are engaged in within the play. Only the expatriates and a sprinkling of Nairobi's middle class could show up for this play, to share in the stories of a Kamĩrĩĩthũ of the 1970s, as interpreted by Stuart Nash, himself a man of British descent, far removed from the realities of possible Gicambas and Kiguundas. How could the interpretation of this specific setting ever hope to achieve the essence of the 1977 staging at Kamĩrĩĩthũ, and within the boundaries of an institution (Kenya National Theatre) built to spite the indigenous Kenyan?

Conclusion

Can there be an unproblematic staging of *I Will Marry When I Want* at the Kenya National Theatre? Yes, there can be; if the play were to be reimagined on several fronts. First, there would be a need to recontextualize the play, as not merely a play but as a process of conscientizing whatever group of workers or peasants. This would lend it its socialist-Marxist-humane credentials, as it would mean involving a live audience focusing on its problems and seeking change in the fashion of Theatre for Development processes. But that would mean that the Kenya National Theatre space is not used "conventionally" so that there would be an interaction with the audience without the barriers between the stage and auditorium. The second unproblematic staging would require a re-territorialization of meanings so that the question 'What is the Kenya National Theatre' can be answered without reference to the physical space that the theatre occupies – does the Kenya National Theatre have to be a physical space demarcated in Nairobi? Can it be an idea that can host the anguish of the characters of Gicaamba, the workers activist and hapless Kiguunda who is awaking from the haunted sleep induced by the numbing strategies of the neo-coloniser?

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History & Nakuru Players Theatre

Wanyonyi Wanyama

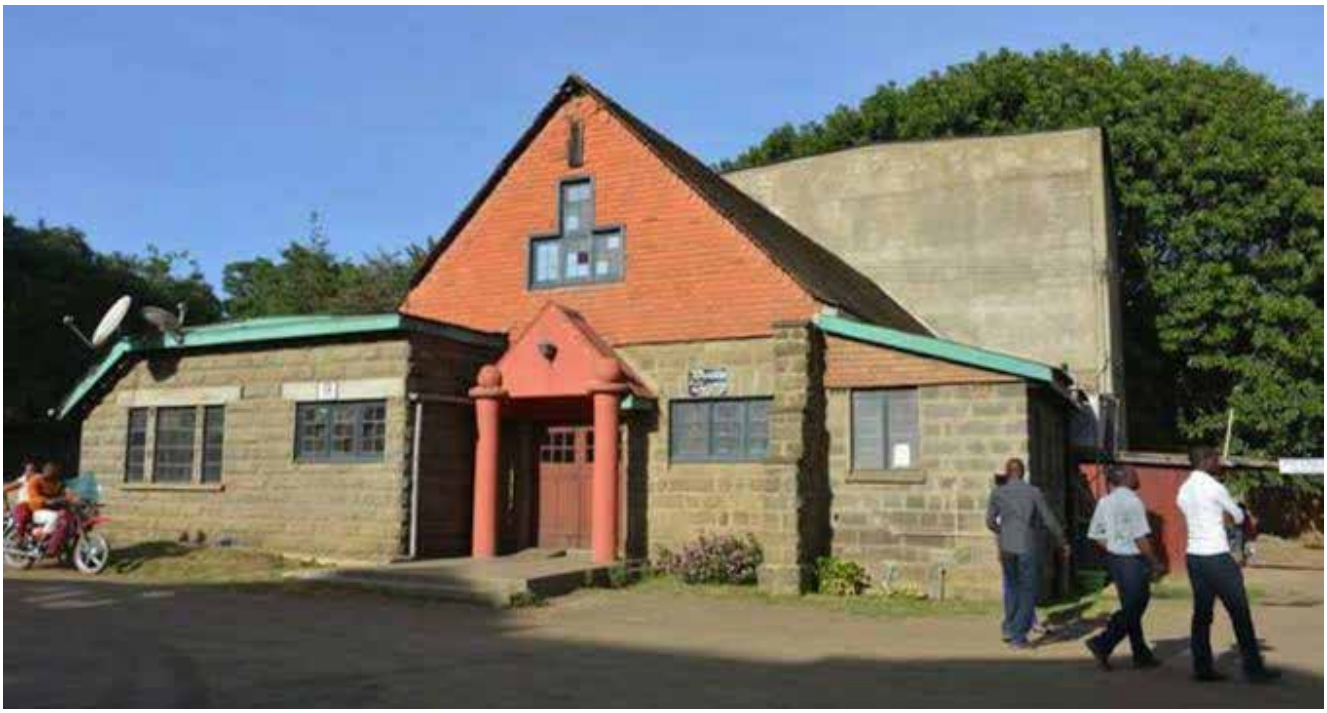
At the exact geographical centre of Nakuru town in Nakuru County, sits a building in the shape of a lion. To the common eye it's just a building that sits on a prime two-acre piece of land in the town's Central Business District (CBD), but beyond what meets your eye is Nakuru Players Theatre, a space that has for the last 70+ years shaped creative minds in their pursuit of nurturing and expressing their creativity while making a living. Over the years, this space has lived and breathed into the creative vibrations of the youngest city in Kenya and the only UNESCO-recognized creative city in East Africa.

The Nakuru Players Theatre is managed by the Nakuru Players Society under the leadership of a trustee and is one of the oldest creative hubs in Kenya. The society was formed in 1949 by European settlers who were looking to establish a performance entertainment scene that would rekindle their European culture so far away from home. At a time when the only entertainment venues were the top club and Nakuru Athletics Club, there was definitely a need to establish a cultural space for their recreation.

Nakuru Players Society was formed at a meeting called by the then Town Clerk, Mr. Ken Louis and held at Nakuru Athletics Club. The meeting was attended by two of the most prolific theatre groups of that time: the Nakuru Players and Nakuru Amateur Dramatic Society. There was a need for a properly constituted society to manage cultural matters. The whole town was invested in the well-being of Nakuru Players Theatre and after the formation of the society they began to look for a space they could identify as their own. In 1952 the society purchased the masonic lodge and the land around it on Garland Avenue, since renamed Kipchoge Keino Avenue. The space was purchased by contributions from various settler businesses and the construction of the building was funded by a loan from the then Barclays bank. Renovations included an extension on the front side of the building into a foyer, which was used as a members' bar opened once a week for the theatre's guests. Other renovations included an extension to the stage and the addition of the dressing rooms at the back.

The space became central to the Nakuru community, bringing together the settlers, businessmen and women, government officials and cultural practitioners. Every performance that was showcased at the Nakuru Players Theatre (NPT), was supported by Business owners from within Nakuru district and was duly recorded. From the then Eveready limited, Barclays Bank, Finley's and Gilani's butchery to mention a few, these businesses oiled the machine that kept the Nakuru Players Theatre space alive. The Nakuru Players Society maintained communications with fellow creative spaces over the years like the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi, the Uasin Gishu Arts Company in Eldoret, The Little Theatre in Mombasa and the British Council in Nairobi.

As independence approached it is rumoured that the walls of Nakuru Players Theatre hosted the fears of the white settlers and was a safe zone for them even as they tried to picture an unknown future. The late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, who after independence was the first President of Kenya, visited NPT, in a bid to reassure the settlers that the government was committed to protecting them whether they decided to leave the country or stay on. In the instance they decided to leave, the government would compensate them for their land and property.



Originally a Masonic lodge, the Nakuru Players added the bar/ Foyer (left), the rest rooms (right) and the proscenium tower (background) that houses the flybars above the stage. Photo Credits - Nash Nderitu.

After independence, many of the settlers left and many of the businesses closed down or were sold. This meant that the support that was accorded to the NPT was no longer forthcoming. The European membership dropped significantly and the space eventually gave room for Africans to join the Society starting with Drum Singers, a group of musicians based in Nakuru town.

After independence, the art performance industry struggled to find its place in the country as creativity began to be undervalued. Even on the national platforms entertainers were not given the recognition they deserved. The transformation of the management from European to African was fully realized but it did not help things as the challenge that remained was regaining the network Nakuru Players Theatre once had. The late Mr. Arthur Brown was the last white chairman and he tried his best to midwife a successful transition.

Prior to independence highly influential people held the position of club president including sir Ken Louis who was the town clerk and Sir Michael Blundel who was the owner of Eros cinema hall in Nakuru town. After independence Prolific African theatre practitioners have held the position of NPS chairpersons with great improvements to the theatre space and artists. These include; the late, Mr Barnabas Kasigwa, a re-known playwright and then drama teacher at Kabarak High School, Mr Otuol, a Cultural Officer in the Rift Valley Provincial Office, Mr Walunywa a lecturer at Egerton University, Mr Collins Dennis Oduor a storyteller, writer, magnet theatre practitioner, Mr Francis Gachau, an actor, producer influential entrepreneur, Mr Silas Temba, an award-winning director, playwright, and drama lecturer, and the current chairman, Mr Benson Ngobia, a director, producer, and a lecturer at KCA University. It's this rich heritage of leadership and networking that has kept the theatre doors opened over the years.

Over the years Nakuru Players Theatre has produced many game shakers in the creative industry within Nakuru and Kenya as a whole. However, without formal financial support, many of the members usually leave the craft and the town in search of greener pastures.

In the 1990s, there was a reprieve when NGOs whose aim was to address behaviour change within the community as a means to reduce infections of HIV among the population decided to use theatre greatly in reaching and interacting with the community. During this period Nakuru Players Theatre become a hub for any theatre engagement that one needed within the area. Some of these partnerships altered the direction which artists interacted with the space. The NGOs provided training, mentorship by seasoned theatre practitioners, and financial aid to theatre groups that they worked with. With this support, the NPT space thrived again with the said theatre groups being able to have independent theatre performances at the NPT.

Unfortunately, with time, the NGOs changed tack and concentrated more on supporting government agencies and less of civil societies. This led to a vacuum of performances (since most were NGO financed) and necessitated the need for artists to recreate themselves. From training gotten while working on community theatre projects, most of the artists, in a bid to make a living, started applying themselves as roadshow MCs, DJs, community health facilitators, event coordinators etc. As the artists were getting popular and busy, the performances at the NPT started to suffer again. The NPS committee decided, that in a bid to support the budding young artists to recreate the culture of theatre-going and performances at the NPT space, they introduced monthly and weekly shows that enabled the young artists to showcase their talents in storytelling, music, acting, dancing among others. This has turned out to be very popular as it not only provided a space for rehearsals and performances but a forum for talent exhibition and discovery.

Nakuru Players Theatre membership remains steadfast in shaping the cultural space of Nakuru and promoting the arts within the County with available resources. Through consistency in ensuring and maintaining a culture of leadership, Nakuru Players Theatre has attracted partnerships with several entities including the County Government of Nakuru and various organisations like the Lake International Panafrican Film Festival (LIPFF), Kenya Film Commission (KFC), Canon Africa, Kenya International Theatre Festival (KITFEST), local businesses, and recently the Creative Arts Spaces in Kenya (CASiK), an initiative by the French Embassy. Through the French Embassy's CASiK project, Nakuru Players Theatre has received high-quality sound and light equipment, and technical training on the same to ensure that the creative space supports all activities technically. With such partnerships, Nakuru Players Theatre can begin to rediscover itself not only as a venue of performances, but a centre of creative excellence within Nakuru and as a face of Nakuru's creative city.

As the space gears towards an upcoming election, it purposes to improve on the gains made in the past and further leverage on the goodwill of relations and partnerships created along the way. There is definitely more that can be done.

Eric Wanyama Wanyonyi is a performing artist, theatre/film maker, and the current Chairman of Nakuru Players Society

Renovation in partnership with the first Nakuru County Government.

Photo Credits - Nash Nderitu.

Perspectives on theatre

Mumbi Kaigwa

I didn't always know what I wanted to become when I grew up. Like most people I knew, I just muddled along. Actually, that's not true; most people I knew seemed to have a very clear idea of what they were going to become. A doctor like Uncle X, a banker like Dad, a businesswoman like Mum. Every so often you'd hear the word "engineer", and jobs like "actuarial scientist" were yet to come.

So, when I was young, I didn't hear anyone in my circle say they wanted to be an artist, painter, actor, or musician. These were things many people did and could do, but always on the side, or when they were in high school – something you might be quite good at, but never something you were going to do as a REAL job.

There was no precedent – when you saw people doing these things they were in school or university, and even if they were professors and writers, they seemed to be working towards the professional salaried job that would come after years of education. The arts weren't seen as something that you did for a living. When we saw foreigners being artists (mostly on television) it looked like make-believe, fiction. Or at the very best, it seemed unattainable because it was abroad. And why would your parents struggle to get you the admissions interview, the embassy interview, the visa, the foreign exchange, and the school, for you to become an artist? Surely it wasn't something anyone studied.

As a result, my route to creating a life as an artist was very roundabout. Like almost everyone I knew, I started off by getting a "real job" after school and it wasn't until I was thirty-six years old that I left that path and became a full-time artist.

In high school I adapted poems into plays with friends, but I wrote my first full-length play at the age of thirty-nine. I give thanks to the West African playwrights I encountered along the way, such as Wole Soyinka, Guillaume Oyono Mbia and James Ene Henshaw, as their work was an integral part of my theatrical growth. Without them I'd probably only have memories of Cinderella and Goldilocks.

Theatre cannot be replaced by anything else

Theatre is important. The space it occupies in society cannot be replaced by anything else. That's why the colonial government criminalised African cultural practices that embodied elaborate communal performance. Because this kind of communalism keeps people united. Under colonialism, serious efforts were made to westernise theatre practice so that there was a distinct divide between the performers and the audience, as opposed to the pre-colonial style of performance, where the performers and the audience were often one and the same thing. Unfortunately, becoming an independent nation didn't result in these old practices being reintroduced; these new leaders were sufficiently convinced that our traditions were uncivilised and they made every effort to continue with a colonial agenda based on western anglicised modernisation.

My introduction to performance began in Hospital Hill School by way of the National Verse Speaking Competition that our teachers encouraged us to participate in as individuals and in choral groups. Through a process of elimination, one climbed up a ladder from competitions in the school zone to competing at the divisional zone and then a provisional level followed by a week-long event to select the winners. At the end of the seven- to ten-day period, a selection of the plays, poems and dances were performed in front of a panel of judges, ministry officials and competing schools. The prize was often a certificate and/or a silver cup, and prestige for the school. I represented my primary school and then high school and won several awards and over time my confidence as a performer improved.

The first poem I remember memorising for one of these competitions was Hillaire Belloc's *Tarantella*, when I was around nine years old and which begins, "Do you remember an inn, Miranda, do you remember an inn?" The poem is about a dance and not, as I thought then, about a spider.

Poetry is fun because you're learning without realising it. For example, you're learning how to speak in public, you're learning new vocabulary, you're learning how to memorise and how to work as a team. So starting really early I was subconsciously building all these skills that would come in handy later on in life, everything from patience to empathy, to communication, and respect for others.

One of my favourite memories from this time is the choral recitation of Okot p'Bitek's poem *Oasis*, with our high school teacher Mrs Hull conducting us as if we were instruments in an orchestra, as we learned how to practise rhythm, intonation and projection.

> Listen to the sandy tunes
> Of the desert song
> As it rides the sand dunes
> Accompanied by the winds
> Singing through the palm leaves,
> I want to hold hands
> With the Arabs
> And dance together
> With the Israelis,
> We shall dance
> By an oasis
> And cool our feet and hearts
> With the water
> Of the oasis!

And it is p'Bitek who introduced these same fourteen-year-olds to the prophetic words about his and our countries' independence in his poem *"Song of a Prisoner"*. It was a great loss to the world that he died so young, at 51, in 1986.

A bit of background information is important to shed light on what was happening outside the school grounds as Kenya approached her independence and onwards into the 1960s when I was joining Hospital Hill.

The Kenya National Theatre was built in 1951 and opened in November 1952. No Africans were invited to the official opening and the theatre was not intended as a space for the majority population. Many of the plays staged following its opening were for the benefit of the British army as well as to boost the morale of the European settler community. Remember 1952 was also the start of the State of Emergency that paralysed life in the African parts of the city. In the decade following independence, the theatre remained resistant to change and continued to proclaim British culture as

Mūmbi wa Maina, Mūmbi Kaigwa and Janet Young in Agnes of God *by John Pielmeier (1989)*

the hallmark of civilisation. As Assistant Director, Mark Mshila was the first African appointed to a senior position, but like many Africans in assisting positions at that time, he was not allowed to make any important changes to the theatre's colonially-inspired policies. Later the same year, in 1968, Seth Adagala was appointed the first African director. As one of his significant contributions to the Kenyanisation of theatre, Adagala established the National Theatre Drama School. The school's curriculum steered towards Western theatre training, for example, stage movement, stage management, acting, scriptwriting, directing and such. African methods of performance training were not developed or taught, and the resident company, established by the school's graduates in 1970, tended towards the production of comedies.

Meanwhile, at the neighbouring University of Nairobi, there was a raging debate about the use of English literature and literature in English as the foundation of the English Department. James Ngugi (later known as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o), Owuor Anyumba and Taban lo Liyong, who were members of the faculty, "argued that the English Department should be abolished and replaced with a Department of African Literature and Languages, with indigenous oral literature, as the starting point of the curriculum with Kenya, East Africa, the African continent and its diasporas in the centre of knowledge, in place of England, the British isles, the European continent and its diasporas.

Both institutions were fighting for respect for Kenyan ideas and practices and intellect.

I'm very grateful to Prof. Kimani Njogu in whose series of publications on art, culture and society I found Dr. Mshai S. Mwangola's essay on Kenyan Theatre, titled: *Njia Panda: Kenyan Theatre in Search of Identity*. I read it in 2022 and I have quoted extensively from this essay. I have come to a much clearer understanding of my own journey and contribution. Indeed the most searing question Mshai asks is "why was Kenyan literature [...] so submissive and hardly depicted the people, the masses, as capable of making and changing history?"

That this written history of the University of Nairobi and the National Theatre should come to me at this stage of my career is both a terrible and a wonderful occurrence. Terrible because it gives me a feeling of being completely disconnected from my own history, but wonderful because it proves to me that the course that I took with my theatrical journey is deeply rooted in the work of all the freedom fighters in general and these important scholars in particular.

There's a saying that "hindsight is 20/20 vision", which means that everything seems so much clearer when looked at through the lens of a life lived. My journey to creating work that is relevant to Kenyan experiences started very early, but, as I didn't have a roadmap, it's possible to think that it took a long roundabout route.

When I'm asked about my career as an actor I usually say that it started when I was ten years old when my uncle Jagi Gakunju was a law student at the University of Nairobi, and also a member of the University's Free Travelling Theatre. Njagi, as he spelled his name then, was cast in the role of Ifada in *The Strong Breed* by Wole Soyinka, and the script called for a young girl of about my age to play "A Girl". I was 10 years old.

The Strong Breed was written in 1964 and "Girl's" role is described as "leading Ifada, the village ***idiot*** around the town". I have a vague memory of the rehearsals, mostly riding home on the back of Uncle Jagi's big motorbike, but I didn't remember anything about the character I played, so I looked up a copy of the play online and it turns out I had pages and pages of lines to memorise.

That really was the beginning of my life as an actress, because a supporting role in the school's musical production of *Oliver* (based on *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens) came later, when I was 11 or 12 years old. In high school there were more plays, such as *West African Sepia* which I co-wrote with my friend Betty Hinga, which created a possible ending to the encounter described in *Telephone Conversation*, a poem by Wole Soyinka, and which won the Inter-House Drama Festival at Limuru Girls' School. Another memorable play was *Man of God* by Kimaru Gicheri, who taught French at the school. This play was presented at the Kenya Schools' Drama Festival, where I won the National Best Actress Award for my role as Sospeter Kagui, a religious man who goes mad when he catches his wife cheating on him with the village teacher.

Fast forward past the secondary school to when I met Janet Young….

I'm not sure how or when exactly I met Janet Young of Tamaduni Players for the first time, but in 1988 when I was 26, I auditioned for a part in one of Tamaduni's productions, *for colored girls who have considered suicide … when the rainbow is enuf*, which is a play by the African American playwright Ntozake Shange. It was one of the first plays that I was in by an American and it gave me an insight into the difficult history and solidarity of black women in 1970s America. I think I gravitated towards it because it is written in a poetic style and my experience of performing in primary school and high school prepared me for this style of presentation.

It was through this production that I was invited by James Falkland, the director of Phoenix Players, to audition and perform in their productions, mainly plays by European playwrights such as William Shakespeare and Henrik Ibsen, as well as the British Frederick Knott and the French playwright Jean Anouilh.

Working at Phoenix wasn't easy; I was hungering for something in my performance experiences, though I didn't know what that was at the time. Phoenix was born in 1983 at the same time that the very Caucasian Donovan Maule Theatre closed its doors to the public.

In an interview she gave Tony Mochama in the Sunday Nation in 2002 when she was 80,

Annabel Maule said it broke her heart to close down the theatre that her parents Mollie and Donovan had opened on June 1, 1958. Her memory was razor sharp as she recalled that her parents formed a company in 1956 through which they intended to raise money to build the theatre. Another British national, Richard Frost, had been asked by the colonial government to establish a theatre for European settlers in 1947, around the same time the Maules came to Kenya. In those days I don't suppose the British paid for land and I could not find any information on how the site for the Kenya National Theatre was decided upon, but according to Annabel, Frost raised Stg£ 50,000 for the construction, Stg£ 2,000 of which was donated by the Nairobi City Council. At that time the British Pound exchanged for Kes 20, and so the building cost Kes 1 million. The National was completed in late 1952 but due to the declaration of a State of Emergency, the theatre didn't open its doors until November 1952.

Prior to the construction of the Donovan, Annabel's parents had been operating out of the Capital Cinema (present-day Hotel Ambassador) on Whitehouse Road, whose name changed at Independence to Government Road and is now the present-day Moi Avenue). Annabel's parents ran an acting school and staged plays in front of the cinema screen before each night's film show; enthusiasts could watch a play followed by a film without leaving the auditorium. The Maules wanted to own their own theatre and started to raise funds in 1956. Donovan and Mollie managed to raise Stg£ 77,000 (about Ksh 1.5 million then) but the money still wasn't enough and they'd exhausted their own resources. The locally-based National Bank of India guaranteed a loan that allowed them to start work on the new theatre in September 1956. An interesting bit of information is that there were freak rains in March 1957, which stopped construction. The Donovan Maule Theatre opened its doors on June 1, 1958, and the life of Kenya's repertory theatre began.

By the late 1970s the DM - as it was known - was struggling financially. Annabel's parents had passed away and many British and Asian patrons had left Kenya at and around Independence. The Central Bank had also imposed strict regulations on foreign currency, and as most of the actors at the theatre were expatriates, paying their wages became increasingly difficult. The diet of theatre was strictly European playwrights; I believe the first African on the Donovan stage was Stephen Mwenesi in *Othello* by William Shakespeare in the early 1980s and the colonial hangover and culture of racial segregation didn't create a welcome environment for Kenyan audiences. Annabel sold the theatre to James Falkland and his patrons, the Bhakoos in 1979.

Unfortunately, this partnership didn't last long. They probably experienced the same problems as Annabel, and the attempted coup d'état in August 1982 only made things worse. Nairobi shut down completely during the dawn-to-dusk curfew that was imposed after the coup. Following the attempted coup there was an increase in censorship and live theatre took a very big hit. In 1983 the partnership collapsed and James moved next door to the newly constructed Professional Centre's basement to start on his new venture, the Phoenix Theatre, with his company Phoenix Players.

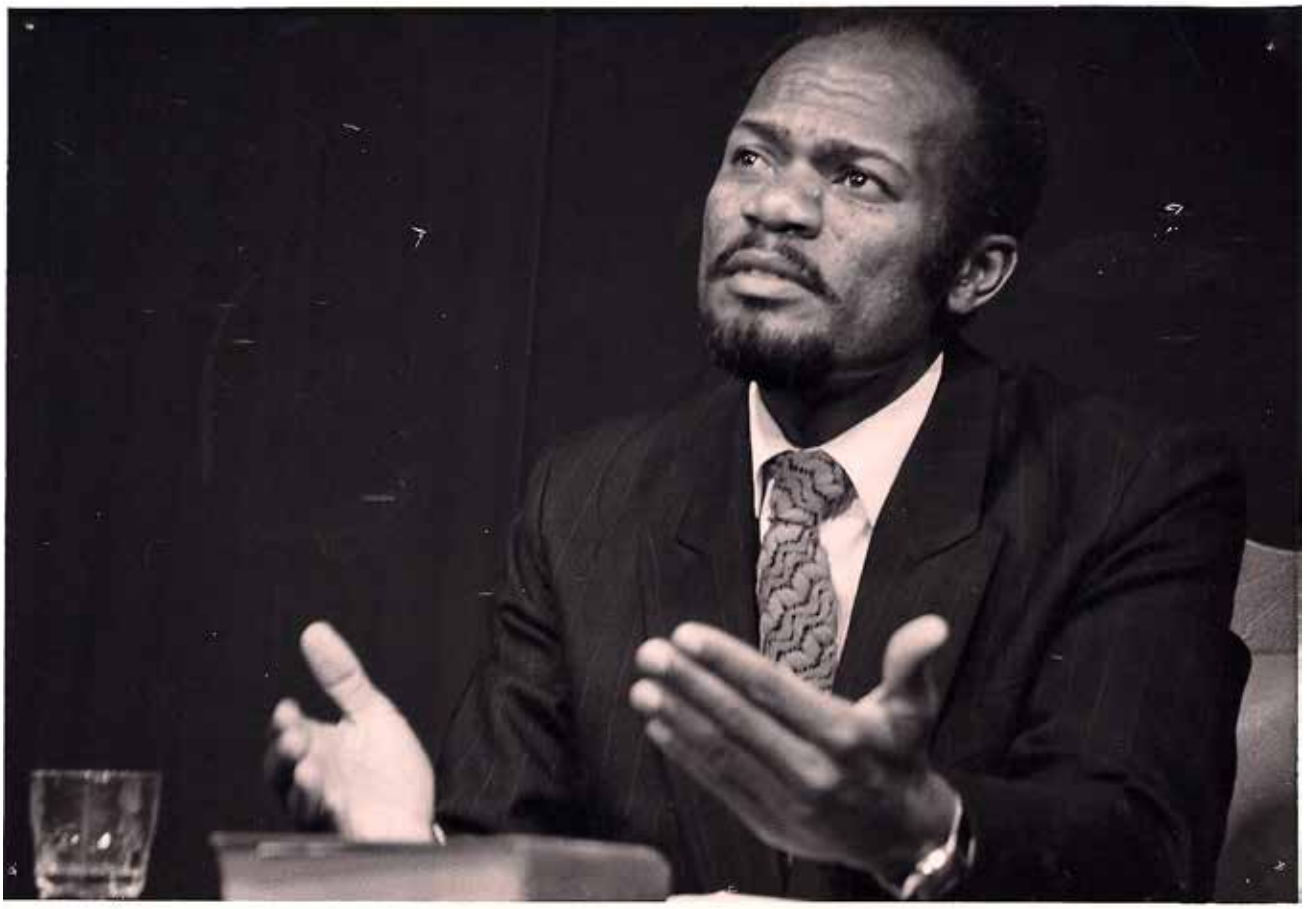
The Donovan Maule was demolished in 1988 and remained a car park for many years, while the Phoenix Theatre had many crises and attempts to save it throughout the '00s before closing its doors in April 2017. With the National Theatre too problematic to hire, theatre companies were reduced mainly to hiring halls in religious institutions or spaces in cultural centres owned by the French, German and Italian governments, as well as the British Council auditorium in the ICEA Building on Kenyatta Avenue, which the British High Commission didn't include in their plans when they moved the Council from ICEA Building to their fortified building in Upper Hill.

Despite the lessons learned from the DM's closure. all through Phoenix's existence their repertoire also consisted almost entirely of what, in 2002, Falkland called, "a very white programme," though he did concede that: "there are one or two Kenyan playwrights coming up." That there were productions elsewhere in Nairobi of plays by the likes of Wole Soyinka,

Ugandan playwright Robert Serumaga's *Majangwa*, J.C de Graft's *Muntu* and Langston Hughes' *Tambourines to Glory* should imply that the programming at Phoenix was more a matter of choice that a lack of Afro-centric material. Like the banks that adopted sheng in their advertising very much later in our history, it would take a long time before Phoenix would commission Kenyan playwrights and composers to stage local productions on their stage.

I'm not sure that James' argument, that the process of choosing plays was difficult because he was also quoted as saying that Phoenix had "a wide cosmopolitan audience. It's Kenyans, Asians, Americans, Canadians, Germans, French, Italians, Japanese." I think the problem was more one of the cost of performance rights (or royalties) being governed by whatever Phoenix could make back at the box office. For almost all of its existence, Phoenix struggled with bills and the annual musical would be the most lucrative show of the year. The musical, which had a long run of months rather than the three weeks allotted to other performances, was expected to cover the box office shortfall of productions that hadn't done too well. There wasn't much room for risk-taking. When I formed my own company we occasionally brought shows to Phoenix where we would often play to full houses. There was definitely tension in the bar when I would ask James why he wouldn't take more risks and do productions that his audiences obviously loved.

Our productions such as *Betrayal* by Harold Pinter, *Talking Heads* by Alan Bennett and *Death and the Maiden* by Ariel Dorfman played to sold-out houses. I would have loved to see Phoenix move away from the repertory format, give plays longer periods in rehearsal, and choose more widely from those plays written by people of nationalities James listed as making up his audience. Granted, there were many things to consider when choosing scripts, such as the size of the auditorium. But seeing what Phoenix accomplished with their annual musicals, with a full band and close to 30 people on stage at the same time, it looks like a bit more risk-taking might have yielded dividends.



Steve Mwenesi in The Gospel According to St. Mark

As an amateur actor, I was still working full-time at a 9 to 5, so the allotted Phoenix Players rehearsal time never felt enough. Phoenix Theatre was a repertory theatre. A repertory theatre is a company of resident actors who present works in rotation. Phoenix's repertoire ran on a schedule of a new play every three weeks and included a steady menu of British farces, one Shakespeare play in the first quarter of the year and a musical play in December around Christmas. Apart from the Christmas musical, all plays at Phoenix would start rehearsals on a Monday and prepare for three weeks. The first two weeks would be spent in daily rehearsal and in the third week you'd be putting the play "on its feet" - Monday: lighting, Tuesday: blocking the play on stage, Wednesday: full dress rehearsal, Thursday: Press Night, and finally Opening Night on Friday to a paying audience. The play would then run for that first weekend, a day off on Monday, and then run for two more weeks. During this time the next play on the schedule would be in rehearsal.

The difference between the actors hired as professionals and those of us who were amateurs was that the professionals spent all day learning lines, while amateur actors only had the evenings after their full-time jobs plus the weekends to research the play and memorise lines. Often I didn't feel ready for the performance on that Friday opening night. I think the audience could tell that we weren't always properly prepared for a paying audience. Many times I'd invite family members to watch my opening night performances and they would say, "will you be ready? Maybe I'll come next week."

So I began to work more and more with Tamaduni Players where the rehearsal period was longer, anything from six to eight weeks. This gave us time to be super ready by the time the show was opening, which really appealed to me. When I first visited an acting and playwriting workshop in America, I was surprised to learn that plays were in rehearsal for months at a time, with practice starting in the morning and ending late at night. There was also a process, which I loved observing, of putting a new play in rehearsal and workshops for years; Tracey Scott Wilson told me she wrote her wonderful play, *"The Good Negro"* for more than seven years..

Before she left Kenya for her home country The Gambia, Janet Young, the founder of Tamaduni Players, invited me once again, this time to join the cast of *Aikin Mata* in 1990, a Nigerian version of the Greek *Lysistrata*. I think this was when I began to find the route my work was going to take later on. *Aikin Mata* had music, dance and song, and rehearsals were really in-depth, with acting and choreography and singing. This became the time I spent in rehearsals preparing the plays I would begin to write in the 2000s, working with musicians, singers, dancers and narrators to build a performance piece that was neither a play, a musical or a dance show, but all three combined. But this was still ten years away.

[This piece of writing is taken from Mũmbi's upcoming memoir, Inside the Life of an Artist]

Mumbi Kaigwa is an actor, writer, producer and director of theatre, film and TV. She first appeared in a television production of Wole Soyinka's "The Strong Breed" at 10 years old. Between 1988 to 1999, Mumbi worked for the United Nations in Nairobi. Since 2000 she's devoted her life to the arts, working with artists across East Africa.

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Kakamega's Wanda Gardens: A Budding Space for Culture and Performance

Rita Mbukha Shitemi

Introduction

Broadly speaking, Kenya has many unique performance spaces some of which are situated in rather unconventional establishments. Such is Wanda Gardens, a recreation centre in Kakamega Town that offers more than conventional entertainment and has become a meeting ground for artists. It is, in fact, a theatrical space for the expression of artistic sensibilities. The uniqueness of this establishment lies in the conscious attempt by the management to provide an opportunity for artists to explore their talents. More so, its inimitability is in the management's deliberate effort not to prioritize profit. Situated four kilometres from Kakamega town along Kakamega-Mumias road at Ejinja Corner intersection lies this one-acre theatrical space. At the far end of this acre, is the Francis Imbuga Memorial Library clearly marked and cordoned off, behind it a flower and tree nursery, and, nestling within it is a sitting and relaxing space.

The memory of Francis Imbuga

Francis Imbuga Memorial Library was established in honour of one of the most popular playwrights Kenya has ever produced. He is the author of the phenomenal trilogy of *Betrayal in the City, Man of Kafira* and *Green Cross of Kafira*. His other works include *Miracles of Rimera*, a novel written within the context of magical realism. Imbuga died in 2012 and this space was established in his honour.

Wanda Gardens was established in 2016 with the main purpose of hosting a cultural centre and a children's library, which now has a collection of approximately three thousand books. It provides reading space for 10 readers at a time. It has a catalogue that guides the reader on the choice of books and a librarian on site to help the readers locate and retrieve books of their choice. However, it has morphed into many things as artists in Kakamega experiment with a variety of things within this establishment. Spoken word artists from both Kakamega and Kisumu perform regularly in this venue, while poetry evenings and storytelling sessions around bonfires are always on offer.

Cockfighting stadium

The latest experiment is the construction of a cockfighting stadium (cockpit). This is the only cockfighting stadium in the Republic of Kenya. Cockfighting is an ancient Luhya cultural game. Indeed, the history of cockfighting goes back to the classical period. The Greeks used to engage in cockfighting before any battle in order to stimulate the warriors to be brave and fearless. Amongst the Bali and the Luhyia, cockfighting like bullfighting is an instrument of self-analysis and a way of celebrating masculinity. To the Luhyia people of Kakamega, cockfighting is a cultural phenomenon that represents reality, albeit symbolically, and reveals the non-obvious hierarchies that pervade the society. It is a game of power, identity and masculine hegemony.

Significantly, Wanda Gardens is the modern-day arena for cultural performances. Traditional ritual drama creates cultural reawakening and a sense of community. It reconnects society to itself and creates a bridge between the living, the dead and those yet to be born. This space is therefore created to teach the younger people about the ways of the community and give them a sense of identity. While doing all this, it also projects a subversive streak, unlike the traditional arena.

In Wanda Gardens, you will find the young and the old engaged in intense discussions on cultural matters and book analyses. It is in fact, the *Kamīrithū* of Kakamega. The *Kamīrithū* experiment spearheaded by Ngugi wa Thiong'o was a people's effort where peasants and ordinary people came together to establish a theatrical space in which they re-enacted their lives with a view of empowering and educating themselves.

Poetic madness

Poetry sessions bring together young writers who write and perform their poetry on specific days of the month. The most memorable poetry session was held on 29th October 2022. This session brought together poets from the Kakamega Book Club and Kisumu county

Book reading as performance

In the vanguard of this experimental space, are members of the Kakamega Book Club composed of mainly youth inspired by the spirit of wide reading. Also active, are professors who provide the vision and guidance for the club. Wanda Gardens has been the home of the Kakamega Book Club since 2019. The Club which has 40 bonafide and active members, hold monthly meetings to interact with the text of choice for that particular month which members are expected to purchase to build their own private libraries.

Every month, this group engages in reading performances to help in the understanding of and reflection on the written text with the ultimate goal of changing their society. Research has shown that fluent oral reading learned through performance reading leads not only to engagement in and enjoyment of reading but also to reading comprehension (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). In view of this, Wanda Gardens has started hosting regular Book festivals. So far, it hosted the inaugural Kakamega Book Festival on May 21, 2022, which included poetry performances with members reading their personal works, and celebration of members' achievements in the literary field. The Kakamega BREST (Book Reading and Story Telling) Festival was hosted on 10th December, 2022 and the activities included book launches, book reading and storytelling.

The book as we know it is the centre of the activities at Wanda Gardens. That is why regular book launches are held at the venue. Since 2019, eight (8) books have been launched at the venue.

Rita Mbukha Shitemi is an Office Administrator in the Office of the Registrar Academic Affairs at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

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Mbukha Shitemi is an Information Scientist currently working at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology in Kakamega, Kenya. She is the Secretary General of the Kakamega Book Club.

The digital space and theatre practice

Nyokabi Macharia

I thought it would be useful for me to talk about this topic by reflecting on my journey in the digital space as a theatre maker. I didn't realize how much my perspective of creating theatre evolved through the different productions I was involved in, until I wrote this piece. As I share my journey, I hope it inspires you to embrace the ebb and flow that comes with the process of creativity.

Introduction

When Covid-19 hit, I was in the middle of pursuing my Masters program in Music Theatre in a foreign country. I was devastated that my program had been cut short and I wouldn't get the experience that I had anticipated after traveling all the way to *"majuu"* as Kenyans call it (which means abroad). I feared that I would be a fraud because after all, the course was extremely practical so if I wasn't physically in a class acquiring these technical skills, would I really claim to be certified in the course?

Amidst the panic, our teaching faculty very quickly adapted to the lockdown situation and started experimenting with the theory classes through Zoom and slowly roped in the more practical courses like singing and dancing into the now online program. At first, I felt completely shortchanged. "I didn't travel all the way to the UK to be taught online, I might as well have stayed back home and taught myself through Youtube," I thought. However, I slowly warmed up to the online program and accepted my fate thanks to my mother who always insisted on having a positive mindset in whatever situation.

This was the beginning of my journey in the online space as a theatre practitioner.

A Book and Its Cover

For my final project in school, I had to create something, anything. It just had to be interrogating a question on a topic I was interested in. My default thought was that I had to create alone since everyone was locked down in the UK. I didn't have any idea about what I wanted to do for my final project until I watched an adaptation of Mary Shelley's, *Frankenstein* on UK's National Theatre's YouTube page. They were streaming their past shows weekly for free as a way of making theatre accessible to people during the lockdown. The play starred Johnny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch and they both gave phenomenal performances. However, as I was watching it, I missed a softness through the vulnerable moments of the play. I wanted to sit in the emotions with the characters a bit more and I thought maybe if the characters were female, the intimate moments would be more profound. BINGO! I had an idea for my final project! The only problem was that everyone else in the UK was still on lockdown. However, Kenya wasn't on a strict lockdown. People could still meet but they had to maintain social distance. The only way I was going to make this piece happen was if I collaborated with people from my home country, Kenya. Therefore, I decided I would direct, produce and executive produce a gender swapped adaptation of a scene in Frankenstein which I named, *A Book and Its Cover* all on ZOOM!

This process was tedious as there were always internet connection issues, I could never get the full angle of the room and had to use someone to move me around with the phone. I had to shout over the top of my voice so the whole room could hear me as we didn't have a speaker to amplify my voice.

That was my introduction to embracing different ways of creating theatre. The experience taught me that anything was possible. My perspective of theatre changed from a play/ performance in a building to creating through any available medium and relaying the final product to an audience.

Balcony Arts

Shortly after I completed my masters program, I was contacted by actor, Charles J Ouda to be part of an initiative by Balcony Arts , a global live streaming platform which was looking to connect American writers to Kenyan actors and directors to create short plays to be staged on Instagram Live. I thought this was a unique and interesting concept and immediately jumped on it. It was during this project that I observed that musicians had always used Instagram Live for jam sessions, especially during the pandemic but actors never utilized the platform to stage plays. Maybe because the traditional perception of staging a play was that it HAD to be in an actual auditorium/building/physical space and have audience members? That is the thrill of stage plays after all? The energy you get from the audience? However, what Balcony Arts made us realize, is that, we can stage a two-hander (a play with two actors) show on Instagram Live as it only allowed a maximum of 2 people on the live simultaneously.

You can watch A Book and Its Cover HERE

I couldn't believe no one had ever thought of this idea especially because of how efficient and convenient it was. Sure, this isn't something you can monetize. However, it's a great way to build on skill and exercise the performance muscle, I thought. This experience made me realize that I didn't have to wait for a whole production, rehearse for 6 months in order to put up a play. In addition to that, it introduced me to cross-cultural collaborations. Finally, I had access to American creatives, who are a step closer to Hollywood, and now I could be, too. More importantly, I realized they are creatives just like us, Kenyans and we are all in a global village. It made me realize that I could create with anybody, anywhere in this world. Even though the borders of the world had been closed off, ironically it felt like the world had just opened up to me.

You can watch one of the pieces HERE

Actors Anonymous

Before I left the UK, I decided to put up a one woman show, *Actors Anonymous* which explored the reflections of a go-getter. I approached a tech streaming company, Theatrical Solutions . They had acquired technology that enabled hybrid streaming that blends in person and remote streamed performances. This meant I could perform to audiences in the UK, but my people back at home could also watch me!

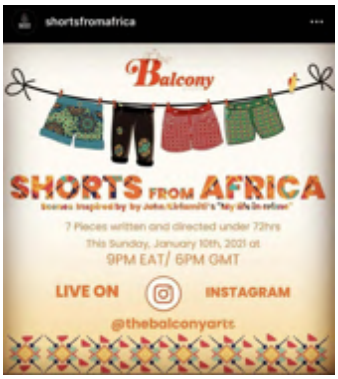
At this point, I had been exposed to endless possibilities of cross-cultural collaborations and was eager to do more of them.

The nature of the medium was also a unique opportunity for me to bring together a Kenyan and British audience to experience both worlds through the piece. So, I commissioned a Kenyan writer to collaborate with a British writer on the show.
This show was extremely tech specific as opposed to what I had done with Balcony Arts. We used multiple cameras to livestream the performance which meant I had to hit certain cameras at certain points. Basically, playing for the camera whilst performing a theatre piece. Whereas I enjoyed the rawness that Balcony Arts format provided, I appreciated how high quality audio and visual accentuates a performance and it could be seen through the audience's reaction.

You can watch Actors Anonymous HERE

Shorts Around the World

Through the Balcony Arts experience, I met Kenyan actor, director and producer, Nice Githinji. After the live shows, we had an online zoom wrap party to celebrate the short plays we had staged on Instagram Live. During the zoom party, she mentioned how she envisioned creating short films out of the chapters of *My Life in Crime* , a classic Kenyan novel by and about John Kiriamiti the most wanted gangster in the '60's & '70's. I thought it was a brilliant idea and immediately wanted to be a part of it. I reached out to her the next



morning and asked her if we could collaborate with Balcony Arts and use their format to put up short plays on Instagram, and we did. We reached out to East African actors, writers, directors and gave them 72 hours to create short plays inspired by the chapters of John Kiriamiti's, *My Life in Crime*. After a successful run, we were inspired to form our own film & theatre company, Shorts From Africa.

After a few months we were inspired to go beyond East Africa, so we mobilized creatives from 10 different nations and different backgrounds, who had never worked together, and gave them a week to write, rehearse and stage six short plays on Instagram Live. We dubbed the edition, *Shorts around the World*. Instagram then allowed up to four people to be on live simultaneously and had introduced aesthetic filters. This meant, it did not limit the performers to two people and we could now use more performers for the productions and make use of filters to enhance the aesthetics of our characters and 'set designs'.

Creating on Instagram Live exposed me to the beauty of using the resources that come with apps and other digital inventions to enhance a piece of art. Before that, I had been apprehensive towards using digital means to add on the aesthetics of theatrical pieces as I thought such spectacles took away from the work. However, this experience made me appreciate the beauty of combining both and finding a balance where they complement each other.

Watch how one of our participants used an Instagram filter and an AI voice for their piece HERE

Theatre For One

Theatre For One is a mobile state of the art performance space for one actor and one audience member which means, a performer only performs for one audience member. The piece is tailored such that the audience member is a part of the show and dictates the direction of the show.

Therefore, this creates a very intimate and unpredictable theatrical experience for both the performer and the audience member. I was a bit jealous that I was called in as a director and therefore couldn't experience it as a performer as I would have loved to try out this new format. The actors had to repeat the performances about 12 times each night and I could only imagine how much of a challenge this posed.

One performer stated that the unpredictability threw her off. Whether it was the electricity (especially in Kenya, where lights can go off any time), or the rain on her tin roof which would then be too loud for her to ignore, or encountering audience members who weren't paying attention which she says, was much harder to ignore. Another performer stated that she loved the fact that she didn't know what each performance would bring. Each audience member brought along a different type of energy which she used to access a different version of the piece each time. As a director, it challenged me to create a dynamic experience and how to use the camera as a character in the piece.

Conclusion

The digital space gave me a gift; it opened up the world to me. Now, the world is my oyster and I am always ready to play in it, in whatever medium it presents itself.

Nyokabi Macharia is an award winning actor, director, and producer based in Nairobi. She won the Best Lead Actress in a Film in 2022's Kalasha International Film and Television Awards for her role as Wendo in Chaguo.

Elegy in Honour of Theatre Maestro Wasambo Were

JKS Makokha

In appreciation of the architecture of fatherhood, I encountered you in this lifetime.

The mind of Heaven is oblique to human understanding. To know it is like easing the elbow of the departed as comfort

Like a dad hoists a lad upon his shoulders, doubling his weight equal to double sight, now I see farther, that death confirms life.

When I stare at your images on media, truer is the rude reality become more present, you are absent.

The pain of your going, hour after hour, keeps coming, again and again

Like a father who plunges into the vast bush, you have left us here at the edge of this life, we stand now at the threshold of the distant brim of meaning itself.

True. I wish I can still see your mouth make words, move to the cadence of sentences, making a mind here, a brain there, form a hole, that only meaning can fit in, well.

You are not here. Were you here to attend your funeral, you will see how men now hide tears underneath words, and more words, paragraphs

I keep saying your name, in tune with the tipping of the reddening skies, twilight bears me witness Wasambo. Were. Luka. Look. I say your name again and again. I believe that it will remain the same. Thus:

Same as your timbre better than a marimba

Same as footfalls of pigeons in June

Same as the eternal blue skies - dome of ancestral suns in descent

Same as the crisp wind upon the wings of a young night. New.

On wings like moonshine rays, I let loose....

I choose to set free the steady patter upon the roof of the eyes

Let the tip top tap of minutes, hours, moments

Arrest the hands of the clock of God. Let the Measurer of Moments run out of energy -

Energies that mirror memories of our chats

Energies that pronounce proverbs with letters of sense

Energies that articulate your Truth, your Meaning in the void of your name now:

Luka

Were

Wasambo

Amen.

JKS Makokha is a lecturer, literary critic and poet based in the Department of Literature at Kenyatta University

Yet Still You Are the Song

Eugene Skeef

yet still you are the song
(in memory of Mĩcere Gĩthae Mũgo: 12 december 1942 - 30 june 2023)

we find ourselves wandering among the silenced internodes of
an unseasonable loss
as notes of a truncated melody yearning to reunite
but not knowing how

for you were the song that completed the choir of our harvested gifts

now we are gathered beneath the canopy of nature's cathedral
to receive the blessings
of the great spiritual commission to act out the beauty
that is the bounty
of your boundless love

yet still you are the song
that possesses the entire range needed for our voices to rise
to the harmony of the heavens of your benevolence

and so we follow the hypnotic call of the birds of the sacred forest
because they listened and learned when you sang
for the light to shine divinely through the quivering interlacement
of the seams of your tuneful inspiration

and we will continue
to sing your eternal presence
in the midst of our restored being

eugene skeef 130723

Eugene Skeef is a South African percussionist, composer, poet, educationalist and workshop leader and has lived in London since 1980. He also works in conflict resolution, acts as a consultant on cultural development, teaches creative leadership and is a broadcaster. Eugene is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and has served on the board of directors of the London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO). He is on the advisory committee of Sound Junction, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music's award-winning interactive multimedia educational project.

Declaration of Restitution

Restitution African Cultural Heritage Initiative

The Restitution of Cultural Heritage Conversations

Kimani Njogu

In 2022, Twaweza Communications published a Special Issue of Jahazi which delved into matters related to the restitution in Africa. Soon after, Africa No Filter released a report *Reclaiming Restitution: Centring and Contextualising the African Narrative"* by Molemo Moiloa. There are other spaces where restitutions concerns are voiced and shaped. This is as it should be. I participated at a global convening of the African Cultural Heritage Restitution Movement hosted by the Culture and Art program of the Open Society Foundation. It drew representation from different parts of the world with discussions interspersed with performances, networking sessions and speeches. It was clear that the conversations ought to have a social justice lens, involve local communities, integrate infrastructural development, include capacity development initiatives, and go beyond the return of the heritage to incorporate the practices of people-centered research, documentation, intellectual property rights, repair, dignity and care.

At the end, participants released a Declaration, as shown below:

"The Accra Declaration on Restitution of African Heritage

We, the undersigned, hereby solemnly wish to recognise the significance of this convening, a first in its breadth and continental representation on the subject of the restitution of African heritage. It comes at this critical moment in the long history of Africa's demand for the restitution its heritage and builds on the increasing global awareness of this issue. This moment calls for the collective commitment for restitution, repatriation, and the restoration of the dignity and respect for African agency to determine its right to its history, and to its future. We pledge to honour African agency in reclaiming its rightful history and shaping its own destiny.

The Global Convening for the Restitution of African Heritage has been a truly Pan-Africanist gathering. It has brought together practitioners spanning the African continent, from diverse fields such as international law, heritage management and museums, artistic practice, activists, academics, among others. The convening has also been profoundly pan-African and trans-African, bringing forward the important contributions and histories of the African diaspora and beyond, including our colleagues from as far afield as Iraq, Mongolia, and Australia, highlighting the pluriverse of the convening. The convening has also brought together practitioners committed to the matter of African restitution across generations, heralding a passing on of the baton of many decades of committed work of Africans over many decades. Together, the debates and engagements have been robust, impassioned and at times contested, and have encouraged a sense of collective focus and commitment to not work in silos or yield to imposed divisions.

Within these profound debates and dialogues, passion has melded with contention, fostering a shared sense of purpose. It is our shared belief that the act of restitution, while

involving the return of artifacts to their origins, transcends mere physicality. It embodies justice, reparation, and a rectification of global power imbalances. This is a collaborative odyssey, wherein Africans script their aspirations and visions for the future.

The convening has recognised restitution's role in raising the consciousness of Africans all over the world, proclaiming the global ecology of the human being and centering Africanist epistemes that honour the multiplicities of our identities. Restitution is not simply a matter of return of African heritage back to its rightful places and peoples, but is a matter of justice, restoration and reparation, and the righting of global imbalances of power. It is, first and foremost, a collective venture for Africans to determine their hopes and visions for the future. Just as African culture has inspired the western world, the cubism movement and the artistic modernity, the time has come for Africans and particularly the youth of the continent to seize the mantle and make claims to its illustrious heritage, its historical sciences and technologies, its spirituality, and its knowledge systems.

The Global Convening on Restitution of African Heritage has been a community based and grassroots led agenda, driven from the African continent. It is a significantly complex and multi-dimensional issue that requires the mobilising of many stakeholders to work together and to play their dynamic and different parts – covering issues of education, activism, investment and economy, the roles of women, the effects of climate change and building important connections for the youth. It is of utmost importance that this conversation continues to happen at different levels, and remains inclusive of all stakeholders it impacts, at the state level, with civil society, and most importantly with communities.

The individuals who gathered at this convening have all been committed to the complex and challenging work of African heritage and continue to drive important work in the movement forward towards effective restitution. It is important to recognise the difficult political contexts and conflicts within in which many currently work. Many are hampered by the distinct lack of resources for the work of African heritage and culture, and more especially for restitution and reparation, topics that drive many funders away. Africans work under the immense weight of the mechanisms of bureaucracy in under-resourced circumstances, and for many artists and cultural producers, working conditions are dire. There is deep need to address the development of skills, the need for support to museums, conservation, and circulation capacities on the continent. In the spirit of progress, we call on African governments and the African Union to work collaboratively with civil societies and communities, and to implement their commitments to dedicate 1% of their budget to culture programs, including their own policies and action plans.

Way forward:

As signatories of this Declaration of Restitution, we resolve to uphold the following imperatives:

- Building a Movement of Moral Coalition: We shall foster unity across diverse sectors to amplify our collective impact.
- Spreading Public Awareness: We commit to disseminating knowledge and garnering public support for this cause.
- Establishing Ongoing African Spaces: On a more regular basis – expanded to museums, community, and public involvement.
- Integrating Art, Culture, and Heritage into Education: We advocate for their seamless integration into our education systems, shattering Western epistemic framework.
- Challenging the Capitalist Museum Paradigm: We strive to reshape the museum construct beyond capitalist confines.

- Support the African Reparation Fund (AReF): We shall champion the establishment and growth of this fund by committing to being thought partners in the movement of restitution.

We therefore mutually pledge that this Declaration of Restitution stands as a testament to our collective will, a vow to reshape history, restore justice, and ignite a transformative legacy for Africa and the world.

Signatories:

Elfia Elesse, Molemo Moiloa, George Abungu, Frank Hermann Ekra, Toussaint Kafahire Murhula, Sylvie Njobati, Dr. Ebrima Sall, Dr. Akwasi Aidoo, Ibrahima Kane, Veronika Châtelain, Dr. Ibrahima Amadou Niang

24, August 2023

W.E.B Dubois Center; Accra, Ghana"

The signatories are members of the Open Society Foundation Restitution Initiative. The Communique was released at during Convening on Restitution of African Heritage, in which Twaweza Communications participated.

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