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Reflections on the Creative Economy in Kenya



JAHAZI has it!

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The Journal is the result of an initiative by Twaweza Communications - Nairobi, and Bantu Mwaura, to encourage dialogue between academicians and art practitioners. The space will be 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

That Kenya has a vibrant creative sector with a long and distinctive history is in no doubt. As part of the informal sector, which carries around 84% of the population, we have come to identify it in various ways, the moniker *jua kali* maybe best expressing its multiple dimensions. These function within a cultural context that is fluid in its embrace of the new, and also embedded in traditional ways of doing. The absence of a facilitative policy framework has, however, meant that this potentially vital sector has had to navigate and create a path for itself. Sectorial stakeholders have variously worked towards building this framework, both before the enactment of, and within the enabling statutes of the 2010 Constitution. Part of this thinking was shared at the Creative Economy Conference, from 26th to 28th February 2015, convened by the Creative Economy Working Group with the support of the Ford Foundation, Advancing Public Media Program.

The international community has increasingly recognized the pivotal role of culture in development. Conversations within UN agencies, at other international and national fora have resulted in conceptualizing how this recognition of culture might be translated into actions leading to sustainable social and economic development. Concepts such as “cultural industries”, “creative industries” and “creative economy” have evolved over time as governments, cultural and creative workers, corporate institutions and civil society seek to understand and operationalize the fundamental role of culture in human development.

UNESCO, the UN agency with a specific mandate for culture, has a long history of involvement with cultural industries dating back to the 19th General Conference of UNESCO, in Nairobi (1976). It first commissioned studies on cultural industries in preparation for European and international conferences (Oslo 1976 and Mexico 1982). The Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development was held in Stockholm (1998), inviting dialogue between the UN, its Member States, various NGOs, and business. UNESCO soon published the first World Culture Report – Culture, Creativity and Markets (UNESCO, 1998). With the adoption by the UNESCO General Conference in 2005 of the Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, endorsed by the UN General Assembly, creativity, creative enterprises and cultural industries have become strategic drivers for human development. Various countries have ratified this convention. At the regional level, the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) on August 25 in Kampala debated and passed the East African Community (EAC) Cultural and Creative Industries Bill. Stakeholders in the sector helped develop this Bill that seeks to establish the Creative and Cultural Industries Development Council. This shall foster an environment conducive for the enhancement and stimulation of creativity and innovation in the Community.

At national levels, there has been growing cognizance of the potential importance of the creative economy for growth and for sustainable and equitable development. The adaption of attendant policy and legislative measures to actualize this recent understanding of culture in development is happening, if slowly. The August 2010 constitution recognizes culture as the foundation of the nation, while protecting and promoting artistic expression. In addition, Kenya's Vision 2030 foregrounds the role of innovation as important in achieving both the economic and social pillars, while national values, goals and ideology will be crucial to achievement of social, economical and political aspirations. The Kenya National Theatre (KNT) has been renovated and performance spaces are mushrooming in the counties. Institutions that train youth in the creative arts are expanding. Although these are major strides in centralizing culture, a coherent framework for operationalizing the policy framework is needed.

In this Issue, (Vol.2 Issue1), we share reflections on the creative economy from artists themselves, policymakers, art lovers and media personalities. These reflections are drawn from three sources. First, in 2010, Dr. Sophie Macharia took the debate of the Creative Industry to Strathmore University, one of Kenya's leading institutions of Business. She organized a Public Lecture Series examining the relationship between creative industry and social transformation. This monthly forum under the aegis of the Ford Foundation attracted participants from the University and the public at large. Secondly, in 2014, the Jahazi Editorial Board invited selected scholars and artists to write articles on their thoughts and practice with regard to the creative economy. Lastly, material was drawn from the national Creative Economy Conference, referred to above. The aim of the conference was to present the different dimensions of opportunity for Kenya's creative economy and means to overcome constraints limiting the creative economy's full contribution to national development.

The extended duration of collection of articles has been frustrating at times for the publisher and editorial team. However, significant insights have been gained on the changing thought and language on how culture, cultural and artistic expression shape human development. As the government moves more and more towards the creative economy as a panacea to youth unemployment, poverty alleviation, weakened industrialization and other socio-economic ills, commensurate focus has not been given to the establishment of supportive infrastructure to grow the creative industries. Thus we are stuck betwixt intent and actual implementation.

As conversations on the creative economy continue, there begs the question whether advocates for the creative economy in Kenya are focussing more on the economic benefits of culture and forfeiting its aesthetic and intrinsic value. Creativity helps us understand, celebrate and express the human condition. It is good in and of itself. And yet, how does the cultural sector begin to moderate its own socio-economic potential on the national platform?

These articles are in no way exhaustive in addressing this dynamic area of the creative economy. But we do hope they are provocative enough to catalyse the ongoing conversations and actions in the culture sector.

Sophie Macharia (Guest Editor)
Mueni Lundi (Issue Editor)



PART ONE

CREATIVE ECONOMY

From The Publisher

Creative Industries and their Role in the Transformation of Society

Kimani Njogu

There is no doubt that a new and deep-seated paradigm is emerging in the world in which creativity and knowledge are centrally placed in the political, economic and social spheres. The global digital revolution has opened avenues for the creative sector to express itself through wide ranging platforms. Popular culture has permeated all domains of life and creative experimentation is being accepted as a way of life. There is no doubt that only nations that pay attention to creativity, experimentation and innovation will deal effectively with the challenges of the contemporary world, including climate change, economic inequalities, and sustainable social transformation. It is for this reason that we must understand, nurture and celebrate the 'creative industries'; those institutions and products that depend on knowledge and innovation to express and interrogate the human condition. The development of creative industries for the transformation of Africa should be deliberate, pointed and sustained. It can no longer be incidental. With Lupita Nyong'o's winning the Oscar amid much competition, Sauti Sol on the walls of the White House, African music and dance doing the rounds on the continent and other parts of the world, and a changing policy and legislative framework in favour of the sector, African artists are defining their space.

What is Creativity?

To create is to make something 'new'; something original. Creativity, the formulation of new ideas and the application of these ideas to generate new works of art and cultural products, scientific inventions and innovations in technology, is intricately tied to notions of originality, imagination, inspiration, and ingenuity. It brings about newness in the world through a process of sustained thinking and experimenting; breaking barriers and trying out fresh paths. Creativity is a fundamental inner characteristic of human beings and is at the heart of intellectual capital. Our creative use of language to communicate is a clear manifestation of our ability to be original in our expression of the environment. We are creative creatures by nature. But it is the purposefulness in activating this creative impetus that allows us to benefit from this potential. Creativity is not just about providing entertainment; it is also about self-expression, innovation and education to improve lives and transform societies.

We can broadly discern at least three types of creativity which have a bearing on the creative industry: *artistic creativity*, *scientific creativity* and *economic creativity*. These forms of the creative project do not exist in isolation but are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. First, artistic creativity refers to the innate ability to imagine situations and the capacity to see the interconnections and emerge with original and novel ideas of interpreting the world, expressed in text, sound and image. In other words, creativity is set in motion by the coming together of sound (such as we experience in music), by cohesion in a text (such as in literary works), and image (such as in painting, drawing and film). Second, scientific creativity refers to our hunger for knowledge, our innate inquisitive nature, and the burning urge to experiment, search for patterns and try out interconnections between phenomena in problem solving. That is, creativity is about rigorously finding the links between items in the environment, maximizing their potential and coming up with something innovative and which has implications on technology and lives. The use of the biometric system that captures patients' fingerprints electronically alongside their medical history is a creative way of merging science and technology. Similarly the use of music and art for healing points to the convergence of creativity and science. Third, economic creativity is a process leading towards originality and innovation in business practices, technology, marketing, and is linked to gaining competitive advantage in economic development. The M-Pesa phenomenon is an example of economic creativity in financial transactions. These forms of creativity require engagement of the intellect and ideas and this can be seen in the innovation and co-creation spaces such as Ihub in Kenya, Hive Colab in Uganda, Kinu-Tech hub in Tanzania and Klab in Rwanda.

What are Creative Industries?

At this stage I would like to define creative industries as currently understood. Broadly speaking, creative industries are the cycles of assembling, production and distribution of goods and services that use ideas and intellectual capital as the primary inputs. Although these industries existed all over the world, the term 'creative industries' gained salience after it was used in Australia in 1994 with the launch of the report *Creative Nation* and given wide exposure in the United Kingdom in 1997 when the government set up the Creative Industries Task Force, through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The UK model defines creative industries as those requiring creativity, skill and talent with potential for growth and job creation through the exploitation of their intellectual property. In a series of research reports – *Scoping Creative Economy in East Africa*; *Scoping the East African Music Sector*; and *Scoping the Arts Scene in East Africa* – released in 2015 in Nairobi by the British Council, there is a strong argument that whether in cultural expression domains of literature, music, performing arts, visual arts or in creative areas such as film, museums, galleries, libraries, and photography there is much promise in the sector. The reports identify originality, skill and talent as crucial in defining the sector.

Other models used to identify the sector include the 'symbolic texts model' in Europe that focuses on popular culture as expressed in film, broadcasting and the press. The symbolic texts are seen as communicative and intricately associated with 'the people' at the production or consumption phases¹. There is also the 'concentric circles model' which puts emphasis on the cultural ingredient of these industries and argues that at the core are those which are expressed in sound, text and image; and the 'World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Copyright' model which lays emphasis on what is 'copyrightable'.

The UNCTAD approach to creative industries, adopted in this Issue of *Jahazi*, enlarges the concept of creativity from activities which have a strong artistic component to any 'economic activity producing symbolic products with a heavy reliance on intellectual property and for as wide a market as possible' (UNCTAD, 2004). UNCTAD makes a distinction between 'upstream' activities (traditional cultural activities such as performing and visual arts) and 'downstream' (closer to the market, such as advertising, publishing or media related activities) arguing that the latter derive their commercial value from low production costs and easy transfer to other economic domains. Hence in this view, cultural industries are a subset of creative industries.

Because they are knowledge based, creative industries produce tangible and intangible goods and services with economic value. These may range from arts and crafts, publishing, music, visual and performing arts to film, television and radio broadcasting, new media (computers, mobile phones) and design. One just needs to look around them to see how inevitable and dynamic creative industries can be! Significantly, more and more citizens are involved by the industries either directly or indirectly, if the opportunities being opened up by mobile telephony in Africa are anything to go by.

How can Creative Industries be classified?

Globally, creative industries have become a strategic choice for reinvigorating social and economic growth, youth employment and integration of communities through cross-cultural learning and sharing. But Africa is yet to benefit from the creative industries due to domestic policy weaknesses and global trends.

Creative industries can be broadly classified into four groups: *Heritage, Arts, Media and Functional Creations*. Those industries viewed as 'heritage' essentially bring together cultural aspects from historical, anthropological, ethnic, aesthetic, and societal viewpoints. They may compose of *traditional cultural expression* such as arts and crafts, festivals and celebrations or *cultural sites* such as archaeological sites, libraries, exhibitions and so on. The deliberate harnessing of heritage industries is a celebration of knowledge and human expressiveness as experienced by communities. Unfortunately, in most of Africa, heritage industries are peripheral to national development plans and principally targeted at the international tourist market, rather than at increasing understanding and exchange within the nation-state. Heritage industries are germane to the construction of national histories and should not be ignored.

The 'arts' may be *visual* which includes painting, sculpture, photography and antiques, or *performance* which includes live music, theatre, dance, circus, puppetry and so on. They are interpretations of the environment expressed aesthetically. Art opens the opportunity for the individual to be social; to reach out to others; to be full. This fullness of the individual, achieved through 'reaching out to others' is central to our humanity. Through art we reflect our ability to associate with others creatively and to share experiences and ideas. Artists creatively view, grasp, and momentarily hold experience and memory into coherent form, expressed in words, movement or image. The art industry in Africa is rich and varied and can benefit immensely through investment in skill enhancement and information technology.

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Another area of immense potential is 'media'. Media, whether conventional or alternative, old or new, traditional or modern, interpersonal or mass, can be instrumental in social and economic transformation. Free media can build confidence in citizens and enhance capabilities and freedoms. When citizens are free to imagine and express themselves through media, they contribute to inclusive development. When media are suppressed, citizens are denied the right to express themselves and transform their world. Free media is central to governance and democratic practice in Africa and states must consciously invest in their growth and nurture an economy based on media freedom. There are immense opportunities being opened up by new media, notably the mobile phone, which can be tapped and enhanced. Undoubtedly, the mobile phone will be core to increasing food security, improving health, conserving the environment and ensuring accountability and transparency among leaders in Africa. Despite the challenges of poverty and poor connectivity, African values of sociality and collectivity, negotiation, interdependence and relationship-building, citizens in Africa are creatively taking advantage of the internet and mobile platforms to access and share information. When media are free, creativity flourishes and enriches the world.

The 'functional creations' which are demand and service driven may include *design* (interior, graphic, fashion, jewellery, toys); *new media* (software, video games, digital creative content) or *creative services* (architectural, advertising, cultural and recreational, creative research and development as well as digital services). Again, these creations are vital for our economic and social development.

What drives Creative Industries?

Creative industries are mainly driven through three major fronts: *advances in technology, increased demand for creative goods and cultural tourism*. First, the convergence of multimedia and telecommunication technologies has integrated the production, distribution and consumption of creative content. Nothing exists in isolation any longer. The liberalization and privatization of media and telecommunications have increased private sector investment globally. For example, when the Republic of Korea harnessed content creation to new communication technologies in video games, animation and other audiovisual services, Korean television programming exports increased from \$12.7million in 1999 to \$37.5 million in 2003. By focusing on content creation, jobs were created for the youth and new consumer trends emerged. The Korean diaspora was key in this process. Undoubtedly, digital technology has opened opportunities for creative content such as video on demand, music podcasting, computer games, and television via cable, satellite and internet.

Second, with an increase in distribution channels and platforms, there is also increase in demand for creative content. The world has been experiencing increasing demand for creative goods and services. This may be due to an increase in real incomes, especially in North America, Europe and Asia, as well as the reduction in prices at the level of production, as a result of more efficient accessible technology. There is also, I think, a new pattern of consumption driven by the internet, mobile telephony and digital media in which consumers are co-creators of products due to the efficiency and speed of communication. With digital migration, the demand for quality content has increased tremendously.

Third, the creative sector provides opportunities for tourism through visits to heritage sites, museums, galleries, festivals and many tourists (local and foreign) are interested in attending performances – theatre, dance, music. There is no doubt that the cultural repertoire of various towns and communities is of interest to cultural tourists. Africa can tap into tourists from Asia in view of our geographical and cultural proximity as well as our shared history. But the tourism policy ought to benefit local populations and be culturally and environmentally friendly. Tourism in Africa should emphasize our creative diversity. It should not exclude low-income neighbourhoods but in a humane and non-patronizing manner include them in its strategy by marketing their social history and cultural diversity. By showing that city environments are linked to rich layers of history, community and memory areas often viewed as 'no-go' zones can be made attractive for locals and others. This calls for a mindset that appreciates the local – an area to which creative industries can contribute.

Can Creative Industries enhance values?

The values that people embody have a direct bearing on economic and social development and creative industries can play an important role in their enhancement. Much has been written about the role of Christian ethics in the development of capitalism and more recently there is impressive literature on the role of Confucian ethics in the success of industrial and economic progress in East Asia. Without delving into a causal relationship between values and economic success, one could claim that whereas Western nations emphasized individualism as the route to achieving economic progress, Japan drew from "*moral values which emphasized group responsibility, company loyalty, interpersonal trust and implicit contracts that bind individual conduct*" (Amartya Sen, 2001: 6).¹¹ These values, initially fostered by religion and educational institutions like *Kaitokudo*, were later integrated with the contribution of education and pedagogy. Values related to *coordination, cooperation and trust* inculcated in the educational system seeped into the culture of doing business in Japan. Similar values can be found in Korea, Thailand, India and a number of other Asian countries.

What values drive our politics and economic practices? Are we able to identify and integrate humanizing values such as **Utu** and **Ubuntu** into a vibrant business ethic to propel the continent forward? Africa also needs to develop a business morality and values such as reliability, trustworthiness, pride in quality control and other virtues that are useful for industry and commerce. Values are not immutable; they are not just 'given'. If values can be explained, they can also be changed through creative interventions and the arts can play an important role in this process. We need to identify the values that we can inculcate in society in order to deal with current development related concerns.

How are Creative Industries performing in Kenya?

The total value of creative industries (copy-right based industries) in 2007 was Ksh 85, 208.7 million, which represented 5.32% of the total GDP of Ksh. 1,603, 176 million (Nyariki et al 2009). Nyariki et al claim that considering that the full potential of these industries may not be captured in the Kenyan circumstances, they may be contributing around 7% to the national economy in terms of GDP (Nyariki et al 2009: 23-24). The major contributors are those engaged in creation, manufacturing and production, performance, broadcasting, communication and exhibition or distribution and sales of copyrighted works. This contribution can be increased manifold if the government was to invest in these industries. But this calls for a paradigm shift.

Creative industries in Kenya are beset by a number of challenges. First, is the lack of capital especially among the main innovators, the youth. Access to start up funds is difficult due to high poverty levels among youth and their inability to access loans in an 'uncertain market'. These industries are viewed as high risk. Second, is the lack of entrepreneurial skills among the youth. Skill development programs and vocational training courses are needed as a matter of urgency. Linking creative industries with institutions of higher learning would be key in broadening the understanding of how to run small businesses. Third, is the lack of infrastructure and institutions. This includes inadequacy of input into the industry, inadequacy of distribution networks, and lack of institutional support. Finally, insufficient understanding of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) for creative work creates problems and the spread of piracy inhibits creativity.

What needs to be done in Kenya?

The challenges facing the creative sector can be ameliorated through a number of interventions. First, is the urgent need to provide practical education to youth in all areas related to the industry. Without proper education, initiatives will start and fold within a few months of inception. Young entrepreneurs will be demoralized. Investing in education and skill enhancement is crucially important. Second, is the entrenchment of an indigenous Kenyan brand. The Kenyan voice will imbue our creative industries with a unique capacity to enter the rest of the world. But this can only be done if the brand draws from our cultures. Music with a 'Kenyan feel' will serve us better globally than music that 'imitates' the North. The same applies to film. By telling Kenyan stories, we inscribe our voices in the world. Third, avail the technology to citizens. The boom of digital technology and fast internet speeds can open up the industry to the region and abroad. For example within film, shooting, editing using affordable consumer software, and distributing movies online through YouTube (or other sites) has been made relatively cheap. By making technology available to youth, the creative sector can flourish.

Fourth, it is important to build a wide customer base locally and internationally.

Without doubt, creative industries have immense potential to contribute in social and economic development but they require support from government, private sector and citizens.

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¹For more discussion see Karin Barber 'Orality, the Media and New Popular Cultures in Africa.' In *Media and Identity in Africa* (Edited by Kimani Njogu & John Middleton), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

²Amartya Sen. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Promoting a National Economy Driven by Culture and Creativity

David Ndii

Keynote Address to the National Creative Economy Conference, February 2015



Definition

'Creative economy' is a relatively novel concept, although the activities themselves are not. It is therefore helpful to begin with a brief taxonomy of what we are talking about. The concept itself refers to the translation of ideas (personal creativity) into products and services, which depend on and are associated with intellectual property. An important subset of creative economy are 'creative industries' which include design, architecture, and advertising. Another key subset is 'cultural production' which relate to artistic expression including music, literature, theatre, art, film etc. Cultural production is the foundation, or wellspring, of the creative economy.

Overview

A few weeks ago Apple Corporation became the first company to cross the US\$700 billion market valuation; US\$ 300 billion more than the next most valuable company ExxonMobil, the world's largest oil company. But what is Apple - or rather what is the underlying value of Apple? The market value of a company is what investors see as the discounted value of all its future earnings. Apple has very little physical assets relative to its value. Its valuation is investor's confidence in, first, its capacity to keep churning out products that consumers love and, second, that the market for those products will continue to grow. These products - the iPod, iPhone, iPad and so on - are themselves products of the creative economy and are also used to consume cultural products viz. music, audio-visual entertainment, books and games such as Angry Birds.

In contrast, ExxonMobil is an asset rich company. It owns a lot of oil reserves and oil refineries and is in the business of an essential product - energy. Yet, the market values Apple more than double what it values ExxonMobil.

This tells us how the market sees the future. It sees people are sitting indoors playing Angry Birds on their iPhones and less people on the road burning fossil fuels. This is good for Apple, good for the environment, and of course good for Rovio (the creators of Angry Birds).

What's driving creative economy?

Proponents of the creative economy aver that it is the fastest growing business in the world. World trade in creative goods and services of 624 billion dollars in 2011, doubled since 2002 (UNCTAD). The key drivers are *economic growth* and the *internet*.

As productivity has risen and the economy improved, consumer goods and basic needs in particular, such as food and clothing, have become relatively cheap (i.e. less percentage of income is required to buy them). Therefore, more of people's rising incomes are available for leisure and lifestyle goods which have more creative content than the basic necessities. Again, with the expansion of information technology, the internet has brought down entry barriers (i.e. democratized) the distribution of audio-visual entertainment, stimulating a lot more creativity and exchange.

Kenya's development context

Like most poor countries, our development strategy is predicated on industrialization. But we have not succeeded. We started with an import substitution industrialization strategy in the sixties, aiming to replace imported consumer goods with locally produced ones. We ended up producing expensive poor quality products.

From the late eighties, we have scrambled to emulate Asia's export led industrialization strategy. In this model, you start at the bottom of the industrialization food chain by stitching garments, then electronics assembly, then up the value chain to make a few components and ultimately manufacture the whole thing.

We have not had much success in export led industrialization either. We established Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in the early 1990s but to date they have created just over 30,000 jobs - and this only after AGOA came to the rescue. Compare that with Bangladesh which adopted the same strategy just a few years before us. Today Bangladesh is exporting over US\$ 20 billion worth of garments and the industry employs over 3 million people.

What ails our industrialization efforts?

Essentially import substitution failed because our markets were very small. So the import substitution industries we set up faltered on lack of economies of scale.

As for export led industrialization, the most compelling reason comes from a very old concept in the theory of international trade - comparative advantage. The kind of basic manufacturing that propels the early stages of export led industrialization depends on cheap labour. Asia is labour rich. Africa is resource rich. In comparative advantage terms, what this means is that we are better endowed with other resources notably arable land and natural resources compared to labour.

To fix ideas, India is just about five and a half times the size of Kenya but it has 30 times as many people. This means that if we are to trade with Asia (think China and India) they will sell to us labour intensive good and we will sell to them resource intensive goods. And that is exactly what you see. There is no way of sugar-coating this. Asia has "unlimited supply of cheap labour". Even as wages in China have risen, we've seen Bangladesh taking over the low cost garment stitching work. India has a half a billion cheap workers on standby.

Creative economy and competitiveness

One of the important attributes about creative economy and in particular products and services with a high cultural content is that the cost/price competitiveness is not as important as what we might call "generic" goods.

Let us stay with the garments industry example. We cannot arguably compete with Bangladesh in the production of white western shirts, or blue jeans for that matter. But let us for arguments sake say we suddenly acquired a taste for clothes that have a strong Kenyan cultural fashion such as the *khanga* and *kikoys* which we wear occasionally. It is conceivable that Bangladesh could compete but unlikely that it would venture to produce such clothes for the Kenyan market - the market is too small and probably the fashions would change too frequently for them to keep up.

It is easy to see then that the cultural content creates a natural entry barrier against imports. So instead of whining about "mitumbas" killing our textile industry, what we could and should have done (and can still do) is to promote local fashion.

Who is to blame? First, it is ourselves and our "ukoloni". For instance why do we insist on western clothes as official wear in our public offices? But I think also our fashion designers can take a share of the responsibility. They have not done a good job of creating a broad range of practical every day clothes. I would like to wear Kenyan culturally themed wear every day but it's hard to find enough good ones - it's all that tourist targeted "hakuna matata" clothes.

What applies for the domestic market also applies for export market. A few years ago, there was a big hullabaloo about Chinese (or Koreans) stealing the *kiondo* and mass producing it for western markets. This was attributed to a failure, by the Government I suppose, to secure intellectual property rights for the *kiondo*.

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So instead of whining about "mitumbas" killing our textile industry, what we could and should have done (and can still do) is to promote local fashion.

It was indeed the case that some machine made *kiondo* looking bags were finding their way to western supermarkets. But the mass commercialization never happened. Why not? The simple answer is that the *kiondo* is a Kenyan handicraft, and the people who buy it out there buy it for precisely that reason. Part of the appeal is that the *kiondo* is hand-woven by Kenyan women, and no two pieces will be completely alike. An industrial mass produced *kiondo* is a different product.

Can creative industries contribute significantly to job creation?

Garments: Let us assume that 40 million Kenyans buy three locally made garments a year. This is 120 million garments. Assume each garment takes one person day to make. That is 600,000 jobs. As I noted earlier, the entire EPZ enterprise has created only 30,000 jobs.

Jua Kali: The jua kali manufacturing sector makes most of our furniture and fittings such as windows and doors, and many other household items which we use daily. They are in fact the most competitive sector. Their main shortcoming is poor designs and workmanship. I think there is a huge potential there to add a lot of value to jua kali products by injection of creativity/design to produce uniquely Kenyan crafted products for both domestic and export markets.

Digital products: I am told we already have a young digital animation industry which has begun to make inroads into the global market.

Audio visual: Let's not forget the traditional industries like film. We are potentially a very competitive location for shooting of films. We have talked about it a lot but we have not done a good job. Looking at our TV screens, there is still far too many Mexican soaps. Those are potentially thousands of jobs. And the two are related. It's by developing a competitive local production industry to create the infrastructure and skills that will make us an attractive location for foreign productions.

Role of State/Policy

Enabling Environment: This is the primary and most important responsibility of the state. The key elements of an enabling environment for creativity is first, freedom of expression and second, protection of intellectual property rights.

Arts and culture infrastructure (theatres, music halls, art galleries): These are part and parcel of public infrastructure in the same way as roads and sports facilities. The rise and potential of the creative economy provides added impetus for the state to put more resources in cultural infrastructure.

Incentives and subsidies for cultural production: Whether the state should subsidize cultural production is the subject of perennial debate globally. The case against subsidies was always predicated on the presumption that cultural production - theatre for example - is a consumption good for the rich. But as noted at the outset, cultural production is the wellspring of the creative economy - it is the engine. But cultural production does not capture all the socio-economic benefits that accrue from it. In economics, we say that it has positive externalities. In other words, it creates more value than it is paid for. The import of this is that there is less of it produced than is socially desirable. The converse also holds - more of goods with negative externalities (e.g. polluters) are produced than is socially desirable. We all agree that production of negative externalities should be discouraged by taxation. By the same token, production of positive externalities should be encouraged with subsidies.

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cultural production is the wellspring of the creative economy—it is the engine. But cultural production does not capture all the socio-economic benefits that accrue from it. In economics, we say that it has positive externalities. In other words, it creates more value than it is paid for.



The Profit-making Template in Kenyan Comedy

Fred Mbogo

...legitimacy can only be ideological. It is 'night school,' as Ousmane Sembene memorably put it, or – to quote Oumarou Ganda – it is 'a book which is, *par excellence*, read by everyone.' A good film will be a useful film, but does a useful film necessarily make a good film? (Barlet 2000: 43)

*Why can't art merely
be for its own sake?
When art loses its
utilitarian tag in
Africa will it become
worthless?*

*When viewed as a
commodity that can be
packaged for profit-
making comedy is
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and tested circumference
and is not allowed
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experimentation.*

Under the title "The Duty to Show" Barlet's (2000) essay throws its readers into the thick of a debate surrounding the monetary 'unprofitabilities' of the endeavor of film making. The argument that gains the greatest of currencies is that the creation of art in Africa is an expensive, almost worthless venture, since there is not much buying power in its citizenry. Entrepreneurs who go into film, television, or theatre productions often seek funding from external sources in order to break even. The funding, as discussed extensively in Odhiambo's (2008) text *Theatre for Development in Kenya*, habitually comes with strings attached. The end results are works of art whose sophistry, aesthetic appeal, and general taste is severely compromised by the anxious need to appease the funding organizations.

Where artists are 'unfortunate' not to get funds from sponsors for their artistic projects, they scrounge for monetary, human and other resources from their friends, relatives and volunteers but more often than not, return home empty handed, haunted by the massive losses incurred in their projects. How then can such artists justify their work? How can the ones funded claim to be 'doing well' while they are steeped in moments of utter disappointment when their artistry is sacrificed for the often shortsighted needs of their sponsors? To come to terms with their daily struggles, Barlet (2000) argues, both these sets of artists shape a view of themselves as prophets, teachers and philosophers. Their art ceases merely to be seen as art but more as tools of emancipation, through conscientization, teaching, preaching, and advocating for moral uprightness. But does this kind of the legitimization of art and its place in society make sense? Why can't art merely be for its own sake? When art loses its utilitarian tag in Africa will it become worthless?

In the case of what can be termed the Kenyan comedy industry, a multitude of ambivalent issues arise out of the relationship between wielders, investors, or potential "makers" of the money on the one hand and the creative workers that

piece together the comedy as an artwork on the other. When viewed as a commodity that can be packaged for profit-making, comedy is tethered within a tried and tested circumference and is not allowed any room for fresh injections of ideas or experimentation. Similarly, when organizations or companies utilize comedy as a resource in their outreach practices within “theatre for community development,” for example, they are only interested in what works for their purposes and detest or discourage the employ of new approaches. David Kerr (1996) in his book titled *African Popular Theatre* illustrates on numerous occasions the formulaic and seemingly unchanging nature of works within the realm of comedy. Patronage, argues Odhiambo (2008), deals a big blow to the artistic freedom that is essential in the recreation of works towards new modes or fresher material. This lack of growth of comedy as an artwork in turn eventually impacts on the potential profits that it can return to the investors who see it as a commodity for sale.

Vioja Mahakamani becomes an important programme in our inspection of the interesting relationships between forces of commerce and those of art in the trade that is Kenyan comedy. The programme’s episodes parody typical Kenyan court sessions. The literal meaning of the Kiswahili title “*Vioja Mahakamani*” is “drama in court.” The storylines are dominated by characters that are struggling to fit within an urban setting that is constantly shifting and therefore challenging and difficult to understand. These characters in their quest to circumvent the hustles of a complex and unforgiving urban setting resort sometimes to “rural” habits that are more familiar to them. While trying to better their contemporary urban dwellers who are seen as competitive and better placed to acquire the rewards of understanding the urban space, some of the characters employ trickery. But the law, through the programme’s court proceedings becomes the restorer of the order destroyed by these characters’ devious ways. Some of the errors that these characters are tried for include: “kucheza karata” (unlicensed gambling), stealing by pretence, assault, urinating in public, unlicensed sale of animal products such as meat and milk, the storage and sale of petrol within residential areas, even noise pollution among others.

Having been on air for three decades, *Vioja Mahakamani* has developed a bag of tricks whose contents have created a pattern for Kenyan comedy. This Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) programme has thrived on the basis of three distinct “internal” elements:

- a) A deliberate pitting of confused and ignorant characters against the confident and knowledgeable others.
- b) A deliberate use of characters that have identifiable Kiswahili accents based on the various Kenyan ethnicities.
- c) Visual exaggeration in the design of characters’ dress, make up as well as in the actors’ facial expressions, gestures and movement.

Granted, these elements play within certain stereotypic schemes or views on perceived habits, practices, thought patterns, or interests of various groups of people based on “tribe,” class, age or profession. The elements are meant to appeal directly to an audience and are couched within a language that is directly accessible. The deliberately amusing names of characters whether through pronunciation or literal meanings, for example, excite audiences toward the oncoming comical servings which often play along formulated stereotypes: Ondiek Nyuka Kwota Olobaa Man Gidi, Tamaa bin Tamaa Tii Tii, Ojwang’ Mang’ang’a Sibuur, or Masanduku Arap Simiti (literally; boxes, son of cement).

These internal elements of Vioja Mahakamani have formed a template which is now employed by almost all the new entrants into the Kenyan comedy scene, be they live, screened or audio performances.

These internal elements of *Vioja Mahakamani* have formed a template which is now employed by almost all the new entrants into the Kenyan comedy scene, be they live, screened or audio performances. FM radio stations have, for instance, borrowed the idea of the buffoon-like character whose ignorance or exaggerated reaction to events become comical presentations to audiences. “Breakfast shows” by these radio stations have adopted the *Vioja Mahakamani* approach in which the accused, in the court cases, often fumble in their ignorance of the law and whose confusion in the light of the accusations levelled against them by the prosecutor become the programme’s toast. In the FM stations, the ignorant and confused character exaggerates his situation but is directed into more or less of his comical antics by a presenter who is serious, knowledgeable and who works as a go-between that links the buffoon to the listeners.

Popular latter day television comedy programmes such as *Inspector Mwala*, and *Papa Shirandula* follow a similar pattern to *Vioja Mahakamani*. *Inspector Mwala* parodies the daily occurrences at a police station in which the inspector, who is the main character, is confronted by challenges such as physical height and the attendant attitudes associated with it. It pokes fun at the system of policing in a direct way, again with the employ of ethnic spiced accents as a source of the humour. Exaggeration, over the top plots and characterization are the main features in *Inspector Mwala*, a trend which has also been applied in *Papa Shirandula*. As audiences, we are boxed into forming attitudes about characters from the Kiswahili accents that are exaggerated to suggest their ethnic origin. A landlord in *Papa Shirandula* for instance employs a heavy Kikuyu accent and her demands for rent are quite elaborated and play within the stereotyped view of the Kikuyu as a lover of money. The main character, Papa Shirandula, is a watchman and seems comfortable in his role which again seems to play within the stereotyped idea that Luhya accented people are “watchmen or cooks” (famously repeated by a renown Kenyan politician in the late 1990s.)

Is it possible to have comedy performed without the tried and tested “internal” elements described here? *Mheshimiwa*, a comedy aired on Kenya Television Network (KTN) has veered slightly off the *Vioja Mahakamani* path although it maintains certain elements. Churchill (2009), which has a good reception on Nation Television (NTV) has created a path of its own albeit with shades of ethnic spiced accents coming into play. The main interest here is to suggest that while comedies following in the mould of *Vioja Mahakamani*’s “internal” elements are seemingly successful, in terms of getting funding within the larger education-entertainment enterprise, or in terms of getting massive audiences when on live performance tours, they nevertheless are limiting in terms of potential. Producers, or investors within comedy are afraid of trying new modes of performance styles that while not immediately rewarding may open new frontiers that may turn the industry into a larger, more serious and eventually profit-worthy enterprise. The argument here is that the industry will profit more if producers allow themselves to be risk takers and therefore experiment with new material or styles of acting. This will turn the Kenyan comedy industry into a more versatile venture that eventually will employ more people, earn greater profits as well as extend the boundaries of reception into discovering new audiences.

The argument here is that the industry will profit more if producers allow themselves to be risk takers and therefore experiment with new material or styles of acting.

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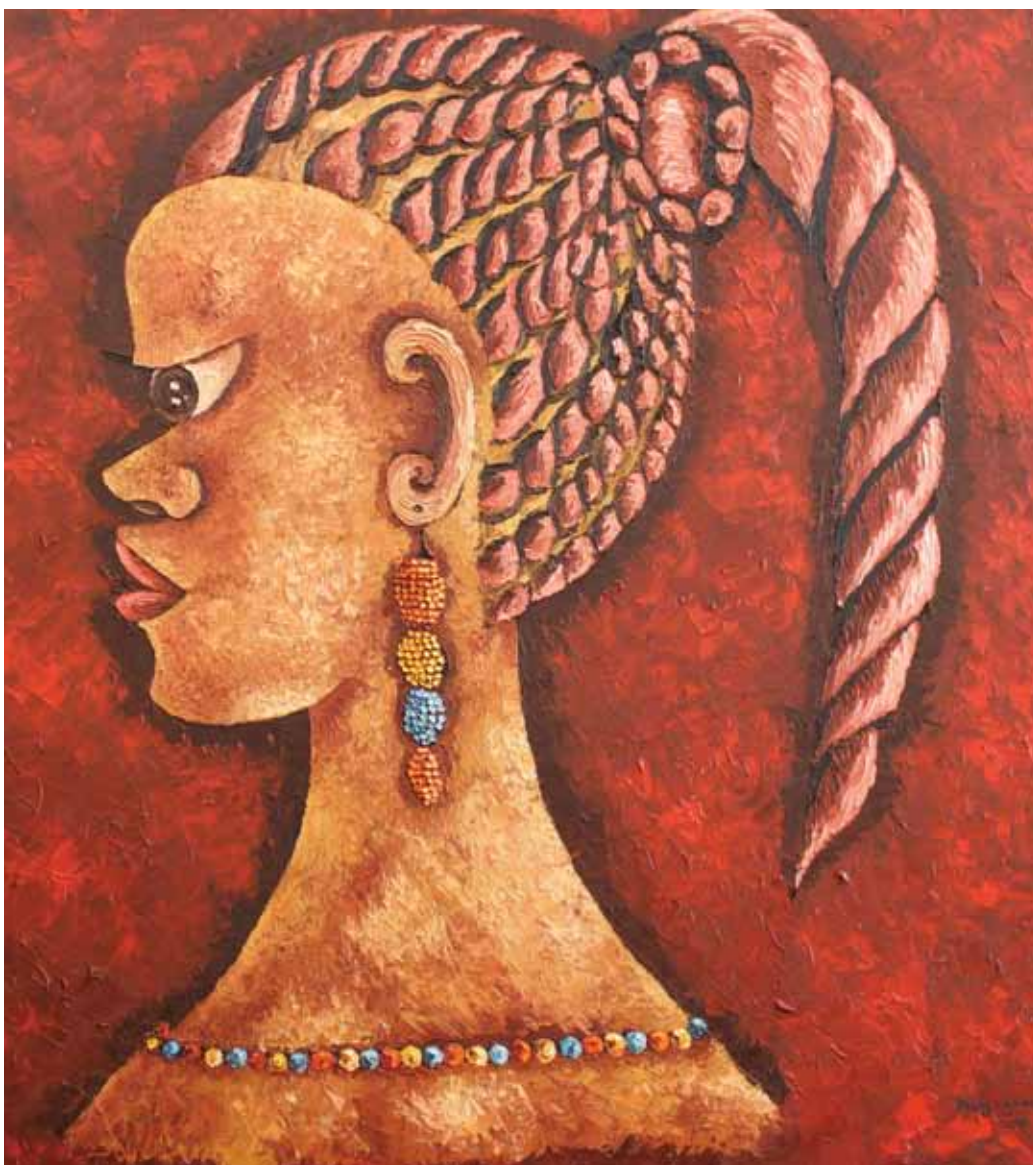
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How Can The Arts Produce Wealth?

Terry Hirst

The arts themselves can produce wealth, if institutions are established and organized to support them, using the value of past intellectual property to underwrite artists and researchers in the present. Lewis Hyde, in the United States, used the art-wealth recycling concept to establish a new non-profit granting agency, the Creative Capital Foundation, in much the same way as Ruth Schaffner created the Gallery Watatu Trust, and Rob Burnett went on to establish the Kuona Trust, to support new entrants into the art market in Kenya. The latter two did it with an astute eye for spotting new talent, intelligent understanding of the international art market and its eco-niches, shrewd investment, creative marketing, and generous support from the socially responsible corporate sector, international granting agencies and international foundations. Hyde's method was a little different.



Creative Capital Foundation, in the US, makes multi-year commitments to the artists they support, extending and renewing grants wherever possible, as well as providing advisory services and professional assistance. The artists make budgets for their new projects, including fair value for time spent, and get help finding and negotiating with galleries, along with insuring their studios and the contents. Established in 1999, Creative Capital, in the first eight years of its existence, awarded more than \$5 million to 242 artists' projects, all from private philanthropy, although they still lack endowment that would make them self-sufficient. However, there is a difference in policy from that of the commercial art galleries.

"Potential profitability is not a criterion for funding awards at Creative Capital: as with other art funders, we ask our panels to look for originality, risk-taking, mastery, and so forth: we respond especially to projects that transcend

traditional disciplinary boundaries. That said, the principal of sharing wealth is essential to the Creative Capital model. It makes explicit the assumption that all who have succeeded as artists are indebted to those who came before, and it offers a concrete way for accomplished practitioners to give back to their communities, to assist others in attaining success they themselves have achieved.”

Lewis Hyde, in ‘Afterword’, *The Gift*, 2006 (1983)

This is essentially what Paa Ya Paa was trying to do since 1965, without understanding what it was doing. Its aim of providing exhibition space for young artists, formally trained or not, with well-publicized gallery openings, well-written, illustrated catalogues, and good sales service, seemed to be working for a time. But, Paa ya Paa was trying to do the impossible, since its aim demanded resources it did not have, even though the artists had established themselves as contributive members of society, whose ‘commodities’ were now being looked for. Then, the art market shrank drastically, as their less-well-paid local counterparts slowly replaced the expatriate university lecturers and the international agency staff, and Paa ya Paa had nobody to blame but itself, because it had not created a new audience, or a market, among the local population as had been done in other aspects of the media. There was some time ago an article written by Osei G. Kofi in the ‘Daily Nation’ (Friday July 24, 2009) entitled ‘*African artists poor as rich cousins refuse to hang money on walls*’, that pretty much summed up the attitude, or philosophy of Modern Art that has established itself in East Africa. Perhaps it is time to have another look at the possibilities?

I have just finished re-reading Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift*, which deals in anthropological detail with the ‘gift’ economies existing before the emergence of the capitalist market economies. I had read it with not quite the same excited pleasure that I experienced on the first reading some years ago, but, I think with much more appreciative understanding. It is a brilliant piece of work, and thoroughly provocative of thought and reflection, and the added ‘Afterword’, since the 1983 edition, adds even more thought to the mix – in other words ‘what are we going to do about it?’

“How, if art is a gift, is the artist to survive in a society dominated by the market? Modern artists have resolved this dilemma in several different ways, each of which, it seems to me, has two essential features. First, the artist allows himself to step outside the gift economy that is the primary commerce of his art and make some peace with the market. Like the Jew of the Old Testament who has a law of the altar at home and a law of the gate for dealing with strangers, the artist who wishes neither to lose his gift nor to starve his belly reserves a protected gift-sphere in which his work is created, but once the work is done he allows himself some contact with the market. And then – the necessary second phase – if he is successful in the marketplace, he converts the market wealth into gift wealth: he contributes his earnings to the support of his art.”

Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*, 2007 (1983)

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Hyde then goes on to elaborate on how the artists have traditionally done this, and there are three distinct ways in which this can happen. The first is to acquire a patron, who subsidizes their needs while they are being creative, thus keeping the whole process within the gift economy – for as long as the artist can put up with being ‘patronized’. In modern times, however, many, or perhaps most, artists have become their own patrons, by taking a second job, most often as art teachers, freeing themselves from financial responsibility. “He earns a wage in the marketplace and gives it to his art.” But this most often proves to be very costly to the sources of his or her ‘gift’, and the creation of their personal work seems to suffer, as I know from long personal experience, until I came to Kenya and discovered a freedom ‘that Europe has long forgotten’ - to quote Jomo Kenyatta. The third way is to take a job, often routine or manual, more or less unrelated to his art that does not conflict with it creatively. In any case, somebody has to enter the market and convert the artist’s gifts to wealth, as the patron once did. In being your own patron, it is difficult for the individual artist to disengage from the creative work on hand, and treat it as a commodity, but this is what has to happen.

“He must be able to reckon its value in terms of current fashions, know what the market will bear, demand fair value for money, and part with the work when someone pays the price. And he must, on the other hand, be able to forget all that and turn to serve his gifts on his own terms. If he cannot do the former, he cannot hope to sell his

art, and if he cannot do the latter, he may have no art to sell, or only a commercial art, work that has been created in response to the demands of the market, not in response to the demands of the gift.”

Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*, 2007 (1983)

All this is extremely difficult to do, and retain any artistic integrity. The most successful in the market can find an agent to represent them, and thus share the load, although not without some form of creative compromise. The paths for the genuine artist are generally not towards great riches, although he may achieve some degree of material and spiritual comfort. The whole question of how is the artist to survive becomes even more acute when he, or she, reaches the springtime of their senility, as Gore Vidal put it, and the flame starts to flicker or even go out. The gift economy does all it can to sustain them – assisted, of course, always by the family ties – but even that finally comes to the point of exhaustion, and the load becomes too heavy and then something else needs to be done. And this is where Hyde’s ‘Afterword’ in the re-published ‘The Gift’ becomes currently stimulating and provocative in its re-called motivating assumptions.

“The first is simply that there are categories of human enterprise that are not well organized or supported by market forces. Family life, religious life, public service, pure science, and of course much artistic practice: none of these operates very well when framed simply in terms of exchange value. The second assumption follows: that any community that values these things will find non-market ways to organize them. It will develop gift-exchange institutions dedicated to their support.”

Lewis Hyde, *Afterword to the Canongate edition of The Gift*, 2007.

Of course, it should! But it does not happen very easily in these modern times, and it calls for a certain amount of ingenuity and dedicated application to some form of institution-building. Gift-exchange institutions are rare phenomena, and only occur generally as a result of vast fortunes gathered ruthlessly in the market, out of which – for a variety of reasons – the international foundations appear with their very selective ‘gifts’, and occasionally things like the US National Endowment for the Arts, from governments – for at least a while. Only the Internet has shown the potential for such developments, with many projects on the web – like the open-source software movement – ‘having the structure and fertility of gift communities’. But as Hyde points out, “If we want our institutions to have the longevity they deserve, then the commercial side of our culture needs to be met with an indigenous counterforce, not a foreign one.” So, what are we going to do about it? Hyde recounts the U.S. history of government funding in the arts (and science), at first covertly during the beginning of the Cold War, which began ‘propaganda patronage’ against the Eastern Bloc, and continued later more overtly with the National Endowment for the Arts, only to fade when that purpose was no longer needed in the 1990s. We need to think more seriously about something similar in the way ahead.

Terry Hirst was the first editorial cartoonist and author of a comic book (Picha Hadithi) in Kenya. This article is published posthumously.

“If we want our institutions to have the longevity they deserve, then the commercial side of our culture needs to be met with an indigenous counterforce, not a foreign one.”



A Creative Economy Ecosystem?

Yvonne A Owuor

In this scintillating presentation, especially targeted at young designers and more seasoned creatives at the National Creative Economy Conference held in Nairobi in February 2015, Yvonne Owuor, acclaimed writer, cut through to the issues at the heart of the Creative Economy—that it needs a business model that can support its distinct character and the creative and imaginative energy that gives it life. She observes that the question at the heart of creativity and its expression is the fundamental one of what it means to be human.

Several years ago, I lived in Swaziland, an incredible Kingdom of mostly mountains and beautiful people. For a long time the country had struggled with having a particular road built—they even brought global experts in. Everyone who came in faltered in front of its almost perpendicular climb. It took a Kenyan engineering company to make the road, and what a spectacular road they made. A few years later, when I landed in Swaziland one of the things I was asked once someone found out I was Kenyan was, “Do you know Engineer Wanjohi?” Wanjohi Consulting Company went to Swaziland because the Kenyan space and its shortcuts mentality had no time and place for their professionalism.

I am thinking about roads and the imagination because I have just had the misfortune of using the Thika Highway for the first time today, to get here. My people, how can one build a highway without a drainage system or side markers? A road with few directional signs, and no marked crossing areas for pedestrians? With culverts that we are supposed to believe are tunnels. No sense of art or pride in such work? We had to import strangers to build a bad road in our own country whilst in another country interested in high standards, the minds, skills, and imagination of Kenyans transformed a road engineering challenge into a showpiece.

Back to the topic: what do we need to grow our creative economy?

What we first need to grow is the capacity to see not only ourselves, but to see what we have and what we are capable of. I am not saying with the eyes only but with the eyes of the heart; to be able to see and to be able to name the vision we hold. We can, and have talked about the Creative Economy for far too many years. The Creative Economy is about the doing. It is in what we produce. We who are content creators and enablers have an amazing opportunity right now with the whole digital migration thing. The subtext of this is the content economy; the migration happens, the liberalisation of channels, guess what, it is about putting control and the agency for content making into the hands of creative entrepreneurs. But are the creative entrepreneurs ready? No. We are faced with an immense opportunity now and instead we are busy lamenting the past and trying to squeeze the metaphorical sour old wine into new skin. So what are we going to do about it? We cannot expect that the mindset of the past will accommodate the new creative industry needs. I am telling you now that trying to force our selves into pre-established corporate business models will not, cannot work. For one, we do not use the same language. You cannot walk into KCB (Kenya Commercial Bank) and ask for a large business loan based on the collateral of your imagination—they will giggle you out of town. But we must dare to imagine and experiment with the kind of institutions and structures that resonate with our needs. It is possible, isn't it? Frankly, we do not have a choice, do we? But it is quite exciting. Look at who is here in this room today. Together, with our specialisations and aptitude, we are the creative industries ecosystem of Africa. In here we have the capacity to emerge with a sustainable blueprint that would change conversation into production.

This is another challenge we face as we seek to reclaim and own and use our imagination infrastructure to generate the models that would support and sustain our productivity. I realise that contributing to the problem of evolving a new lexicon for the ecosystem offering itself to us, is the damage to our faculties caused by the removal of the arts and critical thinking from the school curriculum (what was the Kenya Institute of Education--KIE thinking?) This has stunted the conceptual, design, surrealistic, creative, critical, impressionistic thinking that would seed the visioning of things, processes and products that do not yet exist. Listen, I hear that high schools are sending students to university engineering, design and architecture faculties, who cannot draw, who cannot even describe a painting. How? Really, how? Is it ignorance or is there a secret plan to bankrupt the Kenyan imagination? With a citizens' undereducated imagination how can a country hope to innovate for the future amidst a riot of other ideas?

Even today when we talk about building a city, why do we think of building a Dubai in say, Turkana? Dubai has already been built. Is it that we have no architectural imagination; no idea of conceiving of Kenyan spaces in an original way? In stale Kenya minds Dubai epitomises the total, the ultimate idea of a city. Come on! Why is it that every building that we see along Thika Road, every [!] mall that we see, looks exactly the same, steel, glass and cliché? Why is there is no evidence of an organic, original Kenyan or 'Thikan' vocabulary of space use and design? What murdered design thinking in Kenya? What breed of architects has been inflicted upon our fair land? Quick. Name one recently built structure in Kenya that makes your hearts skip a beat? One that you would drive kilometres to look at? Just one.

I would never have had the place to grow my professional writing life here. I know that because I have tried it. I have tried very hard to stay within this space, build the infrastructure that can allow me to keep writing here. This is my inspiration. But it is not possible. Not yet.

These questions are fundamental to our discussions about the Kenya creative economy. The software (imagination, creativity, thought) is a thing that we rarely consider, but it is software that would inform whatever it is that needs to be born. That is why today we keep going back, round and round, like circling a waterhole over and over again and returning to the same point, right back at the beginning, with nothing really moving. Actually I am wrong—things are moving, but this is how. The thing about the creative industry is that it is promiscuous. It is not patriotic. It will look for its means of expression wherever it can and if it finds an all-embracing environment and community in Iceland that is where it will go.

Listen, Africa oriented artists, writers, designers and singers are good 'commodities' right now. So for example, Kwani Trust publishes my book *Dust*, but only after negotiating with my New York Publishers and my New York Agent, and paying New York. I would never have had the place to grow my professional writing life here. I know that because I have tried it. I have tried very hard to stay within this space, build the infrastructure that can allow me to keep writing here. This is my inspiration. But it is not possible. Not yet. I know it is going to change in the next couple of years. But, guys, we are competing with the rest of the World and there is money to be made and these guys were not looking for me because of the radiance of my smile. They are looking for the product and how it can benefit us all. I am also paying American taxes even though I do not live there.

My job as a content creator is to create. The Agent told me, "We shall circle the wagons around you" meaning that your job, Yvonne, is just to write and we do everything to give you the environment you need to write." It is about the product and the output and the fact that they know that they have a product they can sell. And they have a way of seeing that product that we are not capable of seeing. Here, I have met some of the most incredible young writers who have ever written who are working as Actuarial scientists. One of the senior Central Bank officials in Kenya was a high-level concert pianist in London. This is the environment that we have created. This is what we do. We consume and destroy the intangible, creative, wild energy of the best of our best.

Kenya is already regarded as a hub and an outlier. Anyone who wants a creative orientation to anything already comes to Kenya. The primary challenge is in our own capacity; the capacity of the Wenyeki to see and to own and to understand what they have.

So, why are books consumed? Books are consumed, not so much for the cultural aesthetic as the fact that they answer the very fundamental questions that excite every human being's imagination, such as: "who am I and what does it mean to be human?" The substantive quest for what you call truth, beauty and goodness is not abstract. It lies at the heart of everything—the music consumed or the film watched. We seek meaning and especially for you young designers. You are not designing in abstraction; you are designing for the human condition, for the earth, that will give energy to whatever it is that you create. Don't forget that the meaning can also be distorted. The creation of meaning through creativity is also a political thing. It will transform the legend of failure into success. It can be used for good or bad, but that is its power. And maybe we do not talk enough about what this particular category of things mean.

Kenya is already regarded as a hub and an outlier. Anyone who wants a creative orientation to anything already comes to Kenya. The primary challenge is in our own capacity; the capacity of the Wenyeki to see and to own and to understand what they have and to dare to embrace the person in their midst, to seek out and ask, what is your gift, what structure do we need to create to harness it for you and for us? In its place today we are obsessed with that most vapid of questions (in Kenya) that aims strictly to diminish, judge, limit, constrain and accuse—what is your 'tribe'? And in the manner of a collection of unimaginative knuckleheads, of course we have a long and elaborate negative vocabulary for that question, while the rest of the world dares to imagine and plan for cities on Pluto.

Yvonne Owuor won the 2015 TBC Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature for her debut novel, *Dust* (2013)



PART TWO

MUSIC

Categorizing “Riziki” By Ja-Mnazi Afrika:

Ethnic Perceptions in the Classification of Kenyan Popular Music

T. Michael Mboya

Several studies of Kenyan popular music of the early twenty-first century reveal that this music actively reproduces ethnic perceptions that feed into the politics of the country (Mboya, 2009; Ogude, 2007; Simatei, 2010; Wa Mungai, 2008; Wa Mutonya, 2007). By general agreement, Kenya’s politics of the time is deeply ethnicized (Nangulu, 2007; Muga, 2009). This article highlights the role of the popular music industry in the manufacture and circulation of ethnic perceptions in Kenya at the time by focusing on the marketing and promotion of the music. Specifically, this article examines the reception of a popular song, “Riziki” (2005) by Ja-Mnazi Afrika, and its contested categorization by different “middle-man” consumers of Kenyan popular music, players in the industry who significantly influence the “end-user” consumption of the music. The argument is that ethnic perceptions influence categorization, and in turn this perpetuates the same.

The Reception of “Riziki”

“Riziki” has been one of the most successful Kenyan popular songs of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It was the title track of the second album by the group Ja-Mnazi Afrika and was a “hit” in the country right from the time it was first recorded and released in 2005 through to 2008. It is not easy to account for a song’s popularity, to latch onto what exactly makes one song, and not another, a “hit”, but “Riziki” has several of the characteristics one readily finds in many commercially successful Kenyan and East African songs. The song has a simple melody that is easy to sing-along to, and which is anchored in a “punchy” and memorable chorus; there is a hint of naughtiness (sexual innuendo rather than graphic, obscene language) and, linked to that, a sly political comment in the lyrics; there is the impression of philosophical reflection on the universe (the subjects matter are doorways that introduce “weighty” stuff that apparently lift the song from ‘mere fun dance music’); and the “climax”, “chemko” or “sebene” (the extended instrumental section meant for dance) is melodious and well-managed.

Even though in Kenya it is nearly impossible to know how many copies a music album sells in cassettes and compact discs, given the problem of music piracy (Nyairo, 2004: 20-26), there are several indicators of the popularity of “Riziki”. The song enjoyed massive radio airplay, especially over 2006-2007. In 2007 it won the Best Western *Benga* Song Award at the Kisima Awards, at the time the most prestigious music awards in Kenya. That same year, Ja-Mnazi Afrika won the first prize in the Best Band/Group (Kenya category) at the Pearl of Africa Music (PAM) Awards in Uganda on the strength of the song. Both the original and a modified version of it were in 2008 used as theme songs for the Kenyan crime investigation series *Cobra Squad* which aired on

a national television station, NTV. On the national holiday Kenyatta Day of the same year, Ja-Mnazi Afrika performed “Riziki” in a medley to the crowd that had, led by the President of the republic, gathered to celebrate the heroes of the struggle for *Uhuru* [Kiswahili: “Independence”] at the Nyayo Stadium. Over 2008, Awillo Mike, the composer of “Riziki”, also the band spokesman of Ja-Mnazi Afrika, and one of its three leaders, was something of a regular interviewee of all the leading Kenyan broadcast stations. Awillo was also interviewed by the BBC in their Kiswahili segment. The mobile phone companies Cellulant, Mobile Sawa, Style Up Ringtones, Mobile Fun, developed cell phone ringtones from “Riziki” over 2008. The song continues to be a significant component in the repertoire that enables Ja-Mnazi Afrika to be constantly on tour throughout Kenya.

Closely examined, the indicators of the generally positive reception of “Riziki” by the influential Kenyan consumers of popular music cited above, such as the organizers of the music awards and the ringtone developing and selling companies also send intriguing messages that are extra to the music. For example, “Riziki” won the Best Western *Benga* Song Award at the Kisima Awards of 2007. Questions arising from this are one, is “Riziki” a *benga* song? Two, if indeed it is a *benga* piece, what is *western benga* about the song? Further, the companies that came up with ringtone versions of the song variously classified it (over 2008) as “Luo”, “Zilizopendwa” (Cellulant); “Lingala/Rumba”, “Zilizopendwa”, “Local/East African” (Style Up Ringtones); “Local/East African” (Mobile Fun); and “Luo Tones” (Mobile Sawa). To clarify and explore the implications of these questions, a little background knowledge of “Riziki” and its composer is necessary.

Awillo Mike’s “Riziki”

Awillo Mike started composing “Riziki” in 2000 when he was still with the Kilimanjaro Sound Band whose four main players (instrumentalists/vocalists) were Tanzanian. Awillo was the group’s animator, and its first Kenyan musician. The group also had two Kenyan dancers. In Awillo’s explanatory narrative, he was inspired to compose “Riziki” by personal observation. He was walking through a street in the Mwembe Tayari area of Mombasa one night when the on-going hectic economic activity struck him as curious. The activity produced two almost contradictory reactions. On the one hand, Awillo was impressed by the work going on, and thought that people should never get excuses to be lazy and to idle the time away while they are unable to meet their basic needs – here were people who were trying to make money even at night (hence the Kiswahili proverb that he uses in the chorus: *Uki zuba zuba utapata mwana si wako* [Kiswahili, rough, semantic translation: if you are not keen you will lose that which you value]). On the other hand, still cognizant of the work and thinking that night is the natural time for rest, Awillo wondered if and when those hard workers of Mwembe Tayari ever took a break from their activities. That reaction became the question prominently asked in the song: “*Lakini sasa mwapumzika saa ngapi?*” [Kiswahili, literal translation: But now, at what time do you rest?]

The song was, to his mind at its conceptualization, and even after, a rumba with a muffled zouk beat. This was basically the Tanzanian “muziki wa dansi”

According to Awillo, the basic melody and some of the lyrics of “Riziki” came to him at the moment he received the inspiration for the song. The song was, to his mind at its conceptualization, and even after, a rumba with a muffled zouk beat. This was basically the Tanzanian “muziki wa dansi” [Kiswahili: “Dance music”] that Kilimanjaro Sound Band was playing at the time. After a gestation period of five years, and having grown in the form, that Awillo Mike, who had by the time moved on from Kilimanjaro Sound Band through the Kenya-based Congolese group Choc Generation and the Kenyan bands Extra Kimwa and Bana Kutana to found Ja-Mnazi Afrika, was satisfied with “Riziki” and finally recorded it in 2005.

Categorizing “Riziki”

Regardless of the motivation behind the categorizations of “Riziki” noted above, one can aver that such classifications produce and define audiences for the music. Grossberg et al explain that:

The concept of the audience is a social construction, a concept that can mean and be made to mean many different things. Yes, there are real people out there watching a television program, or reading a newspaper, or buying an album, who can be said to be *in the audience* for a particular media product. However, the idea of an audience is never merely an innocent description of the sum total of individuals. The fact of the matter is

“Riziki” is not a benga song unless, we casually broaden the parameters and say all guitar-based Kenyan musics are benga and all European and American songs of the 1980s are soul, etc. As has lately become the trend in Kenya.

that the audience does not exist out there in reality apart from the way in which it is defined by different groups for different purposes (Grossberg et al, 2006: 222).

These audience definitions have multiple ramifications - cultural, political and financial - in early twenty-first century Kenya. Let us start with the categorization of “Riziki” as a Western Benga song as the organizers of the Kisima Awards did. If we go to the characteristics of benga as a genre as defined by Mboya, (2009) will easily recognize that “Riziki” is not a benga song unless, we casually broaden the parameters and say all guitar-based Kenyan musics are benga and all European and American songs of the 1980s are soul, etc. As has lately become the trend in Kenya.

But, even if “Riziki” were a *benga* song, is there in existence a sub-genre of the form that is referred to as *westernbenga*? What are the characteristics of this sub-genre? There have been attempts to distinguish between Luo *benga* and other variations of the genre. For instance, Stapleton and May have written that:

while the Luos followed root [*benga*] rhythms, Gikuyu musicians like Joseph Kamaru ... and Francis Rugwiti developed their own vernacular sound ... while the Kamba band Kilimambogo Boys created their own mesmerizing *benga* sound, keyed around instrumental patterns and frequent rhythm guitar breaks (1989: 231).

On the basis of these distinctions some researchers (e.g. Wa Mutonya, 2007) have accepted the existence of Western and Eastern *benga*. Now, the distinctions Stapleton and May make can only give variations of benga that are based on the languages which the song lyrics are in; DhoLuo, Gikuyu, Kikamba, Kalenjin, Ekegusii, among others. More important though is that, while it is indisputable that musicians of different ethnicities have contributed to the development of *benga*, it is all but impossible to see that these contributions have resulted in the construction of them as constituting coherent regional or ethnic characteristics. This is a point that needs further exploration, especially given the fact that the key lead guitarists (this being the main instrument in *benga*) of the more successful of these bands from outside Luo land have been Luo, and the obvious sustained referencing of Luo *benga* that one finds in these newer “varieties” (see Osusa et al).

From the practice at the Kisima awards we know that the ‘western’ in their categorization of *benga* refers to the western part of Kenya, the organizers having rather problematically demarcated the country into two parts, the West and the East. Given the problems with the boundary-marking, the delineation pretends to relate to the physical territory, whereas it actually is linked to ethnicity and so, given the movements of peoples, a musician operating in western Kenya can be considered to be playing eastern *benga* and, vice versa. It is therefore not difficult to be sympathetic to the feeling held by several musicians, Awillo Mike included, that the organizers of the Kisima Awards practice some form of unjustified protectionism. The argument here is that when Kenyans root a song to a (perceived) place of origin, either of its makers or intended primary audience (as indicated by the language of the lyrics), rather than to its genre, they effectively remove the song from those markets away from its assumed origins and also from competition with other songs of its type whose origins are located in those other places. This removal “protects” those other songs by giving them opportunity for the kind of success and advertisement that is brought by recognition regardless of their quality and simultaneously limiting the acceptance of the barred song. In a phrase, free competition is undermined, and with that, the benefits that accrue from free competition are lost.

The rooting of “Riziki” to a place of origin, just like its identification as *benga*, is a moving away from consideration or apprehension of the song’s formal characteristics to an identification of the song in cultural, ethnic terms. This is important for the idea of place of origin in postcolonial Africa is often tied to the notion of ethnic identity. This explains why Chinua Achebe defines tribalism as “*discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth*” (1983: 7, emphasis in the original). With that rooting, and the attendant creation of some dis/loyalty in the consuming publics, some attitudes of non-/ownership that arise from feelings of belonging to the place that the song is identified as originating from, a song is placed at the receiving end of both the political and economic advantages and disadvantages of ethnic / “tribal” discrimination.

In the case of “Riziki” this placement has had only negative effects. The placement under Western *Benga*, which ordinarily means the identification of a song as Luo, denied “Riziki” the national audience it aspires for, while at the same time the song cannot pass for a Luo song. If language is the marker of the song’s ethnic identity (as Luo) then we must recognize that the lyrics of “Riziki”, except for a chorus that is inserted into the “*sebene*” towards the end of the song, are in Kiswahili, the national language of Kenya. Significantly, this “*sebene*”chorus is in OluNyala, a dialect of the Bantu OluLuhya language of the Abaluhya of western Kenya, and not in the nilotic Dholuo which is spoken by their JoLuo neighbors. If musical genre is the marker of the identification of the song in ethnic terms, then “Riziki” will be deemed to fall under the *benga* genre that was originated by Luo musicians (Osusa et al, 2009). This still constitutes a problem in the categorization.

The second difficulty is that it is theoretically difficult to insist on tying a musical genre that succeeds in gaining acceptance away from its originating home so much so that it attracts practitioners from its latter homes to the ethnicity of its originators. Can one say today, for example, that rock is African-American music? If the ethnic identity of a song’s composer will determine the ethnic identity of the song, then we must reckon with Awillo Mike’s claim to a hybrid Nyala-Luo identity, a fact that can be said to be made prominent by the point that even though Awillo has composed at least three OluNyala songs (“Ababu Okholo” and “Chingongo Chiebunyala” in *Makulata* and “Madembuso” in *100% Benga*) and arranged a song in several of the OluLuhya dialects (“Lelo Luno” in *Am not Sober*), he has never composed a DhoLuo song. The Dholuo lyrics one finds in two of Awillo’s songs (“Am not Sober” in *Am not Sober* and “Makulata” in *Makulata*) are part of the choruses that he often tucks into the “*sebene*” sections of his songs. Part of the reason for the identification of Awillo as Luo arises from an amusing misunderstanding of the singer’s name, “Awillo”, which some Luo fans assume is the common Luo fond short form of the names “William” and “Willis” but in this particular instance it is an appropriation of the Congolese musician Awillo Longomba’s name. The appropriation goes back to the infancy of Awillo Mike’s musical career when he, like the Congolese musician, was an effective animator. “Riziki”, then, is neither Luo nor *benga*.

This matter of the ethnic identity of “Riziki” in particular and Ja-Mnazi Afrika in general has come up again and again in formal and informal discussions of popular music in Kenya. The fact explains why in several interviews that he gave to the national media in Kenya over 2008 Awillo Mike, consistently emphasized that his group is an all-Kenyan outfit that plays “national” rather than “tribal” music.

The motivations for the categorization of “Riziki” as Luo by the ringtone companies were obviously different from those of the organizers of the Kisima Awards. Ringtone companies sell their versions, and so they try to influence (or create) the markets. It would appear, just from the fact that some of the companies were tempted to give an ethnic inflection to the products they were selling, that there was recognition that ethnicity plays a significant part in the choices Kenyans make in relation to the music they consume. An interesting categorization by some of the companies (Cellulant, Style Up Ringtones) is that which classified “Riziki” as *Zilizopendwa*. “*Zilizopendwa*” is Kiswahili equivalent for “Golden Oldies”. Classifying a song that is still “on top of the charts”, as it were, as an oldie is on the face of it inexplicable. But it should be said for the categorization that these companies were in their own way recognizing that “Riziki” was not to be defined in ethnic terms. In Kenya, strangely, *Zilizopendwa* are only Kiswahili songs of the 1960s and 1970s. It is important to note that these ringtone companies were also distinguishing “Riziki” from the (mostly Kiswahili-language) hip-hop influenced music of the urban youth that had turned their backs on the guitar musics of Kenya. The guitar-musics then were wrongly understood to appeal only to the middle aged and the old. At the same time, the predisposition of members of these age groups towards buying ringtones was assumed to be minimal, hence the low number of ringtones developed for these musics. The same reasons for classifying “Riziki” as *Zilizopendwa* also come into play when the song is categorized under “Lingala/Rumba”.

Conclusion

Whether the motivation was to create markets for them or to accord the songs some

in several interviews that he gave to the national media in Kenya over 2008 Awillo Mike, consistently emphasized that his group is an all-Kenyan outfit that plays “national” rather than “tribal” music.

recognition for their excellence, the categorization of Kenyan music and musicians in terms of cultural identities has basically the same ultimate consequence, namely, the entrenchment of the ethnicized character of Kenyan society. From the fact that the categorization was even made in the first instance one gets the sense that “ethnicity” permeated Kenyan society so thoroughly that nothing escaped it. Thus, whatever the intentions of the producer of “Riziki” the consumers of the song would still perceive it in ethnic terms.

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Ringtone Advertisements (a sample)

Cellulant advertised their "Riziki" ringtone under:

- "Luo" in *Saturday Magazine, Daily Nation*, May 3, 2008, p. 11.
- "Zilizopendwa" in *Saturday Magazine, Daily Nation*, August 2, 2008, p. 17.
- "Zilizopendwa" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, October 12, 2008, p. 5.
- "Zilizopendwa" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, October 19, 2008, p. 5.

Style Up Ringtones advertised their "Riziki" ringtone under:

- "Local/East African" in *Saturday Magazine, Daily Nation*, May 3, 2008, p. 9.
- "Zilizopendwa" in *Saturday Magazine, Daily Nation*, August 30, 2008, p. 9.
- "Lingala/Rumba" in *Saturday Magazine, Daily Nation*, October 18, 2008, p. 9.
- "Lingala/Rumba" in *Saturday Magazine, Daily Nation*, Nov. 1, 200, p.9.
- "Lingala/Rumba" in *Saturday Magazine, Daily Nation*, Nov. 22, 2008, p.9.

Mobile Sawa advertised their "Riziki" ringtone under:

- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, April 27, 2008, p. 7.
- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, May 4, 2008, p. 7.
- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, May 11, 2008, p. 7.
- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, May 18, 2008, p. 7.
- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, May 25, 2008, p. 7.
- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, June 8, 2008, p. 7.
- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, June 15, 2008, p. 7.
- "Luo Tones" in *Buzz, Sunday Nation*, June 22, 2008, p. 7.

Mobile Fun advertised their "Riziki" ringtone under: "Local/East African" in *Sunday Magazine, The Standard*, September 28, 2008, p. 16.

Local Taarab in Kenya: From Listening to Dancing

Caleb Edwin Owen



Taarab is a popular music along the East African coast and while it has been said to have originated in Zanzibar, local communities along the coast such as Lamu assimilated the genre into their own local practices and traditions through the incorporation of local instruments, styles and rhythms.

They stopped playing Taarab music because they needed to dedicate time to a second occupation.

A common explanation people offered was that, in the past, people would sit and listen to Taarab and absorb the meaning of the song's lyrics, yet now, youth want to dance, or "to play" to it.

An article in the *Standard* profiling Taarab music, proclaimed that "the genre has defied the test of time and myriad foreign rhythmic elements and influences – to stamp an indelible mark as a distinctive, East African musical style." The article extolled the importance of Taarab in the musical tradition of the East African coast. Yet when I was conducting interviews in Lamu, most informants spoke of the decline of Taarab.¹ One musician with whom I worked closely, Khalid Kajenje, declared "Taarab" to be dead.² Kajenje's comments were attributed to Kenya's economic problems which made it difficult for local groups, who were not earning income from their music, to continue playing. Changes in musical preferences of the younger generation, moreover, affected the traditions that defined Taarab in Lamu. However, in contrast to Kajenje's belief that the music "is now dead," Taarab has remained a popular form of entertainment for people of Lamu, albeit in different ways from the past. The developments of Taarab in the contemporary period reveal a negotiation between continuity and change. Local traditions have adapted under the economic realities of present-day Kenya and the global influences that have affected East African culture.

Taarab is a popular music along the East African coast and while it has been said to have originated in Zanzibar, local communities along the coast such as Lamu assimilated the genre into their own local practices and traditions through the incorporation of local instruments, styles and rhythms.³ A large part of the tradition of Taarab in Lamu was the music's ability to provide the town's population with a low cost form of entertainment. Musicians often performed for little, if any money. Artists benefited from the opportunity to demonstrate their skills to the community, or to impress a local woman. Mohamed Halif, a former local musician, recounted how Taarab gave his group an opportunity to demonstrate that they were as skilled as prominent artists playing for money, "We started the clubs because we learned that our people were really losing money. They were paying a lot of money. We were just doing it [Taarab] to show that we can also do it."⁴ Such performances brought Taarab to people who did not have the money to hire a famous musician such as Juma Bhalo, Maulidi Juma, or Zein L'Ambdin.⁵ The accessibility of Taarab made it a significant part of the community's tradition and cultural heritage.

Economic hardship has been a driving force behind the gradual decline in local performances. Kenya, beginning in the 1980s, experienced a growing inflation rate that made it difficult for people to meet the demands of providing food and other provisions for their families. In 1980 consumer prices rose by an average of 13.2 percent and remained at around ten percent through the 1980s and 1990s.⁶ The difficulty of providing for families reduced the time that artists in Lamu could dedicate to their music. Many former musicians stated "maisha ngumu" (difficult life) as their reason for quitting music.⁷ They stopped playing Taarab music because they needed to dedicate time to a second occupation. Abdella Bakari Liongo, a former musician, explained, "People are fishing, people are farming, people are doing different work. The problem is that the amount they are earning is not enough for the purchasing of items. Therefore they don't get time to do Taarab anymore."⁸ Former performers

indicated that practicing Taarab no longer provided them with enjoyment because they were exhausted from the extra work that they had to do to sustain their livelihoods.

As local Taarab performances have declined, people in Lamu and Matadoni have turned to listening to audio cassettes and disks, mainly from artists from Tanzania and Zanzibar. "Modern Taarab" refers to a specific style that features danceable rhythms and where vocalists are predominantly women, while men continue to play the instruments.⁹ The success of these groups has been largely attributed to their ability to capitalize on the diffusion of technologies, such as audio and video disks.¹⁰ Capital to purchase electronic instruments and to access recording studios has thus been essential to the success of contemporary musicians. The commercialization of Taarab challenged the ideals of older generation listeners and musicians who saw Taarab as fun and not a medium for making money. Many of the older generation complained that popular groups had acted largely in the interest of profit thus deviating from what they felt was the music's purpose of entertaining people and educating audiences on the important issues in the community. Abdella Bakari, a former musician, exclaimed, "Previously we were just doing Taarab for entertainment. But nowadays they are just doing for getting money as business."¹¹

Modern Taarab's emphasis on dance has challenged people's notions of Taarab as an activity meant for listening and interpreting the singer's lyrics. Many of the older generation, particularly men, did not like the newer Taarab music. A common explanation people offered was that, in the past, people would sit and listen to Taarab and absorb the meaning of the song's lyrics, yet now, youth want to dance, or "to play" to it. Kajeje emphasized the differences between the modern and the local Taarab: "Special Taarab they sit and listen. But these days they don't want to sit and listen, they want to dance."¹² For local artists and listeners these alterations stripped Taarab of the elements that made the music resonate with the community in the past.

While lamenting the decline of traditional Taarab, local musicians have responded to these changes by adapting their own styles of music. Kajeje's group in Lamu has continued to play with local drums though they made other changes to accommodate the demands of the younger generation who prefer the danceable rhythms of modern Taarab. His club incorporated a popular dance beat called *chakacha*. Musicians play *chakacha* with a "fast tempo and drum pattern." Pelvic gyrations are the main features of this dance.¹³ When Kajeje's group wanted people to hear the message of their lyrics, they would switch to a song that was slower and softer so that the audience would have to sit and listen to the words.¹⁴ In this way, Kajeje's group continued the local practices of Taarab, although making adjustments to meet the demands of a younger audience.

The selective incorporation of *chakacha* into the repertoire of Kajeje's performances underscores the struggles of local musicians within a cultural economy that has continued to be influenced by global capitalism. Production of compact and video disks introduced Taarab to a profitable market, which local musicians have not been able to access due to lack of capital. In addition, these changes added to the already existing hardships of local musicians who experienced the effects of Kenya's economic struggles. Far from being dead, however, the ability of local musicians such as Kajeje to continue to perform music and generate a following, suggests that the traditions and conventions of Taarab in Lamu have adapted to changes in the social, economic, political and cultural environments. The tensions of Taarab are the result of broader social processes as Lamu and Matadoni communities redefine their identities in a globally cosmopolitan era.

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¹This paper is based on my research in 2008 in Lamu and Matodoni. Lamu is a small island located within an archipelago on the Northern coast of Kenya, near the border to Somalia. This research was based in Lamu town, the main population center of the archipelago, as well as Matondi, a small village also located on Lamu island. Special thanks to Lisa Gilman, Dayo Mitchell, Carlos Aguirre, and Laura Fair for their generous support and advice through the development of this project. Of course I am indebted to all informants and the generosity of the Lamu community who welcomed me during my stay.

²Khalid Omar Kajeje, interview by author, audio recording, English Lamu, Kenya 6 October 2008.

³Caleb Edwin Owen, "Taarab and the Construction of Community Identity in Two Kenyan Towns" (BA Thesis: Robert D. Honors College of the University of Oregon, 2009)

⁴Mohamed Halif, interviewed by author, assisted by Ali Abdulla Famao, Matadoni, Kenya. 11 November 2008.

⁵These musicians were identified by informants as the most popular on the Kenyan coast. These musicians based in Mombasa, would occasionally visit Lamu to play for weddings or public festivals.

⁶Norman Miller and Rodger Yeager, Kenya, *The Quest for Prosperity* (Boulder:Westview Press, 1994) 127-137. 17

⁷Ali Abdulla Famao, interview by author, Matadoni, Kenya. 11-18 November 2008:

Abdella Bakari Lioongo, interview by author, with assistance by Ali Abdulla Famao, Matadoni, Kenya, 11 November 2008.

⁸Ali Bakari Lioongo, interview by author, with assistance by Halif, Matadoni, Kenya, 11 November 2008.

⁹Fargion, Janet Topp Fargion "Consumer-led Creation: Taarab music Composition in Zanzibar," Editor, Malcolm Floyd, *Composing the Music of Africa: Composition, Interpretation, and Realization*, 205-206.

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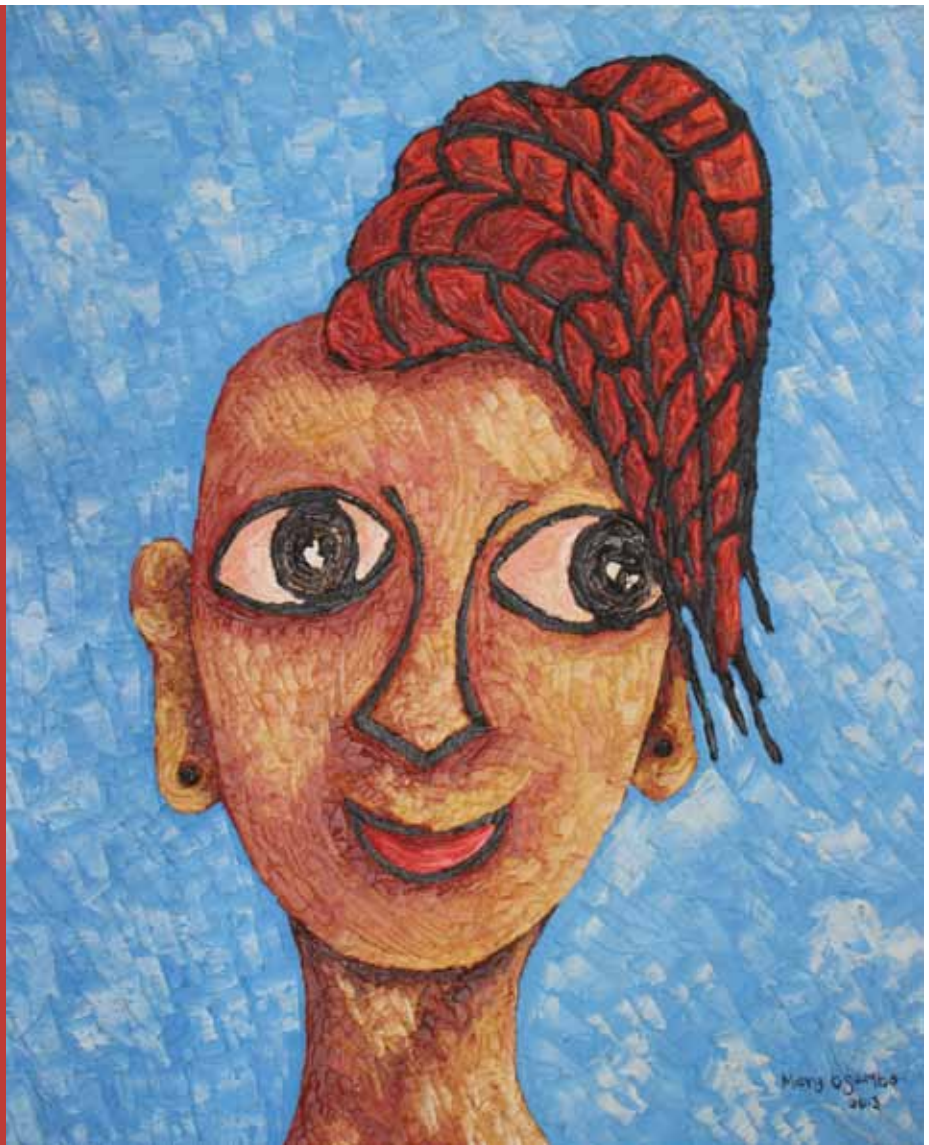
¹²Interview, Khalid Omar Kajeje

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¹⁴Interview, Khalid Omar Kajeje.

The Gambia's Love Affair with Kenyan Benga

Humphrey Sipalla'



*The Gambia is in a
surreal love affair with
Kenyan music, and has
been since the 1970s.*

West Africa is much renowned for its bustling markets that are a veritable blitzkrieg on the senses - a cacophonous explosion of colour, sound, smell, taste, feel and most importantly, a glimpse for the mind's eye. To know West Africa's complex multi-layered, deeply cosmological societies, the non-Western African, must start at the market. West Africa routinely offers a deep culture shock to other Africans who expect to find familiar 'African' culture. It is therefore probably the least unlikely thing to hear Kenyan Benga blasting out of the many 'music shops' lining Gambian markets. But this is precisely what should be expected.

The Gambia is in a surreal love affair with Kenyan music, and has been since the 1970s. By far the most popular Kenyan artist currently is Ken wa Maria with his distinctive Kamba Benga beats. This is largely due to the profusion of pirated copies of his music videos produced by Most Unique Media. Moreover, several radio stations such as Hilltop FM play a selection of Kenyan Benga, particularly on Sunday afternoons. In audio, Luo Benga is king with Gikuyu and Kamba Benga following closely.

The origins of this love affair are largely unclear. What is evident though is that Kenyan Benga and Senegambian Mbalaxx – the latter popularised by Youssour N'dour – now distinct in every sense, share a common ancestry. Caribbean Rumba that was wildly popular in the 1950s and 1960s in parts of Africa's Atlantic coast from Senegal to Congo, evolved into Benga in Kenya and Mbalaxx in the Senegambia, as local artists in these two extremities of Africa, began playing their own music and adapting it to local rhythms and languages. However, in the 1960s and 1970s striking similarities remained. It is stunning to listen to the Gambian sixties band Super Eagles' 'Su nous harit' or 'Dohi Gudi Bahut' or 'Gamba Zambia (African Unity)' among others and hear string and drum rhythms that mirror Kenyan Daudi Kabaka tunes such as those from

the ‘*Helulelule*’ album or even a later Les Wanyika sound like ‘Afro’. So remarkably alike can some of these tunes be that one cannot help but wonder whether direct cross-pollination was occurring at the time. However, as the years passed, Kenyan Benga developed a focus around the string section giving prominence to the electric guitar. Meanwhile Senegambian Mbalaxx built itself around a unique rolling drum rhythm and integrated the almighty Kora – invented in The Gambia about three centuries ago according the recently launched Gambian Kora Foundation, – the *xalam* and obviously the talking drum.

Kenyan vinyl records found their way into The Gambia, thanks to a currently hard to find inventive trader. Described simply as ‘one Joola man’, this erstwhile teacher ran a little shop on 27 Tobacco Road, now renamed Ma Samba Ceasay Street in the island City of Banjul. Now a dilapidated potholed street, current residents do not seem to remember him. Legend has it that on the day a shipment of Kenyan vinyl arrived, a radio announcement would ensure very long queues developed ending at 27 Tobacco Road. Queues began soon after *Fajr*, the morning Islamic prayer, to ensure that one stood a chance of bagging a record. From the mid-1970s to the bloody attempted 1981 coup d’etat that scarred The Gambia, 27 Tobacco was the place to watch for Kenyan music. It is also not unusual to find among The Gambia’s well travelled professional classes, a personal collection or two of pre-1980s Kenyan vinyl records. It is also reputed, that one who knows Dakar’s cul-de-sac well will find tonnes of ‘*zilizopendwa*’ Kenyan vinyl.

The records found their way into night clubs but their true home was in the ‘*Bal poussière*’, an open air dance floor that attracted many a teenager, much to parental chagrin. This a tradition that continues to-date under the Wolof term ‘*fura*’ or simply programme, and it consists of DJs setting up large speakers in an open area within villages or housing estates and blasting music all night long, even for those wishing to sleep! Taken in good faith, youths and even children dance, alcohol free – this is after all a 96% Muslim majority country – kicking up tonnes of dust, hence the French term ‘*poussière*’.

Kenyan Benga’s popularity, attest several vendors, remains largely among the youth of the 1970s, and seemingly too, among the Joola community of southern Gambia and Senegal’s Cassamance who swear to Benga’s similarity to their traditional music. A major difference in the records sold then and now, apart from technological change – or is it because of it – is piracy. Original records are nowhere to be found in The Gambia. Certainly, Kenyan producers have not done much to provide the market with original products. It is ironical that African trade integration seems to have been better in the seventies than it is today. But then the same technological advances like the internet, offer Kenyan artists easier access to information on a potential Sene-Gambian market. Maybe too, it is time that institutions such as the respective national cultural centres make contact and organise tours of artists. One Ken wa Maria would surely be pleasantly surprised by his Banjul following.

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¹I would like to thank Gaye Sowe, my former colleague at IHRDA for sharing his encyclopaedic knowledge of music and equally broad music collection for this research. I also heartily thank my landlord in Banjul, Phillip Jarju for sharing his childhood memories of this fascinating musical love affair.

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Queen Jane: A Tribute to the Voice of the Voiceless

Maina wa Mutonya

The stub on Wikipedia about the late Jane Nyambura (1965-2010) better known as Queen Jane, is not representative of the space that this heroine of Kikuyu popular music has occupied in the Kenyan social imaginary and the cultural scene. Born Jane Nyambura in 1965, Queen Jane's stature as a leading female Kikuyu popular musician will forever remain etched in the memories of many a fan of her *benga* beat.

When she died in July of 2010, different media house in reporting her death had difficulties verifying her place of birth, but all were in agreement that she was born somewhere in the then Murang'a district, now Murang'a County. This is an indication that she was the undisputed queen of Kikuyu music, not only in the area, but nationally as well. When the national broadcaster's website wrongfully stated that she was born in Gatanga, this aroused in me my earliest memories of Queen Jane.

Regarded as the home of Kikuyu music, the present galaxy of stars from Gatanga has never failed their fans from the division, where they constantly perform gigs in the area. In the mid-1980s to the 1990s, Queen Jane would accompany musicians from Gatanga such as Wamumbe and John Ndichu, in their tours in the constituency. When she performed in Gatura's Chini Club at the Tarmac End Inn in the late 1980s, Anto Kamau from Houston, Texas, who hails from the area, remembers the day with nostalgia: 'It was my first time ever to come face to face with a Kenyan celebrity'. Despite many years in the USA, he still remains a fan of Queen Jane's music. I recall the excitement on my elder brothers' faces whenever they would attend the regular live performances in my village, Gatura, one of the major stops of most Gatanga musicians. Being roughly 10 years in the mid 1980s, I could only understand their excitement much later when I encountered her music in my research endeavours.

Having launched her career at the tender age of 19 with Musaimo in 1984, Queen Jane will be remembered as the woman artist trendsetter of Kikuyu secular music. Apart from the Nyakinyua dancers in the 50s and the 60s, the Kikuyu woman's voice was largely muted, and the female singer was just an accompanying artist.

It is extremely difficult to talk about Queen Jane and her music in isolation. Right from where she started with Simon Kihara, better known as Musaimo, to the time of her demise, Queen Jane has commanded respect from musicians and fans alike. This spirit of collaboration has been evident in her music as well with her overt mention of fellow musicians in her songs. While in business sense these would be her competitors, her regular mention of them as colleagues in the business of music showed her great personality in the music world. In fact, one musician, Timona Mburu of the *Wi Sumu* fame, composed a song in honour of Queen Jane after her marriage to James Kariuki in 2001, saying that those who "had eyed her" should know that she was now queen of Kariuki. Queen Jane herself did a song thanking all those musicians and radio personalities, mostly from Kameme FM, who attended her wedding.

Most of contemporary Kikuyu musicians have been products of Queen Jane's magnanimity. Renowned *Mugiiithi* one-man guitarists, Mike Murimi, Salim Junior and Mike Rua started off with Queen Jane's group Queenja Les Les Band. Queen Jane also mentored her younger sisters Lady Wanja and Princess Aggie, as well as Dr Michuki her brother, who are now musicians in their own right.

Having launched her career at the tender age of 19 with Musaimo in 1984, Queen

Jane will be remembered as the woman artist trendsetter of Kikuyu secular music. Apart from the Nyakinyua dancers in the 50s and the 60s, the Kikuyu woman's voice was largely muted, and the female singer was just an accompanying artist. Roman Warigi, a guru of Kikuyu music in the 50s and 60s used to record with his sister Muthoni, but he carried the by-line alone. Joseph Kamaru also sang with his sister Catherine, but Kamaru always got the credits. It was only in the 1970s that Elizabeth Nyambene and Julia Lucy opened the way for recognition of women singers. However, these two artists were purely gospel artists.

As things began to change in secular groups, it became increasingly common to hear of Kamaru Sisters, and Chania Sisters (in the case of Peter Kigia's Chania River Boys Band). Others included Kihara Sisters (of the Mbiri Young Stars) and Karura Sisters (of Karura Brothers). The lifting of the veil off the female voice increased both the volume and the quality of productions, while at the same time helping to expose female musicians to the music scene. Now, one could hear female artistes belting out witty responses to the lyrical accusations that male singers had been levelling against Kenyan womanhood.

Then in the 1980s Queen Jane entered the fray, this time giving the female voice the prominence it duly deserved. Queen Jane was a talented composer, and competently fused the old and the new, both in terms of lyrics and tunes. Like other Kikuyu artists, Queen Jane inculcated the traditional forms into her popular music. In her initial recordings, she would include the traditional folk form *Mucungw'a* within her contemporary benga. Her albums covers then featured her dressed in traditional attire of the Gikuyu community; in *muthuru*, which was a skirt made of skin, and huge earrings, known as *hang'i*. Quite befitting an attire for the queen of Kikuyu music

Where the female perspective was largely suppressed or (mis)represented by the male Kikuyu artist, Queen Jane's intervention as a secular singer was timely. In most of her songs, she has directly attacked the patriarchal hegemony. Her song, *Arume Majini* (Men are Ghosts) was inspired by an increase in the number of rape and defilement cases in Kenya. This is the same theme echoed in her hit song *Muthuuri Teenager*, and *Guka Nindarega*, (I refuse to be married to an old man/grandfather) where she scathingly attacks 'sugar daddies'; old men that trick young schoolgirls into relationships which end as soon as they start, consequently ruining the young girls' lives.

Some male fans have felt that she has been too strong in her condemnation against their own. For instance, Sam Mbugua in Johannesburg, South Africa, feels that her choice of words, especially against men, is rather harsh. In one of her songs, Queen Jane stresses that *Arume ni Nyamu* (Men are Beasts), taunting Casanovas who jump from one lover to the next with reckless abandon. But Queen Jane was never apologetic about this stance, and once declared that 'the fact that men are among my greatest fans simply means that I am telling the truth'.

Her strong lyrics against men triggered off a continuous dialogue and interplay on gender and power relations in Kikuyu music. As Queen Jane castigates the behaviour of men in relationships as sugar daddies in her song *Nindarega Kuhikira Guka* (I refuse to be married to a grandfather), Sam Muraya's famous *Mama Kiwinya* scathingly attacks older women (better known as sugar mummies), who find comfort in young boys as their lovers. The same is evident in Joseph Kariuki's *Nyina wa Turera*, where he states that it is wrong for a 40-year old woman to date a young boy of 20. This consistent dialogue between musicians across the gender divide has encapsulated the day-to-day realities in the society. The tensions in gender relations emanate from the myth of origin of the Kikuyu people. Originally a matriarchal society, men revolted against the system and replaced it with a patriarchal one.

Besides the gender debate, her music has been well-known for other social messages that they carry. She not only attacks men, but also wayward women such as the "sweet-time girls" who are out to cause mayhem to the family institution. In her song *Tunua Baggy* (Loose mouths), she is not polite to gossips and rumour mongers, who are personified in the female characters, Wangari and Wanjiku. Her love-songs are on unfulfilled love. For instance, *Ndi Munogu* (I am tired of waiting), *Mwendwa KK* (KK, my Lover), *Nduraga Ngwetereire* (I have been waiting for you) depict a lover who is running out of patience with a man who is taking forever to commit to the

Her strong lyrics against men have triggered off a continuous dialogue and interplay on gender and power relations in Kikuyu music.

relationship. In the song, *Nyumburira*, (Confess to me), she implores her lover to take his stand sooner than later, instead of wasting time doing his calculations. In most of these songs, she depicts herself as the victim, consequently earning sympathy from her audience and fans. Some of her songs attest to the problems she has had to contend with in a career that is male dominated and where female musicians are easily mistaken for prostitutes. In the song *Nyumburira* mentioned above, she is sad that her lover's friends are discouraging him from continuing with the relationship simply because Queen Jane is a musician. A running theme in all her music is the message to the youth to respect their parents. In the song *John Bull*, Queen Jane revisits the theme of the rags-to-riches story of a young man, John Ndegwa, who later rejects his parents and changes his name to John Bull. She warns of the power of the curse of the poor parents whom he mistreats when he gets rich.

Queen's music has also been most notable in depicting class consciousness. She not only takes the responsibility of being the voice of the women, but also the voice of the voiceless. In one song, *Ndereba cia Matatu*, she valorises the work of matatu drivers, whom she says are as intelligent and useful in the society as any other professional. This led to her recognition by Matatu Welfare Association as the best Kikuyu lady singer. She has also addressed the plight of orphans in her song *Mwana wa Ndigwa*, (The Orphan) and widows *Mutumia wa Ndigwa*. The most powerful one was her song *Hawkers*, where she cries with them and also lashes out at the then Nairobi City Council authorities. A background to this song clearly shows that Queen Jane did not shy away from commenting on the injustices by the then government.

At the onset of multi-party democracy in Kenya in the early 1990's, popular music and theatre were useful expressive forms which Kenyans used to voice their discontent at the excesses of the one-party regime. The Moi regime responded by being more stringent on cultural productions, banning plays and music. But artists and audiences alike found new avenues of expressing themselves away from officialdom. Music with political content was mainly played in bars and matatus. Hawkers became very instrumental in the sale and distribution of these cassettes, but were met with brutality from state officials who arrested them, demolished their kiosks and some lost their lives. Highlighting the plight of hawkers on Nairobi streets, Queen Jane in the song *Hawkers* offered a glimpse of their tribulations, where, striving to free themselves from the shackles of unemployment, they are frustrated by the political dispensation of the day exemplified by Nairobi City Council askaris who endlessly harass the hawkers. She illustrates the social stratum graphically and metaphorically when she queries the humanity of the askaris:

Andu aya nguria maciarirwo ni atumia/Kana ni nyamu cia githaka/Kana ni ruciaro ruria rwa Cain/Rworagire Habiri/Rukirumwo ni Ngai -

Are these people born of women? /or wild animals? Or are they descendants of Cain/who killed Abel/ And God cursed them?

The dehumanising act by the policemen on the hawkers goes beyond the social stratification. To the singer, it is not even an issue of class. She does not expect human beings to treat their fellows in this way. The spineless and ruthless character of the powers-that-be is laid bare. Queen Jane's lament of the plight of the hawkers was symbolic of the many struggles that a great proportion of Kenyans went through during that time. Such lyrics offer critique to officialdom for the everyday problems of the non-elite listeners and elite listeners alike.

Despite having a relatively short entry on Wikipedia, the same cannot be said of her huge following on YouTube. Her song, *Nduraga Ngwetereire* (I have been waiting for you) recorded over 260,000 hits by the time of writing this article. On record, this is one of the highest number of hits on any secular Kikuyu song on YouTube to-date. Given that Kenyans in the Diaspora regularly fall back to the Internet to access local music, this denotes that she has had a huge following outside Kenya as well. Coincidentally, the song resonates with experiences of long distance relationships occasioned by Kenyans going abroad. The song expresses hope that even after the many years of physical separation, the fire of the love will keep glowing.

Queen's music has also been most notable in depicting class consciousness. She not only takes the responsibility of being the voice of the women, but also the voice of the voiceless. .

In her death, Queen Jane's music will continue to command a huge following. As Dr. Fred Mbogo of Moi University comments, 'what is reassuring is that her body of work which is quite large will continue to be played for a long time to come because it seems to me to speak of life so passionately and objectively'. There is no better wording than this to sum up Queen Jane's life, music and her contribution to the Kenyan cultural scene.

Dr Maina wa Mutonya has been teaching African Studies in Mexico and is a researcher on African literatures and popular culture. His recent book explores the politics of everyday life in the popular music of the Gikuyu people in Kenya. His current research interests include a study of the politics of remembering, violence and representation in the popular cultural terrain of Kenya as well as the cultural representations between Africa and Latin America.

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Capoeira: From struggle to a movement

Ndanu Mung'ala

The mention of capoeira evokes images of fight, music and dance. The flair of capoeira has been incorporated into popular culture from Hollywood movies to video games. However, it is in the dance form that capoeira's influence endures, most notably in break-dance. Today, the criminalisation and bans that fettered the practice of this art in the 1800s are no more. In as much as the style has contributed to economic development to a certain extent, capoeira's legacy to the world lies in its great capacity to transform self and society.

Weaving a remarkable testimony to this universal reach is the lineage from Senzala in Santos, Brazil, headed by Mestre Sombra who has taught and inspired his students to open schools in various countries. Mestres Sylvia and Marcos began the London School of Capoeira in 1988 where Professor Tijolo learnt the art before starting his own Capoeira Norte in Manchester, UK. Professor Tijolo's student, Brian Kassim Owango, returned home in 2005 to open Capoeira Balanço Negro, the first official capoeira school in Kenya.

Balanço Negro, which means Black Swing or the Way of the Black Man, is redefining the Kenyan cultural scene through artistic and community activities. The school has over 30 *capoeiristas* (players) who attend class regularly while more than 500 people have been under the school's tutelage since its inception. From 2006 to date, the school has been honoured to host Professor Tijolo, Mestre Ediandro, Mestre Beija-Flôr among other masters of the Senzala lineage, who shared their wealth of knowledge and expertise through workshops held during their time in Kenya. These visits are a testament to the capoeiristas that Mestre Sombra has nurtured and sent out to continue passing on this rich heritage. The school has also had the great pleasure of receiving Mestre Sombra himself in 2010, for the school's first *batizado* (grading ceremony), and more recently in April 2014. I am proud to be part of this family, one I can identify with and fit in with ease be it in Nairobi, London, Manchester, Barcelona, Athens or Santos.

The school also mentors a group of young people at the *Ongoza Njia* (Lead the Way in Kiswahili) Community Centre in Huruma. We spend our weekends with a delightful group of children and youth at the Centre, teaching them the movements and music of capoeira. It is a way to engage them constructively and positively while reducing the time in which they would be idle and open to participating in anti-social activities. The school has also been able to contribute meaningfully to the community through *Tandawazi*, a festival of dance, music and martial arts conceptualised by Brian. The proceeds from the festival go toward *Project Baraza*, an empowerment initiative that seeks to build and refurbish community youth centres in underprivileged communities.

Brian seeks to guard the rich tradition handed down through generations of the Associação de Capoeira Senzala that first grew, 35 years ago, from Mestre Sombra's simple home area. An inscription hangs over the door of the Academy: '*Na Senzala, somos varios expressoes de um mesmo rosto*', (At Senzala, we are various expressions of the same face).

When you look at another and appreciate that they are human, irrespective of status and aspirations, therein is the beginning of harmony. Capoeiristas, regardless of occupation, seek to excel in all that they do and to uphold virtues of respect and

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Mestre Ediandro playing with Brian

Capoeiristas, regardless of occupation, seek to excel in all that they do and to uphold virtues of respect and integrity in spite of the fact that each is drawn to capoeira for different reasons.



Music and capoeira with the children from Ongoza Njia

Capoeira is a philosophy that can only be fully experienced from the inside out.

integrity in spite of the fact that each is drawn to capoeira for different reasons. For some, it is a way of keeping fit while others are interested in understanding and being part of a different culture in which they can achieve a level of mastery and expertise in the art.

The pull that capoeira has for me lies in the historical, the musical and the physical elements of the game. It is that which has enabled me to stay on even when the movements initially appeared impossible to execute and I felt more than a tinge of frustration. The friendship I have come to share with my fellow capoeiristas has given new meaning to the practice of this art as I continue to understand the school's values better. Brian's passion for the art is based on the strong relationship he sees in everyday life played out in a circle and the music that accompanies it.

Tracing Movement and Music

It is a daunting task to attempt to trace the history of capoeira let alone define it. Great masters like Mestre Pastinha said that "Capoeira is whatever the mouth eats" whereas Mestre Bimba, famous for the Regional style of the art, defined it as treachery that enables one to face life's dangers. This further illustrates how this mysterious art touches people in different ways.

Slavery is synonymous to the roots of this ancient art form, which possesses distinct physical and musical aspects of the African culture. Towards the 18th Century, the Portuguese intensified their trade in slaves, especially from Angola, in the Atlantic Passage. Overall, it is estimated that more than four million African men, women and children went through the slave ports of Luanda and Benguela into Recife, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro and Santos in Brazil.

Captivity did not deter the slaves who occasionally revolted and escaped from the *senzalas* to form *quilombos*¹. In reference to the low bush in the forest areas where the slaves escaped to, the word 'capoeira' has strong allusion to the defensive positions that needed to be adopted in the face of vengeful slave masters. Africans in Brazil also borrowed from traditional dances like the *n'golo* from Southern Angola where techniques of fighting with the feet involved kicks, foot sweeps and leg locks. Often the fighting style was disguised with dance to fool any authority who would chance on capoeiristas in the *senzalas* hence the reference to an "Afro-Brazilian dance form".

Expressions of Body, Mind and Spirit

The unique qualities of capoeira borrow expansively from creative expressions in the movements and the music. Capoeira is a philosophy that can only be fully experienced from the inside out. Physical and mental discipline is vital to achieve a boundless synchrony that flows effortlessly and instinctively from the person. The transformation of the self leads one to engage respectfully yet playfully with another in the *roda*, the circle formed by the people around a game of capoeira.

Wit is equally appreciated in the apt songs that are sang in a *roda*; in lyrics that laud the game and teachers alike, mock opponents and celebrate daily events, joys and sorrows. It is a reminder of the beauty of a tradition that was wrought from the greatest struggle of all mankind: to be free.

Personally, my favourite definition of the art remains that of Mestre Sombra: "Capoeira is a prayer", a connection with the Supreme, an expression of the self and a reflection of the infinite avenues that are available to us to change society for the better.

Ndanu Mung'ala is a capoeirista with Capoeira Balanço Negro. A generous blend of music, books, biking and working for peace gladdens her heart.

¹Quilombo: an independent village formed in the back lands by slaves who had escaped from the *senzalas* i.e. the slave quarters on the plantations.

SAUTI SOL

Anyiko Owoko



When we first met and I heard their voices and they told me their story, I knew they had something going on that was unique. The problem was their sound was so different that every producer turned them down. A lot of people did not understand their sound and did not want to be part of an experiment.

The coming together of Sauti Sol and I was based on our creativity. As a band they are very creative. When you listen to their voices what stands out is the harmony - there are three harmonious voices, and one guitarist, a powerful fusion. Yet for the band, that unique sound has never been enough. For them it has always been - this is who we are, this is what we are known for, but what else can we do? How else can we represent our country, our Continent? When we first met and I heard their voices and they told me their story, I knew they had something going on that was unique. The problem was their sound was so different that every producer turned them down. A lot of people did not understand their sound and did not want to be part of an experiment. At that point half of Sauti Sol and I were studying French at the Alliance Française. So we went to the Director, Harsita Waters, and said we are students and could we sing for her, and would she mind giving us space - and that is where we had our first concert.

The biggest challenge at any point of Sauti Sol's career has always been how to get to the next level. I would like to tell creatives out there especially in the music industry - do not wait to have a number one song or a video on YouTube with a number of hits before you present yourself. Sauti Sol had no recording at all and we held a concert that was full house, and soon had a second concert at Goethe Institute. At their first concert at the Alliance Française they were lucky to meet their first manager, Ninka Nauta, the founder of Penya Africa record label. She approached them, said she was from Netherlands and was in Kenya to support Kenyan music, and that theirs was the kind of group she would like to work with. They were like, are you serious? As creatives, if you don't take risks you definitely will miss out on a lot of chances. I have seen Sauti Sol's metamorphosis from boys to men. They have grown up and are taller, their voices have changed and you can hear this when you listen to the new album that is set for release this year, *Live and Die in Africa*. But even their thought processes have changed. When they started out they wanted to be known, and to share their music. But when you get known, and share your music, then what next? You start to create for a particular audience, you start to create for a particular achievement. Their publishers have really helped them and they are getting to that level, but it is a slow process. Right now Sauti Sol is packaged for Africa. We have no business making it big in America or in Europe when we are not the biggest band in Africa. Who are we making music for if Kenyans, East Africans, or Africans don't understand our music? How do we expect the rest of Europe and America to understand our music? Our new focus is to make our African tours a success, and ease up on tours across Europe and America. The band has been playing in Tanzania and South Africa, Mali, Namibia and Nigeria. We are planning shows in Uganda, Kigali and now with the new album we will have a lot of shows out there.

I am going to talk about Sauti Sol's success story especially when it comes to *Nishike*. *Nishike* is the baby you don't want to keep showing off to people, what you might

call a 'necessary evil'... It started with a young producer, Kagwe Mungai, relocating to Kenya. Kagwe is one of the youngest and most innovative and brilliant producers in Nairobi right now. I remember interviewing Kagwe on my TV show Grapevine and he told me very clearly - I am here to work with big artists, I am here to work with phenomenal artists, I would like to pick the sounds of artists like Eric Wainaina and I would love to work with the young creatives like Sauti Sol. Sauti Sol are very choosy, very particular and have set such high standards for themselves it makes them really choosy when it comes to who they work with. So in my head I was like - way to go. Their producer called Sauti Sol, met them and told them this is who I am, this is what I want to do with you. The timing was perfect because Sauti Sol had just started working on the new album, so they said bring us a track and if we like it we will do something with you. So [the producer] came to the studio and played the instrumentals of the song that would become *Nishike*. Immediately the guys heard the beat they knew the kind of lyrics to put to it. They did the song in just one night. They called me to the studio to listen to it. The first time I heard the song, I thought it futuristic, the kind of song that international artists like Usher, or Boys to Men might sing. For Sauti Sol, this was bold; not like an African band. I immediately gave it the go ahead because if you are going to make a difference, you have to make a big difference. It should not be something comparable to anything close to home.

To prepare for the video, we had a week of intense brain storming with Sauti Sol's manager Malek, a brilliant mind, the Director of *Nishike*, Enos Olik, Assistant Director Marvin Obaga and their team plus a few girls who wanted to cast for the video. It was important they understand the concept of the video with its celebratory adult theme, over which we had agreed. It was not supposed to make women look like objects. The band sang *Ulazizi*, then *Coming Home*. Next was *Mama, Papa*, directed at parents, and eventually came the raunchy *Nishike*. Everything went well, the video came out and when promoting it I remember this one time I was awake for two hours straight because of the conversations it provoked. It has not been an easy road. The song has received a lot of criticism, but we stand by *Nishike* because it is part of us, it is our song and it is one of the most sexiest songs in the album. The video got us to one million hits, after which *Sura Yako* music video officially got a million hits. The first video of *Sura Yako* was very close to a thousand hits.

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It is the coming together of strategy and consistency and minds that change trends. Sauti Sol doesn't just want to be big in Kenya. They work hard. Three days a week in studio, and three at rehearsals. For Sauti Sol and me, this is what it is. We don't have another career. We are doing this to make money. When it is your business you don't sleep; you obsess and you work hard. *Nishike* getting a million hits translates to currency. So artists should take not only radio, but also social media platforms seriously. One needs a team: a manager, a publicist, a communication team, and you need to make sure the social media is active at all times. No serious artist can afford to have social media on pause for more than three hours. I am happy to say that Sauti Sol facebook page currently has 170,000 likes, we have 136 thousand followers on twitter, 54,000 on instagram and our youtube now has millions of genuine views. The best thing any artist or creative can have is a true fan base, a true followership so that the conversation continues even when you don't have a new product out. When Sauti Sol fans, for instance, said 'we don't like what you did with *Nishike*. It is not who we knew you for,' Sauti Sol answered, 'okay, but you need to know that we are growing up but we have other stuff for you.'

So for me it is an honour to represent Sauti Sol at this very important conference. I just love to say that Sauti Sol is not really in competition with other artists; they are in this to bring a huge contribution to the industry and to inspire up-coming bands and musicians. Together with Sauti Sol we would love to see Kenya's entertainment scene move a notch higher and match up to those of the West. We would love to see artists make money off their music; we would love to see artists promote a culture and a lifestyle of celebrities and pop culture. We would love to see artists being given the VIP treatment that they deserve.

Anyiko Owoko is a publicist for Sauti Sol as well as being a TV producer, writer, blogger and TV host.

Sauti Sol have since gone on to perform, at State House, for the US President Obama on his inaugural visit to Kenya as president in July this year. Not only did they teach him how to dance lipala, it is rumoured that a picture of them now hangs on a wall in the Whitehouse. Even Owoko could not have imagined this one! Ed.

PART THREE

RADIO, THEATRE AND WRITING

FM Radio Broadcasting in Local Languages Triggering Rural Empowerment in Kenya

George Gathigi

Rural dwellers in Kenya make up about 80% of the total population (Republic of Kenya, 2002) but continue to struggle with developmental challenges that have persisted since independence. In addressing some of these challenges, communication-based efforts have been implemented over the years in areas such as economic production, health, education, social cultural concerns, politics and governance, among others, mainly through radio which is the most accessible medium. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of information and communication technologies though rural areas in Kenya are still lagging behind. With the exception of mobile telephony that has diffused quickly and is relatively affordable, the rural population is yet to experience a substantive leap in accessing and utilizing new technologies whose application and maintenance remain an expensive undertaking. These limitations have maintained people's reliance on radio.

In the broadcasting industry, the last two decades have been marked by rapid changes ushered in by media liberalization. This has presented opportunities for increased information and education provision to people in the rural areas, as commercial broadcasters have moved in to capture different segments of the population. There have been considerable developments in the radio industry compared to television. The number of radio stations has risen from less than ten in 1994 to over 120 in 2009. There has also been an increase in television stations from two in 1990 to about 20, though most channels are only available in the urban areas.

This paper examines the growth of the radio and its performance in providing content to rural populations, its role in promoting social change and advancing local culture. I argue that radio has been responsive and effective in providing pertinent information in key areas necessary to spur social change, local culture and language. However, issues relating to health and education still require more work to be done. The paper uses data collected from interviews with radio journalists from various stations across Kenya and radio listeners in Central Kenya.

Rural areas have always been a fundamental focus in the advancement of social change and have consistently been of main concern in the government's policymaking and planning activities (Republic of Kenya, 1964; 1979; 1996; 2002). Factors that make rural areas central to the national development agenda include high population presence and their role as key sites for economic production; persistence of challenges such as low literacy rates, rapid population growth and limited access to basic needs such as water supply, health, education and essential infrastructure such as roads.

A number of developments in the communication industry have taken place in Kenya in the last twenty years (Odhiambo, 2002). Media liberalization that accompanied political changes in early 1990s saw the emergence of multiple players in radio broadcasting with government owned station KBC losing its monopoly, the enactment

Information and Communication Act of 1998 (KICA) and more recently in 2009, the Kenya Communications (Broadcasting) Regulations. This has resulted in opening up of the industry, domination by commercial radio while public radio became a minor player in the market, a complete reversal of fortunes from twenty years ago. For rural areas, the growth of local language radio stations and community radio has greatly shifted the content found on the medium. Rural listeners have also become a coveted economic group by advertisers, a major shift from the past where economic power was viewed to be concentrated in the urban working segment of the population.

In Kenyan rural areas, availability of multiple radio channels has increased the available content. To many listeners, radio is the leading source of information, education, and entertainment content through community, private, and public radio.

In Kenyan rural areas, availability of multiple radio channels has increased the available content. To many listeners, radio is the leading source of information, education, and entertainment content through community, private, and public radio. People listen to news and current affairs programs to stay abreast of what is happening around and beyond them, usually in local languages. In addition, local language stations have necessitated a local dimension to the news. Due to multiple players, increased competition between stations has resulted in higher standards of news reporting moving towards progressive and objective reporting. The independence of community and private stations enables them to largely stay clear of state interference. However, local language radio stations are constrained by ethnic and/or regional loyalty. They are forced to appear closer to their main target audience who are usually ethnically or regionally defined, leading to a degree of bias by presenting the favourable side. Local language stations may also appear indifferent on controversial issues by staying away from these for fear of backlash, as they may be received negatively by their target audiences.

Rural stations broadcasting in local languages provide topical information such as agriculture. While this information may have been broadcasted on radio before, the ability of local language stations to narrow it to very specific needs makes them more effective. Local stations can thus be more responsive to local problems as interviews with radio journalists around the country revealed. For a journalist broadcasting in North Eastern Kenya, issues such as education, girl-child rights, female genital cut and pastoralist farming would be the main topics, while in Busia border town in Western Kenya, a journalist would mostly focus on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and agriculture.

Some radio journalists have to use a more holistic approach to address multiple issues within communities that have not been able to easily access information until more recently. Stephen, a community journalist who broadcasts in Pokot explains:

When I wake up in the morning I strive to reach the Pokot and change them. It's hard there; there are cattle rustlers, people who are holding onto their culture. Let's say most have not accessed education. When I am on air I try to change them to stop cattle rustling and we have seen many leave guns and start business. Secondly, we provide community education in health and sanitation such as digging latrines. We are trying to reach them so that they can change and be at par with other Kenyans.

The proximity of community broadcasters to the people allows them to use a participatory approach where they can consult the community members to come up with acceptable ways of addressing some pressing community needs. John Agiwa, a producer with a community radio station in Western Kenya illustrates some of the challenges of addressing a sensitive health subject:

There was a time I was handling the issue of obstetric fistula which is a problem with women. There was no presenter who wanted to handle it. I had to go to the opinion leaders and elders and asked them how they would like to hear it. So I did a demo and took it back to them. They corrected me asking me to change here and there. Then I went on air with that program and it excelled. My challenge was in terms of language and I am good now.

FM stations broadcasting in local languages have led to the presence of more traditional elements of African culture in contemporary broadcasting. There is positive reception of cultural content on radio stations because listeners can easily identify with the material. Local language radio is helping to promote African culture, forming a wider part of cultural renaissance that has taken off in the country. "Cultural Nights" phenomenon for example has gained popularity in major urban centres and local language stations are the most common sponsors. FM stations have done a great job in promoting local expressive materials, as with multiple outlets, music from local

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artistes has found opportunity to be heard by a wider audience. Rural listeners' affinity towards local language broadcasting and perception of their local language shows signs of positive change, moving away from a phenomenon noted by Musau (2005) where the dominance by English and Kiswahili in the media propagated negative attitudes towards African indigenous languages. Exposure of different languages on the radio has made them visible, although English is still viewed as a prestigious language especially among young people.

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There is positive reception of cultural content on radio stations because listeners can easily identify with the material.

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Locating Community Radio as platforms for community development

Njuki Githethwa



Community radio is one of the fronts of community media. Other fronts include community theatre, community film, newsletters, billboards, road-shows and paintings, community resource centres, among others. What gives meaning to community media is when viewed as community communication outlets which are targeted, owned and managed by, for and about the community served. A community can either be a geographic community or a community of interest. Community radio is considered as the flagship of community media in the manner they are able to integrate and provide space to the other community communication outlets.

There are various types of community radio stations around the world which makes it difficult to give them a single, agreed definition. Indeed, there has been caution against fronting a definition of community radio since each community radio is unique. Nevertheless, there are common attributes for community radio stations all over the world. Key among these attributes includes the active participation of the target community in the generation of the content and in the production of the programmes. Another key attribute is that community radio is born out of a struggle, a cause, a desire to bring about change.

In spite of the varied definitions of community radio, there is a general consensus that they are effective community communication outlets for community development.

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, better known with its acronym AMARC has adopted a working definition of community radio as local, not-for-profit and participatory broadcasting with a development agenda. In Africa, the definition of community radio in countries such as Kenya and South Africa takes community radio as that which is owned by a non-profit making entity and operated for non-profitable purposes; serves a particular community; encourages members of the community served to participate in the selection and provision of programmes to be broadcast and may be funded by donations, grants, sponsorship, advertising or membership fees. Hence, community radio stations are usually established by a broad range of civil society organisations based on five principles which are widely recognised as key pillars of community broadcasting: Community ownership, community service, community participation, a non-profit business model and independence (Coyer 2009, Fairbairn 2009).¹

Place of community radio in community development

In spite of the varied definitions of community radio, there is a general consensus that they are effective community communication outlets for community development. Community radio has clear potential and opportunities of promoting people's participation in the debates and the management of public affairs. They are platforms for discussions in a community rather than reporting outlets for packaged information.

Gumucio (2001: 34)² traces the practice of community radio to the theory and practice of participatory communication as reflected in the writings of Paulo Freire. Freire opines that people have the right-individually or collectively-to speak their word and name the world in dialogic encounters. Freire fronted the concept of liberating education in which he perceived communication as dialogue and participation. According to Gumucio, participatory communication is distinguished from other forms of communication strategies through its strategies focussed on horizontal versus vertical communication; process versus campaign; long-term versus short-term; collective versus individual; with versus for; specific versus massive; people's needs versus donor's musts; ownership versus access and consciousness versus persuasion.

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The identity of community radio is often misunderstood and unappreciated. In Kenya for example, there is the widespread assumption that any radio station which broadcasts in an ethnic language, or covers a small geographic area, is a community radio. This confusion is arguably due to the reality that community radio operates within the confines of commercial radio framework, in terms of licensing and programming. While community radio is legally recognised in Kenya as a distinct tier of broadcasting alongside private and the public broadcaster, there lacks the architecture, clearly defined through a policy framework, to ensure that community radio exists and operates in a clearly distinguishable manner.

Nevertheless, community radio stations in Kenya which have strived to be true to their identity and mission have proved to be key pillars in communication for development in communities where they are located or serving. The ability of community radio to act as an agent of change is demonstrated by the experience of Mang'elele community served by Radio Mangelete. In an impact assessment survey carried out at the radio in 2007 by Birgitte Jallo, the Chairperson of the women's group of Ivingoni village observed:

"The radio has created a very good feel about ourselves – I am saying this with particular reference to the status of women in our community. We might not be rich or powerful. We might not even be famous. However we have all over a sudden gained recognition, starting from the family and household level all the way up to the district and national levels".³

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Policy brief of 2008, after the Post- Election Violence (PEV), established that community radios did play a positive role in trying to prevent or minimising the tension that led to the violence. The report noted;

"Pamoja FM, located in Kibera slum – one of the main centres of the post-election unrest in Nairobi – has played an especially courageous role. It has, despite its position, insisted on providing a voice for different communities and worked to calm conflict. Young people make up its main audience and it has directed its efforts at trying to stop fighting between groups of youths"⁴

This assertion came amid accusations that vernacular radio stations, which were seen largely confused with community radio stations, played a significant role in fanning the violence. Samuel Poghiso, then minister for Information was quoted:

"The violence experienced especially after the polls was due to the polarity in the media especially vernacular media which were turned into political tools."⁵

The foregoing underpins community radio as an important contributor to the advancement of community development and of the internationally-agreed development goals. They are indicators of an enabling media driven by the principles of pluralism, diversity and participation. Enabling media is essential for providing space and choice to the general public in pursuit of community development and democratic governance.

One of the obstacles of community radio as a platform for community development is when they are viewed as community development projects to generate returns for its "owners" or for providing employment opportunities to the members of the community.

One of the obstacles of community radio as a platform for community development is when they are viewed as community development projects to generate returns for its "owners" or for providing employment opportunities to the members of the community. Another obstacle is when community radio is focussed on 'pushing' to the community information on what is considered as development issues. These obstacles have constrained community radio from performing their roles effectively as platforms for community development.

To surmount these obstacles, community radio should take an educational approach to community development as foregrounded in the practices of participatory communication. The educational approach takes community radio as a facilitator of community development. This way, the sustainability of community radio is pegged on the development and improvements of livelihoods in the community. This approach enables the community radio to focus on broadcasting programmes that are of educational benefits to the development of community projects and of changing people's perceptions. This approach is attuned to Chitere (1994)⁶ who argues that community development is nothing more than change in people's perceptions of themselves, community and society.

The community radio should be participatory in the generation and development of content and programmes as opposed to the radio being used to 'push' information that the community did not participate in its identification and development. In addition, community radio should not operate as a know-it-all communication channel, but one which takes community members as knowledgeable and active participants in development communication. Being community communication platforms, community radio should not displace other means of communication, such as newspapers, public meetings, word of mouth, mobile phones, the internet and others. Rather, it complements these means and amplifies what goes on in these platforms. For example, a community radio can broadcast development discussions held at a public meeting to a larger audience. This way, the audience who were not physically present at the meeting will feel involved in the discussions at the public meeting. The platform concept goes hand in hand with the practice of participatory action research which enables the community radio to identify priority community issues that will lead to the generation and development of content and programming by, for and about the community served.

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Children's Theatre in Kenya:

The Need for Child-Focused Perspectives

John Mugubi

(Dedicated to the late Dr. Ezekiel Alembo, an avid children's writer, researcher and advocate for true Children's Art)

A few years ago, in Kenya, drama was only regarded as a pastime, and not an enterprise that one would undertake professionally and be able to make ends meet. Undeniably, even most celebrated local TV actors only pursued acting on the side while holding on to full time jobs. Examples of such thespians that radiated our living rooms through Television screens in TV drama such as **Fedheha, Vitimbi, Vituko, Tausi, Tushauriane** and others, are innumerable. All that has changed in the last decade. Some of the best paid media persons in Kenya now are not only committed thespians but also derive their fame from their theatrical approach to, especially, moral, social and political issues. Local musicians too can live comfortably on their earnings. At last, the arts are getting the respect they deserve!

Whereas theatre artists have tapped into the business potential of theatre arts that is adult-oriented, children's theatre has virtually been disregarded. While the United States of America established its first national children's theatre in 1931 in Nashville, and currently flourishes with such theatres in every single State, Kenya still does not have a single theatre specifically designed and dedicated to children and young adults. While London City alone boasts of more than five children's theatres, Kenya is a sorry state where drama for children is minimally exploited mostly at the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival (KSCDF) besides incorporation of the genre in a few high cost private schools that subscribe to Western educational systems. Unfortunately, for the average Kenyan child, the KSCDF "becomes to most of them the first encounter with drama" (Shikuku, E.T., 2008, v). It is worth noting that even in this festival that was inaugurated in 1959, children drama was first staged in 1980 (Kabui, 1997, 35). That children's drama was recognized as worthy of any consideration twenty one years later, says volumes about the status of children's theatre even now.

In terms of children's theatre groups in the country, **Shangilia Mtoto wa Afrika** is the only one deserving such a title, notwithstanding that most of the dramatic art it engages in is scripted by adults. Whilst children are the future, drama is one very crucial avenue for social transformation. We need to comprehend, exploit and embrace the socio-emotional benefits of children's drama in order to foster not only social, moral but also economic change. On the latter, it is a fact that trade in children's stuff: dressing, toys, literature, films and the like, is one of the most lucrative businesses the world over. This notwithstanding, we have turned a blind eye to the fertile children's drama. Perhaps, we still hold on to the view that children are "miniature adults" (E. Alembo, 2003) and that art that serves adults may as well serve children. Little wonder then that even the Kenya Schools and Drama festival, albeit "a good avenue for children to exploit their theatrical talent" (Shikuku, 2008, 2), is still not "effective because the plays majorly address an adult audience in terms of issues and how they are presented" (Kabui, 1997, 75). Children's drama is an artistic genre in its own right with its distinctive character and utility in the society.

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When they participate in the creation of the dramatic scripts and when tutored to reason on their own dialogue and action rather than merely utter words and perform like mindless zombies, this accords significance to the situations enacted. In dwelling in the psyche of someone else and glancing at the world from this individual's eyes, drama enables the child to learn to accept and tolerate other people while empathizing with others.

So what is a child-centred play? The play should be about the "child world": either centred on childhood or addressing issues from a child's point of view.

What are the social emotional benefits of children's drama? "Drama, by its very nature is based on cooperation" (Peter Slade, 2008, 147). When a participatory, rather than the customary dictatorial, teacher/director-take-it-all approach is taken, right from the scriptwriting, through rehearsals and performance, children learn immensely about the virtues of giving and receiving. When they participate in the creation of the dramatic scripts and when tutored to reason on their own dialogue and action rather than merely utter words and perform like mindless zombies, this accords significance to the situations enacted. In dwelling in the psyche of someone else and glancing at the world from this individual's eyes, drama enables the child to learn to accept and tolerate other people while empathizing with others. By helping us understand each other in this world where, led by narcissistic leaders, humans have fashioned, perpetuate and unabashedly continue to validate artificial compartments based on race, ethnicity, class, caste, creed, political affiliations, sexuality and others, drama will ultimately have played its rightful role by broadening our minds and instigating emotions of tolerance and empathy towards others. Subsequently, the enactment available in children's theatre helps children discover meanings from their own real life situations. Children also learn how to solve or confront certain problems in society.

Inevitably tied to the element of cooperation are the virtues of communication, obedience and self-control. Since drama is a collaborative affair, it demands that the participants – scriptwriters, actors, directors, choreographers, designers, stage-managers and producers - communicate with and understand each other. 'Communication', a word which means 'to make one with', is key to any form of development. Once a child can communicate well with other people, he/she will understand him/herself better (especially from the community's perspective). As a result, then, the child will be able to relate and work well with other people since he/she understands them. In a planet that is becoming less individualistic and more communal in confronting global challenges, with many countries all over the earth seeking for partnerships and to forge unities with their neighbours (**the European Union** and **East African Community** being cases in point), drama is a splendid mode for eliminating any form of egoism and unconstructive introversion in children to enable them cope and also make their own contribution in future. In the same respect, the child will acquire confidence about themselves and their own abilities, leading to a better sense of self-worth. A nation full of persons with a low self esteem cannot prosper and yet the seeds of self-respect can only be implanted effectively in childhood. As a Swahili proverb affirms: "*Samaki mkunje angali mbichi*" (fold the fish while it is still fresh and raw), drama can help nations shape their children's perspective of life.

Since play is an exterior expression of the unconscious, fostering children's theatre will accord children a projective avenue for articulating their private worlds and distinctive personality processes. In this regard, apart from serving a cathartic role based on the children's previous experiences, children drama "can increase their sensitivity to emotional experiences and better understand their own emotional reactions" (Slade, P, 45).

Aesthetically, drama for children should be child-focused. Whereas critics such as Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (2004) have argued that all identities including childhood are created by adults in the light of their own perceptions of themselves, notable psychologists Jean Piaget (1950) and Erik Erikson (1950) proved the contrary. Their findings are yet to be challenged scientifically. Piaget clearly outlines four major stages of cognitive development while Erikson found out that human life faces eight major affective crises during their course of life. While Robert Sears (1951) discovered that all human functioning is the product of interactive effects of all the influences, both congenital and experiential, that have impinged on the individual, his findings still do not support Lesnik-Oberstein's thesis which intimates that children are tabula rasa , empty pitchers on which adults inscribe or fill in whatever material they wish.

So what is a child-centred play? The play should be about the "child world": either centred on childhood or addressing issues from a child's point of view. It is unlikely that a play or any work of art for that matter that centres on wife-inheritance, or giving birth (Alembi 2003), drugs, alcohol, death, graphic violence and sex, would be of interest to a child, unless the child's upbringing has exposed them to such matters. If such subjects have to be tackled in a children's play, then they must be dealt with sensitively

and from a child's angle of vision. As much as children will in real life sometimes be forced to deal with the demise of a relative, they must not be perpetually reminded, and in a gory manner, that life is after all very temporary. We may end up nurturing a whole generation of cynics. On no account should drugs and alcohol be glamorized in a child's play. Such subjects can only be infused in a children's play if it is evident that absorbing them leads to the characters downfall; thus pointing out the dangers of imbibing them. On violence, it would surely be depraved, indeed unforgivably immoral to ask a child to play the role of a serial killer in drama or film. It is worse when the serial killer becomes the central character in the children's play or film:

...it matters that it is the protagonist who is violent. It is natural when viewing any kind of narrative entertainment to identify oneself with the protagonist. An adult may identify with a violent character while watching a program without wanting to be him, but for children this is often a difficult distinction. The problem is compounded when ...the protagonist is presented as heroic and glamorous. (Buchanan, M, 1999, 4)

Themes for children's theatre must therefore be selected cautiously. Plekhanov (1953) emphasized that art has significance only when it illuminates or arouses or conveys actions, emotions and happenings that are of relevance and indeed importance to the society. Art is not only a product of the society; it is also a force in the society. The power that children's theatre controls can therefore be used appropriately and profitably at the same time to not only make money but most significantly, to affect and inculcate good attitudes, since art works on the emotions.

Context is also a key issue in children's drama. The play should be based on the familiar. A play based on snake-gods, cooking of felines, cannibalism and transsexual gender identity will definitely be as inappropriate and repellent to an African child as scatological (toilet) humour. Propelled by a new focus, presently there are palpable energized efforts to increase local content in our TV drama. Many locally produced TV programmes now pervade our screens: **Papa Shirandula, Makutano Junction, Changing Times, Tahidi High, Higher Learning, Nairobi Law, Mother-in-Law, Wash and Set, Siri, Beba Beba** and others. The list is impressive. However, most of these programs target the adult, the young adult or the general viewer. Locally produced drama designed for children is negligible with only one programme, **KnowZone**, which has components of drama, being aired by one of the local TV stations. No local animated drama or films exists presently. Our children are still treated to the foreign **Ben 10, Secret Saturdays, Scooby Doo, Tom and Jerry, Best Ed, Flap Jack, Chowder, Bat Man, Spider Man, Beast Machine, SkyDancers, Angels Friend**, among many other foreign animations. The result is a child who is out of joint with his/her own environment.

Child drama and Film is the area that artists need to tap into to not only shape the society accordingly but also in order to earn a living. It is obvious that there is a lacuna in this regard to the extent that our children are either fooling with Play station at cyber cafes or homes or accompanying their parents to pubs, most of which have designed a children's amusement corner to profit from children who have a limited choice in terms of entertainment. And if as Goodman (1964) avers that children "usually admire and want to be like their elders and hence soak up the ways of these elders, without much inclination to pick and choose", then we run the danger of nurturing a whole generation of drunkards.

Nashville Children's theatre, the oldest children's theatre in the United States of America, receives up to 800 visitors every day. The Children's Theatre Company (CTC) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, serves between 275,000 and 350,000 families annually. Polka children's Theatre in London engages over a 100,000 children every year. Indeed, while children's theatres thrive in the developed countries and some developing countries in Africa such as South Africa and Egypt, where such theatres are taken seriously in terms of their role in social development, most African nations have not considered such theatres as important.

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Kenyan Theatre and the Creative Economy



Keith Pearson

The cultural community of Kenya has thought and talked long and hard about their place in the National Economy and at this point in our social and economic history, very few would deny that cultural practice has an important role to play in the economic lives and well-being of Kenyans. Let us examine the place of “the theatre” in this economic development, and take note of a number of interesting trends and developments.

For the sake of this discussion, let us accept the broadest definition of theatre, being that which we bring to audiences in return for entrance money, but not that which is clearly the territory of other art forms (music concerts, dance performances, acrobatic displays etc). We can further divide the performances available to audiences into the categories of one, the expected, two, the unexpected and three, the innovative. Some companies cross these boundaries on occasion, but most seem to be comfortable to remain within these categories.

Over the past decade we have seen three strong trends which have been influential in the development of the professional opportunities for live performers. These are the development of the school set book industry, the vernacular comedy and the “Trouser Play Industry”. Prominent among the companies providing performances based on the set books of the literature syllabus are Jicho Four directed by Jasper Oluoch (An Enemy Of the People, Shreds Of Tendernes (sic), Mayai Waziri wa Marathi, Kifo Kisimani and The River Between) and Eric Ndung’u’s Fanaka Arts who have performed from the same list recently, as well as their popular Kikuyu comedies (Ici ni Ciakwa, Inia Mbembere). Although we do not have access to their budgets, these companies have been able to offer consistent employment to performing artists, and regular offerings to student audiences.

During the same period we have seen the consolidation of audiences at the Maison Francaise, where two groups in particular, Festival of Creative Arts and Heartstrings Kenya (formerly Ensemble), have seen a steady increase in audiences for their programme of British sex comedies dealing with endless variations of the story of male infidelity (Trouser Plays) seasoned with the occasional offerings of murder mysteries and original Kenyan work. It is now possible for these companies to find themselves playing to three full houses per day on weekends, thanks to their excellent marketing strategies, dedicated organisers and efficient and aggressive use of new media such as Facebook and Twitter.

It is interesting to note that Phoenix Players, in its compact, 110 seat theatre nestled in the basement of the Professional Centre near the Kenya Parliament, has seen a strong decline in audience numbers and professional opportunities over the past decade. Far less predictable, but highly professional in content, have been the creations of John Sibi Okumu – Meetings, Karibu Minister, Role Play (whose work does fill the Phoenix Theatre), Sitawa Namwalie (Cut Off my Tongue, Silence is a Woman) and Mumbi Kaigwa (KigeziNdoto, Wit, for Colored Girls). The trend for the work of these artists has been to look to produce the shows over a longer period of time, and reach diverse audience groups.

The Theatre Company of Kenya prides itself on its level of innovation and has produced over 60 productions in its 15 year history, promoting a national, even regional agenda by touring with its annual, Fire By Ten touring show and all its other productions. During this period the company have participated in the revitalisation of the near-moribund theatres in Nakuru and Mombasa (Nakuru Players and the Little Theatre Club in Mombasa respectively). Our hope is that the (mostly) positive audience trends in Nairobi will be repeated in the other cities and towns, as the middle classes explore creative opportunities outside of the home and bar. Meanwhile, our responsibility as performing artists is to ensure the highest of production standards and quality of work, as we welcome our new patrons.

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Towards a post- Makerere Writing Tradition: Creating a Vibrant Fiction Industry

Tee Ngugi

The fiction industry in the developed world is a multi-billion dollar industry, whereas in Africa generally, and in Kenya particularly, it has yet to reach even half its potential. Growth of the fiction industry is dependent on broadly three mutually influencing stages: creating (composition of the work of fiction), publishing (production and marketing of the work of fiction) and consuming (buying and reading of the work of fiction). As can be seen in the following configurations, a weakness at any one stage negatively affects the fiction industry. Poor fiction products discourage its consumption; low consumption of fiction discourages its publication; and a rigid publishing policy can discourage creation of fiction. It seems to me that in Kenya, all three stages of creation, publication and consumption manifest those mutually reinforcing weaknesses. In what follows, I discuss these weaknesses and suggest possible remedial action.

The decolonising effort took two forms: political mobilisation to challenge the colonial institutional edifice, and intellectual action to challenge the colonising ideology. This ideology – originated or influenced by philosophers such as Hegel – claimed that Africans existed in the “conditions of mere nature”. To counter this claim, African intellectual expression sought to define and validate an African world-view and sense of being; this effort being represented by philosophies such as Negritude and African personality. Many writers of fiction in the post- and colonial periods, too, were drawn to this project, employing the resources of fiction to articulate an African world-view, often in contradistinction to that proposed by European culture. The best example of this tendency being Okot P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. According to Abiola Irele, “it isn't so much the fact that our modern literature has explored the theme of culture conflict that strikes one now, as that it has determined a fixation ...” The theme of the colonial encounter and the supposed resulting alienation provided the theme of much of modern African intellectual and literary expression.

But in using his/her art to define or validate an African worldview, the writer could not escape having to also define African literature. So the African writer asked himself or herself: *What were the distinctive features of African literature? Did written text represent a radical discontinuity from oral artistic expression? Who is an African writer?* In 1962, African writers gathered at Makerere University to debate these questions. What emerged from the ensuing discourse was the view that art in oral tradition was functional, and for African literature to claim continuity, and therefore authenticity, functionality – along with other narrative devices employed by oral tradition – would be its essentialising ethos. Taban Lo Liyong, blissfully unaware that this prescription for literature would result in what he later – with no sense of irony – called a ‘literary desert’ in East Africa, would reiterate: “We need utilitarian literature, rather than sweet music”. Thus the literary text became increasingly indistinct from the sociological text, a process critic Sanya Osha praises unreservedly in an essay titled *Writing at Degree Zero* as follows: “Some of Africa's most accomplished literary artists have traced the beginnings of socio-political anomie in images of regression that offer more profound insights than the theoretical formulations of numerous social scientists.”

Writers who attempted to experiment outside of what I call the Makerere literary tradition, would face the caustic wrath of their peers: “The modernist retreat of our poets into privatist universalism makes it easy for them to shed whatever African nationalist consciousness they have before they cross the threshold into the sanctum of poetry in the clouds.” (Chinweizu, et al).

Driven by this developmental and ideological imperative, most fiction transgressed on key elements of art: overbearing authorial intrusions to explain customs (as in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*); characters with an ideological consciousness not suggested

by their development or interior logic of the novel (as in Ngugi's *Matigari*); a self-conscious narrative voice (as in Soyinka's fictional writing); compromised 'interiority' of the novel, so that its world and that of the author are indistinguishable (as in most fiction coming out of that period); inauthentic dialogue style borrowed from oral tradition, etc. African fiction thus came to employ – to use Simon Gikandi's phrase – “the resources of art superficially” in its relentless drive to fulfil a pedagogical and ideological purpose.

No doubt, some of these books achieved market success, but not so much because of their artistry as because of their historical significance. To the Africans, still caught in the throes of nationalism, and many still connected to traditional culture, the books told of a way of life and articulated a point of view with which they identified. To the West, the books provided novel subject matter, themes and narrative styles. “Telling purely human tales - of men as individuals rather than as spokespersons for an age - was not among Achebe's talents ... there is a leanness of narrative in his work,” writer and critic David Kaiza says of Achebe's artistic talents.

The consequence of this didactic formula was that – over time - fiction failed to speak to a new generation of readers outside of the classroom. In an interview with Aurelio Journo, the writer Binyavanga Wainaina captures this disconnection between available fiction and the new generation of Kenyans: as follows: “In their teens...they had a problem with the didactic nature of the books written at the birth of the Kenya nation, books that were telling us how to be and what to think. These books didn't really talk to us, to people born after independence...”

In a TV programme - Page Turner – aired on Citizen Television, members of a book club at the University of Nairobi echoed Binyavanga's observations. Asked why there was declining interest in literature, respondents - students and lecturers - blamed “old syllabus and old books”. Tony Mochama, a poet, addressing the same question, put the blame on the literary orthodoxy captured in the view that books like *Things Fall Apart* “have said everything that needs to be said.”

These books that did not speak to a new generation of Kenyans compounded a reading culture described in various studies on reading habits in Kenya and other African countries as poor. A 2009 study by the Kenya National Library Services showed that out of 85 percent of Kenyans who read something in the previous year, an overwhelming majority had read newspapers, magazines, religious and motivational texts, but only a small percentage had read fiction for leisure. One often - quoted reason for this situation is poverty; books for leisure reading compete for scant resources with other more immediate demands. However, Justus Mbae, writing in the *Wajibu Journal for Social and Religious Concerns*, discounts this suggestion, arguing that Kenyans prioritize other leisure activities over reading, especially fiction. He points to culture - not resources – as the culprit, a conclusion shared by many writers, publishers and booksellers.

Therefore, didactic and political fiction, and a poor reading culture have acted singularly or in concert to negatively influence the consumption of fiction. So publishers declared the dearth of reading local fiction for leisure, and adopted a publishing policy that focused on the production of school textbooks. There was little effort to discover new writers who possibly could inspire a new generation to read fiction, and even less effort to encourage reading and writing through sponsorship of libraries, literary prizes and festivals, activities that could create the conditions for breeding a reading culture and new writing. In a very real sense, therefore, a weakness at the point of creation, coupled with an underdeveloped reading culture, had influenced a publishing policy that exacerbated the former two conditions.

To be sure, the Makerere writing tradition meant well by seeking to answer political and psychological colonialism. Literature had come to the aid of nationalism and put itself at the service of nation-building. But in so doing, it limited the possibilities of art. Art at its best addresses and yet transcends national concerns. The Makerere orthodoxy, therefore, fallaciously presented the debate as a false choice between what it called functional art and arts-for-art's-sake. So Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo would argue: “I cannot see myself writing about lovers because there are so many problems.”

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But the debate is much more complex because at the heart of it is the question of whether art has attributes specific to it, and without which its artistic purpose cannot be fulfilled. The challenge then for writers of fiction who want their work to speak to specific political and social issues is to do so without transgressing on these attributes. In other words to articulate a political message without violating the 'interiority' of their fiction. As Simon Gikandi informs us in *Reading the African Novel*, the challenge for the political novel is "to create a fictional world which is an accurate depiction of the real world in the course of which the authorial vision will emerge as a logical development of the interaction of the characters and their situations." Stated differently, the idea would be to restore 'sweet music' to fiction, so that we can learn about our social condition while in its sweet embrace. For the political fiction writer the choice is, therefore, not between "committed writing and uncommitted writing"; it is between politicisation of fiction and the fictionalisation of politics. A new generation of African writers must gather again to debate a post-Makerere writing tradition that will reclaim "sweet music" as a defining feature of artistic expression.

Though the effort above will be essential in addressing the poor reading culture, it will not be enough. A report on the subject of a poor reading culture by the writer Muthoni Garland recommended funding media campaigns and road shows to promote reading, and reducing tax on paper and books. These are important suggestions, but inculcating a reading culture will have to involve every facet of society: parents, schools, city councils, churches, politicians, business people and, of course, the publishing industry. The goal would have to be a national cultural renaissance with reading (and discussion) as its central organising principle.

The lead agency in such a national effort would have to be government, working in partnership with the publishing industry and other stakeholders. As such, there is need to re-examine and strengthen national policy on cultural development in general and artistic production in particular. This is in line with international and regional conventions on culture, whose aim is the achievement of not just a strong human development index, but also economic growth.

The publishing industry will be unable to play its role as a key partner in the process of artistic reawakening without a revision of its publishing policy so as to emphasise investment in a new generation of writers of fiction. The publishing industry should not view investment in new fiction as corporate social responsibility, but as investment any company would make in the development of a new product or modification of an old one in order to reach and satisfy a more discerning and irreverent generation of clientele. In addition, policy change will have to be accompanied by passion, innovation and daring (thinking out of the orthodox box).

In the end, however, we are all stakeholders in the development of the fiction industry. All of us - teachers, parents, communities, corporations, media - must do our bit to facilitate the growth of a reading culture, as well as a new literary tradition. For when the fiction industry takes off, all of us will be the richer spiritually and materially.

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PART FOUR FILM

The Business of Film in Kenya

Simiyu Barasa

In the business of film making, it is the amount of money put in to produce a film and the numbers of monies made at the end of its major run that matter. 'Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End' reportedly cost *Buena Vista* \$300,000,000 and grossed \$960,996,492, 'Avatar' cost *20th Century Fox* \$237,000,000 and grossed 2 billion dollars. As these films were raking in those astronomical figures, Kenya's parliament had set aside Kshs30 billion as the budget for Agriculture in 2009, roughly half a billion US dollars. Simple arithmetic shows that each of these films grossed two times the Kenyan budget for agriculture, yet agriculture is considered among the top five economic activities for Kenya.

Closer home, in Africa, Nollywood revenues are estimated at \$250m annually. In Nigeria, Stephanie Okereke's award-winning movie, 'Through the Glass' grossed 10 million Naira after release on 16th September 2009, on Silverbird cinemas, beating such Hollywood blockbusters as 'Public Enemies' and G.I. Joe. (The Vanguard, on <http://allafrica.com/stories/200910200125.html>). According to the Department of Trade and Industry, South Africa's entertainment industry is valued at around R7.4 billion, with film and television generating more than R5.8 billion in economic activity each year.

In Kenya, 'Out of Africa', a story about the colonial settler Karen Blixen shot by Hollywood in 1985 on a budget of US\$31,000,000 grossed US\$87,071,205. Though the film was, of course, not a Kenyan production, the fact that it was filmed in Kenya and had a Kenyan storyline to it just goes to show the potential for Kenyans themselves to reap in this industry. After all we have the sceneries, we have the actors, we have the equipment, and we have numerous stories to be told. This paper will not discuss why this is not happening, but rather, will highlight the state of independent film production in Kenya, its growth, the aspirations, and its potential as one of the most economically viable industries with opportunities to create not only wealth, but employment opportunities for many.

A recent research by the Copyright Board of Kenya reveals that the creative industry in Kenya contributes 6 billion Kenya shillings to the national economy. This however is because the industry is operating at its minimal, and if it were to operate to its full potential, it would generate 42 billion shillings, and create 230,000 jobs, directly and indirectly, far outpacing agriculture. As many are wont to ask, where would these opportunities be created when there is little to show in the movie industry in Kenya? To debunk the myth of low volumes of productions and to offer insights as to the various opportunities available in the industry, let's do a quick overview of the film production process.

The film production process in Kenya just as anywhere else follows a formulaic pattern. A creative mind comes with a great idea for a story. A writer writes it down as a screenplay, and a producer looks for the money to make it if they believe that the story has the potential to interest viewers in terms of entertainment, information and therefore able to sell. A director is brought in, together with a crew of camera people, lighting technicians, "sound people", set designers, make-up artistes, wardrobe people and many others. Auditions are conducted in the meantime, and actors chosen. From then on it's the actual filming, where transportation to and from various locations has to be factored in, decisions made on where the whole battalion of cast and crew are going to be fed, and for the next few weeks, (or months, depending on the size of the production), the 'business of film' takes place, viz, money is drained from the producer's pockets and into the pockets of others.

The final product is edited, by an editor or a group of editors, music is composed for the film, (or rights bought to use already existing music), as posters are creatively designed for purposes of advertisement and for DVD cover and inlay as the product is prepared to be sold to the public via DVD/or shown in cinemas. A few people will come together to form the marketing team and take charge of all related services including connecting the audience through retail outlets and social places such as cinema houses, and shopping malls. This is not always easy especially at retail level, for it takes much convincing to stock items that are new and unknown. A couple of months later, the producers sit down and stare at the balance sheet, either with a smile or a frown. It all depends on the returns.

This whole chain aptly shows that throughout the production process, there are numerous business opportunities that exist, both for people who have studied film, and even for people with no interest in film arts whatsoever but who are interested in a good business venture. A few opportunities present themselves in the following broad areas:

MARKETING: This is a rigorous exercise which, if successful means that every person wants to be part of the group that has watched the movie. Hyping and strategic, sometimes aggressive marketing ultimately would sell a film. Anyone with a passion for sales and promotions may find this sector offering good career prospects. Movie critics often times play a great role in influencing the direction of the movie sales and their critical appraisal if positive and enthusiastic in itself becomes a marketing tool. Movie marketing can be extremely demanding and challenging, but the rewards available to successful movie marketers can be very high. Sometimes a good movie that is poorly marketed may not realize high sales, while another that is not so captivating but well marketed may score very high ticket sales.

ADVERTISING: This is another economic activity very closely related to marketing. Without advertising, the film business would not achieve nearly the success that it does for the movies that are released. Although some movies are able to depend upon word-of-mouth recommendation to get viewers, that is not the norm. Aggressive advertising is more often than not the crucial factor in the profits and loss see-saw. In Kenya, advertisers use radio, print, TV, street posters and billboards, to inform and captivate an audience.

FILM DISTRIBUTION is another field in the entertainment business where a professional can venture. A distributor is basically a business person who links film producers with people who exhibit films such as cinema houses, shops, and broadcasters. They can also opt to circulate movies in home entertainment formats, including VHS, DVD, Blu-ray and online digital formats. Film distribution is one of the most lucrative and 'safest' business aspects of film; all it needs is aggressive business acumen.

FILM FINANCING is a business area especially for those who don't want to get involved in the daily hustles of being on location. Since films require money, individuals with finance and an investment sense can fund films, and wait for the returns. This requires a clear analysis of accounting, expenditure, controlled costs and projected revenues. Digital technology has however made it possible to shoot and edit even feature-length projects for only a few hundred thousand Kenya shillings, with, in the worst case scenario, a two month post-release period to recoup the initial production money.

FILM PRODUCTION is the actual activity of making films. It includes the directing, casting, editing, and music scoring to produce a film. This is the field in which many jobs can be created, and monies made, due to the volume of human labour needed. A small scale film production directly requires at least 20 individuals to be contracted, while big films have hundreds of people directly contracted. Under the initiative to offer employment to the youth, skills such as carpentry, painting, and others, are required in set building. Other areas in the production process include make-up artistes, wardrobe people, actors and extras, as well as electricians. According to a recent survey by the Copyright Board of Kenya, if the industry operates at its optimum, it has the capacity to employ 230,000 people annually.

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SERVICE PROVISION is another area of film production where commercial returns are possible. For a film to be made, people need to hire locations to film in. Very few film studios exist in Kenya, notable among them being Film Studios Kenya and Protel Studios. With the number of productions growing every day, it is no wonder that these studios can't cope with the number of producers who want to hire their premises, creating a challenge especially when they have to build sets and demolish them every other week to accommodate producers.

Good quality film processing facilities are scarce in this country forcing most producers to take their films to South Africa, Egypt, India or London for post production polishing. Millions of dollars head out of the country this way, yet a new frontier exists for provision of post production facilities. This is evidently a business opportunity - building sound stages and after effect's studios.

Other film production opportunities exist in outside catering services, since crew and cast need to be fed, location hunting services, where one can scout for exciting scenery and lure producers to film there (at a cost!), provision of electrical equipment, as well as filming equipment.

While all these areas offer fertile grounds for filmmaking as a commercial venture, one needs also to take into consideration the legal side of film production in Kenya. For instance, licensing a business company is necessary, as is getting the prerequisite licensing from the Department of Film Services to allow one to operate as a filming agent. The local authorities are required to give special permissions to film e.g. on their streets, or game reserves, and this needs to be factored in when analyzing benefits and obstacles to filming as a business venture.

It is clear therefore that the local film industry in Kenya can actually be among the top commercial ventures in the country, if more people recognized its potential and invested in it.

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The Status of Women in Kenyan Film

Rachael Diang'a

A lot of emphasis has been placed on the instructional role played by several performing arts including oral literature, poetry, music dance and all the popular forms of theatre. As information carriers, these performing arts have been largely used in enlightening the society on different concerns that affect it thus acknowledging their role as instruments for enhancing the development process. Development is not an easy concept to give a universally accepted definition. From the second half of the 20th century however, it has, been associated with, especially, poverty reduction and macroeconomic stability leading to an increased economic growth.¹ We even have art forms such as theatre for development, created specifically for development. Yet, in East Africa, the potential of film within the development phenomenon remains underutilized.

Globally, film has been widely used in enlightening the society on topical development oriented issues.² Between the wars, over two decades after the screening of the first film in Paris, the art was slowly developing a new function as a pedagogical tool. As its influence spread out to the so called "third world" from the late 1920s, colonial office in Britain started to look into the implications of film (and radio) for both the colonial power and the colonies. It emerged that Film's ability to influence a society could not be captured in better words than those of J. Russell Orr's: "A successful film has a greater circulation than any newspaper and than any book, except the Bible."³ East Africa's earliest contact with film was during the region's colonisation, a process that invested so much in film's exceptional potential as an instructional material. For in East Africa, at that time, film was equalled to instruction. Little wonder, when a British colonial officer, Julian Huxley, came to East Africa in 1929 to test how the 'natives' would react to instructional films, he found a medical doctor, A. Paterson of Kenya Department of Medical and Sanitary Service, already successfully using a film he had produced for instructional purpose in Africa. The film, *Harley Street in the Bush*, had been a major force in the campaign against hookworm at the East African coastal strip.

Film is highly capable of reaching a very wide audience at a go. A single production can be retrieved in different formats, at different occasions and shown in different locales when need arises.⁴ Film also comes in different genres, which speak to the audience in different ways. The documentary, for example, presents the situation to the audience, leaving him/her very little room to bring in his own interpretation to the film. Fiction film on the other hand, gives the audience an allegoric explication of life. Film therefore stands out as a very appropriate pedagogical tool in not only shaping the society but also redirecting it towards its developmental goals.

Film language, in general, considering the different camera set-ups like close-up, over-the-shoulder, long-shot; transitional and editing techniques such as fade-ins and fade-outs; jump cut or continuity, all work together to intensify the filmmaker's appeal to the audience. Film, unlike other performing arts, places the audience in a position where s/he can more clearly identify with



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viewer is compelled to deliberate on the harmful traditional practices the society imposes on the girl and when she grows to a woman, and their impact on both her personality and future life.

the situation at hand. This is because film talks to the audience through the moving image in a natural setting. Film's natural settings with the real life props or characters, give the viewer a clearer picture of the incidences as opposed to the situations in stage performance where improvisations take centre stage marring reality to a large extent. These are some of the elements of film that puts it at a more appropriate platform to address developmental issues such as empowering the (African) woman. In adequately addressing such issues, film, like indigenous African performing arts, becomes more utilitarian to the society that produces and/or views it.

In a discussion on the significance of film viewership or consumption, a film theorist, Timothy Corrigan (2001) gives several reasons in justifying film criticism; he says by criticising films, we are able to make connections, between a film and other areas of culture in order to illuminate both the culture and the movies it produces.⁵ It is important to foreground this dimension of criticism with regard to the status of women not only in the Kenyan film but also in the society that produces the films. Films may have different approaches in tackling the same social problem yet perfectly communicating to their recipients. The predicaments of an African woman seem to have captured a lot of attention from many Kenyan filmmakers, majority of who happen to be women.

Role in Empowering Women

One may wonder why Kenyan films by female filmmakers such as Wanjiru Kinyanjui (*The Battle of the Sacred Tree*), Catherine Muigai (*Saikati the Enkabaani*), Anne Mungai (*Saikati*) and Jane Munene (*The Price of a Daughter and Behind Closed Doors*) have focused so much on the turmoil that surrounds a woman's life in the contemporary society. All these films explore the plight of the female from childhood, when she is highly vulnerable, well into her post-menopausal ages.

A case in point is *Price of a Daughter* (2003), which explicates the tough life a young Maasai girl, Naisinya, undergoes. She is forced to get a genital cut at a tender age of nine and is immediately pushed into marriage to a man as old as her father. This is where her struggle to liberate not only herself, but also the entire female population in her community, begins. Naisinya colludes with her mother, who helps her report the matter at the girl's former school. The matter is forwarded to the police who finally come to Naisinya's rescue enabling her continue with her education. Unlike many young children, Naisinya approaches school with a utilitarian focus. As some of her classmates imagine a utopian life in the future, and think of future professions just for the fun of it, Naisinya goes ahead to explain why she would like to be a nurse; she wants to save her community from the pangs of stringent yet fruitless traditions like what she had to go through. She has her community at heart as young as she is.

Price of a Daughter makes a difference in the Kenyan film industry. Munene says she did not want to tell the Maasai story with an exoteric gaze. In Kenya, the Maasai community occupy the "fourth world" as Robert Stam (2000: 285) refers to the communities found in the "third world" whose cultural value has been over- and misused in cultural films by elitist third world filmmakers. Anne Mungai's *Saikati* and Catherine Muigai's sequel, *Saikati the Enkabaani* (1998) are more inclined towards Stam's description. Munene opted for a cast from within the Maasai community.⁶ By so doing, she wanted to give a more credible story since the film is based on a true story.⁷ She also allowed the cast to put in their considerations during the shooting period so that she did not end up telling the story, but reproducing reality through the film medium. Munene did not want to speak for the Maasai but rather let them speak for themselves under her direction. Her casting technique takes us back to Corrigan's views on film criticism.

Viewing the unfolding of events in *Price of a Daughter* the viewer is compelled to deliberate on the harmful traditional practices the society imposes on the girl and when she grows to a woman, and their impact on both her personality and future life.

As mentioned earlier, filmmakers may take different approaches in addressing a particular social concern. So is the case with the directors of *Price of a Daughter* and *Naliaka is Going*. One may be convinced that the female Kenyan filmmakers tend to dwell on the problems facing women and girls since the filmmakers understand better the whole situation of being an African woman. However, some male filmmakers have shown serious, sustained interest in the plight of girls and women in the society. One

such filmmaker is Albert Wandago, who is known for his *Metamo* (1997), *Sabina's Encounters* (1998) and *Naliaka is Going* (2003) among other films. These three feature films showcase some of the difficulties girls/women go through and how they get deprived of basic privileges entitled to them. Wandago's most acclaimed film, *Naliaka is Going* was released at a time when the Kenyan film industry was witnessing a new phase of its growth. This is the time a growing interest in professional appreciation of individual local films was seen.⁸

Naliaka is Going tells the story of a young teenage girl, Naliaka, whose life is entangled between ruthless men on the one hand and heartless women on the other, who are always impeding her social progress. Naliaka has dropped out of primary school yet her parents do not find this detrimental to her future. What Naliaka loses at this point is an opportunity she strives to make up for throughout her life, which goes as far as the film's end. However, Naliaka's elder brother, Jacob, studies architecture in college and it is Naliaka who has to pay Jacob's college fee out of her meagre domestic servant salary. Wandago's juxtaposition of these two siblings calls upon the viewer to make personal judgement on Naliaka's plight.

Male domination is prevalent in this film and women (with exception of Mrs. Elam) succumb to it. Mama Naliaka, though ageing, is aware of male oppression but cannot talk about it openly. She only grunts to herself about the heavy workload that her husband expects her to complete. Like Naisenya's mother (*Price of a Daughter*), Mama Naliaka has become sceptical of the patriarchal society she lives in and is quite aware that her daughter (the next generation) will inherit this oppression unless something is done. The two mothers help their daughters escape from underage marriage. Their respective fathers plan their daughters' never-to-be marriages and the girls' husbands-to-be are their fathers' friends and age-mates. To a large extent, we can view these marriages as activities meant to cement their fathers' friendship with the suitors. The presence of Jacob in *Naliaka is Going* provides the young generation of men with a possible icon with whom to identify in order to help save their 'sisters.' Jacob is totally against Naliaka's marriage. That is why he runs home to inform her of their father's plan to marry her off to Richard the builder.

In these two films, masculinity is equated to ownership of material wealth, which adds more power to men at the expense of women's well being. Men own and manage companies and with them, rest the power to hire new employees. Because of this position, they manipulate their juniors (both male and female) for personal benefits. Naliaka's planned marriage is based on the fact that Richard assists her family such that even her father's finery comes from Richard. Because of his wealth, age notwithstanding, Richard feels that Naliaka should not, whatsoever, object to his proposal to marry her.

Wandago's film presents a less talked about reality in women's liberation movement. Women are not just oppressed by men. Although a superficial look at the two films may lead one to accusing men, fellow women play a major role in stagnating the progress of younger women who usually hold a lower social status. Although Munene does not point a finger at any particular woman, she moulds a young man who sympathises with women and girls in his (Maasai) community. In *Naliaka is Going*, Mrs Elam, a middle-class woman leads this team. She does not guide Naliaka, her domestic house-help at all. She hurls insults at her, accusing her of one mistake after another, and yells at her any time Naliaka blunders, of course unintentionally and out of ignorance. Claire, Naliaka's friend colludes with Pik to ensure that Naliaka is under Pik's control. Naliaka herself, after rising from house-girl to front office secretary, adapts the high-tempered-successful-woman attitude she saw in Mrs Elam. The impact of her new found trait is felt by the tea-girl in her office, among other people working under her. Such women as Mrs Elam and the new Naliaka who in the end become friends, "sometimes become a liability to the feminist movement" in general (Adeleye-Fayemi 2004: 44).

Conclusion

The ability of the filmmakers to neatly weave intricate story-lines that capture the Kenyan, and by extension, African woman's story is remarkable. If more filmmakers in Kenya further explored the possible use of film in addressing developmental needs of the country and even the region, some of the practices hindering women's full

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participation in the development process will have to be reconsidered. Early marriages and denying girls a chance to go to school increase poverty, as women are pillars to the family unit. By these films centring on harmful traditions and the need for girl child education, they inform the society on the need to treat girls and women with consideration of the part they can play in development. Women like Naisenya have been opposed to the atrocious practices they face but they dare not express their feelings since they totally depend on their oppressors for their livelihoods.

By Naisenya buying her father a precious gift: a blanket, at the end of the film, her oppressor's (the father) dependence on her is evident. This reversal of roles has forced her father to shy away from being the one to choose a husband for her. She can now make an informed choice as she feels mature enough to take responsibility of her choices. She asks her father to marry her off. This is a great shock to the father who views her as a rebel who first, dared question the need for her initiation rite, second, found her way out of the traditional marriage and third, discarded her parents and community to 'get lost' in the city.⁹ Even if it takes becoming a temporary outcast like Naisenya, any medium that enlightens the society on the need to empower women should be sought.

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¹which has been characterised by, among others, evolution of colonization into globalisation and establishment of new free trade policies between the developing and the developed countries

²A successful example is Film Aid International's use of film to promote health, strengthen communities and enrich the lives of the vulnerable and the uprooted. The programme aims at facilitating social change through film and video. Message filmmaking, a widespread activity in the independent African cinematic podium also works in a similar way.

³This is further elaborated in Smith (1979:437).

⁴This becomes less straining and cheaper compared to live theatre since the production team does not have to move to every site of exhibition.

⁵See Corrigan 2001.

⁶Personal Communication with Jane Munene, the director of *Price of a Daughter*

⁷Ibid. This reminds us of the important and absolutely inevitable interconnection between an African film and the realities of the society that makes it.

⁸In the last two years, we have seen a remarkable rise in film criticism by Kenyans. Beatrice Mukabi (2003), Catherine Ngugi (2003), Florence Sipalla (2004) and Rachael Diang'a (2005) attest to this. The trend is expected to remain steady as more critical works on film from Kenya are underway.

⁹Naisenya feared going back home since she could not face her father after she committed an abominable crime by escaping from her forced marriage. One never knows what would have happened to her had she gone home before she was through with her studies and achieve her dream of becoming a nurse. She did not want to take chances.

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PART FIVE

VISUAL ARTS

Interview with Tony Wainaina, Art Collector

Sophie Macharia

Q. Tell us a little about yourself.

A. My background is primarily finance and investments. I studied Agricultural Economics as my major but along the way I developed a keener interest in the investment world, so I did a couple of years at Georgetown University. That is where I did my MBA and I majored in finance and investments. That then took me to Citibank. I joined Citibank in the mid-nineties and worked with the corporate finance section and also what they called at the time, direct investments, which gave me a lot of exposure to other markets. It was an East and Central Africa Market Fund. I thought of doing something much more localized, such as raising and investing capital for the local market. There was an opening that came up in what was called the ICDC Investment Company. They were looking for a CEO who would help set up a management team. ICDC then used to be managed by government through ICDC the state corporation. I took up the post in 1999 and worked there for five years. I then took a two-year sabbatical to join my family in 2004 and when we came back in 2006 I took up a position in Transcentury. They were looking for somebody to set up a management team. I helped them set up systems and took up the job of CEO. My intention was to stay there a couple of years and then move out on my own, which I have now done since 2009. What I am doing is working with investment groups and investment holding companies. The firm I set up helps incubate these investment groups to help them move from the relatively small vehicles to far more aggressive, proactive investment holding companies that the members can now see as their primary investment vehicles and retirement plans. I am also interested in other investment ventures, the SME types, companies that I have helped set up for the last 10 years or so. That is my brief professional side. I also have a lot of other interests, particularly the arts, which I have been involved in for the last 15 years – sitting on boards in art institutions like Ramoma Art Gallery. I am also a trustee in the recently created The Art of Music Foundation, a foundation aiming to set up Kenya's first youth orchestra. My general interest in art keeps me engaged at different levels in trying to promote the arts. Besides this I have a personal interest as an art collector for the last 12 years. I am married to Carol, who is currently working in London with the Coca Cola Europe Group as head of the Human Resource Department. I am a father of two children, Wambui (16) and Kamau (13). Family life also keeps my hands full, as it is satisfying and gratifying, and we are a very mobile family

Q. Why the interest in art? How did you begin? Who motivated you?

A. My initial exposure to art and introduction to the world of art came through a gentleman who gave me my first job after university, a Swedish called Kurt Schinonovich who has since passed on. At the time, he headed the Economics Department at Price Waterhouse Consultancy Division. He hired me and soon we became good working colleagues and friends and he introduced me to the whole world of arts. He gave me my first book on art "The Great Collectors". He gave it to us as a wedding gift in 1993. I read the book and began to understand the motivation behind great artists and the history of art, why some artists go back to the renaissance, a journey from the old masters to the more recent 20th century artists. And I also enjoyed studying the history of art as well. This sparked an interest in me to understand what we had in the local market, so I began to explore what was available in the Kenyan market. I visited several galleries at the time, They were not very many at the time, establishments such as Kuona and the GoDown which gave space to individual artists and then I began

I begun to see the art as bigger and more complex than just painting or drawing pictures, but more of a canvas to celebrate who the artists were as people, their world, their imaginations, and essentially transferring their life experiences were on to canvas. This got me totally engaged.

to engage with artists one on one, Peter Elungat, Richard Kimathi, Kimani, and I slowly started to buy their art. Their art gave me peace of mind and helped me get over my then hectic work life. As I got to understand artists' motivation, I begun to see the art as bigger and more complex than just painting or drawing pictures, but more of a canvas to celebrate who the artists were as people, their world, their imaginations, and essentially transferring their life experiences were on to canvas. This got me totally engaged. There is a definition of art which for me just captured it, why art is so important; *imagination is an embodiment of what is most mysterious about us all and it connects the conscious with the subconscious. And it helps us to understand what inspires the body and the mind to relate to the universe. It describes it as the most important part in all of us.* We all have some artistic natural instincts, how we manifest this is different. Some do it through cooking, music, etc. I must confess art has consumed a big part of my life and I continue to do whatever possible to promote African art and art beyond our borders. We have very good artists some not necessarily with high art qualifications, but needing more exposure and getting them known beyond our borders since the talent is there. This would also improve their standards of living. Unfortunately there is a very big disconnect between the quality of art and how they are compensated for that art.

Q. Why do you think this is so, that we are not often willing to pay the worth of the artists in terms of artistry, time and aesthetics yet we are able to spend quite a bit on social gatherings?

A. I think a big part of it is simply creating awareness, creating a market across the economic spectrum especially those Kenyans that can afford to buy the artworks not only because it gives them pleasure, but as an investment opportunity as well. Because typically anyone who has rented or bought a home has walls on which to put up art works but they end up putting old calendars, framing pictures from calendars, old photographs etc. but they have not been taken through the understanding. I guess what I went through myself those many years back really helped the thought process, where this artwork has been created, the artist behind it, the fact that this is imagination process from one's mind to the canvas. And the fact that it can and does appreciate in value.

Q. Can you explain this part a little, the investment part? Where would I, for instance sell my art, how would I know its appreciation in price if today I needed to raise some money?

A. That is still a challenge today in Kenya. Until you have created a secondary market in any part of the world you have auction houses in the world's largest cities that allow artists and owners of art to sell artworks several times over. It is very difficult without this secondary market to begin placing a value, making people understand that this can be an investment. It happens to a very small extent in Kenya. There are some galleries that take peoples' work to sell and take a small commission. But we need to develop this to the level of an auction house where you have professionals that are able to showcase artwork, introduce the artists, and explain the art, because there is great interest generated from outside Kenya especially the western world but most of this art finds its way out of Kenya and into international auction houses. We could create our own auction houses here at home if we had one. There is quite a number of artists whose art has continued to generate interest in these auction houses and fetching a large amount of money.

Q. Are we then saying that the largest consumer of African art is not the African?

A. Unfortunately yes, because that is where the market is. The question in fact ought to be how we connect our art with this market. And when the local artist is exposed to the market that appreciates his art, whether local or international, then this becomes an incentive for other artists and the production of art can only grow and get finer. Unfortunately, for now, it has been left to people like you and I to sustain the arts in this region. We can go further however in promoting art through talks, seminars conferences etc. This is happening albeit in a small scale. The government could elevate this sector immensely through policy, legislation and collaboration with the private sector. For instance if Kenya enacted a policy in which every public building constructed spent, say, 5 % on art, this would be enough motivation for artists to

The government could elevate this sector immensely through policy, legislation and collaboration with the private sector. For instance if Kenya enacted a policy in which every public building constructed spent, say, 5 % on art, this would be enough motivation for artists to produce great art.

produce great art. In countries where this happens, artists enjoy and live off their work with a degree of comfort because they are adequately compensated. There are local artists whose work has appreciated in recent years. We tried with a group of art enthusiasts, to introduce this in the new constitution, but it seems there were so many issues competing that art was not put on in the way we expected. We will continue to lobby for this through other structures and frameworks available. Culture, National Museums and Heritage, are options. Events such as art competitions would create spaces for emerging artists while motivating the art sector. The government would create the structures but the private sector would have to sustain it through the secondary market.

Q. What other forms of art interest you besides fine art?

A. Tribal artworks also interest and intrigue me too. There is much more to captivate an art lover, due to their history, motivation and complexity. Among my collected works I have a collection of stools from all over the continent, Angola, DRC, and other countries and they all have significance. What you have to make sure you understand as you purchase is the history behind them, - where did they come from, what ceremony were they used for? - initiation, marriage, etc. I also have an interest in sculpture, carvings that have a typically African feel. Tanzania has very complex carvings among the Makonde, creating everything from the trees of life, high back stools, Makonde drums. My favourite artworks are from Cameroon, the Bamileke stools and thrones created from single logs of wood-very majestic and impressive. These artists were historically commissioned and paid by the royal kingship especially in West Africa where they would present the art work to the royals.

Q. This historical art is obviously very different from the popular, tourist driven art, or “jua kali art” that is commonly found at “Maasai Markets”. Let’s talk a little about this art. How can we, in your opinion, rejuvenate this art so that there is freshness and diversity in this sector?

A. Two things, there will always be two sides, a market whose demands are driven by the popular, the batiks, Kamba carvings, Kisii soapstone carvings, Maasai beadwork, the Kikuyu Kiondo, etc. This drives the tourist market because they provide for what is popularly and uniquely Kenyan. The tourist market is driven by gift buying, souvenirs, mementos etc. Here you are not likely to find the most imaginative pieces that demand from the artist a lot of time and thought. For this category therefore, the pieces are churned out for mass market, and the artist and artisans in this sector depend on this market for their livelihood. There are positive signs that Kenyans have become an important consumer of this art especially in jewellery, home and personal accessories. This sector meets the demand for commoditized art, for that is what this art seems to be. You would not compare their prices with those artists who painstakingly create a piece over many months. I could mention Peter Elungat and Richard Kimathi - pieces that they previously sold for Ksh50,000 about five years ago now fetch Ksh400,000 in the local market. Because they have made a name for themselves, even the new art they are producing, they are able to as a standard, sell between Ksh200,000 to Ksh500,000.

Q. Art is largely viewed as representative of a people’s culture and identity, besides aesthetics. How well would you say our Kenyan artists represent our culture and identity through their artistic expression?

A. Every community has its representation of art, based largely on their locality (local resources), their heritage, lifestyle and their history. That is why for instance you have Kamba carvings, Kisii soapstone carvings, Maasai beads, etc. The diversity enriches the national culture. One cannot here talk about what is better or more superior to the other. Most of the art was need-created and grew to aesthetics over time attracting communities beyond themselves. We cannot unfortunately pride ourselves in promoting this art nationally. The local and tourist consumer has driven this sector. Some communities have developed art and produced artists that have become very talented.

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Q. There is a general belief that Kenyans have not cultivated the culture of investing in art. Why do you think this is the case, if it is true?

A. Art was both practical and aesthetic. The perception that art collection is elitist is wrong. But the creators of art are very humble. There are consumers at a different level at a national gallery, the viewers do not necessarily own the art while others will buy and keep in their home. Both sectors are enjoying the art.

Q. With new technology there is the art prints created out of an original and mass produced.

A. I think it is a good thing because it makes art work more accessible to mass markets in terms of price. For instance, an artist may want to create a limited edition 50 pieces which he would sell at a much reduced price from the authenticated original which would be a lot pricier. Unfortunately, it is also possible through the black market, to print and avail them at the supermarkets and even hawkers in the street. In advanced countries, this is illegal and anyone found doing this risks stiff punishment. It remains a big challenge to the artist just as pirating music and film is a challenge to the industry. But there is still a market for the original piece of art despite these challenges and artists should not be discouraged by this trend.

Q. Finally, if you were given a chance to save only 3 pieces of art from your vast collection, which would they be and why?

A. That is very difficult. But if I have to choose, I would choose the Bameleke thrones, one stool and a high seat, both of which have copper on the surface because the artistry in curving these pieces is absolutely intriguing. From what I have been told, they dated early 20th century, 30s or 40s. These pieces belonged to a royal family in Cameroon and because they were going through hard times, they were forced to sell them. I purchased them from a Dutch dealer who has a presence in Kenya, and I had no clue the chain before me. The second piece would be one of the very first pieces I purchased from Peter Elungat – the painting of a muse he calls Angelina. Her stare, very emotive - and old Abyssinian-like attire. It is a piece you can look at for a long time and not tire of it. I have had it since the late 90s. The third, mmmmm... would have to be a much more modern art, actually an elegant Kisii stone carving of an elephant that I got as a gift. It is very heavy and delicate and requires 4 men to carry. The curving took a little more than a year to complete. It is a single piece. The artist is not known, probably several artists did this.

Q. The future of art in Kenya, and Africa at large - how do you foresee it, especially if it has to depend on a very small percentage having disposable income, and the passion to purchase art?

A. I am very optimistic. A lot is happening in the background. Many artists are now going for short international exposures on scholarships to universities and art schools. This helps develop new skill, and also branch out into different types of media. A number of our artists have benefited from these visits. It opens their minds up. Richard Kimathi is one such that has really grown out of this exposure. You also have some corporates that are beginning to recognize their worth. Safaricom has dedicated their ground floor to art exhibitors and it is open to the public. They showcase their pieces without charging them any commission. Initiatives like these are motivators and other corporates could do the same. With this kind of momentum, we begin to see better value accorded the product. We are on the cusp of an explosion of African art and interest from outsiders. Art collectors from Europe are very quietly amassing African art work and storing them in the hope of gaining immensely when the interest and market of African art grows as it certainly will. One can argue that this is not in our interest and it is creating a class of people aiming to profiteer from the art and our cultural heritage, but since there is no policy or legislature, these people literary go to villages and offer pittance to artists and take them away and these things government should control.

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Q. Art for posterity?

A. When I buy the art it is more, for now, the pleasure and the history behind it. I document this piece and I pass it on to my kids and on and on. This will ensure that nothing gets lost. Educate the artist, Commentary by the artist.

Q. Is there a group for art lovers where artists meet and discuss their art, and perhaps buy and sell among themselves?

A. You must be reading my mind. Very interestingly it is my sis who came up with this idea. We have called 15 people to come up with a group. Pooling money together to create a market to buy and sell art. But you know it is a very personal thing. Passion drives it.

Q. Final word?

A. The future of art is promising, but we also need to talk a lot more. The people that appreciate art need to talk more, and be heard. Ramoma Gallery for instance, is a hidden gem. They have frequent awareness creation session by guest art collectors. Artists and collectors interact and engage both socially and also create spaces for business. Taking an interest in such a venture could enrich your life.

S. Thank you very much Tony for sharing your passion for art with Jahazi. I feel most honoured for such an enriching session.

T. You are most welcome, the pleasure was mine.

Dr. Sophie Macharia is an independent scholar and literary critic.



The Immense Potential of Visual Arts in Kenya's Creative Economy

Margaretta wa Gacheru

The Kenya government has almost completely missed the boat when it comes to cultivating its people's creative economy. At a time when the United Nations has come out with multiple reports of the viability of growth in this sector, the government of Kenya has closed its eyes to an appreciation of the immense investment potential that is to be found in lending its full support to the arts sector.

The creative economy has yet to be defined as a sector where economic growth is a real possibility. And yet the visual, performance and even digital arts are all areas that have been identified by global donors as arenas in which both individuals and organizations deserve to be assisted in light of the untapped potential they see for developing Kenya's creative economy.

Ironically, it was expatriates who early in the 20th century recognized the economic as well as artistic potential of the Kamba carvers. Small scale European businessmen created markets for the carvers working in Ukambani and thus stimulated a massive response among that community which has since gained world renown for what unfortunately is commonly seen as Kenya's only art form - the so-called "souvenir carvings" also known as "airport art" because the lifelike wooden forms of rhino, elephant and gazelle are still frequently on sale at our international airports.

And yet, the visual arts in Kenya have especially blossomed in the last few decades, despite the lack of support from government. Both schooled and unschooled artists have joined in what Nelson Mandela named "the African Renaissance." Working in what the American sociologist Howard Becker calls 'art networks', scores of Kenyan artists work in clusters and make use of *jua kali* techniques to find ways and means of being creative and artistically productive 'on a shoe string'. Countless local artists work in a *jua kali* style to satisfy their artistic needs for the four basic items that every artist requires, namely space in which to create, art supplies, skills training be it formal or informal, and markets wherein they can exhibit and sell their work.

"Making do" with few financial resources, these artists use many of the same techniques that *jua kali* artisans utilize to make functional items for sale in markets like Gikomba, Kawangware, and other semi-industrial areas of Kenya's capital city. Artists are just as resourceful, resilient, ingenious and self-reliant as the *jua kali* artisans, and yet the artisans have government support; the artists have little or none.

Jua Kali Spaces

Kenyan artists have historically had to find make-shift spaces wherein to create or produce their art. Some have slipped into stalls at the City Market, which is what the pioneer Kenyan painter Ancent Soi did back in the 1960s. Some have apprenticed initially with artisans in order to both find space and informal skills training, which is what sculptors like Harrison Mburu did while working at Gikomba and so did Gakunju Kaigwa while apprenticing at one of the African Heritage workshops. The history of the Banana Hill Art

Countless local artists work in a jua kali style to satisfy their artistic needs for the four basic items that every artist requires, namely space in which to create, art supplies, skills training be it formal or informal, and markets wherein they can exhibit and sell their work.

Gallery, previously known as an Art Studio, is a particularly useful case in point. A group of unemployed school drop-outs who initially were attracted to the work of one self-taught artist Simon Njenga, simply moved into his tiny mud and wattle abode and started emulating him. The former acrobat and street entertainer (who is better known today as Shine Tani) had only discovered his knack for painting while 'window shopping' around the Nairobi Hilton Art Center.

This need for space was noted by the late Ruth Schaffner who was in the process of using her own funds to build an art centre in Ngecha village, having seen the immense creative capacity of young people living in that area. Unfortunately, Schaffner passed on before she completed her project. But other individuals and non-governmental organizations picked up on her idea and ran with it. For instance, one British expatriate combined Ruth's visionary plan with the practical model developed by East African artists at Paa ya Paa Art Centre to create Kuona Trust, a site where at least 25 artists can be found on a daily basis creating works of fine art. But just imagine how much farther all these artists would be if the Government had lent them a hand, or shared even a fraction of the World Bank funding for *jua kali* artisans with *jua kali* artists!

Exhibiting and marketing

It is in the area of marketing that Kenyan artists have been most resourceful. The Government never created the national art gallery that was envisaged by Kenya's second vice president, the late Joseph Murumbi, back in the early sixties. Without that institutional support, artists have nonetheless made their way to various art centres founded by expatriates, such as Gallery Watatu, Kuona Trust, Godown Art Center and the late RaMoMa Museum. Yet the need to exhibit and market both locally and globally has never been satisfied by expatriate middle men, many of whom are more self-serving than concerned with advancing Kenya's contemporary visual arts. Nonetheless, artists' resourcefulness is visible in a wide variety of strategies such as exhibiting out of their home studios, renting commercial venues or putting their art on the internet, either on social media networks like Facebook and Instagram or on their own websites like www.kamwathi.com or www.africancolours.com where their work gets promoted among a global audience online.

Far more needs to be done to assist Kenyan artists to break out into the global art market scene and become self-sufficient. Much more also needs to be done to promote Kenya's creative economy both locally and globally.

Investing in Kenya's Creative Economy

So what is the creative economy?

Most Kenyan entrepreneurs think of business and finance in relation to economics and rarely in terms of the profit-making potential of art and creativity. Yet increasingly, around the world, entrepreneurs and international donor agencies, including the UN, are waking up to the tremendous untapped growth potential that lies in the arts and thus the creative economy.

Simply defined, the creative economy consists of all the arts seen in light of their revenue-producing power. That means looking at the performing, visual, digital and literary arts in terms of their immense economic potential.

Some artists resist their work being discussed in such mercenary terms. But others appreciate the fact that any serious artist must earn a living from his art. And as the Kenyan artist Shine Tani put it, he used to be an artist but has increasingly become a business man, specifically as the manager of the Banana Hill Art Gallery. He has his reasons the shift in focus. "I don't believe that an artist needs to die a poor man." By taking on a more entrepreneurial approach to his own art and the management of the business of Kenyan visual arts, Shine is on the cutting edge of the contemporary Kenyan art market.

And Shine is not alone. Increasingly, fellow Kenyans are coming to see the value of contemporary Kenyan arts, be they in the area of performance where groups like Heartstrings Kenya and Phoenix Players are consistently performing before house-full audiences, or music where night clubs all over the country are full most weekends. In visual arts, more and more Kenyans are looking for Kenya-made designs in fashion, fine art and even films, many of which are becoming award-winning works. Even book launches featuring Kenyan writers are increasingly gaining attention. No longer is one allowed to



say, as Taban Lo Liyong used to claim, that Kenya is a 'literary wasteland'. It is no longer the case when we have authors as wide ranging as poets, playwrights, historians, and of course, novelists. They are being published but they are also self-publishing their art.

Global Investors

But it is not only Kenyans who are seeing the significance of investing in creative economies. The current global financial crisis is causing investors all over the world to think deeply about where and how to invest for the future. When the American dollar was on the brink of collapse in 2008, many people—not only those in the habit of investing—began seriously to look for safe havens to put their savings. This was one reason the price of gold has shot sky high.

Yet whether one is talking about paper money, plastic money or gold, nothing has more enduring value than the currency of creativity itself. Creative ideas are the basis of innovation, and innovation is the basis of economic growth. Once someone cottons on to this notion, he or she will begin to appreciate that creative ideas are the fuel of economic growth. This is the point the British economist John Howkins was trying to tell the world when he wrote *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*.

Howkins is by no means the only one who sees the immense untapped potential of the creative economy. On the contrary, no less than seven United Nations agencies have focused on the creative economy, not only in so-called developed economies but 'emerging' economies as well.

The immense investment potential to be found in contemporary African art has increasingly been recognized in global art markets such as Sotheby's, Christie's, Duarts of Paris and Bonhams of the UK. In all of these major world markets, the arts are recognized not only as objects of beauty and creative expression but as safe havens which only accrue in value over time. This is why for instance, art works by acclaimed painters like Picasso, Matisse and Van Gogh as well as sculptors like Giacometti, Henry Moore, and Michelangelo, all of whom produced art which today is practically priceless it is so valuable.

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This is not to say that Kenyan contemporary art has yet to produce a Michelangelo or Leonardo di Vinci; however, artists like Jak Katarikawe, Kioko Mwitiki, Patrick Mutabi, Elkana Ongesa, Gakunju Kaigwa and Peterson Kamwathi all have a global following. Unfortunately, most of their patrons are non-Kenyans, although that is gradually changing. Nonetheless, many come from Europe but also from Asia, including Japan, South Korea and China, where unfortunately, the clearest sign of appreciation is plagiarism on the part of some Chinese artisans.

Nonetheless, there is still time for Kenyan connoisseurs of the arts to come forth and cash in on the creative productivity of Kenyan and east African artists. Fortunately, the National Museums of Kenya recently appointed a gifted Kenyan artist, Lydia Galavu, to be curator of its art collection. The permanent collection of the RaMoMA Museum is set to go on tour in Europe and Asia, and increasingly Kenyan artists are becoming transnational in their own right, promoting themselves through various exchange programs including ones established by the Triangle Arts Trust. But even independently, artists are finding means of going abroad either for further studies and exposure or exhibiting and marketing their own art.

On a few occasions, Kenya's Ministry of Culture has helped artists out. For instance, the Ministry has worked in tandem with the government of Italy to mount several international exhibitions in that country; but such events are few and far between. The Ministry of Culture is annually given one of the lowest budget allocations of any in the national government. What's more, it was the coalition government that cut Art Education from

the national curriculum, thus cutting off an important avenue for training young people in the development of creative ideas, thus dampening the potential for future growth of Kenya's creative economy.

So the government needs to get a stern wakeup call and act on behalf of the artists. Recently, an artist from Bangladesh exhibited in Kenya and found immense appreciation among local audiences. But he said this was the norm for artists at home where the Bangladeshi Government invests seriously in its artists believing the growth and development of its own creative economy is for the benefit of the country and the national economy. And in countries like Italy where a conservative government was cutting back on funding for the arts, the public was up in arms against that government which rapidly lost public favour. So it is in the long term interests of our own government to wake up and recognize that supporting the arts is an important strategy for growing the Kenyan economy. It's not only a means of addressing the immense unemployment problem in the land; it is also a way of enhancing the tourism industry and tapping into a vast human resource pool that promises to generate more wealth for the country than any fictitious gold or diamond mine could ever do.

Margaretta wa Gacheru Ph D. is a freelance journalist



The NEST - Nairobi's Home of Alternative Arts Thinkers

Njoki Ngumi



The NEST Arts Company is a multi disciplinary arts collective in Nairobi that convenes artists, thinkers and curious minds to collaboratively create and consume socially engaged cultural products and experiences. We are excited to invite the year 2015 along with its promise of greater and dynamic opportunities through which we can tell stories, transform our narratives, and dignify our lives.

Throughout the year 2014, together with our community and supporters, we hosted stimulating co-creation music labs, exciting interactive theatre projects, featured our first feature film at premium international festivals, convened international social innovation learning programs, supported a reflective visual exhibition, sponsored a city-wide filmmaking competition and had the pleasure of convening creative economy conversations across the region.

As we turn three later in 2015, we are committed to deepening our programming and practice, thus harnessing the critical role that art plays in constructing our individual identities and communal experiences.

At the NEST, we are persuaded that the arts unapologetically celebrate what is most beautiful and universal about the human experience. That the arts also grieve and roar in pain and anger when things are not fair, and speak out. That through the arts we can access ongoing reflections on our society and be enabled to imagine different futures and outcomes, dream them tangibly and depict them holistically. That the arts create the languages through which we can construct our identities, clarify our consciences, suggest solutions to our challenges and therefore help build our collective resilience.

Through our work so far, we have sought to instigate new artists to collaborate to create socially engaged cultural products and experiences for new audiences. Work which allows for continued intense dialogue and that has helped to build an archive which forms a bulwark against rigidity, stasis and complacency. Work which emphasizes the need for the freedom of the citizen to create, self-define, experiment, and explore the world of the human mind and spirit.

In 2015, we are looking forward to taking on new cultural challenges and conversations. We are interested in exploring the creative economy, sustainable living, food and energy. We are interested in engagements around Africa's identity politics along with legacies, colonial and otherwise, around the migration of persons. Additionally, we are looking forward to new opportunities to expand our range of vocabulary and tools for engagement as well as to support the creation of effective responses to our dynamic social, political and economic environments.

Through these conversations and efforts, we argue that things can be made right and whole, if even just for a few fleeting moments - that the individual can do great things, and infinitely more if many individuals act together.

Because Art Is Life.

The NEST is located at Jabavu Maisonettes in Kilimani area of Nairobi county.

For more details, updates and events, please check our website: www.becauseartsislife.org



Louis Mwaniki and the History of Modern Art in Kenya

Terry Hirst

I was naturally saddened by the death of Louis Mwaniki. We had been friends for most of our working lives, and were close age-mates. But I was even more saddened to realize that this outstanding Kenyan artist was not to be recognized or even recorded in the national consciousness. In 1963, at Independence, there were only five formally trained and qualified Kenyan artists; Gregory Maloba, Peterson Kareithi, Francis Ndegwa, James Bukhala and Louis Mwaniki. Maloba was Head of the newly formed Department of Fine Art and Design at University College, Nairobi. Kareithi was the national Inspector of Art for Schools. Louis was at the University College, having just returned from further training in Turin, and the others disappeared up-country to teacher training posts.

The relocated Elimo Njau, and Francis Nnaggenda joined the Kenyan art scene, and joined the expatriate artists, like Frank Foit, Joyce Butter, Robin Anderson, Jony Waite, Timothy Brooke and others, and another handful of Kenyans were completing their training overseas. The so-called 'self-taught' artists, such as Joel Oswaggo, Ancent Soi, Sam Wanjau, Hezbon Owiti, and the relocated Ugandan, Jak Katarikawe quickly joined them. The School of Fine Art at Makerere was being run by Sam Ntiro, and both Maloba and Mwaniki had taught there, where a whole group of East African artists continued training. It was a lively art scene. But I have talked to young graduating artists in recent years, and few of them have heard of these early generations of Kenyan artists. Indeed it is as if they live in a continuous present, rather than as the inheritors of a new cultural tradition, which is as it should be.

The first generation of modern artists *changed* African Art in a revolutionary way, and they should know that. Okot p'Bitek's provocative *'Artist the Ruler'*, finished two weeks before Okot died, challenged all creative people in East Africa to think about what they were doing:

"This view of culture as something separate and distinguishable from the way of life of the people, something that can be put in books, and museums and art galleries, something which can be taught in schools and universities for examination purposes, or enjoyed during leisure time in theatres and cinema halls – the Western tradition which regards culture as something that can be bought and sold, where the artist is some special fellow who is paid with money for his works – is entirely alien to African thought."

Okot p'Bitek, *Artist the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values*, 1986.

Where these artists *do* get a mention, for example in academic publishing by the Smithsonian Institute, in a work like *'New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African Artists in a Generation of Change'*, by Jean Kennedy, 1992, it is as a result of sifting through earlier records rather than a direct re-evaluation of the work or of the artists themselves, and their relevance. The first generation of East African artists, both formally trained and self-taught appear here. Louis has a brief mention, including:

"Mwaniki's artistry has a focus that is distinctly African in spite of his foreign experiences. Unlike the work of some artists that bears the stamp of colonial imperatives, he turns the medium to his own purpose; as a result, his work becomes African.

One of East Africa's finest print-makers, Mwaniki has contributed graphic illustrations to a number of East African publications, and his prints have been included in numerous exhibitions abroad."

The advances made in printing technology, since about 1945, have enabled a vast expansion in the market of Art books and magazines, with good full-colour reproductions. More people today in the world, rather than any other time in history, are aware of the productions of individual artists, or groups of artists and their work, because virtually the whole history of past civilizations is now available to be looked at privately in our own homes, at a cost. Now the emergence and arrival of broadband Internet makes that prospect of finding such information in words and pictures, along with music and video to go with them, even more widely available at an even more affordable cost.

Surprisingly, few such art history books have been published in, or even about, East Africa. Art History as the history of artists does not seem to exist in Africa in any popular form, apart from a handful of titles from West Africa, published by Mbari in the early 1960s. In East Africa there are no artist's autobiographies, and even biographies are still rare, being mostly concerned with outstanding politicians, fondly remembered teachers, and other 'big' people, but never artists. Although in the university art departments, undoubtedly monographs on individual artists and schools of artists do exist as dissertations for degrees, they are rarely – if ever – available to the general public, or even to journalist in the news media.

Similarly, in Frank Willet's groundbreaking book, *African Art: An Introduction*, 1971, and Uli Beier's earlier *Contemporary Art in Africa*, 1968, there are also the inevitable omissions in such broad over-views of a vast continent. Only Elimo Njau is mentioned from East Africa in one of them. But most of the blame for this must fall upon the 'art academia' in East Africa, which has failed to pass on the richness and subtlety of an incoming tradition and dominant narrative, as it established itself, or stimulated the media to do so – so that even the deaths of some of outstanding modern East African artists have passed unnoticed, such as Gregory Maloba, Sam Ntiro, Francis Musangi, and now Louis Mwaniki. The young come to believe that they are the first to face this new future in the international modern art market.

But if work is omitted in foundational accounts, as it is in the East African situation, it becomes less likely that it will ever subsequently become included in later scholarship, unless the academics are very diligent in 'turning over the bones in the churchyard', as ours do not seem to be. The South Africans have done theirs splendidly. Written history is, after all, about what has been 'chosen to be remembered', not about what actually happened. It is in this way, let alone from deliberate – and sometimes malicious – exclusions, that artworks and the artists become written out of history, and inheriting generations lose their invaluable perceptions and often-insightful stimulations of that transitional experience, and this is already happening with the first generations of our modern artists.

The names and works of the pioneering modern artists are never, or rarely ever, mentioned or shown - even to the specialist students in the art schools and colleges.

A book by Judy Ogana and Carol Lees, *Kenya Art*, 2004, even suggested that the 'first generation' of modern artists in Kenya appeared in the 1980s, and this seemed to bring little argument from the formally trained artists in academia in East Africa, whose founding School of Fine Art, had been started in the late 1930s, at Makerere, and had been fully established in 1952, fifty years before, with the Nairobi University College Department of Fine Art and Design established ten years later in 1963.

So, in 2004, *Kenya Art* claimed that the first generation of modern artists was in 1980.

Then, after a gap of six years, Safaricom Limited published a beautiful catalogue to accompany the exhibition that opened its new Safaricom Centre in 2010. It was called, not surprisingly, *Islands of Creativity* and featured twenty-five rather randomly chosen painters and sculptors resident in Kenya. The catalogue showed a full-colour example of each artist's work and a photograph of the artist with a brief bio-pic making a double spread. It was an excellent exhibition catalogue, but hardly 'an examination into the hearts and minds of some of Kenya's leading artists' that it cautiously claimed, although it was generous exposure for the selected ones.

So much for 'Art in East Africa' as 'the History of Artists'. But 'the History of Artworks and Crafts' has fared little better. The true origin of the traditional cultural inheritance in

Art History as the history of artists does not seem to exist in Africa in any popular form, apart from a handful of titles from West Africa, published by Mbari in the early 1960s. In East Africa there are no artist's autobiographies, and even biographies are still rare, being mostly concerned with outstanding politicians, fondly remembered teachers, and other 'big' people, but never artists.

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East Africa, despite the efforts of Margaret Trowell, in her ground-breaking books, *Tribal Crafts of Uganda*, 1953, and *Classical African Sculpture*, 1954, has largely disappeared in the sands of time. Anthony Stout wrote *Modern Makonde Sculpture* in 1966, to accompany his touring exhibition of Makonde works in the US, and published by Njau's Kibo Art Gallery Publications, with black and white photographs that sufficed magnificently. Later, in 1972, Roger Fouquer brought out *The Makonde and Their Sculpture*, published by National Arts of Tanzania, with an insightful Preface by John Berger, which was a more subtle contemporary cultural examination.

But there has been no book about Elimo Njau's celebrated murals in Muranga, no recognition of Gregory Maloba's public works in Uganda and Kenya, and none of Louis Mwaniki's sculptures in a public sculpture park in UK, and other work on permanent exhibition in the former Yugoslavia, or Sam Ntiro's work in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. But there was, however, Usam Ghaidan's brilliant book *Lamu: A Study in Conservation*, published by EALB, in 1976, and Kaj Andersen's *African Traditional Architecture*, a really excellent overview of shelter and homestead construction in Kenya, from Homa Bay to Lamu, published by Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1977, to much international acclaim.

Louis Mwaniki was an outstanding Kenyan artist of international repute, and deserves to be recorded and remembered as such

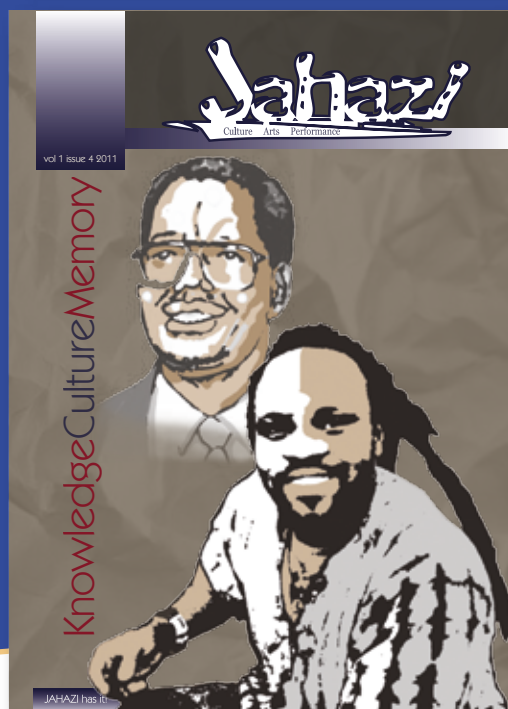
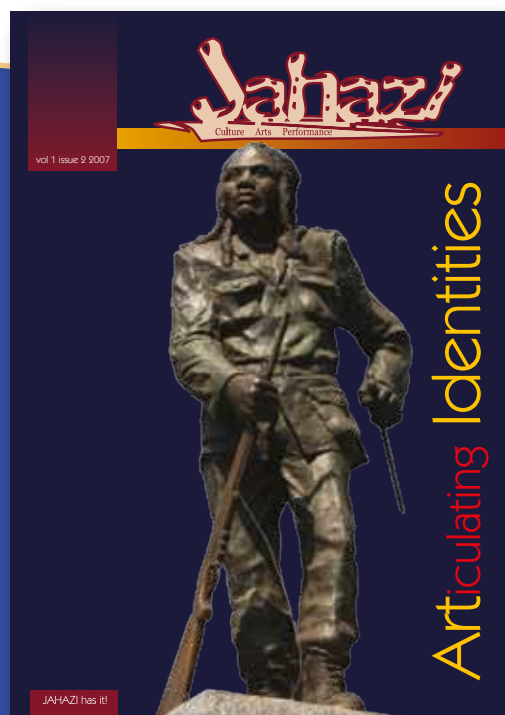
Traditional wisdom tells us we have three important tasks in our lives. The first is to learn from society about its traditions and its culture, where we are outer-directed. The second is the process of individuation where we become inner-directed. The third is 'to die to oneself' and all egocentric pre-occupations, and achieve true freedom. Few people consciously follow this path in their lives, but it can be clearly seen in Art History as lives of the artists, such as Louis Mwaniki. The first two tasks were traditionally accomplished by, first, apprenticeship in a studio or college, and then by the travels of the recently qualified 'journeyman' artist after the presentation of his 'master-piece', and these are still symbolically in operation in the modern art education system. Louis, for example, after university travelled widely and worked in North America and Europe, and finally modestly achieved true freedom.

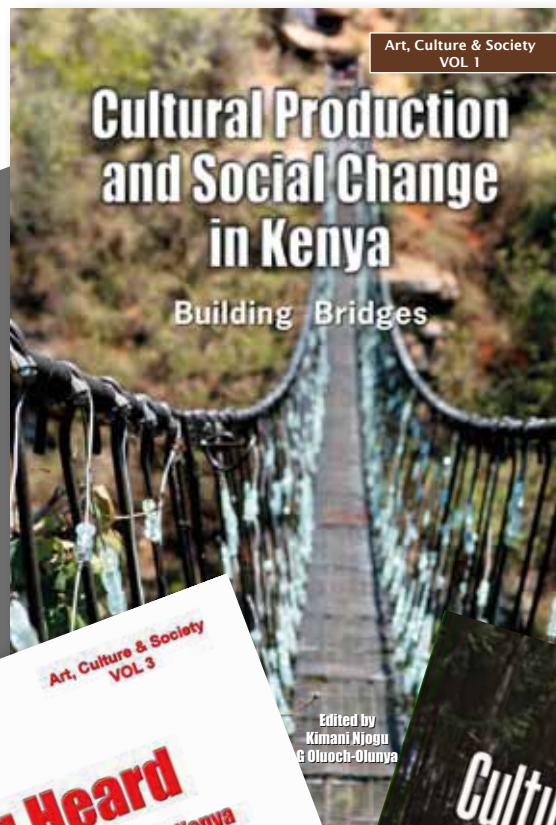
Louis Mwaniki was an outstanding Kenyan artist of international repute, and deserves to be recorded and remembered as such, as part of the History of Modern Art in Kenya. During his later years, as a rather taciturn and very free and independent artist, his work in painting and print-making grew to be very strong and arresting. A few months before he died, he was in my studio, telling me he was building a new studio to work in, and that I should visit when he had finished. Sadly we never got around to it.

Terry Hirst was the first editorial cartoonist and author of a comic book (Picha Hadithi) in Kenya. This article is published posthumously.

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