

“WHEN YOUTH SAID NO! WRITING AND READING YOUTH’S INITIATIVES IN HEALING AND RECONCILIATION IN THE DRAMAS OF AUSTIN BUKENYA -THE BRIDE (1984) AND ALEX MUKULU 30 YEARS OF BANANAS (1993)”

Christopher Joseph Odhiambo

Department of Literature, Theatre and Film Studies

Moi University, P.O. Box 3900,

Eldoret-Kenya

Email: cjodhiambo@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper is a critical reading of Austin Bukunya’s and Alex Mukulu’s dramatic representations of conflict, healing and reconciliation. The paper, in this regard, explores dramatic strategies that these two playwrights from Uganda deploy to problematize these notions as experienced in post-colonial Africa. But of great interest are the significant roles which, these playwrights deliberately, assign the youth in the project of initiating transformation which eventually leads to healing and reconciliation within their dramatic imaginaries. The paper proceeds to highlight the ways that the youth in these dramatic texts engage with, and challenge cultures and versions of history that privilege sites of performing conflicts and how they in return subvert and invert such sites, converting them into spaces of performing new rituals of expiation, healing and reconciliation. This paper consciously reads these plays as contribution to the projects of healing and reconciliation in post colonial Africa, since drama is not just an imitation of reality but in many ways acts as catalyst for change; or what one of the foremost practitioners and theorist of intervention theatre tradition, Augusto Boal, refers to as rehearsal for revolution.

Key words: Youth, Culture, history, transformation, healing, reconciliation, dramatic imaginary

In many nations of the world, it is openly agreed that the youth constitute a majority of the population. However in many developing nations, especially in post colonial Africa, the youth remain on the periphery of their societies. They lack a voice, and more often than not, remain invisible in conversations and debates of the so called ‘serious matters’ of their societies. In Kenya, for instance, their voices are usually heard when they are amplifying the voices of politicians in expectation of handouts. It is also a truism that many a time the youth have been used by the political class to do their ‘dirty work’. However two playwrights from Uganda, Austin Bukunya and Alex Mukulu, have attempted to redefine the perception of the youth through the possibilities of the dramatic imagination. The plays seem to participate in the project of debunking the myths and stereotypes that are ascribed to the youth as lacking agency. As such, in their plays, Bukunya and Mukulu have placed the youth at the very centre of their dramas, that is, *The Bride* and *Thirty Years of Bananas* respectively. In these dramas the youth are conceived as subjects and not objects of socio-cultural and political transformations. In fact, these plays not only challenge but of course, subvert the commonly received dispositions and myths of youth as immature, irresponsible and reckless.

In the two plays under inspection the potential of the youth are central and privileged. In the dramatic structures of these plays the youth have been overtly ascribed both a visible presence and a voice. They occupy the centre stage of the performance space where they articulate ideological positions that contest cultural and political hegemonies, which they conceive as retrogressive to the project of (the) nation building and nationhood. Arguably, the imaginary visions, as constructed in these plays, depend largely on the dynamic potential(s) and resilience of the youth who initiate and responsibly manage transformation.

In Bukunya’s play, *The Bride*, the cathartic and therapeutic powers of the youth are dramatized in regard to the strategies they deploy to transcend strictures of customs and traditions. But before delving deeper into how they approach this healing and reconciliation project, it is perhaps necessary to provide a brief synopsis of the play at this point. *The Bride* as a dramatic work has as its structuring mode a conflict between the agents of transition and those of conservatism. It begins with the moon dance by the newly initiated youth. However complications emerge because the male initiates have allowed Namvua, an ‘immigrant’ girl, an outsider, who though born in this community does not qualify to be initiated into this ‘Rika’ of her age-mates; the ‘rika’ of

albino. But the female initiates out rightly object to the male initiates inviting Namvua to, not only participate in the revered moon dance, but also her co-option into the rika. Interestingly however is the twist that the plot of the play takes. The trajectory shifts into an intergeneration conflict between the more liberal thinking newly initiated youth and their die-hard conservative progenitors.

Paradoxically, the development of consciousness and the act of rebellion amongst the youth in this play begins when the youth have just gone through the ritual of initiation; instead of the ritual binding them to the customs, traditions and beliefs of their society, they in some kind of ironic reversal, contest the very same traditions and customs this ritual was supposed to symbolically inscribe on their individual and collective identities. For example, all the initiates 'who preceded them had to prove themselves by raiding other communities as attested by one of the elders Ngagehenya when he proudly announces that:

In the daring days of my youth,
after we had proved ourselves in the knife
before the plains,
we were send to raid the wild hills and
mountains
and bring to Wanga's shrine presents of captured
arms,
and the skulls of freshly-slaughtered savage
warriors.
(...)
You children, what worthwhile act have you
performed
since the knife ate away your childhood
to prove yourselves descendants of those great
warriors
of the battles of Maveta, Kukunya and Viwinga?
(*The Bride*, 1984, p. 30).

However the leader of the new initiates, Lekindo, defies the elders' incitement by strongly declaring that:

Here at the load of Wanga.
Rika of the Albinos, take up your spears;
Raise them before Wanga's load and before the
elders...
Here, before the Father of Days and all the
plains, we swear:
WE WILL NOT KILL (*Initiates repeat this line.*
Commotion)
No man, or woman, or child, will die again
at the point of these spears.
This is our season, and it will be a season of life
and peace.
(...)
Wanga meant us for life.
People must not die.
(*Initiates repeat*)

(...)
We will not kill.
(*Initiates repeat*)
(...)
Rika of the Albinos let us swear again.
(*Raises his spear; Initiates do likewise, and
repeat the next two lines*)
We will not kill.
Men must live.
Here at Wanga's load we deposit our spears,
broken,
(*They break their spears above their heads and
put them down*)
Never to kill again (*The Bride*, 1984, pp. 30-32)

Lekindo's response in regard to the elder's cultural ideological (dis)position is a clear testimony of the new consciousness in these initiates significantly hailed as rika of the albino. This appellation, rika of the albino, obviously gestures to their contact with Western civilization, and its enlightening modernity. The consciousness, derived from this contact, indeed make these youth to conceive their world differently from that of their elders. It is this new level of consciousness, most probably inspired by Christian ethos, that make them to defy the arbitrary dictates of tradition such as proving their manhood through ritual killings. What the elders ask the youth to do in this fictional 'worlding' is not dissimilar to what the politicians in post colonial Africa drive the youth into, to actualize their selfish ambitions.

It is interesting to note how Bukenya subverts the frames of ritual in this play to imbue the youth with this new consciousness. Normally a ritual entails the transfer of folk knowledge from one generation to the next without any contestation by the initiates. Thus in a ritual enterprise the initiates always construed, to echo Paulo Freire, empty slates waiting to be filled up with folk lore. However in this dramatic imaginary the youth refuse this definition. They break the culture of silence that is usually the defining character of such rituals of initiation. The breaking of this culture of silence is signified by the voice of their leader, Lekindo, when he defiantly pronounces that:

Patience, patience, Rika of the Albinos.
We swore when the knife ate away our childhood
that ours would be the season of light and sight.
Our manhood and womanhood would be a fight
against
all darkness and blindnesses (*The Bride*, 1984,
p.2).

It is significant to note that Bukenya uses the trope, Albino, as a site to play out the difference and "Othering"; that very play of exclusion which pervades the politics in post colonial Africa. Bukenya wittingly

subverts the cultural functions of initiation ritual that is normally consciously intended to establish categories of difference and otherness, into a site of protest and rebellion against the very cultural imperatives that it is meant to reiterate and affirm. As Lekindo further strongly asserts: “remember that this is another battle we have to fight against the rocks of custom” (*The Bride*, 1984, p. 10).

With the new consciousness the youth now strive to transform and heal their society from cultural practices and traditions that they perceive as sectarian, destructive, enslaving and repugnant to humanity and natural justice. Thus the new consciousness drives the youth to advocate for a new society with socio-cultural values and ethos that respect individual rights and the rights of others irrespective of their race, ethnicity or gender differentiation. As the youth leader Lekindo explains to the elders:

I am not cursing your ancestors for being
dead,
but dead they are, and they should let us
have our share of the sun and the wind while
we live.
Why do we always have to be crouching
under the hanging smoke-soot of dead man’s
fire?
Do we have to go and spend the first year
of our manhood savaging in the forest
just because the ancestors said?
Do we have to go and slaughter innocent
strangers just because the elders said?
Do we- (*The Bride*, 1984 p. 16).

From the dialogue that the playwright assigns to Lekindo, we can conclude that the playwright is, with much gravitas, concerned about social and cultural transformation and the healing of the society. It can also be argued that for the playwright this transformation can only be meaningful if it is initiated by the youth. In fact the following tirade between the youthful Lekindo and his elderly father Shundu is instructive:

Shundu: My roots are what the ancestors have said to the plains.
We grew straight and proudly by following the light of
wisdom
Which our forefathers bequeathed to this land....
Just look at yourselves, you willful ones
who wish you had sprung up like wild trees,
and not been born, so you would be bound
by no ropes of obedience to any parent or clan.
Where is grace, where is decency in your days?
(...)

Lekindo: Your plains are only a caveful of stoned-bones
of what some slit-eyed ancient ghosts uttered
when men went on all fours and the world wasn’t a
world
which you still want to rule us with.
We too have got mouths, and tongues in them;
Why can’t we be allowed to speak for ourselves
and for our grandchildren?
(*The Bride*, 1984, pp. 17-18).

This newly acquired voices of confidence and boldness surely seems to surprise and shock the older

generation. Though this new consciousness is obviously a result of the new generations contact with the Albino religion and education, it is really difficult for the older generation to fathom that such transformation has taken place among the youth; never before has their authority been questioned, critiqued nor contested. Traditionally, the groups of initiates had been seen as *tabula rasa*, that empty slate waiting to be filled with folk knowledge. This is why the protesting voices of the Albino rika can only be interpreted as a form of madness by the elders. As Shundu puts it: “Wazimu has entered our children’s heads and madness is spreading among them like plague” (*Bukenya*, 1984, p. 24).

For me, it seems that Bukenya is suggesting that change in this society just like in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, is inevitable. However in Bukenya’s dramatic imaginary this change can only be catalyzed by the youth who are in the stage of transition: Like the Yoruba god of creativity, Ogun, these youth are ready to plunge into the abyss of transition and alter the equilibrium of the society. Like Ogun, the youth also want to heal the society by riding it of its retrogressive practices that create artificial differences that marginalize some inhabitants. The immigrants such as Namvua and her family who have lived in this community for many generations are still considered as outsiders no matter the positive contributions that they have made in the development of this society. Thus it is inevitable for Lekindo to marry Namvua at the end of the play as a symbol of both healing and reconciliation. The hate that the community has for the immigrants must be expiated. It is important to note that before Lekindo marries Namvua, Namvua is initially intended to forcefully marry a skull because, as an immigrant, she does not have basic human rights to make personal choices. However Lekindo, the youth leader saves her from this act of indignity. The following dialogue should suffice our explanation:

Lekindo: People, you came here
to celebrate Lerema’s marriage to Merio’s daughter.
The plains have been told a lie.
You are dancing over a death.
It is the owners of the shrine
that desecrates it.
(Enter Samiji, Melanyi and Kitavi with Namvua and pot.
Astonishment in the crowd. Mkumbu screams).
Here. (Lekindo takes skull out of pot)
This is the groom whose wedding you are celebrating.
This is Lerema’s son:
For a Lerema does not die.
Is that reason enough to condemn
This girl, our agemate, to such a marriage?
We are for life.
And death we shall destroy even in Wanga’s shrine.
Lerema:
(...)
The weight of our sorrows has broken us.
Shundu’s son, if you promise life,
Wanga needs you to guard the plains.

(...)
Behold my son.
Behold heir to the shrine. (...)
Behold Wanga's beloved.
I am a servant of Wanga
From his shrine the Fixer has spoken.
(cheers)
Celebrate, therefore, the marriage of his chosen (*The Bride*,
1984, pp. 53-54).

It is therefore obvious that in Bukenya's imaginary the ritual of initiation that marks a transition in the individuals from childhood to youth hood should in essence lead to new consciousness that can also catalyze personal and collective transformation, healing and reconciliation. It is also a comment that the youth should not just follow instructions that would lead to the destruction of humanity.

Whereas Bukenya dramatizes the project of transformation, healing and reconciliation using conflict as the organizing and structuring principle, Alex Mukulu in his dance drama *30 years of Bananas* takes recourse in the enactment of memory. This, in many ways sounds like what the post apartheid new South Africa nation would use in the form of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to deal with its own brutal and traumatic history. In this play Mukulu dramatizes the 30 years of Uganda's independence through the eyes and ears of the youth; those born after 1962. The thirty years of bananas signify the madness that beset post colonial Uganda as a consequence of poor political leadership. The new generation of young male and female Ugandans in the play express and act out their disgust and disillusionment of the thirty years of independence that are construed as years of total wastage. By engaging with the memory of those thirty years, this new generation expects both, some form of catharsis and expiation. This journey through memory is supposed to be a learning experience for the youth so as to eschew the mistakes of their predecessors. This is well articulated by one of the characters in the play Nakuya when she declares in regard to the role of the youth in the new Uganda that there:

are men and women who have
grown up during the period 1962 to 1992
men and women who should be taken seriously:
and as case studies for everyone who is interested in
knowing what the leaders of tomorrow look like today,
what they think now and what they will be when their time
in
office comes (30 thirty years of Bananas).

For this new generation of young men and women the healing of their country entails confronting the history of madness; what the playwright refers to as thirty years of bananas. To achieve this healing the participants must engage in a ritual of a backward glance, that journey that an individual makes to confront and reconcile with

experiences of a painful and traumatic history. This ritual of re-memory in a sense is meant to be therapeutic even if traumatic. This is because through this ritual of re-memory the celebrants are capable of confronting the traumatic past and at the same time invest it with new alternative meanings and possibilities.

As such history becomes a mirror through which the present and future actions are reflected; as Kaleekezi, a character in the play presented as a refugee and therefore an objective witness as well as a repository of Uganda's history of the 30years of bananas, cynically comments about Uganda leaders:

One thing about Uganda's leaders has been their amazing likeness to stones used in slings or catapults. This stone I am about to unveil is one that ruled Uganda in much the same way a bottle top covers a bottle. Once you remove this top, though, you can only consign it to the rubbish heap of history (Bananas, 1993, p. 40).

With the insight achieved from the journey of the backward glance, the youth in this play-text appear to have a better vision of their nation. Through this insight they are now aware that the ghost of the past must be expiated before any progress towards the building of the nation can commence. This is well articulated through the rhetorical questions of the chorus:

While talking about Ssaabaaja Kabaka
Walugembe
Apollo Milton Obote
What aspects of them will history show of them?
That our children will be proud of?
What did they teach us?
Did you learn anything from their times?
How are the lessons you learnt going to benefit our off
springs?
What will they learn?
In time to come, what will you stand to tell?
Who will you praise beyond thirty years of bananas?
Grandchildren will always ask what did our grandparents
do?
God forbid that we'll tell them that all we did was eat
bananas!
Are you learning something? (Bananas, 1993, p.43).

From the rhetorical questions posed by the chorus it is not difficult to appreciate Mukulu's privileging of the youth in the project of national healing and building. The history explicitly indicts the predecessor -fathers of the post colonial Uganda nation for not leaving behind a legacy worth emulating. Nothing according to the chorus which apparently is the mouthpiece of the playwright can be learnt from these pioneer leaders in the thirty years that they were in the driving seat of the new nation.

Unlike the older generation the youth resist the culture of silence and use their voices to revile the thirty years of bananas. They realize that the healing of the nation can not take place if they do not use their new found voices to point out the errors of the past. They realize too that they are the ones who can heal the nation from the banana malaise because the older generation does not only suffer from a culture of silence but is too complacent; a form of complacency that the youth construe as bordering on conspiracy. The youth's rebuke of the elders silence during the years of madness is most telling:

Chorus: You cowards
We've spent thirty years just eating bananas
Thirty full years
You cowards
You left Mutesa die alone
Obote was in office two times
Amin killed you and you just
looked at him
you cowards
Lule was snatched from your hands
Binaisa insulted you to the limits
Muwanga silence you, made you
Deaf and dumb
You cowards
Even Tito had his time ruling
All thirty years (Bananas, 1993, p.50).
The youth are extremely angry with older generation for
allowing politicians to run down the country,

for their cowardice and lacking in leadership. The attitude of the youth in this context is not different from those of the African-American who also accused their progenitors for acting the "Uncle Tom" .

The youth seem to suggest that the only effective way of healing the nation is by fighting the culture of silence and inculcating the culture of sacrifice to ensure that the banana malaise never recurs. Chandiru, one of the characters in the play, defiantly pronounces that:

I was too young then, but now I am a man of thirty. One thing I will never accept is a killer for a leader. I don't care what you are thinking now. Get this clear. I don't want a killer for a leader. We know Indians who burnt themselves seeking a cause. We know so many have died because they wanted to change wrong to right, falsehood to truth. I have spent, thirty years watching people who fear death; But when I talk to age mates, there seems to be one thing we don't fear: death. A leader who comes to kill will not last. He will not last (Bananas, 1993, p. 60).

Though at times the utterances of Mukulu's characters seem to entrench the commonly circulated stereotype of the youth as reckless and hot blooded, there is a sense in which their response to the situation seems to be the only valid and legitimate way of dealing with the banana republic's malaise.

The political Evangelist, who is actually the political voice of the playwright, sums the position of the youth quite aptly when he asserts that:

To cut a long story short, the team that was trained and prepared to start playing in 1962 has never started playing... The whistle was blown in vain. Since then we have grown up looking up to captains who had no vision at all. Looking up to captains who have no clear direction for their team mates. We have for thirty years been looking up to captains without a driving force, and no motivation strong enough to keep them running competing and winning (Bananas, 1993, p. 95).

Mukulu's panacea for healing the nation is the mainstreaming of youth in the running of the new nation. Though his vision seems to be so harsh in the sense that he advocates for a complete removal of the older generation in positions of authority and replacing them with the youth, the history of the big man politics in post colonial Africa does vindicate him. According to Mukulu, those born before 1962 in Uganda can not bring about the desired change: Once again his mouth piece who represents his political vision declares that:

We need front wheel drive people only. That excludes everybody above thirty years of age. In other words, every one born before 1962 is not a front wheel drive person. We want those kinds of people to observe total silence and give us a chance to try out a new team that will run, compete and win (1993, p. 95).

Though Mukulu's vision in this dramatic imaginary of transformation appears idealistic and utopian, as a work of art, it acts as an apt tool for intervention especially in its style of provocation that would catalyze the youth into some kind of action that will heal the society of the malaise infested upon it by the bad politics of the post independence leaders.

Thus the two plays have been analyzed in regard to their conscious attempt to place the responsibility of healing the nation devastated by poor political leadership. As Achebe reminds us in his book of essays, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, the trouble with Nigeria, is purely and squarely one of poor leadership. Mukulu, in a way that reverberates Achebe, even though in an idealist and oft times utopian, seems to suggest that the sickness that besets post colonial African can only be healed if the youth are mainstreamed in all spheres of nation building. That is why one of the characters, Nanjobe, in a reconciliatory tone calls for an inclusive system of governance as opposed to the usual exclusivist politics of post colonial Africa when he asserts that the leader that they need is a:

A captain who will not train us to believe in one ball, one team; because we know a team can't play by itself. There must be competition. Without competition there will be no losers or winners. Without losers

and winners there will be no competition, there will be no mistake made, and therefore, no achievement (Bananas, 1993, p. 107).

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TOPIC CONTROL IN THE MARKET DISCOURSE

Samuel M. Obuchi

Department of Languages and Literature
University Eastern Africa, Baraton

P.O. Box 2500–30100

Eldoret, Kenya.

Cell: 0722-935350; 0733228186; 0208001410

E-mail: smobuchi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Human interactions such as between a trader and a customer, involve the process of acting towards a collective goal. Thus, traders and customers cooperate in order to buy from and sell to each other. This, I may call, the cooperative joint action whose achievement is largely dependent on the mutual participation and intimate involvement of the transacting partners. The transacting parties have an innate driving force that motivates them to behave and act in a certain way. Arrazola (1998: p.21) captures this scenario when he says that: an intended collective goal in this sense is based on the goal holding agents interacting in order to satisfy their content of the intention by acting together. I note that transacting partners in the market place have the content of the collective sense and are committed to their intimate goal they wish to achieve. The acting together can be said to be mutual if there is commitment through their individual contribution to the mutual goal at hand.

Key words: Discourse, topic control, market.