KENYAN POPULAR THEATRE AND THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

By

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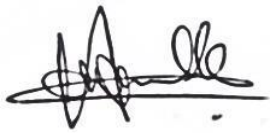
Reg No: C/80/52823/2018

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN LITERATURE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

2023

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university.

Candidate: 

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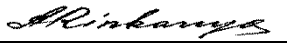
First Supervisor: 

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DEDICATION

To Moli Ndanu aka Kasupuu and Simon Kawive aka Kababuu in whose hearts burn the desire for what is just … one day, as it was before, they will fight for each other.

And;

To all artists who engaged and continue to engage in the search for social justice through theatre: Aluta Continua

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My utmost gratitude goes to Prof. Alina Rinkanya and Dr. Masumi Odari for their able supervision and patient guidance throughout the writing of this thesis. I thank the Chair of the Department of Literature Dr. Jennifer Muchiri and the coordinator of post-graduate studies Dr. Musonye for their support. The lecturers in the Department of Literature supported and urged me on. Prof. Henry Indangasi gave me useful perspectives on my work and challenged me to take the path less travelled. Dr. Simon Peter Otieno and Dr. Tom Odhiambo gave me interesting perspectives on theatre and performance and I thank them. Dr. Makau Kitata and Dr. Kimingichi Wabende who gave me useful texts, reference materials and critical insights to my work are sincerely thanked. Dr. Godwin Siundu gave useful comments for the improvement of the thesis and deserves special thanks.

Theatre artists and practitioners – Dr. Mshai Mwangola, Zein Abubakhar, Salma Njoki, Sophie Dowllar, Mary Airo, Oluoch Madiang, Oby Obyerodhyambo, Ondanyiro Wamukoya, Mueni Lundi, Tony Mboyo (Kasmall), Ann Wanjiku, and Fredrick Ogolla (Toothbrush) – gave me oral and written interviews and materials. I specially thank Sophie Dowllar who helped me with books, 5Cs manuscripts and articles from the late 1990s; Mary Airo who availed to me *Shamba la Mfukeri*; and Zein Abubakar whose expertise in oral performance was very useful. Prof. Eunice Sahle introduced me to interdisciplinary studies and to Antonio Gramsci's "praxis" and I sincerely thank her. Some of the authors of the works under study – Prof. Kithaka wa Mberia, Prof. Kivutha Kibwana, Wakanyote Njuguna and Kang'aara wa Njambi – were available to me during the writing and I thank them for the insights I got on their works. I thank my fellow students and friends for the comradeship and sharing.

I specially thank Nduku Ikeny'anza and Dr. Larry Ndivo for their support and encouragement. Virginia Mwathi of Machakos University helped me with the technical aspects of Kiswahili translation and I thank her. Members of my family, especially those that I interacted with most during this period – Benedetta Munyiva, Elizabeth Muthoki, Stella Munyiva, Patrick Mutinda and David Kasyoki – are sincerely thanked for letting me write. Last of all I thank the one person who has been special in my life during this writing period: Mitchelle Kamengele aka Mercelina. Her exuberant insouciance and the glow of her warmth in my heart made it much easier for me. She laughed loud and hard at my peculiar inability to finish my "homework" in one sitting like she usually did.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

4Cs	–	Citizens' Coalition for Constitutional Change
5Cs	–	Five Centuries (Theatre Group)
ANC	–	Africa National Congress
ANPPCAN	–	African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect
CIPEV	–	Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence
CLARION	–	Centre for Law and Research International
CRECO	–	Constitution and Reform Education Consortium
FCC	–	French Cultural Centre
FHI	–	Family Health International
FIDA	–	Federation of Women Lawyers – Kenya
FRELIMO	–	Portuguese Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
HIV	–	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRC	–	International Committee for the Red Cross
IDEA	–	International Drama in Education Association
ILISHE	–	Ilimu Sheria
IPCET	–	Interactive, Participatory Educational Theatre
KCC	–	Kenya Cultural Centre
KDEA	–	Kenya Drama and Education Association
KHRC	–	Kenya Human Rights Commission
KNDFF	–	Kenya National Drama and Film Festival
KNT	–	Kenya National Theatre
KSCDF	–	Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival
LiMID	–	Like Minded Donors
LRF	–	Legal Resources Foundation
MPLA	–	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
NCCK	–	National Council of Christian Churches in Kenya
NCEP	–	National Civic Education Programme
NGO	–	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAC	–	Pan African Congress (of Azania)
PATH	–	Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health
PET	–	Participatory Educational Theatre
PETAD	–	Participatory Educational Theatre and Development
PhD	–	Doctor of Philosophy (degree)
SWAPO	–	South West Africa People's Organization
TB	–	Tuberculosis
TfD	–	Theatre for Development
USAID	–	United States Agency for International Development

ABSTRACT

Critics have for long noted the possibilities of using popular theatre to play different functions, including political mobilisation and entrenchment of social justice ideals. Acknowledging this, I sought to explore how popular theatre created social awareness of the theme of social (in)justice in Kenya from the mid-1980s to early 2000s. This period coincided with the peak of the single party-political dictatorship associated with former President Daniel arap Moi and, conversely, the agitation for multiparty democracy. At the turn of the millennium, however, the idea of political freedoms as social justice had taken root, thanks in part to the work of popular artistry that dominated Kenya's public imaginaries. During this period, a number of popular theatrical works associated with mainstream and scholar-activists were written, even though some barely attracted worthwhile critical attention in respect to social justice. I selected some of these for my study. These were Francis Imbuga's *Aminata*, Kithaka wa Mberia's *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi*, and *Natala*; Kivutha Kibwana's *Kanzala*, Kang'aara wa Njambi's *Paukwa*, Legal Resources Foundation's *Shamba la Mfukeri, Constitution* and Reform Education Consortium's *Uraia*, and Wakanyote Njuguna's *Before the Storm*. The objectives of this study were threefold: to interrogate the theme of social justice in selected popular theatre texts in Kenya; to analyse the style of popular theatre in search of social justice in Kenya; and, to evaluate the use-value of popular theatre in Kenya's contemporary struggles with social justice. To achieve these objectives, I applied methodological approaches of textual analysis and semi-structured interviews in conducting the study, while enlisting interpretative tools drawn from Performance Theory, the Sociological Theory, the theory of the Carnivalesque, aspects of Post-colonial Theory and the social justice postulations of James Dawes. The study made three fundamental findings. First, that the global trends towards inclusivity influenced the growth and development of social justice in Kenya through popular theatre that mainstreamed themes of gender equality

and democracy. Second, the study established that the texts under study employed diverse elements of oral performance, including idioms, riddles and storytelling to familiarize their audiences and readers with the main thematic concerns. In so doing, the playwrights and artists innovated discursive safe spaces using other techniques of defamiliarization – notably humour, distancing irony, ambiguity and metaphor – to evade state censorship and other mechanisms of control. Ultimately, I argue that the texts under study and those of the same orientation constitute a subgenre of theatre that I call "civic theatre", and suggest that future preoccupation with social justice will likely find civic theatre an inevitable tool.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Theatre, the world over, has been a favourite art form for depiction of the struggles of the people seeking the realisation of the society they desire. This society is construed as one in which social justice is prevalent and achievable. Social commentary has been a pre-occupation with theatre as a result of the interaction between the text, audience and the production. Drama, theatre and performance are intricately interrelated. Drama has been used to refer to words on a page, whereas theatre is performance, even when it is of words on a page. In most cases theatre has been reduced to drama, but as Mark Fortier argues in *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, "a full study of theatre must be open to words on the page. Moreover, a study of theatre which does not see its relation to performance in general has made an artificial and limiting distinction." (p.12). In this section, I make a brief review of Kenyan popular theatre, its function in education and conscietisation of society towards social justice. I also look at the textual basis for the study.

I argue that popular theatre in Kenya has taken the form of both proscenium theatre and community theatre. The stage as a performance space (and the proscenium theatre as we know it) has its roots in the colonial period and was continued after independence both in formal theatre spaces in major towns, in social halls and in the education system through the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals – an elaborate annual festival that involves all categories of learning institutions. Stage theatre constitutes plays, musicals and recitals performed before diverse paying audiences or audiences mobilised for specific events. On the other hand, community theatre refers to forms that lie outside the conventional theatre as known in Western traditions of drama and theatre (proscenium/highbrow/repertory). It is the

form of theatre created and performed in community spaces, for community engagement, by members of the community, and providing, as Rūta Mažeikienė argues, a "new aesthetic and communicative experience" (p.128) to the larger community on issues that pertain to their daily lives and experiences. It may not necessarily be categorised as traditional or modern – it is contemporaneous. It takes such forms as masquerade, mime, pantomime, puppetry, role play, rituals, narratives, songs, dance, incantations, circus, cabaret, burlesque shows, and minstrel shows among others.

There has been in Kenya a proliferation of performances in community spaces of a form of theatre variously called "popular theatre" (Desai: (1990), "community theatre" (Byam: 1999), "theatre for development" (Mda: 1993), "educational drama" (Mumma: 1994) "participatory educational theatre (Ogolla: 1997)", among other titles. C J Odhiambo (2004), commenting on the many typological variants, observes that the variants in the nomenclature are not significant since the referent is the same – a theatre that leads people to a "new consciousness and a new understanding of their reality" (p.6). In this study, I focussed on popular theatre, both the proscenium and community theatre and how it has been used as a tool in the search for social justice.

The term "popular" itself has nomenclatural difficulty. Karin Barber argues that the term popular is slippery and disputed wherever it is used:

> At first, the term "popular" was used in African studies to refer exclusively to new cultural forms created in response to colonisation and post-independence experiences. This category of genres, texts and performances does have a kind of intuitive coherence: observers have noted the upsurge during the twentieth century of new styles of music, painting, theatre and fiction, which all shared key aesthetic

> features, including a self-conscious differentiation from longer established and more prestigious cultural repertoires. (p.7)

She goes on to argue that these new forms were mostly urban, syncretic and interstitial hence mostly disregarded as "a residual category" in both academic and cultural enterprises. I argue that what she calls "prestigious cultural repertoires" are what we call cannons, in this case the Eurocentric proscenium pieces and not necessarily the African cultural and artistic forms. This categorisation is intentional because the study proceeds from the understanding that the postcolonial society was dealing with a unipolar dichotomy: an elite using Eurocentric tools for culture and government, and a majority African oppressed population creating a new communicative imperative for liberation.

I agree with Barber when she argues that "popular" should not be pushed to pre-colonial cultural art forms or to mean "for the common people." Thus:

> …a history of popular culture needs simultaneously to recognise the many instances of cultural expression of protest, satire and self-assertion by disadvantaged and oppressed strata throughout history, and to keep in view the porousness of cultural boundaries, the substratum of shared forms and the repurposing of genres over time (p.8)

However, although Barber is talking about the strata in any society, pre-colonial or modern, the conceptualisation of "popular" in this study goes on to interrogate the adaptation of artistic forms from either strata or cultural imperative to curate an alternative form that communicates to the whole community in a language that articulates and propels the social justice agenda.

Social justice in this study is conceptualised as "fairness" (John Rawls – 1971) and also as "freedom" (Amartya Sen – 1999). Our study proceeds from the understanding that Kenya, in

the 1970's to 1990's, was governed in such a way as to negate the realisation of fairness and freedom. The theatre that was the focus of this study stems out of a period in which both the performer and the audience were gagged and deliberately desensitised.

Some scholars of state formation in Africa emphasise the importance of understanding the state as a political social construct. Regarding Kenya, Yash Ghai and Jill Cottrell posit that the geographical region called Kenya was created in the 1985 Berlin Conference, allocated to the British, its final borders drawn in 1926 and was colonised up to 1963 – negating the social fabric of the people and communities therein. Accordingly, "the state they established was of an alien people; based on organisational principles very different from those of local people which were community based…it was founded on violence and the violations of the rights of communities" (p.4). The colonial experience created an unequal society based on race, education and property. This inequality precipitated resistance of ethnic communities, trade unionists and political, cultural and social activists. Yash and Jill, while acknowledging that there were other resistance movements in Kenyan, observe that the Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) is better known because it exposed the "moral bankruptcy" of the colonisers by their brute counterforce to the armed resistance (p.5)

And it is indeed true that people resisted. A host of heroes led armed and cultural resistance against the incursion of the British long before the Mau Mau insurgency. Karari Peter, for instance, identified insurgencies that include the Nandi Uprising of 1895 – 1905 which was led by Koitalel Arap Samoei, the Giriama revolt led by Mekatilili wa Menza, 1918-1919 Gusii rebellion led by Moraa Ng'iti and Otenyo Nyamaterere, the 1947 Murang'a women's revolt, the 1950 Kolla Affray revolt. Other resistances that he does not capture include the "Ngai Ngoma" revolt led by Syotune wa Kithuke, the protest led by Waiyaki wa Hinga in

Kikuyu, the Kilungu protest led by Muinde wa Mbaa Nyangu, the "Release Harry Thuku" protest led by Muthoni Nyanjiru, and the anti-destocking revolt led by Muindi Mbingu among others. As far as I could find, comprehensive digest of the history of resistance has not been written. Most of the documentation exists as anecdotal references as most writers have focussed on the monumental Mau Mau war.

During the negotiations for independence, the British developed and imposed a Lancaster House Constitution in Kenya. After independence, the Constitution was changed to create an imperial presidency that centralised power in the hands of President Jomo Kenyatta. Shitemi Khamadi (2015) argues that this was done through a series of constitutional amendments that saw the presidency vested with all powers to run the country and effectively making all other arms of government beholden to the centre. (p.1). Upon Jomo Kenyatta's death in 1978, Daniel Toroitich arap Moi took over as president and was to rule for another twenty-four years. The 1982 coup, among other things, led to the establishment of a *de jure* one party state and the clampdown on dissent. Although this law (famously called Section 2A of the Constitution) was repealed in 1991 and in 1992 multi-party elections were held, the hold onto power by one party (the Kenya African National Union – KANU) continued until 2002. The period is also replete with the struggle for freedom of speech and conscience, a wider democratic space and a new constitutional dispensation. Makau Mutua (2009) observes correctly that Kenya reached its nadir under the twenty-four-year rule by President Daniel Moi, but ironically, it is in the same period that a "partial liberalization" of the state was realised by a reformist-oriented opposition and civil society effort (p.4).

When President Mwai Kibaki took over in 2002, the country was buoyed with hope, but it didn't last. The contention over a new constitutional order saw a divisive referendum held in

2005 where the government lost. The 2007 presidential elections were also contested – a contention that turned bloody. The Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence (CIPEV) found that 1,133 people were reported dead, 3561 injured, 117,216 properties destroyed and over 600, 000 persons displaced. (p.345). The resolution to the crisis led to the drafting and passing of a new constitution in 2010. This notwithstanding, the 2013 and 2017 elections have been contested. With rising political polarisation, poor governance, poor service delivery, abuse of human rights, extrajudicial executions, bad leadership and the ever-increasing cost of living, Kenyans are still struggling to realise their rights. This goes to show that the pursuit of social justice in Kenya has been a constant preoccupation of its citizenry.

In this study, I looked at theatre as an act of liberation where the artist and the audience engaged in educating and sensitising each other through enacting social justice. Sifuna D N (2000) argues that democracy flourishes as a direct consequence of literacy – "political literacy goes hand in hand with political action." (p.216). Sifuna's views are not as revolutionary as those espoused by Paulo Freire (1968) who proposes a surrender of the creation of the topic, objectives and the materials to be used in study to the learner. Commenting on this model presented for education, Desai (1990) argues that:

> A truly dialogic educational practice must allow the student to play an active role not only in the decoding of a codification but also in the initial stage of the construction of the codification. In terms of Freire's own practice, this may be understood as the handing over of the camera to the student; in African theatrical practice, it means giving control of the theatrical means of production to the villagers (p.80).

Applied in Kenya, this would actually have meant a complete overhaul of the teaching and learning framework. This political literacy could not be legally allowed in Kenya as the

government thrived through an alliance of the imperial bourgeoisie and their local representatives which was aimed at turning "Kenyans into slaves" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1981: p.xi). I argue that theatre was used as a tool to counter this enslavement, and I agree with Richard Boon and Jane Plastow when they contend that "theatre matters"

> …in its power to bring together divided communities of different kinds…and to engage creatively, productively and meaningfully with a wide range of issues from extreme poverty to AIDS, violence, human rights, sexual, racial and political intolerance and the power of the state (p.1)

In this study, I investigated how the theatre was used to not only understand the community that the people lived in, but to explore modalities of recreating a desirable state of existence. This study contends that the community theatre that was developed and practised in Kenya has been influenced by the situation obtaining at the time of creation, curation and performance. Secondly, I argue that the theatre took forms that could easily speak to the issues at hand and suited the occasion of performance. In this, I take cognisance of the fact that, as Henry Indangasi postulates, "form and content are opposites that interpenetrate; and they do interpenetrate in the sphere of semantics. What you say is not synonymous with how you say it; but what you say is shaped by your style of saying it." (2010: vi). I investigated how the theatre said or presented what it did and the impact this mode of presentation had on the theatre itself and on the material and world views that was presented.

The depiction of the struggle for social justice through theatre is as old as mankind. Sophocles' *Antigone*, a play in the antiquity period of literature, speaks to the right to conscience pitted against the mightiness of political power and religious bigotry. Bertolt Brecht was averse to what he calls the "climactic catharsis" of traditional proscenium theatre which in his view brought complacency to the audience. He came up with the

Verfremdungseffekt ("defamiliarization effect", "distancing effect", or "estrangement effect") which according to him was supposed to make the audience realise the social injustice and abuse out there in the world which they were supposed to engage in eliminating – that theatre should not produce “emotional orgies” in the audience but should “show how the world can be transformed” (Boal, 1979: p.103).

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

The foregoing shows that across time and space, individuals and communities have invoked different theatrical practices to engage with and pursue ideals of social justice. In Kenya, this preoccupation with social justice predated colonialism, and involved marginalised individuals such as Mekatilili wa Menza, whose quest for her people’s freedom from colonial brutality remains a talking point in historical texts and popular imaginaries. Even in postcolonial times, this interest in social justice continued. At the same time, however, little has been done in terms of concerted studies of how these popular theatrical initiatives ultimately deepened and spread the political consciousness and inclined the common masses towards the ideals of social justice in modern times. I attempted, in the present study, to fill this gap.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Theatre, like all literature, is generated from a social paradigm – real or aspirational. I contend that the impact of a narrow democratic space and the crackdown on dissent that had been experienced in Kenya over the years had an impact on the socio-political spectrum and the realisation of social justice in Kenya. This study aimed to analyse how popular theatre in Kenya was used as a tool in the search of social justice. Theatre, from time immemorial, has been used in conscietising the society. In Kenya, such works as Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (co-authored with Ngugi wa Mirii) and *The Trial of Dedan Kimanthi*, as well as Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, were interrogations of leadership and governance in Kenya. The investigation of the works of theatre of these and other writers on neo-colonialism and the relationship between power, wealth accumulation, corruption and national disenfranchisement has been carried out widely – in the context of the contestation for power in the post-colonial construct. Other writers and artists such as Okoiti Omtata and Wahome Mutahi have been studied in respect of their portrayal of the dynamics of power relations (Outa, 2009).

There exists a corpus of other plays and productions that originated from a programmed education and advocacy agenda for social justice by organisations and individuals in Kenya that merits study in regard to how their purpose influenced their form. An investigation of how this has affected the theatre that was produced in an effort to champion social justice themes was critical. The perspectives taken by writers and practitioners of theatre on social justice were investigated. A key point of analysis in the study was how these plays were written and/or performed, how they resonated with social justice agenda and how the communities that they were performed in related with them. This study aimed to fill the gap in scholarly discourse on social justice and popular theatre in Kenya.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The current study sought to achieve four objectives, thus to:

i. Interrogate the theme of social justice in selected popular theatre texts in Kenya;

ii. Analyse the style of popular theatre in search of social justice in Kenya; and,

iii. Evaluate the use-value of popular theatre in Kenya's contemporary struggles with social justice.

1.4. Study Questions

To achieve the foregoing objectives, this study sought to answer the following questions:

i. What have been the dominant perspectives on social justice in Kenya's popular theatre through time?

ii. What are the dominant stylistic choices employed in popular theatre and its concern with social justice in Kenya?

iii. What is the use-value of popular theatre in Kenya's contemporary struggles with social justice?

1.5. Hypothesis

This study was based on the following hypotheses:

i. Popular theatre in Kenya has discernible patterns and hierarchies;

ii. Despite being 'popular' in the sense of masses, popular theatre in Kenya deploys effective stylistic choices to achieve its ends while deflecting state reaction; and,

iii. While the popularity of popular theatre forms of the 1980s and 1990s may have petered out, the use value of popular theatre remains potent in Kenya today.

1.6. Rationale for the Study

This study focused on the theme of social justice because Kenya has had a troubled relationship with (in)justice, necessitating a body of literature, specifically theatre that

pursues the themes of social justice. Noteworthy is the fact that the peak of agitation for social justice in Kenya, thus the 1980s and 1990s, also coincided with the emergence of popular theatrical works that has hardly been studied in a long project such as a doctoral study. This gap necessitated my intervention.

Secondly, I selected the playwrights under study because they were among the major playwrights who (except Kithaka wa Mberia and Francis Imbuga) located their works outside mainstream academic institutions, hence lending their works to a sense of the 'popular' since they were rooted with the people 'on the ground.' For these reasons, playwrights such as Wakanyote Njuguna, Kang'aara wa Njambi, Kivutha Kibwana, and their ideologically aligned academics such as Kithaka wa Mberia and Imbuga, had positioned themselves as practitioners of civic activism and civil society works. This positioning exposed them to state harassment that included silencing or stigmatisation of their works, leading to their near erasure. Therefore, studying them for such a project ensures a kind of immortalisation that also captures an ideological bent in the growth of Kenya's post-colonial literatures.

And while these playwrights had other works to their respective credits, I selected only those that privileged themes of social justice and resonated with the peak of Kenya's history of oppression, thus the 1980s and 1990s. Some of these works had in fact been commissioned to advance the cause of social justice. For example, Francis Imbuga's *Aminata* was commissioned by the United Nations Decade for Women conference held in Nairobi in 1985. The Five Centuries (5Cs) Theatre Group that was affiliated to the Citizens' Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs) performed the play *Paukwa* written by Kang'aara wa Njambi who was commissioned by the organisation in 1994. The Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION) commissioned the writing and production of Kivutha Kibwana's

Kanzala in 1997. Wakanyote Njuguna was commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1998 to write *Before the Storm.* The Legal Resources Foundation commissioned the production of *Shamba la Mfukeri* in 1997. Kithaka wa Mberia's *Natala* was funded for production by Women and Law in East Africa (Kenya) in 1996. Kithaka was commissioned by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to write *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi* in 1997. The Constitution and Reform Educational Consortium (CRECO) – a consortium of non-governmental organisations – working with its member organisations in 2001/2002, carried out a theatre project with a production named *Uraia* funded by a consortium called Like Minded Donors (LiMID) as part of the National Civic Education Programme (NCEP). For all these reasons, it was important to investigate how the texts' "special" purpose in the advancement of social justice informed their content and form – the reference point for analysis being how social justice was appropriated through the theatre.

1.7. Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to the texts that were produced in Kenya specifically sponsored by organisations that were championing social justice, human rights and democratisation. The drama texts that were used for this study are: Francis Imbuga's *Aminata,* Kithaka wa Mberia's *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi* and *Natala,* Kivutha Kibwana's *Kanzala,* Wakanyote Njuguna's *Before the Storm* and Kangaara wa Njambi's *Paukwa.* The community theatre texts to be studied will be LRF's *Shamba la Mfukeri* and CRECO's *Uraia*. In analysing the selected texts, I only focused on the subject of social justice, while only referring to other issues where they served to buttress my arguments on the primary concern.

A key limitation of the study relates to the fact that the modes of popular theatre as studied then have either been overtaken by new forms of solo activist performances, and hence are

not easily relatable. Secondly, the texts studied are somewhat time-bound to the 1990s and 1980s and thus have not attracted sustained readerships in current times. Nonetheless, given the ever presence of concerns with inclusivity and other forms of social justice, the current study overlooked these limitations in the interest of growing more knowledge on the Kenya's experiments with social justice.

1.8. Definition of Terms

This study concerns itself with the relationship between popular theatrical performance and the search for social justice in community.

Social Justice

This is a philosophical or political postulation that all persons should have equal opportunity and access to resources, general well-being and justice. The concerns for social justice include oppression, violence, gender-based discrimination, racism, ageism, labour exploitation, electoral injustice, poverty and systemic marginalisation and demonisation. Social injustice is both perpetrated by individuals on others or by governments and government actors on the people.

Community

Community, as used in this study, defies geographies, cultures and ethnicities to refer to shared interests, persuasions, ideas, imaginaries and experiences. I take the perspective that is advanced by David Chavis and Kien Lee (2015) that community is "both a feeling and set of relationships among people" that comes from shared experiences and a sense of shared history – not necessarily the actuality of it. A community is therefore not defined by space or blood relations or actual experiences but by the commonality of imaginaries and ideologies.

Popular Theatre

Theatre that breaks the walls of the repertory theatre and uses community centred mediums for artistic expression and performance. It is a theatre that speaks to the social aspirations of the people and communities of performance. Its creation, whether by a community of artists or a professional writer, and whether performed in communities or in the proscenia, is meant for a social awakening through the interrogation of the social milieu.

Freirean Pedagogy

The kind of teaching and learning that is a space for dialogical and participatory education. It was advanced by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* It is antithetical to the traditional method of teaching which Freire refers to as "banking methodology" because it assumes the learner is an empty vessel that should be filled with knowledge. This traditional pedagogy, Freire believes, is favoured by the oppressor because it is easy to use it to dominate others who are seen as marginal objects that need to be integrated. Freire advocated for the fact that a learner has experiences and knowledge that he/she brings to the learning experience and that the pedagogy becomes a tool of liberation.

Dialogical Education

This is a kind of education advanced by Paulo Freire that employs participation and dialogue between the teacher and learner. It advocates for dialogue between the learners and the teacher as opposed to the teacher making a presentation which the learners have to memorise. The common everyday perspectives of students are discussed and their ideas broadened and deepened. The teacher, through this dialogue, helps clarify matters on the students' ideas and guides them to overcome misunderstandings or uninformed postulations. Both the teacher and students explore the world of ideas together.

Dialectical Pedagogy

Dialectical pedagogy is the Plato teaching method and philosophical practice of interrogating postulations through reason and logic in order to discover the highest value – truth. As presented in Plato's *Dialogues* it is a method of enquiry in pursuit of what is intuitively obvious but practically elusive truth. In this method, there is a repetition of themes and the repetition manifests in greater depth or different lens. As a functional learning method, it rests on radical self-enquiry and self-examination.

1.9. Literature Review

The exploration of popular theatre and social justice is important as it orientates the thesis with respect to ongoing discussions on the subject. In this section, I will review the discourse and philosophical foundations of popular theatre. I will explore the popular theatre practice in Kenya in order to create an understanding of what form it has taken. On social justice, I will interrogate the popular conceptions of social justice and specifically identify what strand of argument I will pursue in this thesis.

First it is important to point out that theatre in Kenya is not a product of the colonial experience. The communities in Kenya had theatrical performances as part of their cultural enterprise: it was a way of life. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981), argues that in precolonial Kenya, theatre was integrated in the daily activities of the people and not an isolated event, it was instructive as well as entertaining (p. 37). He suggests that it was integral to the wellbeing of the society and its survival. He goes on to argue that colonialism severed the organic rhythm of social creativity and destroyed the tradition of theatre. According to him, the colonialists – both the administrators and the religious missionaries – are culpable of destroying theatre as was then practised. He singles out the missionaries who "in their proselytising zeal saw many of these traditions as works of the devil." (p.37). I agree with this argument because

colonialism was disruptive and the destruction and replacement of culture was its primary target.

Today, theatre and performance in Kenya has taken three key forms. Firstly, there is the stage/proscenium theatre whose history in Kenya comes with the advent of colonialism and constituted the performing of texts from the majorly English, German, Russian, French and Italian repertoire. This theatre continued in the post-independence period with theatre companies and groups performing in such venues as the Donovan Maule theatre, the Kenya National theatre, the French Cultural Centre, the Phoenix theatre and Rahimtulla theatre in Nairobi. Other spaces included the Nakuru Players Theatre, the Little Theatre in Mombasa and several other spaces such as cultural centres (local and foreign), schools, churches and social halls across the country (Ngugi, 1981, p.38). The texts performed have included European and American plays, texts authored by Kenyans or playwrights from other African countries and local language treatises – either translations or original pieces. In this category also falls the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival, an annual carnival of theatre produced by educational institutions.

The second form is Community Theatre – also variously called "Theatre for Development" and "Participatory Educational Theatre." (Odhiambo C J. 2004). This is the kind of theatre that is designed for passing educational messages on a plethora of issues including health, human rights, democracy, development and constitutionalism. It is usually presented in community spaces to catalyse discussions and debate on particular issues pertinent to the communities. Some community theatre modes constitute skits whose dilemma is used to pose central divergent questions (CDQs) for debate and often involve community members enacting scenarios and learning together. These theatre experiences either found a home in

academia or in Non-Governmental Organisations or even took place in communities where the performances were curated and presented. There are many proponents of this theatre in Kenya. Let me single out three of these proponents (Opiyo Mumma, Odanyiro Wamukoya and Lenin Ogola) to illustrate this point.

Opiyo Mumma in 1994 wrote a seminal PhD thesis – "In Search of a Kenyan Theatre: The Theory and practise of Educational Drama and its Potential for Kenya" where he studied the drama festivals, theatre in education (TIE) and educational drama in the context of an evolving theatre practice. He went on to set up the Kenya Drama in Education Association (KDEA) which hosted major conferences and research projects on theatre - a climax of which was the International Drama in Education Association (IDEA) conference held in Kisumu in 1998. Such seminal works as *Orientations of Drama, Theatre and Culture: Cultural Identity and Community Development* are a product of the experiments and discourses of KDEA. The work of KDEA connected the academia, research, and community mobilisation and education.

Ondanyiro Wamukoya, was employed in 1996 by an NGO – the Legal Resources Foundation – as a Programme Officer for outreach. He employed theatre to design education programmes for communities on a plethora of governance issues – the constitution, the quest for democracy, human rights and property/inheritance rights. According to him, they would conduct auditions and get professional artists to workshop pre-written plays (such as Ondanyiro's *Jemima's Quest*) or be taken through the themes and then curate theatrical interventions (such as *Shamba la Mfukeri*) to articulate the themes and to initiate and facilitate community dialogues on the same. These pieces would then be presented in communities using the concept of travelling theatre. (*Shamba,* 1997).

The work of Lenin Ogolla and Mathew Ondiege whose practice is captured in Lenin's book *Towards Behaviour Change: Participatory Theatre in Education and Development* principally employed Behaviour Change Communication and was carried out in community spaces. It involved curating with community members to produce theatre for educational interventions in the same communities. The same community centric approach was employed by such artists as Bantu Mwaura (in his work in prison spaces through dramatherapy) and Roger Chamberlain, Mueni Lundi *et al* who curated Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) community performances under CARE International in Kenya on reproductive health (Mueni Lundi, Interview, 2023).

The third form is the Sigana, a theatrical rendition of narratives, Salome Mshai Mwangola (2010) calls it a "new endogenous form evolving from indigenous performance traditions" (p.119). It is a form that uniquely blends traditional storytelling with song, dance and enactment. This is a conscious effort to create a new form that interests a diverse audience. The stories are broken down, infused with references to other stories and spaces and told as authentic creations that the tellers seem to be/have been participating in. The delineation of the performing space is critical in the construct of this form. Amadi Kwaa Adzaya opines that the performance space is occupied by both performers and audience simultaneously – a permeating space of interaction built on continuous pathways (2006: p.41). This is reminiscent of the Boalian "spect-actors" (Boal, A. 1979) where the "spectators" become "actors".

From my findings, the scholarship on these forms in Kenya has not dealt with the question of the search for social justice through this endogenous theatre and therefore this study aimed to

fill this gap. Notably, both community theatre and Sigana pander towards the development of an endogenous theatre practice. Victor Lutsili Ladan looks at how indigenous theatre forms (their nature and creation) "could be tapped and used in creating a radical endogenous model of TfD for Kenya" (2010: p.6) and how practice could inform the Boalian theory of using theatre as a tool for liberation and development. To him, the process "deconstructed the erroneous notion held by the modernists that indigenous theatre can only serve a domesticizing role in the community." (2010: p.225). This notwithstanding, Ladan's study did not interrogate the search for social justice and specifically human rights which was the mainstay of my study.

Every epoch in history produces its own theatre – just like all literature. Writing about theatre, Jerry Pickering (1981) argues that theatre "at times has led to social change ... and at times it has fallen behind the continuing social revolution ... but in every age, theatre has been as relevant as human beings have made it" (p1). Stephen Greenblatt argues that the theatre would not be detached from the realm of social practice because it has a use value, it provides pleasure to the audience and it has a "triumphant cunning" (Lodge, D (ed). 1988: p.507) that makes people forget they are participating in a practical activity by creating an illusion of its distance from ordinary social practice. It was imperative therefore that the theatre produced in this period of repression in Kenya had a unique form which needed to be investigated.

This study sought to answer the question of what kind of society of Kenyans desired, what change they wanted and therefore what kind of theatre this desire for change produced. For example, the Mbari scholars of Nigeria had a strong belief in the liberating essence of drama – complete with the invocation of cultural forms of performance and narrative in the nascent theatre movements of the 1960s in Nigeria – the Contemporary Alarinjo Travelling Theatre

and the Theatre of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists. This theatre was either derived from the myth, folklore, proverbs and riddles of the communities or adapted from the writings of Amos Tutuola or Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa. A critic, Bakare Babatunde, citing the case of emergence of literary dramatists in Nigeria, argued that independence came with the challenges of "conspicuous decadence" wrought by the ruling elite (p.21) and therefore theatre emerged out of a desire to midwife a new Nigeria that departed from the throes of colonialism and its negative impact on society. In this way, theatre was seen as a tool for righting the wrongs of leadership and governance. By critiquing this leadership and providing for desirable models, it became part of the script for nation building and for the development of ethos. Bakare further postulates that these writers used theatre to "enact" socio-political rights and as a "viable means" (p. 26) of exposing the ills of colonial occupation and enabling people to start conversations on decolonisation.

A noticeable contribution of this movement was the desire to create an authentic African theatre that relied heavily on African art forms. This speaks to a search for form, an African form that distinguishes this theatre from the Western Aristotelian modes of theatre which, as Augusto Boal (1974) observes, was based on four pillars: peripeteia or the stimulation of harmatia in the protagonist; anagnorisis or the recognition of the flaw; catastrophe and catharsis. (pp.26-30). This Aristotelian form had been imposed by the colonialists through the education of colonial subjects. The imposition also led to the death or relegation of African art forms as being barbaric and uncivilised. After independence, the decolonisation movements sought to reengineer the African essence and to re-imagine home away from the imperial construct, to, in the language of Homi Bhabha (1992) "revolt against the seemingly monolithic, seemingly rational authority of imperialism" (Fortier, p.196).

The search for the true African form is a continuing subject in literary discourses in the continent and elsewhere. Temple Hauptfleisch (1997) identifies five significant general characteristics of African performance forms:

> It is a ritual and symbolic performance form; it is participatory and public in performance; it has a musical base; there is a strong tradition of oral narrative and the dance forms are distinctive, not only in their physical attributes, but in their function within the total performance. (p.33)

That the Mbari club – where Es'kia Mphahlele was a member – took as a major role the liberation of South Africa from apartheid, is notable and could have influenced theatre productions in the country. But it should also be noted that in South Africa, the struggle against apartheid saw the emergence of unique theatre traditions – as Blumberg and Walder (1999) argue:

> In South Africa, the hybrid and syncretic nature of theatre has been apparent since at least the time of Herbert Dhlomo (1903-56), a believer in drama which addresses the present by means of the past, involving a merging of indigenous and imported approaches to create national regeneration (pp. 2-3).

This demonstrates that the quest for a national regeneration or societal change is central to the realisation of social justice. The question this syncretic hybridity of the theatre seeks to answer is one that reflects on the past (hence the use of traditional forms) to fashion a social ethos for the future. In this theatre therefore, the present reality of apartheid – like was the case for South Africa, or dictatorship and an overbearing state in Kenya – became the springboard of the creative theatrical interventions. Censure and demonization of the theatre in Kenya took the form of harassment by government (as was the case with Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Kamiriithu theatre) or just a plain denial of the space to perform. Kaunga

Ndayi argues that theatre in the post-independence period faced stagnation with the Jomo Kenyatta administration banning performances and shows that did not advance "national unity" as dictated by the state. These were labelled as "subversive" activities of dissidents (p.71).

From the outset, it is clear that the post-colonial state was serious on silencing alternative voices. In my view, these are the voices that articulate the issues of social justice. It is important to state that after the "death" of the 1976 founded University Free Travelling Theatre (FTT), in 1990, Opiyo Mumma, Gichungu Makini and Odera Outa started a "theatre workshop" – perhaps influenced by the South African theatre at the time – and revived the FTT. This new FTT was almost like an autonomous entity outside of the University. The theatre's first trips were hardly funded by the university (only a bus was provided). The FTT also included "outsiders" who were not students at the university – David Ng'aruiya, Tyson Maina, Mueni Lundi, Joni Nderitu, Sam Otieno, Opiyo Okatch and John Limo – or not from the Literature department – Diana Kitavi, Anindo, Leah Mitula etc. The new FTT started with a performance of *The Floods* by John Ruganda which was a school text. Later Mbongeni Ngema's *Asina Mali* and Franz Marx's *Egoli: A Place of Gold* were workshoped and put up. But the strictures at the university became difficult to navigate. Perhaps the best anecdotal evidence of the problematics of theatre as perceived by an ambivalent government infrastructure was the case of *Drumbeats on Mount Kerenyaga* production by the Theatre Workshop Productions (TWP).

According to Salome Mshai Mwangola (2010), the group came up with this improvised performance when they were denied a licence to stage Dario Fo's classic play *Non-Si Paga! Non-Si Paga! (Can't Pay? Won't Pay!),* and the censorship official urged them to stop

performing political dramas and instead concentrate on oral narratives. Mwangola presents us with the question of how the government considered the Western forms of theatre as "dangerous" to law and order and the false belief that oral literature was a passive entertainment genre. The period is replete with instances of "traditional groups" being invited to state functions to entertain the leaders. TWP decided to use the traditional art forms. Opiyo Mumma says that Theatre Workshop Productions sought freedom through the arts and for the harvesting and sharing of ideas between the artisists and the communities that they worked with (1994. p. 171).

The journey in search of social justice had just begun and this intention was deciphered by the authorities. That is why *Drumbeats'* 1991 premiering in the University's Education Theatre 2 was curtailed by censure – the venue was padlocked and the show cancelled (Mwangola, 2010, p.103). Two years later, after the advent of political pluralism, the play was also denied venue at the Kenya National Theatre after dress rehearsal. Years later, it was produced as a Miujiza production "in the other side of town" (Mwangola, 2010. p.104).

Thus, it was inevitable that theatre would seek for new forms and spaces, both for legal anchorage and for performance. This was fated to happen to groups and individuals that sought to use theatre for the advocacy of social justice and human rights. This study aimed to interrogate some of the texts and contexts of search for social justice.

In the post-independence period in Kenya, just like in the Mbari literary movement in Nigeria and the South African "African" theatre development, the use of African theatrical forms – including language – had already taken root. Evan Mwangi (1988) attests to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's play (co-authored with Ngugi wa Mirii) *Ngaahika Ndeenda* – being overtly

influenced by oral literary forms such as music, dance and narratives. Mwangi further argues that in the play, the peasants' and workers' fight against their oppressors is the background for the struggles against an unfair social and economic order in present-day Kenya. (p.103). He points out that theatre is also a central theme in Ngugi's later fiction. He cites the novel *Murogi wa Kagogo* (2004) whose plot follows "the antics of thespians in their efforts to liberate Africa from patriarchal and authoritarian regimes." (p.91). The persuasion that Evan Mwangi identified in Ngugi's plays is one that goes beyond the use of drama as a form of education/awareness creation or entertainment to the deployment of the theatre in the creation of a national consciousness by creating a theatre that used African theatrical forms and that takes the place of the colonially imposed theatre that was not promoting conscieteousness (p.96). As such therefore, there was already an emergence of form – a form that could be called Kenyan theatre. I wanted to trace whether or not the emergent theatre continued this trend or took other forms "compliant" to the forms favoured by new patrons of theatre (whether by design or default) in organisations advocating for social justice.

Opiyo Mumma (1994) who sees the writing and production of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* in 1978 as marking "an important phase in the development of political and didactic theatre in Kenya", (p.166), argues for a unique form of theatre that would characterise it as a distinct Kenyan form in the world. Mumma further discusses the growth of what he calls "political theatre" by such theatre groups as the Free Travelling Theatre and the Performance and Creative Arts Centre and plays by writers such as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Micere Mugo, Al Amin Mazrui and Francis Imbuga who were associated with Marxist ideologies and whose productions had mass appeal and were aimed as conscietising the people (1994: p. 153-176). What Mumma calls "political theatre" needed to be interrogated to determine whether the adoption of a thematic persuasion amounts to the creation of a form. Although the pursuit of the

presentation of social justice is not central to his thesis, it was important that the question be asked: is the theatre that "enacts" freedom and "performs" social justice thus didactic? Does this didacticism conform to any known pedagogical trends? These are questions that I hoped to answer in this study.

Outa (2009) further discusses the theatre scene in the 1980s and 1990s and concentrates on power relations in drama and theatre in Kenya. Together with the luminaries such as Ngugi and Imbuga, he identifies a "corpus of artists whose works can be said to have been 'constructed on the margins', and who are distinct for the fact that they remain largely 'unpublished' and are virtually unknown in mainstream critical practice" (Outa 2009, p.13). He further discusses Kenyan artists such as Oby Obyerodhiambo, Wahome Mutai, Ben Ateku, Okiya Omtata and others in his research in the context of expanding the social discourse of power relations and of 'killing' the singular binarism that had confined the study of drama, theatre and performance. Similarly, Peter Ukpokodu (1988) asserts that with the destruction of Kamiriithu, just like the case was with other conscietisation theatre endeavours such as the Soyinkan Guerrilla and Sumaru theatre in Nigeria, the Refugee theatre of South Africans exiled in Tanzania and the Zambuko/Isibuko theatre in Zimbabwe, "the Kenyan theatre will thrive surreptitiously in drinking halls, market places, and abandoned houses by employing guerrilla tactics in production. It will also survive in political dance dramas, songs, and "acts without words."(p.23). This may have come to pass with the emergent practice of holding theatre in formal spaces of informal settings. The "formalness" of the space is generally dictated by the "construct" of the stage (proscenium) as a clearly delineated area of theatrical performance.

From the foregoing, there is an established connection between the socio-political questions in a community and the theatre it produces. Central to the inquiry of this study was the form theatre in Kenya took especially in the periods when there were rampant claims of social injustice. The plays identified for this study were written and/or produced in the period between 1985 and 2003. As demonstrated earlier, this was a period of great changes in Kenya's governance landscape. I enquired into the character that theatre took in certain periods and what role it was assigned by the practitioners and the communities in which it was presented/created. I was also concerned with how Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) used theatre and what form this theatre took in order to fit the role for which it was fashioned.

Some of the authors and plays under study have received considerable literary appreciation. Firstly, Kithaka wa Mberia is an accomplished playwright and poet who has published many titles. His works have been performed extensively and studied variously. For example, Grace Njeri Waweru has written a paper "Usimulizi Katika Tamthilia Za Kithaka Wa Mberia" in which she studies three of his plays - *Kifo Kisimani, Natala* and *Maua Kwenye Jua La Asubuhi.* Her study is based on an analysis of the narrative features in the texts. The elements of narrative style analysed are proverbs, songs/dances, voice and epic. She observes that proverbs and songs are used in the three plays to enhance both her message and the performability. She further argues that, on the contrary, the realism and flavour of music and drums does not clearly emerge till towards the end of the play (p.57). She also observes that there is employment of proverbs and songs in the three plays. However, the use of tone does not come out clearly in the play *Natala* and the use of stories does not emerge in *Natala* and *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi*) (p.61). These are major issues in any drama. In this study, I sought to interrogate how Kithaka wa Mberia uses these African artistic forms such as song,

dance, proverbs and other short forms and the role they played in enhancing the discourse of social justice – something that, in my view, has not been discussed.

Secondly, Francis Imbuga who authored *Aminata* among many other plays, has been studied widely by such scholars as John Ruganda and Outa Odera and a host of others. His appropriation of language and use of marginal characters to deconstruct serious issues of leadership, governance and culture is his main achievement. That some of his plays such as *Betrayal in the City* were allowed as secondary school setbooks at a time when Kenya was under the dictatorship of President Moi is a testimony of his prowess as a playwright. Joshua Kyalo argues that both Imbunga and Ruganda as playwrights are "totally dissatisfied" with the leadership of their communities in the present time (p. 23) and the characters that they create seek "spiritual regeneration" from this past so as to create futures that are better for the society. This notwithstanding, and whereas Imbuga's *Aminata* has been studied as a school text in Kenya and has received its fair share of critique on the portrayal of patriarchy and women empowerment (Kebaya and Olembo, (2013)), I have found no analysis that relates to an examination of social justice.

Thirdly, the *Uraia* production was developed as part of the National Civic Education Programme that was preparing the country for constitutional review. According to Ondanyiro Wamukoya (2023) who was the Executive Officer of CRECO at the time, organisations involved in advocacy such as The Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION), the Release Political Prisoners (RPP) and the Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs) – and who were part of the consortium – elected to have theatre as a key part of their work. *Uraia* was a production by community and professional artists who were identified by the Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO) and trained on the thematic

imperatives of social justice in a month-long workshop held in Wida hotel in the outskirts of Nairobi in 2001. The organisations then divided the country into regions and sent teams out to perform in community spaces therein. C. J. Odhiambo, on attending some of these performances in Nandi, argues that the performances in the communities were stock pieces that had been predeveloped and hence did not involve the audience/community in co-creation – a thing he believed would have been more beneficial and with greater impact considering the appropriation of Boalian methodologies and even the experimental Kamiriithu theatre of Ngugi (p. 108 - 109). What Odhiambo might have missed is that the methodology used by the CRECO teams, according to Salima Njoki (2023) was novel in that the productions were not scripted, that they were open ended and generic and could be understood and identified with by all communities in Kenya.

Lastly, in my research, I only found anecdotal references to Kivutha Kibwana's *Kanzala,* Wakanyote Njuguna's *Before the Storm,* Kanga'ara wa Njambi's *Paukwa* and LRF's *Shamba la Mfukeri.* While it is easy to justify the latter two, Kibwana and Wakanyote are established thespians and writers who would have had their works studied. In the subsequent chapters, I will address myself to the issue of literary merit of the two texts and explore this dilemma.

I will now briefly comment on the issue of social justice in terms of construction and how it is explored in this study. The study of theatre and social justice must take into cognisance the arguments that pertain to the conception of social justice. As such, academic discourse on social justice has been predicated on the relational conflicts between a person and another, human beings and nature, human beings and society, human beings and law or state and human beings and phenomena. A few examples would suffice. In the African context, the concepts of social justice are encapsulated in the philosophy of Utu/Ubuntu. Utu – a

Kiswahili concept and Ubuntu – a Zulu concept – mean relatively the same thing. John S. Mbiti argues that the philosophical foundation of Africanity is the "corporate man" who cannot exist alone:

> Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. … whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (p. 108-9)

This is the foundational basis of Utu/Ubuntu. Desmond Tutu (2011) clarifies this further when he says that "Those who had Ubuntu were compassionate and gentle, they used their strength on behalf of the weak, and they did not take advantage of others—in short, they cared, treating others as what they were: human beings" (p.4). James Ogude when discussing this argues that the Nguni phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu gambantu" *(a person is a person only in relation to other persons),* is the philosophical encapsulation of the complex ideology that touches on all aspects of life – the interdependency with respect to morality, self actualisation and existence in general (p.4). The construction of social justice therefore becomes the foundation of social interactions – each person relying on the other and therefore working for the good of the other. Echoing this, Micere Mugo, a foremost proponent of utu/Ubuntu philosophy, posits that

> … utu is the capacity to exhibit behaviour that is human. Utu is based on the philosophy that the soul is paramount and that losing it is worse than losing all one's material wealth. It is based on the philosophy that to be whole and to define ones personhood and one's humanity, the human physical form is inadequate. In other words, one's soul and inner being are the cores that define personhood - not physical

> or material manifestations alone. To purposefully reiterate: having wealth - however gratifying this might be – while being spiritually poor is reduction of one's "personhood" (p. 4)

From her elucidation, it is clear that the social construct of the African and his/her humanity is the collective wellbeing of all people and that the exploitation of one by the other, or even the accumulation, display and use of wealth has no redemptive bearing. Social justice, if we take Micere's postulation, is therefore realised through the application of utu in relations with others. I investigated how the characters in the plays under study exhibited utu/Ubuntu in their dealing with and relating to others and how this contributed to the realisation of social justice.

Plato and Aristotle, the Grecian interlocutors, are famed for exploring the subject of social justice. Plato in *The Republic* construed justice as a "virtue establishing rational order" with the non-interference of social organs in the functioning of others. Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* considers justice as "what is lawful and fair" with the accompanying binary of "distributive" and "corrective" justice – the former relating to equal distribution and the latter to restoration of what had been lost. Though these two have been critiqued for not identifying all human beings as equal rational agents, they nonetheless set a basis for the conceptual framing of the discourse on justice. Thomas Hobbes, the English thinker, in the *Leviathan* considered justice to be a negation of the animalistic naturalism of humankind and a subjection to the "social contract" which would establish law and order. He argues that the laws of nature are consistent to the fountains of original justice, but a covenant prefigures a law whose breakage is the root of injustice. David Hume, the 18th Century Scottish thinker, makes justice a social construct that is relative to human needs and interests and considers public utility to be the sole basis of justice. Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, in his

book *Metaphysics of Morals*, sees justice as "right". He developed what is called the "Universal Principle of Right" and his basic argument is that social responsibilities pertaining to justice and rights are correlative. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, both Germany historians, argued that only the abolition of capitalism and overthrow of the bourgeoisie can bring about justice. In *The Communist Manifesto* they argue that justice can only be realised through a distributive process of sharing labour and its proceeds equally among members of the community of workers. The English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, advances the idea that justice is a function of utility – that whatever has higher utility value is justified. He sees "liberty" as having two functional sides: "self-preservation" and "harm" both of which are necessary to conserve justice. Conversely, he advocates for equality of the sexes, the unlimited right to thought, lifestyle and association. From these philosophical postulations, social justice is itself a theatre of contestations.

That notwithstanding, John Rawls and Amartya Sen are the two prominent thinkers and philosophers of social justice whose postulations guided this study. On the one hand, Rawls in *A Theory of Justice,* advances the theory of "justice as fairness" in the Kantian sense. He argues that each person has an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberties for other people and that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so as to be advantageous to all and also attached to positions and opportunities accessible by all. He references this frame to the access and enjoyment of socio-political liberties and economic opportunities. He is a proponent of civil disobedience where unjust laws are in place and being deployed by states or governments in ways that negate the civil liberties of citizens. The question I have engaged with in this study is how the theatre for social justice enacts "fairness."

On the other hand, Amartya Sen in *The Idea of Justice* sees justice as the presence of "economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives." (p.5). He argues that freedom is inversely related to development; that development "requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states" (pp.3-4). Sen proposes two kinds of reason: the "evaluative reason" (where rights are enhanced) and the "effective reason" (where rights are seen through the free agency of people). He argues that what people can "positively achieve is influenced by freedom. He identifies freedoms such as political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security that are linked together by "empirical connections" (p.10). This was important for this study as it helped me map what "development" was realised through the enactment of social justice.

The appropriation of social justice was restricted to the progressive meaning of "freedom". In this study, I interrogated the nature and function of theatre used in the advocacy for social justice in Kenya and these philosophical postulations from Plato to Sen were interrogated in relation to the presentation of characters and themes in the drama. This is because the interface between social justice and literature is in the creation of characters whose life is dedicated to the search for freedom. The investigation of whether and how theatre became a medium for the advancement of social justice and how this impacted on the form of the theatre was considered important.

I also proposed to interrogate the question of aesthetics imbued in the works under study. This was done because the question of form as "clothing" to content is an important question

of analysis of texts appropriating social justice. S.A. McClennen and J.R. Slaughter (2009) argue:

> In human rights culture, aesthetics are intricately tied to ethics, and the apparent urgency of the human rights text should not avert our critical eye from the vehicles in which themes travel, the forms through which texts speak. Form, we maintain, is where much of the social work potential of cultural production lies. Form may, in fact, be the only way to adequately recognize theme. Paying attention to form enables think about the human rights implications of cultural works do not seem thematically, or immediately, related to human rights (p.12)

It is instructive therefore that in an investigation of the theatre that is employed in the search for social justice, due consideration is given to the themes it advances, the construction of its theatrical nuances and what form(s) it takes. On the whole, and in the case of literary scholarship in Kenya, I have found no text that examines the relationship between theatre and the pursuit of social justice. Suffice it to say that this study, as it analysed the search for social justice in the selected texts, engendered itself to the type of theatre that was developed, the kind of spaces of performances it took place in, the form that it adopted and the inflections it suffered (if at all) as a result of seeking to appropriate social justice.

1.10. Theoretical Framework

Mark Fortier (1997) argues that theatre and theory have different relationships: firstly, theatre as analogous to theoretical reflections, secondly, theory used to explain and elucidate theatre in general or particular works of theatre and thirdly, theatre answering back to theory by questioning presuppositions and exposing limitations (p.10). This study uses frameworks of theory in theatre and human rights to analyse the corpus of material under study and to explore the relationships that the theatre has with each theoretical precept. Due to the complex social nature of the subject, several theories were used: the performance theory, the

sociological theory, the post-colonial theory, the carnivalesque theory and the theory of aesthetics in human rights.

The emphasis in theatre is performance. The Performance Theory was therefore to be used to interrogate the nature of performance. Richard Schechner (1988) argues that performance is an "illusion of an illusion" and therefore may be more "truthful" and "real" than ordinary experience. (p xix). Schechner argues that since the Cambridge discourse of theatre as ritual (or remnants of) as derived from the Aristotelian construct of the Dionysian festival, the performance concepts of time, non-productivity, rules and spaces have gained greater prominence in the analysis of theatre. The relationship between the performers, the performance space, the spectators and what happens to these three before and after the performance are critical to understanding the performance experience. The complex relation between these various elements is what constitutes theatre. The theory helped me in an analysis of this relationship and the attendant results.

Secondly, the study, since it has great concern for the development and use value of theatre in society, employs the sociological approach to literature. One of the key postulations of the sociological theory is that literature is both a social product as well as a social force. The sociological approach is directed at understanding (or placing) literature in its larger social context and how it works in society. In Sociological theory art is seen as a reflection of the society and that it refers to existing realities at the time of its creation. The performance of human rights in the community theatre space was, in the study, considered as a social act, a process of affirmation of being and a recreation of society. The interrogation of how this happens was a key component of the study. A sociology theorist, Hermerén Goran (1975) argues that works of art are not produced in a vacuum – that every work of art is surrounded

by what he calls a works "artistic field" (3). In my view, objects in this Hermerénian artistic field blend to create the work of art.

The sociological approach provided a guide to my analysis of the role that theatre has played in the society. Kenneth Burke (1945) argues that a "rounded statement" consists of naming the act, its background, the agent, the agency and purpose. Theatre is the product of an interaction of these aspects: they contribute to the totality of the experience. Burke further argues that these five variables bring order to human relationships by identifying the basic motives of being: "guilt, redemption, hierarchy and victimage" (p. x). More recent theoretical postulations of this theory speak to the social construct of private and public behaviour. Peter Eke (1975) talks of the "two publics" that exist in Africa – one which he calls the "primordial public" which is moral and is connected to social morality of the people, and the other that he calls "civic public" which is amoral and is linked to the (post) colonial enterprise and governance. (p.92)

Eke's ideas point to what we can call "the incongruent individual" one who does not necessarily have a dual personality but whose singular personality is manifested through or by contraindications. In the plays under study, we review the private and public actions and behaviours of characters that portray this incongruence. Another proponent of this theory, Michel Foucault (1980), brings a different argument on how power and authority is exercised when he postulates that "power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogeneous domination over others or that of one group or class over others" and that individuals "are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (p. 98).

This implies that power is systematic and applies to the whole of the society as opposed to individuals (whether the oppressor and the oppressed or the power wielder and the powerless. This helped the study in reliving the exercise of power and authority and how the individual person becomes a part of the social "chain" as opposed to an isolated actor. The study endeavours to find out whether in the practice of theatre in Kenya there is a reflection and/or a commentary on the emergent societal ethos – the social context, the characterisation of public and private life and the exercise of power. I investigate how this theatre practice reflects the society and how the social "motives" affect it.

Thirdly, the post-colonial theory was employed in the study. This framework of analysis is based on the unique experiences the colonised people went through and the responses that they developed or created as a result. Post-colonialism, according to Fortier,

> [ ] implies both a situation coming after colonialism and a situation in the heritage or aftermath of colonialism: both an ongoing liberation and ongoing oppression… (It) aims to give voice to an oppressed group by understanding and critiquing the structures of oppression and articulating and encouraging liberation and revolution (pp.192-3)

The key tenets of post-colonial theory include the existence of hybridity in the characters from colonised cultures (Homi Bhabha (1986)), and the use of language to create ideological dominance over the colonised (Bill Ashcroft (1989)). Another proponent, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987, 1999) conceives post coloniality has the effect of "othering" the colonised who end up appropriating realities of the coloniser. At the political level, as Peter Ekeh (1975) argues, the African bourgeoisie emerging out of colonialism developed what he calls "post-colonial ideologies of legitimation" (p.100) that defined their anti-colonialism as being "against alien colonial personnel but glaringly pro-foreign ideals and principles" (p.

101). The uptake of colonial dogma therefore became an anti-colonial tool of the new elite who used it to legitimise their suitability as a replacement of the colonisers. This appropriation of language, culture, forms of resistance and the hybridity were interrogated. I used the theory to understand how the leadership in Kenya, appropriated postcolonial postulates to deny people rights or to make the celebration of the same difficult and how artists navigated the artistic terrain to enhance social justice. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) argues about the liberating power of language both as a system of signs and as a grammar by which a people's agency may be conceived and then expressed. (p.24) I have employed this conceptual frame in interpreting the plays written in Kiswahili in terms of how they inflect notions of social justice.

In trying to understand the form this theatre took, I employed Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin believed that a people oppressed could only find voice in the carnival. With the growth of capitalism, the carnivals dwindled in Europe and literature was the safest vehicle to realise this freedom. Renate Lachmann (1988-1989) argues that Bakhtin's reading of François Rabelais' book *Gargantua and Pantagruel* was influenced by his "experience of the postrevolutionary avant-garde in Russia", that was characterised by "the swirling up of meaning that it brought forth, the experience of the plurality worlds, of the intercrossing of cultures and languages, of texts, genres" (p.117). Bakhtin posits that the book's comic violence, bad language, exaggeration, satire, and shape-shifting are the best examples of carnivalesque literature. Bakhtin offers four categories of the "carnivalistic sense of the world" which he considers as abstract notions of freedom: free and familiar interaction between people; eccentricity; carnivalistic misalliances (the connecting of naturally unconnected things) and sacrilege. According to Bakhtin, the climax of the carnivalesque

theatre is the deposing of the "false king" – a clown who is earlier in the drama crowned as a king – a dualistic and ambivalent ritual. It is this dualism (also exhibited in death and birth, good and evil etc.) that characterises life and thus the theatre. He also held the view that carnival was not confined in space, only in time. The street to him became the symbol of the carnivalesque idea because it could be accessed by all people.

My focus in this study was on popular theatre texts analysed with respect to their appropriation of social justice and how this appropriation had inflected their form. It was inevitable that I consider the theoretical frameworks that relate to the aesthetics of social justice. James Dawes (2009) aptly captures the dilemma that such a study would encounter. He presents the five paradoxes of the interdiscipline of literature and human rights – "the paradox of beauty, the paradox of truth, the paradox of description, the paradox of suffering and the paradox of witnessing." (pp.395-6). He, respectively, argues that the aesthetic experience both promotes human dignity but also brings to the fore ideologies that attack it; that the idea of truth upon which human rights work is grounded is uncertain; that descriptive language liberates as well as constrains us in its boundaries; that narratives of inhumane suffering support the need for human rights but do harm to those that have suffered it and that witness accounts actually emasculate the victims. From his arguments, it is clear that a study of the interrelatedness of literature and social justice themes calls upon the researcher to beware of the narrow and slippery path before drawing conclusions.

Although he is majorly concerned with the narratives of atrocity and/or autobiography, he nonetheless gets to the core of the problematics of form and content which is at the centre of literary studies. An outcome familiar to this kind of thinking can be seen in the postulation by

Paul Heritage (2004) where, when writing about a project carried out in Brazilian prisons in Sao Paulo, he argues that:

> The same promise that we find in performance is the deferred victory implicit in declarations of human rights. Like theatre, these declarations are always brought into the present by their enunciation, and are based on the experiences of the past. But they point to a future that can be different, can be changed (p.100)

This study, while being guided by the postulations of Dawes and the five paradoxes, interrogated the questions of aesthetics, language and "testimony" (as narrated/performed "truth") and how these are advanced or affect the literariness of the theatre for social justice in Kenya.

In summary, the use of the various frameworks helped me situate the study in the various theoretical postulations. The performance theory grounds the study in theatrical discourse and in identifying the impact of the performance on the campaign for/advocacy for social justice. The sociological theory helped me in the analysis of all the objects (political happenings, artistic movements, social structures, the manifestation of power etc.) and how they blended in the creation of the texts under study. The postcolonial theory was used to analyse how the texts present the power relations between the colonized and colonizers in the social, political and cultural milieu and how this is manifest in the post-colonial reality of governance. The carnivalesque theory helped in analysing the form that community theatre took – the language, the dramatic structure and performance modes.

1.11. Research Methodology and Ethical Issues

Methodology

The study employed qualitative methodologies such as textual analysis, unstructured interviews and descriptive analysis. Kothari defines qualitative research as that which investigates "phenomena relating to or involving quality or kind" (p.3) and I was investigating the kind and quality of theatre that emerges out of human rights advocacy. Textual analysis as a methodology was given prominence. It involved a critical reading of the text and analysis of thematic and aesthetic nuances and inflections so as to determine the intersections of popular theatre and social justice. A literary analysis of the corpus of materials that were produced during and for performances was also done. Through this method, we were able to achieve one of the key purposes of research: to describe the phenomena called popular theatre and how its form interacts with the content of social justice discourse.

The other research methods employed provided contextual material and collaborative evidence. Library research was used to establish the obtaining socio-political environment in the period and the literatures that emerged. The research also sought to understand the programmatic focus of the organisations at the time of commissioning the plays/performances and the impact that these artistic renditions had. The study also employed the *ex post facto* method (also known as descriptive method) to find out the status (historical) of community theatre and social justice. This gave us an opportunity to describe the two phenomena. A key limitation of this method, which I was aware of, is that the findings I got would only be indicative of norms, not standards. I used this method to investigate what was being done, not what could be done or should be done.

Unstructured interviews of the playwrights and practitioners who were commissioned to write or to create and curate the theatrical pieces and their performances were carried out.

Through this method, we were able to get an understanding of the performances and how they advocated for social justice. These were important interviews because they guided and focused the study.

Narrative inquiry, the investigation of personal and human dimensions of experience over time, was also employed as a methodology. I enquired into how the artists and writers conceived, curated and performed plays that advocated for the search of social justice. This was important for determining whether or not the theatre produced was inflected in any way due to its didactic nature. Secondly, it helped me understand how the drama affected them as individuals and their perception of the change that was wrought by their work on their lives and the lives of others.

Ethical Issues

Generally, ethical issues in research refer to the considerations of good judgment that inform decisions on the process of data collection and use, identification of respondents, and interpretation of the analysed data. These considerations relate more to imperatives rather than obligations in dealing with third parties of a research process, especially vulnerable ones such as children, the elderly, the illiterate, and persons living with disabilities. Such issues include informed consent of respondents, protection of respondents against risk of harm through adherence to protocols of anonymity and confidentiality, as well as avoidance of conflict of interest on the part of the researcher (Feming, J. and Zegwaard K. E, 2018, pp. 209-211).

In this study, I adhered to these ethical considerations. I recognised the agency of the respondents by seeking their permission to conduct the interviews and to use their names in the subsequent write-up. I informed the respondents that the purpose of the research was for

an academic project only, for which I did not intend to profit from their responses. I also assured them of their right to decline my request for interviews or any information, and also informed them that they could revoke their permission at any time in the course of the interviews. The respondents generally granted permission unequivocally.

Because most of the popular theatre productions were done in the 1990s, most of the respondents had vague memories of what exactly happened and how it happened. Subsequently, I noted some memory lapses in the responses, which I helped clarify by use of probing questions and other prompts. I also addressed the implications of my own involvement in popular theatre activities in Kenya over the years, which had necessarily meant that I worked with some individuals who later became my respondents. To guard against personal and infectious biases in data collection and interpretation, I took verbatim notes for attribution and had them reviewed for accuracy. This involved, for instance, conducting interviews with the respondents at three different stages where the second and third sessions sought to quality assure the responses obtained in the first phase of the interviews. Finally, having been a practitioner of theatre for social justice for many years, I guarded against personal biases and presumptions during interviews and analysis by running my provisional findings through my supervisors for interrogation.

1.12 Chapter Descriptions

Chapter 1: Introduction

The chapter introduces the study on theatre for social justice in Kenya. It outlines the objectives, hypotheses, rationale for the study and carries out a review of existing literature on the subject. It also outlines the theoretical framework, the methodology and the scope and limitations of the work.

Chapter 2: Discourses on the Development of Theatre for Social Justice in Kenya

This chapter examines the development of popular theatre and the discourses this theatre advances. The texts are analysed with regard to how theatre enacts a quest for social justice. It outlines and critically interrogates the themes that each of the text explores and how it treats them.

Chapter 3: The Style of the Theatre for Social Justice in Kenya

The chapter is an exploration of the question of form and aesthetics against a theatre loaded with purposed messaging (didacticism). It analyses how and what styles the artists and Playwrights Employ.

Chapter 4: The Relevance of Theatre for Social Justice in Kenya Today

This chapter focuses on the challenges of a theatre in search of social justice in an increasingly open society. I review global experiences with the use of popular theatre for particular purposes and the impact it had. It seeks to fashion relevance for this kind of theatre in Kenya today.

Chapter 5: Findings and Recommendation for Further Investigation.

The fifth chapter sums up the arguments advanced in the previous chapters, the findings and conclusions that the study has yielded. It also makes suggestions for further research on the subject of popular theatre.

CHAPTER 2: DISCOURSES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEATRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN KENYA

2.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the main themes in the primary texts while linking them to social justice. In doing so, I extend the background information on the texts as contained in the literature review section that highlighted the gaps in scholarship in and on the texts. I illustrate the role of theatre in creating "thinking communities" and firm the role of the theatre in making people take up the social justice agenda in their communities (public participation). I also ask whether theatre appropriated the social change narrative and what conditions it worked on for the purposes of understanding what theatre did, can and cannot do. This will serve to fill the scholarship gap on what actually happened and add to the body of knowledge on social justice and theatre. I examine *Aminata, Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi (Maua), Natala, Kanzala, Paukwa, Shamba la Mfukeri (Shamba), Uraia* and *Before the Storm (Storm)* in regard to how the theatre enacts a quest for social justice. In a sentence, this chapter is an analysis of themes in the plays under study and the potential they held for impacting the society.

The study of theatre of/in social justice inevitably takes us to the relationship between human rights and literature. E.S Goldberg and A.S. Moore argue for the development of an interdiscipline – the concerns for social justice determining how we interpret literary texts and conversely how literary texts deliberately advance social justice. They argue that scholars are striving to understand the "ethical, literary, and political implications" of the foundations of both literature and human rights by

> reading literary texts for the ways in which they represent and render intelligible the philosophies, laws, and practices of human rights from multiple, shifting cultural

> perspectives and considering how stories, testimonies, cultural texts, and literary theories contribute to the evolution of such philosophies, laws, and practices. (p.2)

This study conducts an analysis of texts of popular theatre in Kenya and an interrogation of how these texts embody social justice themes. Specifically, the study concentrates on the methodologies that the texts employ to "render intelligible" the human rights discourses in an increasingly globalized world. It investigates how the texts curate an evolution of social justice frameworks – or how they "Kenyanize" the contexts of social justice. "Social justice" is a wide concept because of the broad base of the constituent words. Social relates to society, and justice is a frame for relations between persons, configurations and phenomena. As said in the first chapter, this study is guided by the propositions of John Rawls and Amartya Sen on the concept of social justice. Sen's argument is one of social justice as development, and includes political freedoms, freedom of opportunity, freedom of access and economic protection from abject poverty. Sen sees the role of the family, the community and the government as integral in ensuring that the individual enjoys social justice. Rawls' argument is that justice is fairness.

The two postulations have their share of critics. They include Michael Boylan (2004), who in *A Just Society* argues for a "rights based" deontological approach arched upon the necessary conditions for human action (but largely agrees with the concepts of distributive and retributive justice); Kai Nielsen (1979) who advances the idea that equality is more important than individual liberty; Robert Nozick (1974) who in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* advocates for an entitlement conception of justice and rejects redistribution; Martha Nussbaum (1999), who in *Sex and Social Justice* advances a feminist interpretation of justice through the "capabilities approach" that advances women's equality and women's human rights; Thomas Pogge (1994) who advocates for a globalist interpretation of justice and Michael

Sandel (1982)who in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* argues that the well-being of the community takes precedence over individual liberty.

All these speak to the construction of social justice in nuanced ways and none deviates from the reference or notions of freedom, equality of access and the dual agency of the state and the individual in the attainment or appropriation of social justice. I am persuaded by Oby Okolocha (2014) in "In Quest of Social Justice: Politics & Women Participation in Irene Isoken Salami's *More than Dancing*" who concludes that

> Social justice means that all conditions of social interaction in society should be subjected to the principles of justice, which is a fair and proper balance between all members of a social group … justice is therefore social, when it is not individualistic, when its objects and form involve the application of equity in dealing with others, and it entails working together to accomplish justice in a civil society. Social justice therefore, demands that the principles of justice must be applied to all interactions, in all areas of social life (p.60).

This means that the conception of life of all persons is premised on justice. To the analysis of literature, and theatre to be specific, it means that all thematic aspects need to be viewed from the perspectives of human rights and what is just. The construction of what is just is thus guided by what advances the general good of characters and, by extension, humanity. These postulations and the critiques are applied in the discussion of the thematic imperatives in the identified plays.

Pre-eminently, the playwrights under study were prominent theatre artists in the 1980's and 1990's in Kenya and can be said to be "political theatre" activists (Ukpokodu: 28). Political theatre has a long history and is descriptive as a term. Kirkby argues that

> [t]heatre is political if it is concerned with the state or takes sides in politics. This allows us to define "political theatre" in a way that distinguishes it from other forms of theatre: it is a performance that is intentionally concerned with government that is intentionally engaged in or consciously takes sides in politics (p.129)

He further argues that it is intellectual, since it deals with "political ideas and concepts, usually in an attempt to support or to attack a particular political position," and literary, because its "production elements are subservient to, support, and reinforce the symbolic meanings" (p.130). To Kirby (1975) the politicality of theatre is interpretational and depends on the person reading it or producing it. Oedipus and Hamlet are political in this nature, and they are explicit in pointing out "the institutions and aspects of government that should change; it often describes and supports the exact nature of these changes" (p.131). According to Kirby, theatre scholars are concerned with how "the content … relates to particular theatrical devices and techniques. He is concerned with the functional relationships between style and expression, between performance and audience" (p.132). He posits that the Teatro Experimental de Cali – a theatre in Colombia that popularised the Colombian guerrilla war, or the play La Muette, that fermented the Belgian revolution in 1845 (Kirby 1985: p.133), are examples of practical political theatre. He says that all theatre, that attempts to send a message to the masses, has a binary orientation – that the enlightened "teacher" who has an idea of what needs exist in the society writes plays to create this awareness in the community and to teach the people what to believe and think (p.134). This, he contends, has been the trend since time immemorial.

In analysing the plays in this and the next chapter, I am aware of the ambivalence of "political theatre" both as a literary terminology and a stylistic predisposition. That the

theatre was produced as an educational and awareness creation mechanism will be considered.

2.2 Contending Spaces and the Discourse of Social Justice

In this section, I explore the theatre practice in Kenya and the impact a narrowed democratic space had on theatre. The historical reality in Kenya is replete with numerous incidences of democratic reversals – such as amendments to the constitution to centralise power in the 1960s, the enactment of Section 2A in 1982 to create a *de jure* one party state and the retention of the Chief's Authority Act from the colonial period. Although this is not my focus, it is important to reflect on how social justice was hindered in the country and how this affected theatre and performance.

Theatre being an expressive art could have been affected by the political and social upheavals of the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's in Kenya. The unique nature of theatre experience – the creation, the text and the process of production – endears itself to a curation of a community ethos: Fortier argues that it is impossible to separate theatre from the "broad social and political world" so as to focus on either the text, the theatrical event or its human subjects because it requires a designated space, physical facilities, theatre workers and an audience. As such, it is complex and has an intimate relationship with the external world. Theorising for the theatre therefore must take cognisance of any changes in outside environment that may (and usually does) affect its production (p. 152).

Though we do not set out to develop a theory, we are interested in unravelling the "complex intimacy" of the theatre with the "outside world" of its happening. Kenya's socio-political environment wore on the development and growth of its theatre – in both form and content.

The environment in which this theatre survived and happened therefore definitely shaped its character.

Opiyo Mumma (1994) argues that theatre in Kenya can be divided into "three main broad categories, namely traditional, popular and literary theatre." (p.129). Whereas I agree with his delineation of popular theatre, I find the other categorisation problematic for two reasons. The first is that he insinuates that traditional theatre disappeared with the 1920s legislation on cultural activities by the colonial government. This may not be true – the celebration of traditional rites of passage such as circumcision in some communities of Kenya up to now is a testimony of the reverse. Secondly, the categorisation of "literary theatre" as plays by Kenyan playwrights is in my view a nomenclatural misnomer. Although in this case he refers to plays written in the colonial tradition, the exclusion of the traditional and popular from "literariness" negates his thesis on the search for a unique form of theatre in Kenya.

I espouse, in lieu of the above, that theatre in Kenya took three main forms and can be categorised with respect to performance genre. The first is the formal theatre – a carry-over from the colonial period performed in imitation of performances in western cities and initially grounded in the Kenya National Theatre, Donovan Maule Theatre, the Phoenix players, French Cultural Centre and other cultural centres of such countries as Germany, Italy and Japan. The second form is the moralising theatre such as was/is performed in the religious or educationally controlled spaces. The Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival (KSCDF) – now the Kenya National Drama and Film Festival (KNDFF) – is the most enduring and consistent space of this category. The third category is popular theatre – the theatre that defies space and geographies of performance and authorship to speak to the social conditions of the people, the theatre whose mainstay is the performance of social justice. This third category is

pervasive and could have elements of representation in the other two. It is the theatre that consists of street theatre, some repertory theatre, and educational theatre that was produced and performed in Kenya to engender social themes that pertain to justice. In other words, my delimitation of popular is that which speaks to the aspirations of the people without having a moralizing or necessarily technical agenda. The character of this theatre is the mainstay of my thesis.

These categorisations for me present the contestation of "space" in performance. The best example of the contestation within a space is represented by two parallel aspects: the Kenya National Theatre (KNT) and the Kenya National Drama and Film Festival (KNDFF). The KNT was established 1952 after the Kenya Cultural Centre (KCC) Ordinance was enacted in 1950. The declaration of the Emergency in that year by the colonial government reduced KNT to a "war station" where soldiers came to unwind during the war. Salome M Mwangola (2010) observes that

> Even after the Emergency was over, and Independence transferred the ownership of the theatre to the independent Kenyan government, little changed at the KNT, which remained under British Council direction. In 1968 … the first African director of the KNT, Seth Adagala was appointed, with a mandate to make the KNT the true centre of theatrical activities all-round the nation. […] However, this did not translate to a decolonisation of the theatre; British citizens and the European theatre companies remained in control of the KCC, and the KNT continued to promote an elitist agenda. … Western theatre continued in general to be promoted in form and content over the development or support of any other. (pp.48 - 49)

The upshot of this observation is that theatre – the physical and psychological space – was controlled by the former colonial master. It would be important to note that Adagala was soon

replaced by James Falkland who reintroduced the British outlook to theatre by refusing the production of Ngugi and Micere's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* (Mumma, pp.151-2).

Similarly, the KSDF was started in 1959 and it was initially treated like a "junior" version of the colonial theatre tradition (with performances of European texts allowed only) but soon metamorphosing to a colossal expression of teachers' and learners' conceptualisation of the challenges around them. Opiyo Muma (1994) notes that the Kenya Schools and Drama Festival was begun in 1959 as a "private and autonomous organisation" in which participation was for only "all-white schools" (p.128). He notes that the texts presented in the festivals were those from the Europe (mostly by Shakespeare) and the festival was run by the British Council. This was bound to change with the popularisation of the art form in schools. Muma notes that by 1979, the organising committee had been Africanised and in 1982, the festival's performance took place in Mukumu Girls' School – a testimony "that they intended a radical break with the conservative tradition; the students were now going to perform in their own environment to familiar audiences." (p157).

Of these two examples that encapsulate the contestation of space for performance, this second one presents a change in orientation. This may explain the reason why the festival's popularity has continued to grow, with many categories added (the most recent being the narrative and the film) and it becoming a significant theatre event in the country. KNT conversely has become an alienated space (as it has been throughout) with many artists avoiding it due to the exorbitant charges it levies to artistic performances.

I observe that popular theatre has prospered outside these two spaces. Instead, it has prospered in community spaces and in flowered into multiple sub-genres. The evolution of popular theatre in Kenya took a dramatic turn with the clampdown that was meted on the Kamiriithu project in the 1970s and early 80s. Ndigiriri in "Kenyan Theatre after Kamiriithu" argues that a new direction had been created by this particular theatre experience which had used a local language and was created by people who were not academicians or itellectuals in a space that fit the peasants and workers and that they created a theatre that from their lived experiences, on themes that they understood and a language and nuance that resonated with them (p.73).

Ndigirigi's expose is problematic for three reasons. In the first instance, he dates theatre in Kenya from Kamiriithu and it is clear that his take off point is the adoption of a methodology and language that was different from what the likes of Donovan Maule theatre offered: London referenced performances by and for white elite. The second problem is that he premises the functional role of theatre as a "class-suicide" tool – bringing the intellectuals "down" from their citadels and bringing the peasants "up" from their hovels to a meeting of "humanity". Whereas this may be in sync with the Marxist ideology so espoused by Ngugi and others, it is not the universally applicable theoretical framing that a study of theatre (or any other discipline for that matter) should be referenced to. We will return to this subject later. Thirdly, Ngugi's Kamiriithu, which was a revolt against the domination of the National Theatre by whititude, was a theatre conceptualised and built in the proscenium sense – complete with curtains. I am convinced that it was not a departure from the colonial edifice, but a call for integration and acceptance; an apologist stance.

We note that with the physical closure of Kamiriithu having been done, there followed a difficult period for this kind of theatre in Kenya. In the same paper, Ndigirigi traces the clampdown by the government, now as official censorship, in the years that followed. This, he says, affected the Kenya Schools Drama Festival productions (such pieces as the plays by St Pauls Primary and the Kenya Science Teachers College) (p75) and other productions by theatre groups such as the Wananchi theatre and Miujiza players. It is evident therefore that the theatre in the formal spaces was being killed by a repressive regime. The University of Nairobi, hosting performances in Education Theatre II had become a hub of performances – including performances by non-students. But, he says, this did not last long – in 1988, when the Department was asked to produce a play to celebrate twenty five years of independence and ten years of Moi rule – they opted to produce Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, the planning committee noted "the satirical parallels between Kongi's Isma and Moi's Kenya" (p.76) and the play was removed from the programme.

Ndigiriri further notes that "Between 1989 and 1993 a number of Kenyan productions were denied licences for public performances. The worst year was 1991, when a total of eight plays were denied performance" (p.77). It will be noted that all the productions that he refers to were "foreign" texts in that they were by playwrights who were either Kenyans or not resident in Kenya.

As noted above, the biggest flaw in Ndigiriri's work is the deification if Kamiriithu. He argues that his delving on to the matter of censorship is so as "to illustrate the institutional handicaps that have prevented the emergence of another Kamiriithu. The ideological and intellectual atmosphere has also changed. Since Ngugi's detention and subsequent exile, the political situation has been such that no intellectual is free to work closely with workers and

peasants." (p.79). This is, for all intents and purposes, a preposterous posturing. I argue that, though it was an important effort in Kenyan Theatre, the Kamiriithu model was just that, a model. Theatre for social justice in Kenya, like all other disciplines, took other forms and other persuasions, and these other forms are not subservient to Kamiriithu.

My argument is that theatre must have existed in other forms that, by design, did not attract the government censorship – a theatre that was political while seeming apolitical or taking place in settings that were socially "un-censorable" and politically neutral. These spaces for instance include the United Nations' Women Conference of 1985 where Imbuga's *Aminata* premiered and unpoliced community spaces where the play's abbreviated forms animated community dialogues. Others include religious venues and festivals across the country where David Mulwa's *The Redemption* was performed. Mshai Mwangola talks about her experiences with the production of "sections" of *Aminata* in communities:

> We went to perform in Oby's village in Seme. The reason we went there was because he was in our troupe and that was his home, and the people there could welcome and protect us. In this instance, we had taken just one scene in the play – the part that Ngoya reappears as a ghost and is talking to Aminata about the land inheritance. What we did not know was that in the community, a patriarch had recently died and the family was locked in a similar debate about land administration. The community also believed that the word of such a person would not be contradicted by the living. We ended up, in the facilitation, not discussing Aminata, but the symbolic nuance. The community engaged about their situation, their culture and totally ignored us. We had not prepared for this. (Mshai – Interview, 2019)

The spaces, such as the one in Seme, were owned and governed by the community. The artists, while seeking to catalyse a community dialogue, became "outsiders" and the community deliberated and made its own conclusions. In the case of organisations, their registration and "legal" status was used to sanction the performance – they owned the production and therefore were in control of the discourse.

Censorship of the theatre had some important impact on how the genre of popular theatre would develop. I discussed in the previous chapter the censure of Theatre Workshop Productions by the government and the University of Nairobi in respect of the performance of Drumbeats on Mount Kerenyaga. It is critical to say something about the process the devising of the production went through. Oby Obyerodhiambo, who was the default leader of the group then since Opiyo Mumma had gone back to his studies in Europe, says about the production:

> After we had problems with the university about performing Dario Fo's play, we agreed we were going to do a Kenyan play. I took it upon myself to write the first draft which consisted mostly of the dialogue and annotations where the "movements" would be. I took this to Nyayo house in order to secure a licence to rehearse and perform. I also brought it to rehearsal and together with others we workshoped the movements: James Shuyanga contributed the Masai song, Hassan Wario brought the Borana song and Esther Luganje contributed songs from the coast. Some of the songs were recast from well-known/popular songs. The only performance of the original script was done at the Kenya Cultural Centre as an open dress rehearsal. During this performance, there were three special branch officers in the audience. We knew them. The following day was to be the opening night, but the Director of the centre at the time, Alice Oyaro, called me to her office and took away

> the performing licence. The opening night was cancelled. The second performance done in Miujiza Theatre years later was based on a complete script that I had written. I had added on to the story line and songs. This script was rehearsed and not workshopped (Interview, July 2023).

Censorship therefore in a way forced artists to start on the journey of workshopping performances and contributing to building a unique kind of theatre – the theatre that is steeped in community idiom and that imbues performance with local songs, dances and nuances that resonate with the audience. In my view, this was the journey that popular theatre perfected going forward.

I have delved on the matter of censorship and clampdown on theatre in the formal spaces to demonstrate the point that performance, and specifically theatre, did not die as Ndigiriri seems to argue. It took another form, a subaltern form – (in both content and character). I argue that after the 1982 installation of a state with the singular narrative of one party (and therefore one voice), theatre went underground. This happened in two significant ways – the spaces of performance and the form. Performances started happening in social halls and churches and community gatherings. This had the impact that the social dynamics of the spaces were infused into the themes. Thus, the theatre took to interrogation of biblical scenarios and the messianic parallel. The other impact was that the form it took was by and large dictated by the psychological orientation of the audience – the space for social and political interaction was corrosive and therefore – just like the development of the Negro blues in the face of oppression in the Americas – the preponderance of song and music as the bearer of the themes became common.

This notwithstanding, the trend of formal theatre spaces being dominated by foreign pieces and "sponsored" performances has continued for a long time. In his article "Days of Plenty on Stage" Oby Obyerodhyambo writes that March 1998 saw a plethora of performances: the performance of Aristophanes' *Lysisterata* at Hotel Intercontinental - a performance by Kikuyu Campus students sponsored by Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE); Bertolt Brecht's *Man Equals Man* was showing at the Kenya National Theatre; William Shakespeare's' *Romeo and Juliet* was done with a run at the Phoenix Players and *Two of a Kind* by Hugh Janes was up; The French Cultural Centre was putting up *Tower of Burden* by Onukaba Ojo; the Breaburn Theatre was showing Tomie de Paola's *The Knight and the Dragon*; Annabel Maule was running a 14 day workshop on "Ideas for Improvisation and Re-enactment" in an effort to revive the defunct Nairobi Theatre Academy; a community theatre workshop by Carol Odongo and Charles Kiarie to a theatre group from Maralal supported by (Netherlands Volunteer Organisation (SNV) was happening; and a company from Reunion Islands were presenting a dance drama titled *Les Porteurs d'Eau.* This is clearly a pointer to the fact that theatre in Kenya at that time mainly stayed as a foreign enterprise – something supported by others so as to thrive. This also means that the others' interests and cultural biases found their way into dominating the theatre.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that the patronage theatre received had a lot of influence in its growth and development in Kenya. Could this theatre then effect a change in society? Where there was social injustice, could this theatre be relied upon to bring about a narrative that sparked a discussion on restoration and righting of the wrongs? Outa (2009) postulates that

> Much of that presumed power of theatre in Kenya has precisely been undermined by its near *pauperised* status; the fact that it has no resources of any meaningful kind that can supplement its capacity to stand a rigid ideological ground (p.21)

The battle for an "ideological ground" – one which would stand for social justice and advocate for human rights was therefore doubtful. Then came a new player into the arena: organisations that commissioned theatre productions to achieve particular results. The United Nations Decade for Women Conference was happening in Nairobi in 1985. Francis Imbuga was commissioned to write a play, *Aminata*, to augment the theme of the conference. In 1991, Section 2 (A) was repealed and political pluralism was legalised. This meant that the democratic space was opened and more organisations embraced theatre as a means, nay, tool for education on human rights and governance. Theatre was also seen as an important mechanism that could be used for the development of a narrative for social change. The plays under study were written by individuals or workshopped by artists under the tutelage of organisations to fit in these organisations' programmes. An evaluation report of the 5Cs Theatre Group notes:

> Since its inception the 5 Centuries – 5Cs theatre activities has traversed the large and diverse landscape that is Kenya. With many performances in the slums of Nairobi, the group has travelled to Kilifi, Mombasa, Machakos, Kitui, Athi River, Limuru, Murang'a, Nyeri, Laikipia, Nakuru, Naivasha, Embu, Mbeere, Meru, Kisumu, Busia, Ngong, Garisssa and Turkana… Literally speaking, it has been the 4Cs (Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change) greatest ambassador to the grass root constituency. (p.5)

The theatre group had been performing Kang'aara wa Njambi's *Paukwa* but had also devised four other plays according to the needs they had harvested from the communities. These were thematic plays on police brutality, workers' rights, prison conditions, and ethnic clashes. The

plays were also delivered with the varied dramatic methodologies of puppetry, dialogue, music and narratives. During the unstructured interviews I conducted, I corrected the affiliation of the 5Cs theatre from Kenya Human Rights Commission to 4Cs and to drop the "5Cs" play as was initially proposed for study and in its stead took up Paukwa which was the play dedicated to social justice. . The group was flagging in the year 2000 with the parent organisation – 4Cs divesting its programme work to community mobilisation and side-lining theatre artists from a new programme (National Civic Education Programme) that was being designed. Though the group exists today, only a few members subscribe to its ideals and it has lost its passion.

The other plays discussed in this thesis did not lead to the formation of a group – rather they were projects for which artists were auditioned and contracted to perform. Kithaka wa Mberia's *Natala* (1996) was not commissioned to be written, he wrote it from a story he read in the newspapers about an incidence in Western Kenya about a "dead" man who returned to his home, but its production was funded. It was only commissioned for performance by the Women and Law in East Africa (Kenya). On the other hand, *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi* (1998) was commissioned for writing and performance by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The commissioning organisations determined the theme (and aspects of it) that had to be explicit in the play. In this way, the creativity of the playwright was guided and his portrayal of characters and nuances were in check. The aim of the play was to create a theatrical rendition of the subject at hand making both meaning and analysis accessible to communities in which they were performed. The thematic imperatives in these two plays are therefore in a way restricted to truthfulness in especially the legal positions on women rights in the case of *Natala* and the provisions of the Geneva conventions in the case of *Maua.*

Kivutha Kibwana's *Kanzala* was produced by Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION), a non-governmental organisation that had been formed by University of Nairobi dons as an avenue for promoting civic and alternative community education. A councillor (parodied in *Kanzala*) was the face of oppression and duplicitous political skulduggery at the time. Acting as the henchmen of political bigwigs, councillors were the local bosses: ruthless and exploitative. The play that was produced early in 1997 (with the elections coming up in December of the same year) was aimed at infusing some morality in the leadership and articulating voter education to citizens. Wakanyote Njuguna's *Before the Storm* – commissioned by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was performed by theatre artists contracted by CLARION. The play is on the impact of ethnicity and ethnic clashes on politics and political party organising. By 1998, the country had experienced ethnic clashes twice (1992 and 1997) and the play was a mechanism to discuss the issue and bring healing.

Shamba la Mfukeri (1997) by the Legal Resources Foundation and "Uraia" (2001) by the Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO) were unique projects where the dramatic pieces were devised by theatre artists and performed in communities as Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) productions. *Shamba la Mfukeri* deals with the issue of oppression from the colonisation standpoint – how colonial occupation and subsequent subjugation has led to dehumanisation of people. It sought to mobilise citizens to discuss the issue of land as a means of production and identity and the politics of "fake independence" or neo-colonialism. It also interrogated the process of developing a constitution- dwelling on the question whether parliament or the people were the ones to make it, an argument that had a lot of currency in the mid-1990s. *Shamba la Mfukeri* was a series of scenes with a dramatic progression over time. On the other hand, *Uraia* was devised as a number of independent

skits covering the various aspects of germinating positive "Kenyanness": good governance, nationhood, democracy and constitutionalism and situated in the present. During my research, I found out that the *Uraia* production did not have a "script" but had a corpus of skits and practiced logic created through improvisation in a month-long workshop held by artists in Wida Motel, Kiambu County in 2001.

I have thus established that popular theatre took diverse forms – some purely Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) and others the proscenium mode while other took a mix of the two to various degrees. The spaces of performance were also diverse. Pre-mobilised audiences converged in formal spaces such as the KNT to performances of complete plays and community members congregated in a variety of their own spaces to participate in educational performances of mostly PET or truncated performances. The overarching purpose of the performances was to impart certain skills and knowledge on set themes championed by the sponsoring organisations.

2.3 Thematic Imperatives in Theatre for Social Justice

Thematic imperatives refer to the aspects of social justice that the theatre spoke to. I intend in the section below to delve into the aspects of contestations of power or the injustices explored in this theatre. From the onset, these imperatives are treated as points of departure and therefore centres of conflict and its resolution – if at all.

Section 1: Interrogating Culture and Gender Equality in *Natala* and *Aminata*

In this section, I discuss how gender is treated as a factor of leadership by the two plays. Gender, the construction of "human hood" around sexuality, is perhaps one of the most contested spaces in cultural milieu. This is as result of the cultural and, especially, patriarchal

construct of sexuality and its confusion with gender roles. Little wonder therefore that as Fortier (1997) argues, “feminism theory is directly and predominantly political. Its purpose is to struggle against the oppression of women as women, this oppression, which is seen to be historically extremely common and widespread, is the result of patriarchy” (p.108). As such, gender equality is an effort to unmask the “lie” that men use to oppress women. Manhood, the fact of being male, is presented as a condition that inhibits the attainment of social justice for women. The patriarchal construct of manhood in the African sense is laced with phallic symbolism, bravery or might and ownership of property. These are associated with virility and emasculation, respectively, for those who gain or lose them. It can actually be called hegemonic masculinity which Courtenay (2000) describes as ‘the denial of weakness or vulnerability, emotional and physical control, the appearance of being strong and robust, dismissal of any need for help, a ceaseless interest in sex, the display of aggressive behaviour and physical dominance" (p.1386). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) see it as the ascendancy to power “achieved through culture, institutions and persuasion” (p.832). This construction of manhood as hegemonic masculinity is replete in African drama. In Wole Soyinka’s *Lion and the Jewel,* Sidi considers Lankule not to be a man if he cannot pay her bride price. Also, Sadiku, Baroka’s wife, holds a “mock” celebration of the loss of virility in her husband, in the process tricking Sidi to go find out. Baroka’s virility becomes the yardstick of manhood and therefore he wins the belle. Another example can be seen in Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Mirii’s play, *I will Marry when I Want*, where Kiguunda wants to assert his manhood, he connects it to property, albeit meagre, when he tells his daughter that “A man brags about his penis however small. A poor house, but mine!”(p.4). The daughter has been wooed by the rich man Kioi wa Kanoru’s son, John Muhuuni, and is now mocking her parents for the poverty they live in. That Kiguunda loses his title and land to Kioi in the

end – over something frivolous like a loan to organise a "sinless" church wedding, his emasculation is complete.

2.3.1 The Contestation of Culture in Gender Equality: The Case of *Natala*

Kithaka wa Mberia in an interview (2019) revealed to me that he created *Natala* out of a story he read in the newspapers about the confusion wrought to a wife upon the reappearance of a husband she and the community had already presumed dead and whom they "buried". In *Natala*, the playwright examines the suffering visited upon Natala, the protagonist, upon the "death" of her husband. The suffering of Natala is occasioned by three contestations of culture: her being a "single" woman in a predominantly patriarchal society; her being strong willed and unbowed by masculinity, and her being aware of her rights and determined to pursue justice to the end.

The narrative of cultural contestation is one of the appropriations of power to one or another culture. Whereas culture is transient and constantly evolving, arguments for and against conceptual framings of social milieu are usually back referenced. I argue that in Natala the characters are "stuck" in timeline loops and the power certain positions and cultural postulations hold. Wakene for instance, who is younger than Natala, reasons like the octogenarians Mama Lime and Mzee Palipali whereas Mzee Balu, Wakene's father, reasons like Natala who is the daughter-in-law. The contestation for the ownership of property - the Natal/Tango farm – and of Natala (as a woman to be or not be inherited), is at the centre of the play. Both parties use culture – traditional and modern – as basis for contestation and therefore fomenting the conflict.

Natala, a woman in her mid-thirties, is doing well in village life replete with the nuanced challenges of social rivalries until she gets news of her husband's death by motor vehicle accident. Notified by the office of the chief, she goes to the city to get his body and they bury him. As a young widow, she attracts the sexual overtures of her brother-in-law, Wakene and is subjected to the inheritance debate by the clan represented by Mama Lime and Mzee Palipali. When she holds her ground, Wakene hatches the plot to steal her lands title deed and sell the land to the chief. Her efforts to seek justice through the official government systems are thwarted by the complicity of the chief in the design of things and by her refusal to his overtures. She has to physically fight and to repossess the title deed twice from Wakene who has taken it from her house on both occasions. Several contestations are discussed hereunder.

Firstly, *Natala* espouses cultural and social contestation. Natala is cast as a woman under siege – her in-laws represented by Tila, are infringing on her social space, the chief has sent a message of a visit through Gane (who confuses it with a sexual overture) and her husband has written that he is coming home in seven days. Tila, her brother-in-law's wife, epitomizes the patriarchal narrative when she comes to borrow salt yet quarrels about Natala's close fistedness. She refuses to recognise Natala as a human being, as a person, and instead, when asked to leave, says

Tila: Niko kwa Kaka wa Mume Wangu

(I am at the home of my husband's brother)

Natala argues that she is annoying her with her insistence on quarrelling over nothing. Her response is as stultifying as before:

Tila: Mwenye nyumba hatukatazi kuja hapa (p.5)

(The owner of the house does not refuse us from coming here)

…

Tila: Ukikasirika utafanya nini? Niko kwa kaka wa mume wangu (p.6)

(What will you do if you get annoyed? I am at the home of my husband's brother)

Wakene, Tila's husband – lives at home and the other, Tango, is away in the city. That Tila invades the space of Natala and doesn't recognise her as the owner of the home, electing only to refer to her husband's brother, Tango as the one who owns the home. This is a patriarchal message that causes Natala grief. . Notice that Tila uses the patriarchal inflection of "kaka wa mume wangu" (my husband's brother) which is gender exclusive as opposed to the gender inclusive "shemeji wangu" (my brother-in-law). The later would have included Natala in its extended meaning and an in-law too. Little does it matter that Wakene is a drunk. When he sends greetings to Natala through Gane, the latter's sarcasm in describing his status is stinging:

Gane: Sijui kama niliongea na binadamu au pipa la Pombe

(I don't know whether I talked to a human being or a drum of alcohol)

In this case, both men are away – one lost in alcohol and the other in the city. This presents to us an alienation of men from the patriarchal construct of manhood. This has the effect of pitting the strong woman against weak men, a dramatic reversal of the strength associated with men. Natala, nonetheless, is vulnerable and fragile. She is ill prepared to take the news of her husband's "death" from the authorities. At the end of the first scene, she is the image of a doomed woman. When she visits the mortuary to collect the body of her husband, Natala is treated to the worst form of objectification and gender-based violence. The mortuary attendant, talking to one of the dead bodies, says "Wewe! Usilale kipumbavu kama mwanamke!" *(You! Do not sleep in a silly way like a woman).* This is clearly misogynistic as it assumes that women, because they are women, sleep in a particular way which is "silly" to him. When she protests this and asserts that a woman is neither stupid nor a banana trunk, the

attendant says that she is uttering "maneno yasiyo mbele wala nyuma" *(nonsensical words).* The attendant agrees that a woman is a human being only from the point of view of subservience to the man and refers to the biblical analogy of the rib. She is abused, equated with the already inherited wife of the mortuary attendant's brother and then plainly asked to bribe (and in its stead to have sex with) him as a precondition to being given her husband's body. She has to literally fight off the mortuary attendant and floor him like "a four-legged animal" (p.22) before he capitulates. She spends a lot of time asserting her humanity as opposed to "womanity". She tells him that she is not a door in a public building to be touched by anyone and when he threatens her with violence, she takes a higher moral pedestal:

Bala: *(Akijiweka tayari kumrukia Natala)* Kazi bure! Moto utazimwa. Leo utajua mimi ni mwanaume kamili.

(As he prepares to pounce on Natala) Don't waste your energy. The fire will be put out. Today you will know that I am a real man.

Natala: Nawe utajua mimi ni binadamu kamili (p. 22)

(And you will know I am a real human being)

Natala has relocated the conflict to the exercise of humanity as opposed to a conflict between a woman and a man. The mortuary attendant, like Wakene and the chief, misses the point and as a result ends up being humiliated. Conversely, the main weakness in the treatment of human rights in the text is the dislocation of womanhood. Whereas in this culture the submissiveness of a woman is antithetical to the realisation of social justice, Natala has to do body building exercises to deal with abusive men and she has to fight off violently four attempts at sexual assault. She literally beats down the mortuary attendant, the chief and Wakene (the latter twice) so as to prove both her independence and assert her humanity.

The cultural space, as projected by Mama Lime and Mzee Palipali, is where elders sit and predetermine the fate of female members of the community. They posit that Natala needs the protection of a man. They demand that after the death of her husband, Natala should be inherited by Wakene as is guided by culture. But perhaps the most perverted sense of the application of culture and tradition is the link they give this inheritance to respect, and respect to the perpetuation of family. Mama Lime argues:

Mama Lime: Njia nzuri ya kuhakikisha uelewano thabiti baina yako na familia ya marehemu mumeo ni kuwaonyesha kwamba una waheshimu. (p.35)

(The best way to ensure proper understanding between your late husband's family and you is to show them that you respect them.)

When Natala questions how the clan knows that she wants to be married, Mama Lime presents her with a *fait accompli:*

Mama Lime: Ndiyo mila. Mme akifa, mke huolewa upya katika familia hiyo hiyo. Hutakuwa wa kwanza. Hutakuwa wa mwisho. (p.37)

(That is the culture. When a husband dies, the wife is remarried in the same family. You will neither be the first nor the last.)

Respect as a social justice aspect refers to the deference of one to another on equal terms and grounds. The "respect" being referred to here is actually the subjugation and objectification of the woman as a subject to the clan and its dictates. Natala would have to negate her humanity for her to respect the clan. On her rejecting the inheritance proposal, a new plot is hatched: that a cleansing ceremony (ostensibly a sexual engagement to cut a "cord" and hence free Natala from her dead husband's stranglehold) must be conducted. This, Lime and Mzee Palipali say, is essential to the healing of her children and the people of the clan in general. When she discovers that Natala's child, Bwanu, is unwell, she quips:

Mama Lime: Basi si ndio hayo mambo! Hizi ni athari za ugwe. Na mambo bado. Sio tu watoto wako tu ambao watasumbuliwa na maradhi. Itakuwa vivyo hivyo kwa watoto wengine katika ukoo. Hata watu wazima watateseka. Tayari kuna dalili. Suluhisho ni moja tu: wewe kukubali tambiko la kukata ugwe. (p.62)

(There you go! These are the effects of the cord. This is just the beginning. It is not only your children who will be affected by the disease, but also other children in the clan). Even grown people will be affected. The signs are already there. There is just one solution: accept the ritual of cutting the cord.)

The irony of the cultural contestation is that the said elders are in cahoots with Wakene who is hell bent on disinheriting Natala. He has hatched a plan to sell her land to the chief and campaign to be a Member of Parliament. To do this, he has stolen the title deed from her house. This is despite the fact that the land was not inherited from the family but was bought by Natala and her husband. The fact that Natala's name does not appear on the title deed is taken by Wakene to mean that it belonged solely to her brother and that he, Wakene, was the one eligible to inherit it. There are three social justice issues here: the definition of marriage, matrimonial property and the place of children. The second is that of right to inherit and the third is the role of the government in adjudicating social justice.

The first issue has been a contested landscape over the years. Only rather recently has a law been enacted in Kenya *(The Marriage Act, 2014)* – to define marriage and the rights to matrimonial property. According to Mama Lime, women were considered as part of their husband's property (p.38). The voice of the woman or the consideration of her feelings and opinions was non-existent. That is why Natala is always being told what the tradition decrees,

what the elders have said and what custom requires. Nobody listens to her. When she stands her ground, she is vilified as a stubborn woman who has no respect. Indeed, her supposed rudeness, according to Mama Lime, is derived from her people (p.26).

On the issue of inheritance, the perception of the community where Natala lives is that land and property belong to men. When Natala's husband dies and she refuses to be inherited, she becomes *persona non-grata* in the clan lore. This informs the reasoning by the chief, the elders and Wakene that Natala should not inherit that land or stay on in it. As a matter of fact Natala is given a deadline of vacating the land by Wakene's declaring possession of the land, the house and the children (p.73). This view is however not shared by Wakene's father, Mzee Balu, who accompanies Natala to Wakene's place to retrieve the title deed. Mzee Balu is pained that his son seems to have gone mad by deciding to disinherit his brother's wife. Wakene is so possessed with greed that he talks back at his father and even accuses him of favouring Tango when he was alive and now Tango's wife, Natala. He claims that Mzee Balu does not love him and he spoiled his childhood. He holds Mzee Balu complicit in his own destitution since he, Wakene, claims he drinks to revive his manhood. Wakene's victimhood narrative – perpetrator turned victim – is a dramatic irony that enhances the conflict and mobilises the audience to identify with Natala.

On the third issue – the role of government and its agents – it is to be noted that the Chief is complicit in the disinheriting of Natala. When she notices that the title deed had been stolen by Wakene and she goes to report, she is treated to absurd ridicule, sexual violence and plain obfuscation of justice. She has to literary repeat that she needs his assistance a record ten times (pp.44-46) before he gets round to asking what it is she wanted. This is a serious indictment of the government in its role of governing, hearing citizen's voices and acting to

resolve conflicts. The chief is presented to us as an absentminded officer who doesn't even hear the office door being knocked. First, he takes offence at her entering while he was daydreaming, and then goes on to demand his bribe to be paid. He had ostensibly "allowed" Natala and Mzee Balu to bury Tango, despite there being a law to the contrary, a law that stipulates that he had to give permission for them to gather and bury Tango. He had indeed gone to stop the burial and insisted that he is bribed to allow for the funeral to continue. Although Natala had refused to give him a bribe, her father-in-law had promised the chief that he "would go to his office" later to take it. Thirdly, he subverts Natala's search for justice for the return of the title deed by terming it as a family matter that he should not intervene in. Fourthly, he imputes that the title deed correctly belongs to Wakene who is supposed to inherit her anyway. Fifthly and lastly, he refers her to the clan elders. These five instances amount to abuse of office and the subversion of justice. Little did Natala know that the chief wanted to buy the land and had already discussed with Wakene about prices – something that she does when Wakene walks in and she listens at the window. For these three reasons, cultural space as a contestation of justice is portrayed as subversive and antithetical to the realisation of social justice.

Secondly, *Natala* interrogates the construction of masculinity and its contestation. In *Natala*, manhood is cast as sexual prowess, might and ownership of property. Firstly, manhood as sexual prowess is seen when Wakene's niece, Gane, finds him celebrating the death of his brother, and anticipating the sexual opportunity that presents itself in the widowhood of Natala, Wakene tells her:

> **Wakene:** Laani Ulimwengu uliokufanya kuwa binamu yangu. Hujui unacho kosa!
>
> *(Curse the world that made you, my niece. You don't know what you are missing.)*

Gane: Labda nakosa maradhi.

(I could be missing diseases)

Wakene: Mtambo! Ungepata fursa ya kujua kwamba Wakene ni mtambo wa umeme! (p.12)

(An iron rod! You could have had the opportunity to know that Wakene is an electrified iron rod)

The mortuary attendant, in the play in a play, analogises his earlier athletic prowess to his prowess in bed:

Bali: …. Zamani nilikuwa mkimbiaji wa mbio za kilometa tatu. Uwezo huo bado umo mwilini mwangu. Nguvu hizo bado zinaishi katika damu yangu (p.19)

(In the past I used to run the three kilometre hit. That power is still in my body. That energy still lives in my blood)

When he later wants to rape Natala, he thinks himself as the water that will "put off Natala's fire". The chief too wants to assert his manhood by having his way with Natala. His office affords him the opportunity to "enhance" his manhood by subjugating women.

Manhood is also constructed as physical energy superiority. In both the case of the mortuary attendant and of Wakene, the men use physical violence and muscle as a means to subdue Natala. When the mortuary attendant jumps at Natala, he does so to prove his manhood by violence. Natala fights back and floors him. On his part, Wakene breaks into Natala's house to take the title deed. Natala follows him and a fight ensues. Mama Lime and Mzee Palipali celebrate the opportunity for Wakene to show his manhood by beating the hard headedness out of her:

Mama Lime: Wakene, mtie adabu huyu mwanamke!

Wakene, discipline this woman!

Mzee Palipali: *(Bila kumwambia mtu maalum)* Huyu kijana ameutoa wapi ujeuri huu?

(To no one in particular) *From where did this young lady get such insolence?* (p.75)

Fighting with a man, even when the man is on the wrong, is something the community frowns upon – something that is forbidden in tradition. It is ostensibly an "affliction" on a woman the two cannot understand. It is important to understand that the two had come with Wakene to support him in dispossessing her. In perhaps the most elaborate scene in the whole play, the two tussle and fight it off. The woman is presented as fighting with a pan and wooden ladle and Wakene with his belt. Natala kicks Wakene "… kwenye suruari chini ya kitovu" – literally "below the belt" but literary inverting violence to target the biological "manhood" and this brings the fight to an end as he yelps in pain and crawls away on all fours like the mortuary attendant. This detail is important, and ironically the playwright seems to argue that the empowerment and humanising of women has the effect of dehumanising men: both men crawl on all fours like an animal. This is counterproductive to the feminist agenda.

In conclusion, tradition is presented as antithetical to the realisation of social justice. The projection of the man as advantaged over the woman in the setting of the play is purely a function of the patriarchal construct. Kithaka, in appropriating the feminist call for the "humanisation" of the woman in the traditional setting, creates a problematic narrative – one where weak and evil men connive to deprive an upright and strong woman who wants to protect her land and her children. Her win against the male aggressors becomes immaterial and antisocial. In this narrative, the assertion of the humanity of the woman is juxtaposed with the beastification of the man. The arrival of her "dead" husband is the greatest flaw in

the play. Instead of creating the woman as able to sustain herself and to fight for and enjoy her rights, the author subverts this and immerses the play in the gender stereotype where a man "arrives" to rescue a woman from her predicament.

2.3.2 Culture as a Tool of Opression – the Case of *Aminata*

Culture is the collectivisation of the lived experiences of a people. It encompases elements such as language, rituals, role delineations, work, traditions, customs and ways of life of a people. The culture of a people is the mainstay of their identity. In post colonial communities, culture is in a process of mutation and there are usually two or three contestations that occur at the same time. This is because of the existence of competing ideologies and therefore the flux of adaptation to a (usually new) dominant culture and the attendant resistance to change. In *Aminata* culture is used as a tool for oppression – laws, practices and beliefs are used to marginalise and dominate women. As such, the play provides us with an opportunity to critically interrogate these. The dominant cultural contestation is that of leadership and it manifests in the rites of passage (in this case the burial of Rev. Ngoya), the questions of gender identities, religion and inheritance. I will look at each manifestation shortly.

At the opening scene as Rev. Ngoya's grave is being dressed, Jumba and Rosina get into an argument about how the whole process is being conducted and ultimately about how the disposal of Ngoya's remains ought to have happened. It is apparent that Jumba has been annoyed by some of the actions of his brother, the Reverend, and therefore would want to ensure that he "locks" his spirit in the grave – and hopefully stem the influence of what he sees as the "corrosive" Christianity from continued spread. Jumba wants to do this against Rev. Ngoya's own wishes that his grave should not be cemented. This action sets the stage for the contestation in the play. Jumba is ganging up with Ngoya's son, Ababio, and they had sold a bull to carry out this activity. Mama Rosina and Nuhu, the mason, are for the

respecting of the wishes of the dead – ironically, as it is the tradition – and Jumba is doing it to protect the traditions of Membe.

We learnthat Rev. Ngoya had led the debunking of the myth of eating chicken for women, the inheritance of land by women and had infringed the sacredness of traditional worship places of the people of Membe. This had irked Jumba, the headman, and therefore the present endeavour of trying to keep his spirit imprisoned. In Jumba's mind, the cultural change constitutes evil:

> **Jumba:** That much I will not deny, but thius church is evil. Aminata is evil too. That is why she escaped unscathed. When I think back, I curse myself for the part I playd in welcoming the robed strangers here. I was a foolish youngman, all ears and no brains. Attracted by the toy with the tag of God on it. But now, now I am wiser. My dreams are full of the same thoughts, Aminata is evil. She is Membe's black sheep. A sheep long recognised by those that want to destroy the very foundation of our ways of ages. (p.13)

He is against the new religion for several reasons. The first one is that it introduced a new ethic to the society especially the eating of chicken by women. The second reason is that it opened the community to external influence that introduced new paramemters for leadership and living – including vasectomy and dislocation of the home from the village to urban centres. The third one is that it disrespected the ancestral ways of worship. Rev. Ngonya chose to build his church hear Membe's shrine and, as a consequence, a lightning strike killed his children who were sheltering under the Mugumo tree of the shrine. According to him, Aminata is the exemplification of evil. He uses the example of her surviving whole the tragedy of the lightning strike that killed his children and made the only surving one –

Mbaluto – dumb, as the evidence of her evil. He is also annoyed at his own inadequancies of not being able to buy his brother a coffin and letting Aminata buy it. A third issue is the fact that he accepted vasectomy – that was introduced to the Membe by Mulemi, Aminata's husband, and now he is unable to sire children – evidence that he is no longer a man.

What complicates it further is the fact that Aminata was given a piece of land by her father as a parting gift (in appreciation of the way she took care of him when he was unwell and also as his child) and both Jumba and Ababio are against this and use the cultural dictates of land inheritance to fight her – even though she did not want it in the first place:

Aminata: Land? No. Father, you know women do not inherit land from their fathers.

Ngoya: You are not a woman Aminata, you are my child. Will you or will you not accept the gift?

…

Ngoya: It is difficult, I know, but we must accept change. The way your innocent hands accepted that bowl of chicken soup, so you must accept this soil, a gift from your father, in his last days on earth.

Aminata accepts the gift, but it has to be given to her by the elders, and Jumba, being the head of the elders' council, moves to ensure that this does not happen:

Jumba: Ababio, my umblical cord was not buried together with yours. *(Pause.)* Noe listen, you will have to stop drinking. You and I will have to talk to members of the land circle individually. We have to convince them that will or no will, Ngoya's land is Membe's land and belongs to his sons by tradition. *(Pause.)* Have you heard me well?

Just like he disregarded Rev. Ngoya's wish that his grave shall not be cemented, he connives to disregard his will on the inheritance of the land. He even conscripts Aunt Kezia, Mulemi's aunt, to impress upon her nephew that Aminata was evil. Mulemi doesnot agree with her immasculated views and makes the point that he and Aminata agreed on the kind of family they wanted – including the number of children. In her frustration Kezia argues that Aminata had replaced him as the man in their home:

> **Kezia:** No, *Dagitari,* Aminata is overdoing it. A woman is not a woman if she has no time for her husband and her children. That is why you are playing this game of boredom. You have made Aminata your husband in your house. (p.33)

One by one, all Jumba's plots fail. Nuhu expresses misgivings at being tricked to cement the grave (p. 3) and the elders see the logic of the inheritance and defy his wishes. He doesn't know what to do so he opts to fall sick inorder to avoiding chairing a divided council that will rule against him. The elders still see through his foxy ways and decide to meet without him to take the decision. He is beaten at all fronts and as a last ditch effort, he decides to subvert the same tradition by offering Mama Rosina the stool of rule:

> **Rosina:** *(Fighting off a fresh bout of laughter)* I am trying, cant you see I am trying? *(Feigning seriousness.)* What about the elders of the stool?
>
> **Jumba:** Yes, what about them? It is they who want change.
>
> **Rosina:** No Jumba, the elders are not as crazy as you are. Tradition demands that…
>
> **Jumba:** Aaah! There we are at last! We have now come round to it, tradition! *(It is his turn to laugh.)* The cobweb shakes, the fly is caught, and the patient spider will have his meal. Tradition! What tradition Mama Rosina? "Give Aminata her piece of land." This I know is the silent wish of most of the eleders. All in

> total disregard of our traditions. So why should you not sit on the headman's stool for the same reason? You are a woman of Membe now, aren't you?

He is doing this to punish the elders who have defied him. He hopes by doing this, tradition, which has been used to deny women inheritance and participation in leadership and to keep men as the focus in the society, will fall into disarray and the elders will be the first casualties. But he is wrong because Mama Rosina's ascendancy to the stool of rule is celebrated in the village. The death of Ababio, as announced by Agege during the soil handover ceremony, is not tragic, and only momentarily delays what is inevitable.

What Francis Imbuga seems to be saying in this text is that tradition and culture are not static and change is inevitable. It is the adjustment to these changes and the intermarriages of culture that will be profitable to the community. The use of culture as a tool for exclusion and oppression is ridiculed in the play. Leadership then becomes a function of wisdom, the kind that is shown by the pragmatism of the borderline character in the play – Agege – who goes through real character transformation in the play.

This notwithssatnding, there are internal contradictions. The fememisnist perspectives that the sponsors of the play wanted are mischaracterised. Aminata, for instance, is fighting over inheritance with Ababio, an uneducated drunkard and therefore this disorintates the conflict. Secondly, the take-over of the stool of rule by Mama Rosina is shown as a failure because she is unable to carry out her first duty as the "headman". Thirdly, the death of Ababio is seen as a huge loss for Aminata who cannot receive the soil in symbolic inheritance.

Section 2: The Historicisation of Injustice: The Case of *Shamba, Paukwa* and *Uraia*

According to John Willet (1964), historicisation in theatre is described as a "fundamental interpretative attitude". The concept was developed by Bertolt Brecht in a poem entitled

"Speech to Danish working-class actors on the art of observation". Brecht wrote: "Imagine all that is going on around you, all those struggles, picturing them just like historical incidents. For this is how you should go on to portray them on the stage…" (p.1). As an aesthetic therefore, historicisation refers to the contextualizing of the experiences of the character into perspectives of otherness – the making of things happening to a character at the current time as historical incidents happening to other people. Historicisation in theatre enables the performers to distance themselves from a reality that they are experiencing.

In this section, I am going to discuss how the social construct of injustice is presented in the three productions – *Shamba la Mfukeri, Paukwa* and *Uraia.* The three theatre pieces are similar in that they are dramatised narratives of history, or, in the case of some of the skits in *Uraia,* ahistorical period, and retell the story of Africa (and Kenya) from the precolonial period, through the colonial period and connect this to the architecture of the present-day life for the people. Secondly, they deal with similar themes of injustice as suffered by the people through the invasion, occupation, dispossession and the trickery of leadership.

2.3.3 Reliving the History of Oppression in *Shamba*

This popular theatre piece is credited to the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), a Kenyan NGO that is involved in community education and paralegal work. *Shamba* fits the definition of popular theatre advanced by Prenki and Selman (2000) who include it in the community and social theatres paradigm. They define popular theatre as " a process of theatre which deeply involves specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analysing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change, and analysing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied" (p.13). *Shamba la Mfukeri* is presented in the Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) format. It is the story of a farmer,

Pandemba, who has been suffering in fictitious land ruled by Mfukeri - a parody of President Moi (Ondanyiro, interview, 2023). LRF argued that the play was an allegory of the dilemma of change facing the country in the 1990s. It was used to catalyse a discussion of democracy and governance with the constitutional discourse being the entry point. The play interrogates who would represent the voice of citizens in the national discussion on delineating rights and duties – the citizens directly or the leaders.

It presents a community that is at peace and engaged in labour. This is reminiscent of Kenya communities before the advent of colonialism. Shiraz Durani (2006) argues that in this period the social, political and economic activities of the people were "dependent on land, water and other resources" for their life and continued existence (p.26). The play explores how this tranquillity was disrupted by the coming of the white man, Jacaranda, whom the people call "Kaburu" – a different person who happened to come by and the community welcomed. But this visitor started surveying and beaconing the land. The community did not understand what he was doing and they feared him. He converts some of the villagers and announces that he has taken the land for the queen. He appoints chiefs to rule over the people and commands people to work on his farm. He also changes the type of crops to be farmed. This is enforced by local people who have turned against their fellow villagers. He introduces taxation in the pretext of bringing development. The people resisted Kaburu and they removed him. But, as has been the case in the post-colony, they elected his ally, Mfukeri, the educated one, the one who was carrying Kaburu's gun, to be the new leader. The people decided on a constitution that they would follow. But Mfukeri changed the constitution and centralised the powers of state and government to himself. Some farmers joined Mfukeri and started amassing wealth from the state coffers. The people were side-lined and become spectators.

When the farmers decided to change the way they farm, they were dispersed by the government. In protest, Pandemba decides to uproot the Kaburu's (and now Mfukeri's) cash crops so as to plant food crops. She is resisted by her neighbours who fear the wrath that she will face. But her argument is simple: she has children who need to be fed and whose school fees have to be paid. Her song is one of defiance:

Pandemba: Heri kufa maskini, kuliko kusimamiwa na binadamu

It is better to die poor than to be lorded over by a human being

Soon, she is attacked and told of the contract that has existed with the government. She raises issues of development not done and the delays in payments as the reason why she wants to plant food crops. The government operatives insist that the law must be followed. The protests of Pandemba and her friends are not heeded. The central question is the dialectical relations between the "wananchi" (people living in a country) and "wenyenchi" (owners of the country) - where the rulers hold the position that they own the land and the duty of citizens is to work on it for the benefit of the rulers.

In the second part, the "government" plays the drum and one by one people come dancing. The drumming is bad, and people cannot dance. The people gang up to chase the drummer – symbolic of their inability to dance to the government's tune. A meeting is called by Mheshimiwa Girikasha. The Mheshimiwa comes late to the meeting and although the people complain, he gets his way. He announces that Mfukeri is annoyed by several things – women want to lead, that people are doing business without permits and that everyone wants to speak to Mfukeri directly. This has prompted Mfukeri to call for the formation of a committee to collate the views of people and their leaders on the way forward. He asks for the people's views so that he can take them to the government appointed committee. This becomes the

point of contention is the composition and legitimacy of the committee. He is abusive and when Awinja, the women's representative, asks about the place of women, he retorts:

> **Girikasha:** Ningekupiga na ufunguo wa gari lakini wacha nikupatie mawaidha… ukikuja kwa mkutano, usikuje kupayuka ovyo…
>
> *I would have hit you with these car keys, but let me just advise you…when you come to a meeting, don't talk nonsense.*

The people decide to disband the committee. This irks the Mheshimiwa, who considers that his wealth and knowledge put him apart from the locals – who are dirty, unknowledgeable and engineering a different social ethic – like the youth with "funny" hairstyles. The dilemma is left unresolved.

The play in the two acts traces the history of the colonialism of Kenya, the reorganisation of the community ethics, the development of classes with the society, the struggle for independence, the takeover of the struggle by the collaborators and the continuation of colonial agenda through the new elite. In my view, this play draws parallels to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* - the satirical allegorical novella that characterises the Russian Bolshevik revolution that started in 1917 and how Joseph Stalin betrayed it (Letemendia, 1992). When the animals in Manor Farm overthrow Mr Jones, the pigs get the leadership position, assume a human identity, and go on to lord it over other animals – complete with a set of laws – what Letemendia calls "a meaningless absurdity" (p.129). At the end of the book, the reference to each other as "comrade" is suppressed and the name "Animal Farm" changed back to "Manor Farm". The last line of the novella reads: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which" (p. 54). This is a major reversal of the revolution which

in effect lays ground for a follow up revolution. Indeed the animals have realised that nothing has changed.

The same applies to the Mfukeris of this world. He is educated, but his education is alienating and stultifying as he wants to be like his former master - the Kaburu - instead of serving the people. The story of Mfukeri, is an allegorical reference to African leadership that continues to exploit the people and to advance the neo-colonial agenda from the former colonialists. The leaders create more "unfreedom" that the colonialists did - especially because the people do not expect it from the new leaders who were the leaders of the fight against colonisation.

The play also contextualises the national discussion in the 1990s in Kenya about how the national conversation on a new constitution was going to be held. The PET nature of the play allows for the issues arising out of the play to be discussed. During the performances, there was a backdrop with images and comments/statements that spoke to the freeze moments. In the forum theatre methodology, the freeze moments constitute the climax of conflicts that require to be resolved through an interactive discussion with the audience. The play therefore contextualises oppression and exploitation of the people from the colonial times and its continuation by the comprador bourgeoisie elite who take the reins of power from the colonialists. It is a commentary on governance and a critique on the emergent African nations – Kenya to be specific – which have inherited and perpetuated the architecture of domination and exploitation of the people.

2.3.4 The Dehumanisation of the Violated in *Paukwa*

Paukwa has over the years become a signature play for the 5Cs theatre group. The name of the theatre group that premiered this play – *Five Centuries* – is taken from a poem, and later

expanded into a play by the same name, that was written by Kang'aara wa Njambi. At the time, he wrote under an alias, Maa Chivoti, because of the fear of persecution. Kang'aara is a political artivist who in the early 1990s was active in the composition and performance of poetry and theatre. His major works include the plays *Five Centuries* and *Paukwa*. He, together with Karimi Nduthu, also composed many songs that formed the bulwark of mobilisation for the movement of resistance against oppression and dictatorship. He was a founder member of the Release Political Prisoners (RPP) pressure group that operated under the aegis of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and a number of other organisations affiliated to it before it became an institution on its own. The RPP adopted songs as the mainstay of the theatrical performances that it did across the country. One of the most prominent recitals was the *Five Centuries* poem which was the prelude to the performances of the theatre group and became the signature name the group adopted.

This elegance of Africa in the poem is reminiscent of the poetry of the black aesthetics – poetry that glorified Africa in what is oft referred to as the "primordial" stage – pure and attuned to nature. Its purpose in the performance was to "locate" Africa in the minds of the audience and to contrast it with the "chaos" of the present-day post-colonial experience. This way, the audience was prepared for the destruction and utter desolation, the dismembering of the beauty and the defacing of the edifice of beauty so portrayed in the play. This is to me the classic stage set for the tragedy of colonialism and occupation. Talking about the literatures of post-coloniality, Bill Ashcroft *et al* (1989) argue that:

> A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation or "voluntary" removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a

> supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialect of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures (p.9)

I set out to analyse the performances of the Five Centuries Theatre Group of the play by the same name. I found out that although the play *Five Centuries* exists and was indeed one of the two original scripts by Kangaara wa Njambi that were performed by the theatre group at the initial stages, it is *Paukwa* that was the mainstay of the social justice agenda. *Five Centuries* was mainly performed as a celebration of the history of Africa, its colonisation and the impact it has had on African peoples and countries. It is therefore removed from the questions of social justice in the sense of interrelations between people, between people and governments and within communities in Kenya which is the mainstay of this study. Instead, the second script, *Paukwa* has been the most performed by the group in respect of the social justice agenda and thus more relevant to the study at hand. It has been used by the group over time – in mobilisation and performance in a plethora of edutainment interventions. Tony Mboyo aka Kasmall, a member of the group opines that:

> *Paukwa* has presented us with the opportunity of adaptability of the text and the conflict in the performance of social justice. It is possible to pick a section of the play to fit in any social justice and human rights issue that we would be planning to speak to. The scenes of violence, denial of rights, evil prosecution, bad governance and even greed of our leaders are present in the play. Also, it uses the form of a narrative. This is easy to use and adapt. Initially, this was important to us because of the restrictions to freedom of speech and expression when we first performed it in the 1990s. (Interview, October 2020)

The play is called Paukwa because of the prominence of the form it takes – one of narration. Paukwa is the opening formula – call – in narratives performance:

Narrator: Paukwa

Audience: Pakawa

It can be described as a play that personifies the dislocation and cultural denigration of a community of beings visited upon by the greed of one of their calibre. The play is a fable of the journey of Africa from its primordial social cohesion, its beauty, and its natural endowments, through the period of colonialism, occupation, torture and exploitation by a crass class of beings involved in skulduggery. It is rendered in the form of a dramatised narrative. In the narrative the setting is in an imaginary country inhabited by animals of all kinds. The narrator introduces the inhabitants as animals in their "functional" role in life:

Msimulizi/Narrator:

Dunia ni Kigeugeu huleta vyema na vimbi	*The world is uncertain, it brings good and bad*
Wengine ni kuku tu, kitoweo cha wenziwe	*Some are chicken, the stew of others*
Wengine ni panya, walishwa sumu	*Others are rats, they are fed with poison*
Wengine punda, wabeba mizigo	*Others are donkeys, beasts of burden*
Wengine ni ng'ombe, wakutoa maziwa	*Others are cows, they give milk*
Wengine ni nyoka, huuma	*Others are snakes, they bite*
Wengine ni Sungura wa kukamuliwa	*Others are Sungura to be milked of*
damu na jasho	*blood and sweat*
Wengine fisi, hula cha wenzao	*Others are hyenas, they feast on other's things*

(p.4)

The narrator sets the stage for the characterisation of the beings into roles and fates rolled into one narrative bundle: the chicken is characterized as "food" for other beings, the rat as a pest that should be eliminated by poisoning, the donkey as a beast of burden, the cow as a milk

producer, the hare as the oppressed hard worker whose sweat and blood is milked and the hyena as the one that eats what every animal produces. The two main characters, Sungura (hare) and Fisi (hyena), are described in the language of production and exploitation. The other beings/animals are described in terms of their functional role in life. This way the narrator sets the stage for conflict of the worker/producer with the exploiter – the lazy but conniving beings that load over others. The presentation also brings to the fore a problem of archetypical characterisation so prevalent in narratives.

The narrator introduces the characters as living in antiquity "zama za kale" in an island that is bestowed with all the things that one can imagine of:

Msimulizi Kilibarikiwa kwa kila namna kama kinginecho katika ulimwengu ule: mazingira yenye mabonde na milima, jua na mvua angani, jangwa na misitu ardhini, wanyama wa pori na viumbe vya maji, hali kadhalika wadudu wa aina mbalimbali. Dunia ya kawaida kama tunavyoelewa. (p.5)

It was blessed in every manner like any other thing in that world. An environment with valleys and hills, sun and rain in the atmosphere, deserts and forests on the land, wild animals and aquatic beings. Moreover, insects of different types. A normal world as we understand.

The description here is similar to the fabled description of Africa before the advent of colonialism. Martin Meredith (2005) confirms this mystery of Africa to the world when he says that "the maps used to carve up the African continent were mostly inaccurate; large areas were described as terra incognita" (p. 1) giving it what Wole Soyinka (2012) calls an "aura of the primordial, a suggestive buttressing of those claims that the beginning of humanity is located within her landmass, almost beyond dispute."(p.28). In effect, the

narrator in *Paukwa* foregrounds the disruptive and exploitative nature of the colonial enterprise.

But soon after, the narrator introduces us to the protagonist and antagonist, two beings whose relationship is known to the audience: "Hao viumbe wawili sote twawafahamu sana kwani wao huigiza katika hadithi simulizi kemkem …Sungura na Fisi." (p5). *(We all know those two beings very well for they act out in many oral narratives ... Sungura [hare] and Fisi [hyena]).* The play is thus set not only in the island but also in the minds of the audience and in the lore of the many narratives that the two characters act in: the hyena being a narrative trope of greed and the hare of cunning.

The narrator/facilitator presents herself as a griot, an elder and keeper of the memory of the community – she has seen whatever exists to be seen, she has not missed anything that was said, but she is still unable to understand the situation that is about to unfold. She engages the audience to help her solve a riddle. The dilemma she presents is one of an irreconcilable dissonance in the world, a world where the producers of commodities are not the beneficiaries of their production. The narrator argues that she is confounded by the predicament and turns to the "wise" audience, in the Boalian style of enrolment of the audience, to help her solve the "secret of the metaphor" (p.4). The stage curtain is opened to portray a backdrop of the dialectical relations between beings that are working and a being that is sleeping fitfully. The plurality of the beings cultivating is contrasted with the one being that is sleeping. The working beings are singing and celebrating their hard work. The sleeping being wakes and utters a most diabolical statement that sets the conflict in the play:

Fisi: *(Akiamka toka usingizini)* Mke wa mtu simtaki … Lakini nikimpata simwachi. Chochote nipendacho ndicho nipatacho.

(Waking up) *I don't want anybody's wife…but if I get her, I will not let her go. Whatever I desire, I get* (p.2)

I say diabolical because it is an embodiment of the contradictory nature of the character of the oppressor: that the oppressor does not "want" what belongs to another, but if he sees it, he will not leave it alone – he will want it and take it. This makes the character of Fisi to be evil in a primeval sense – that he is the personification of evil and this is hidden from the rest of the world. The hyena, in this utterance, conjures the patriarchal construct of objectification of the women by alluding that the ownership of property is personified by the ownership of a woman/wife. What the Fisi can think of in his wakefulness is the "wife" of another and not any other thing. Taking the woman "owned by another" is the epitome of disenfranchisement and the peak of a conflict.

What follows is an absurdist cross-purposed dramatisation – Sungura talking about servitude, being a slave who is at the beck and call of a master, a beast of burden and workhorse – poverty and homelessness torment him: "Si mahali wala raha kilicho changu" *(I have neither a place nor joy)* (p.5). On the other hand, Fisi is talking about his glory, his eminence, his ownership of the world: "Dunia i mikononi mwangu…Yaani mimi sina hofu wala mashaka" *(The world is in my hands, I have no worry or trouble)* (p.5). The stark difference between the two characters serves two purposes. Firstly, it draws the empathy of the audience towards Sungura and mobilises the opinion of the audience against Fisi. Secondly, it foregrounds the themes of unfairness, oppression and exploitation that are the hallmark of the play. The audience therefore is prepared to witness an exploration of the evil and the devising of the plan to end it.

When Fisi finally sees Sungura farming, he pronounces the farm to be his and relies on a law that was created ostensibly to bring "rights" to all:

Sungura: Sheria gani?

Which law?

Fisi: Sheria iliyobuniwa ilinde na ieneze haki kwa kila mmoja. Wapi cheti?

The law that was created to ensure the rights of everyone are protected. Where is your title deed?

This introduces the dynamic of difference. Whereas Sungura and his ilk believe that the land is theirs because they have lived here for centuries, have been working on the land and have been eating from their sweat, Fisi and his ilk introduce the certification of ownership. Fisi has a certificate of ownership – a formal and legal document. Sungura thinks it is a joke, but in effect Fisi is introducing the advent of colonialism where large swathes of land in Africa, India, Australia and the Americas (and thus property) were arbitrarily annexed by colonising nations and allocated as spheres of influence and ownership and certified by a conference or agreement that was made the conquerors. The allegory is a powerful one.

In the play, Fisi not only claims ownership, but eats of the fruit in the farm. When he is accosted, he pretends that he does not even like them so he would not pay. But then he reinterprets the law again – he claims that the land, the fruits and even Sungura belong to him. The options that Sungura has are well spelled out:

Fisi: Kwa njia fupi nasema hivi: kwamba shamba nimeuziwa na ni langu, tangu leo. Kwako mambo yamebaki mawili. Ubaki unifanyie kazi au upotee. (p.8)

In short, this is what I am saying: This land has been sold to me, and it's mine from today. You have two options: you stay and work for me or you get lost

When Sungura contests this, he is attacked by Fisi. Sungura is incensed and fights back, pinning Fisi down. But Fisi has other resources – an armed security force of Mbwa Mwitu *(Jackals)* that he owns and maintains. When they come onto stage, they take his side and subdue Sungura. What follows is incarceration and a trial in court. The court is presided over by Fisi as judge and prosecuted by Mbwa Mwitu. Sungura is found guilty of contravening a law that he knows nothing about. He has also not participated in its formulation.

Fisi goes on to declare himself "Mfalme hadi Kifo" *(King for Life)* (p.24) and on an occasion when he is entertaining guests, he hatches a plan to pit Ng'ombe against Sungura: he had Ng'ombe's house torched and blames it on Sungura. First he tricks his guests to eating and drinking before any discussion or speech can be had. This, as Ng'ombe says when he is asked by Sungura how Fisi got enthroned as the king, is the tradition:

Ng'ombe: Si waelewa mila zetu walimwengu: mwenye mali humiliki uongozi. Hiyo ni kawaida, na kawaida ni sheria.

But you understand our traditions: the rich become rulers. That is the usual thing, and what is usual becomes the law.

Sungura: Mlikuwa na majadiliano ya kuthibitisha tabia zake, msimamo wake, lengo zake na mambo mengine muhimu itupasavyo kujua kuhusu wanaopendekeza kutuongoza ya kutuwezesha kuamua kama tutawapa atamu za kutuongoza au la?

Did you have a discussion to confirm his behaviour, his ideals, his objectives and other important issues that we are supposed to know about those that are suggesting to rule and enable us to decide whether or not to give them a chance to rule us?

Ng'ombe: Kusema ukweli hatukufuata huo utaratibu. Tulianza na mankuli na tembe.

Sincerely speaking, we did not follow that procedure. We started with eating and drinking alcohol.

(p.25)

This here is the tragedy of leadership in Africa: that behaviour becomes normative and translates into laws. Ng'ombe and all the other beings do not interrogate the past of Fisi, or how he has acquired the wealth that he has. Having wealth is the only prerequisite to being a leader. When accosted by Ng'ombe for allegedly having burned his home down, Sungura appeals to Ng'ombe's reason and to their long-standing relationship. Ng'ombe cannot understand the motive Sungura might have had and actually sees sense in Sungura's words. It is notable here that Ng'ombe is actually portrayed as the foolish character whereas Fisi is the trickster. On realising that he has been duped, Ng'ombe teams up with Sungura to go accost Fisi. Fisi on the other hand is having a crisis of his own: he had instructed Mbwa Mwitu to burn down Ng'ombe's house and had promised him a powerful leadership position. This had not been forthcoming. Mbwa Mwitu, either out of frustration or pure foolishness, discloses the heinous plot. Fisi is undeterred, conversely, he is emboldened – even with this betrayal: he dares the poor and cowardly animals to do anything:

Fisi: *(Akijidai)* Haya basi. Ni mimi niliyopanga hayo madhara yote iliyowapata. Mtafanya nini nyinyi waoga maskini hohehahe. Siwaogopi hata kidogo. Nawaamrisha muondoke hapa sasa hivi na tukisahau kisa hiki la sivyo mtakiona cha mtema kuni.

(Bragging) *Ok then. I am the one who orchestrated your problems. What will you do, you fearful and very poor beings? I don't fear you. I command you to*

leave here now and we forget about this incident or else you will face the consequences. (p.30)

But the animals regroup and attack Fisi and his lackeys, the jackals, and subdue them. Fisi's rule through trickery comes to an end. Whereas the other animals want to wipe these vile creatures from the face of the earth, Sungura, who has borne the brunt of oppression, does not want to dehumanise himself by using the same degradation and violence against his oppressors. It is also clear to the animals, as Ng'ombe argues, that the laws that exist, the court system and the corrupt practices entrenched in governance are controlled by Fisi and his friends. This means that they cannot get justice as Fisi will manipulate the system to his advantage. Again, if they kill Fisi and the Mbwa Mwitu, they will find that the evil network had deep roots and another Fisi will sprout from the ground (pp. 29-30). This dilemma is then picked up by the narrator and posed to the audience.

This play takes us to the historical construct of the Kenyan state through a systemic distancing of both the actors and the circumstances they find themselves in. The use of the narrative technique allows the writer and actors to transport the audience to an imaginary country, an island. This is reminiscent of the much-touted image of Kenya as an island of peace in a region destabilised by war and conflict that was projected as a national image of Kenya in the 1980s. The glorious past is interwoven with Sungura's and his ilk's hard work, a balanced society has evolved. The advent of colonialism is presented as the waking up of the despicable character Fisi and the subsequent conquest and subjugation of Sungura. The court scene is reminiscent of colonialism – where the people were governed by a law whose logic they did not understand and whose implementation they were only victims of. The postcolonial leadership is demonstrated as a continuation of colonialism, this time with the citizens hypnotized by the riches of the rulers and inebriated by alcohol, food and conspiracy wrought by the leaders. This is despite the riches being drawn from the exploitation of the

labour of the subjects and suffering being meted on the conscientious among these subjects. The play, in keeping with the tradition of moralization in narratology, avoids creating monsters out of the good characters (by their refusal to avenge themselves on Fisi and Mbwa Mwitu even when they are defeated) and instead fosters hope for communal regeneration.

2.3.5 Socialisation of History to Locate Nationhood in *Uraia*

As stated earlier on in the first chapter, *Uraia* was developed in 2001 by artists engaged by member organisations of the Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO). These organisations included The Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION), the Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs) and the Release Political Prisoners (RPP). The organisations had a history with the use of theatre for community education and mobilisation. It was part of the methodologies used in the National Civic Education Programme (NCEP) that was implemented in 2001-2002. CRECO *et al* (2001) identify four broad themes for the curriculum - nationhood and nation building; state, democracy and democratisation; constitution, constitutionalism and constitution making; and the practice of governance (p.v).

Uraia constituted four skits that are oriented around the four themes. The process of creation and the fluidity of the text and plot for the skits meant that little or no script was documented in writing – in the formal sense that a play is written. C. J. Odhiambo (2005), who attended and observed some of the performances by CLARION in the Nandi area documents the performances as consisting of "four skits" (p. 105) – though he only ends up describing three. Odhiambo may have been assessing the production based on the participatory education theatre (PET) construct as presented in the Boalian Forum Theatre. In it, the facilitation is based on enacted dramatic scenarios complete with a backdrop and freeze technique. The

researcher has found out that there were four themes: nationhood, constitutionalism, democracy, and governance. The theme of "nationhood" was not reduced to a skit, but to an animated community discussion guided by the facilitator. The artists invited the community to sing songs of "patriotism" that had emerged in the country since independence such as "Kenya Nchi Yetu" *(Kenya, Our Country)* and "Mimi ni Mwana Kenya" *(I am a Kenyan).* The text of the songs was therefore used to ignite a discussion on the things that make one love or hate the country. Salima Njoki, one of the artists in the project, posited as follows:

> I had been a member of the Five Centuries (5Cs) theatre team before I joined the CRECO project. We had been using songs and dance effectively to talk about the situation in the country, the oppression, the pain and the desire for change. This had resonated well with communities. In the talking about nationhood, which was the first performance after mobilisation, we decided to use songs for two reasons – to animate the performance space and to find an entry point for people to talk about their country. The facilitator would ask the audience: "when you hear this song, what do you feel as a Kenyan?" (Salima Njoki, Interview, 2020)

The second skit – on democracy – was presented through the story of the educated daughter of the village's richest man who comes back to the village and decides to marry the village idiot, much to the consternation of her parents. It was used to spur dialogue on who really should make the discussion on who to marry. The third skit – on constitutionalism – was presented through the oral narrative of digging the well. In the narrative, the king of the jungle invites all animals to a meeting to discuss the issue, and through it the various animal needs and roles are problematized. Usually, the question of the quantity of water one should be allowed to fetch was the tinder that ignited the conflict. The fourth skit was on governance. In it, a father would call for a family meeting and announce that he wanted to sell the piece of land where the family lived inorder to educate one of his children – a girl.

The discussions that followed would touch on property, participation in decision making and the value of the girl child. In *Uraia* therefore, the drama is not necessarily defined by dialogue and the enactment of conflict, but by the presentation of an agenda for discussion. This agenda is presented as an ethical, cultural, social, political, economic or spiritual dilemma. The performers would mingle with the audience and pose questions as well as answer them in-role. Usually, the dilemma would be left unresolved and contested so that its conflicts become a mnemonic tool for social cognition, memory and continued community engagement after the performance was over.

The performance of *Uraia* was used to initiate discussions with communities and to ignite public discourse on the issues raised. The facilitator was key in ensuring citizens voices were heard and moderated while the joker effectively poked holes in any argument with his borderline character. Also, the artists would use local names for characters and settings. This enabled them to localise the performance. The skits were, in my evaluation, skeletal in nature and only got fleshed out in performance. When talking about the creation process, Oby Obyerodhyambo who was the creative director of the project and was involved in creation argues that:

> The creation of a Participatory Educational Theatre piece has three important aspects. One is the development of plausible stories that can pass for generic as well as specific/localized application. This storyline must have "normal" characters relating in a "normal" environment. Secondly, the development of logic for audience participation. This constitutes the presence of sufficient points of departure for interpretation and argument by the characters. These departure points become the facilitation points where what are called Central Divergent Questions (CDQs) are

> poised. The third consideration is the thematic imperative - this is the social issue upon which the dramatic piece is predicated (Interview, July 2020)

It can therefore be argued that the *Uraia* Theatre Project broached new ground on methodology by pushing the boundaries of the known practices and forms of theatre while drawing from the Boalian archetype espoused in Forum Theatre. My argument is that this project consolidated songs, dance, African narrative techniques and Forum theatre in one performance. Kawive Wambua (2006), when writing about this project ascribes it to be "Interactive Participatory Education Theatre (IPCET) model where artists "step-out-of-the-shoes-of" the characters that they play:

> In this phase performers throw back the scenarios created and address themselves to life. This is the point where in other theatre forms catharsis permeated the audience. But in here reality is not left at the metaphoric stage, it is unclothed and let to walk the market. And thus, the role of theatre as a cultural tool of reinventing the individual and of constructing identity becomes imperative. (p.27)

From this assertion, it would seem that the artist-teachers switched between the reality crafted in the play and the reality that they as individuals find themselves in. Whereas this was predicated on the themes, it also brought a new dynamic of immediacy which was aimed at being transferred to the audience-teachers.

The three plays considered in this section are purely theme based and use historicisation as a means to project these themes. PET is here used as a methodology, just like songs and narratology, to advance the participatory agenda of civic and community education. Theatre therefore becomes a tool to achieve an end as determined in the programme of the organisations that employed it. The dramatic impetus employed is one of convenience.

Section 3: The Empire of Rights – Regurgitation of Statutes and Human Rights Provisions: the Case of *Maua, Kanzala* and *Storm*

The three plays analysed in this section were commissioned. This means that the funder was keen on ensuring that the organisation that was charged with the task, delivered on the specific mandate and object that was predetermined. The plays were also written by individual playwrights, and, as Kivutha confesses (Interview, 2019), the play had to satisfy the donor before it was approved to go to auditions and later staging.

2.3.6 Enacting the Geneva Conventions on War in *Maua*

Maua was written with the express aim of presenting, artistically, the Geneva conventions on war. These include: *Convention I* – the convention for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded and sick in Armed Forces in the field; *Convention II* – the convention for the amelioration of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of the armed forces at sea; *Convention III* – the convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war; *Convention IV* – the convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war. These conventions were ratified in 1949 (by 196 countries) and later amended by protocols of war – *Protocol 1*, (1977) relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts and *Protocol 2*, (1977) relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts.

As such, *Maua* is a play based on the portrayal or exposition of these conventions and protocols – a creation of awareness about them. The setting and characters therefore become but tools for the exposition. The play begins in an internally displaced persons' camp where two victims – stereotyped as women haunted by the horror of the invasion and the killings – are lamenting the suffering they are going through. Their land has been taken, their relatives killed, their food stores destroyed, their title deeds burned, their children's books and school

certificates burned and living in squalid conditions rife with rape, HIV spread and other forms of dehumanizing filth and starvation. The visit by Kabitho, a member of their ethnic community, is a stark reminder of their helplessness. We learn as the play unfolds that the Wandiku community has been a target of ethnic cleansing every five years. This is also tied to the electoral cycle. At the present time, Chebwe, the Watange mobiliser and war monger has said that the Wandiku are joining political parties to take over the leadership of the region (p.34). This is not the truth as Toiche finds out and hence wants to leave the fighters:

Chebwe: Uliapa kwamba utapigana mpaka wageni wote waondoke Lolomo

You swore to fight until all foreigners leave Lolomo

Toiche: Niliapa. Lakini niliapa kutokana na habari ambazo hazikuwa sahihi. Mlituambia kwamba Wandiku wanaunda vyama ili wachukue uongozi wa nchi kwa nguvu na kisha watupokonye mali zetu.

I swore. But I swore on the basis of information that was not right. You told us that the Wandiku were forming political parties so as to take over the leadership of this country by force then grab our property. (p.34)

But the attacks have been going on. Wandiku in Lolomo Kusini were attacked four months ago, and those in the Lolomo Kaskazini have been given notice to move out of their land by 31st May (p.10). Kabitho therefore reaches out to a retired captain of the army, Tungai, a member of the Wandiku ethnic group, to seek his expertise in training their young men to ward off the coming attacks. Though Tungai resists and even refuses the endearments of relations (he is married to Wangane, Kabitho's niece), his resistance is broken by the appearance of the distraught women, Nyagichi (his classmate) and Gachono. They are allegedly asking for directions to Tunyaiga. Here they relay to him their suffering: the government backed disinformation that saw them go back to their farms only to be attacked again and their being transported by force to an unknown place in the Mkuyuni province.

They narrate how they ran off and are seeking to start a new life in Tunyaiga. This irks him and he chooses to train the Wandiku fighters.

Tungai: Kwa nini watu wateseke hivi nchini mwao? Kwa nini watu wauawe bure bilashi? Inawezekanaje kuangamiza watu vivi hivi? Nyagachi hana mume tena. Hana watoto. Jamaa wake wote wameangamia – wameangamizwa na Watange. Hatuna budi kutilia vitisho vyao maanani. Ni muhimu watu wajiandae mapema. Lazima wafunzwe kupigana. (p.41)

Why should people suffer like this in their own country? Why should they be killed for no reason? How possible is it for people to be killed like this?? Nyangachi has no husband now. She has no children. All her family members have been killed, killed by Watange. We should take their threats seriously. It's crucial for people to be prepared in advance.. People must be trained on how to fight.

Chebwe, on his part, has had the training, acquisition of weapons and mobilisation of his ethnic community ongoing. When we first meet him, he is telling his wife, Neche, a tall story of how he missed her on his journey from Dar-es-Salaam to Arusha by ship – a practical impossibility as the two towns are connected by a road. But Neche already has read the news of his involvement in the skirmishes and confronts him. He does not relent and swears to go on with the plans. When his daughter learns of his involvement and confronts him, he is defensive and obnoxious – abusing her and her mother. She runs away from home to find her lover, Waito, and seeks a solution to the looming confrontation. Captured by Wandiku fighters, she actually becomes, like Helen of Troy, the catalyst of the fight. But Tungai's war ethics save the day, for he insists on releasing her and delays the fight.

Toiche and Chugu, two parallel characters from the Watange and Wandiku respectively, make a decision not to continue with the war. Toiche is disturbed by his guilt consciousness for acquiring weapons and training the fighters, and Chugu tells on the planners and funders of the conflict. It is from his words that Waito and Nali plan to stop the skirmishes by planning a demonstration against it. Though the demonstration never happens, Nali confronts her father and Waito protects her when she comes to their area. Their symbolic marriage is what the fighters rally around to resolve the conflict.

The construct of manhood is interrogated from the start of the play. Nyangachi and Gachono tell Kabitho that the Watange men have dispossessed the women and children of the Wandiku while, to quote Gachono "Wandiku men have stood by and watched, their tails between their legs" (p.3). Nyagachi laments the past when women of the Wandiku used to give birth to men:

Nyagachi: Laiti ingelikuwa zamani ambapo miji yetu ya uzazi ilizaa wanaume!
(I wish it was in the past when our cities of birth birthed men)

Kabitho: Bado mnazaa wanaume, Nyagachi. Nitazame!
You still give birth to men, Nyangachi. Look at me!

Nyagachi: Agh! Nikutazame nini! Wewe ni mwanamke mwenzetu. *(Kwa Gachono*) Gachono, nenda uniletee skati na kirinda
Agh! Why would I look at you? You are a fellow woman (to Gachono) *Go and bring me a skirt and dress.*

That they are gifting him with a dress and skirt is the contempt they have for the men, who according to them, are no longer men, but women. Men are presented as people who defend

their families (women and children) from external aggression, who will not agree to be dispossessed, who will not let their women and children live in squalor exposed to the vagaries of nature – dying from pneumonia and other disease wrought by unsafe food and lack of sanitation. Women, in relation to this construct, are under the care of men and the fact that their men have been killed, is a demonstration of the men's own weakness. When Nyagachi remembers how her husband died, she cries in pain and faints in both horror and hopelessness (pp. 38-39). We are unable to decipher anything about the man because he is first presented as a hardworking man who sells charcoal (until he is coal black (p.38)) for ten years so as to get enough money to buy the land. Then he is presented as having arrived home on the day he was killed. This is characteristic of our view of theatre for social justice: the concentration of the drama is in the perversion of the right, the point of divergence from the provisions of collective and universal good that is the basis of dramatic intervention and point of conflict. It is his effort to seek to disprove the two women that propels Kabitho to start planning and financing retaliatory attacks on the Watange.

When Chebwe's daughter confronts him on his role in planning the violence against the Wandiku, he evades her accusation by accusing her friends of theft. He says:

Chebwe: Vijana niliowakuta hapa! Ndio wamefanya hivi. Majasusi! Wamekuja mpaka nyumbani na kutenda haya. Na bado binti yangu yumo nyumbani. Nali, huwezi kutambua watu waovu unapowaona? Wewe ni kama mamako! Bure kabisa.

The youths that I found here! Are they the ones that have done this? Snoops! They have come up to my home and done this. And my daughter is still at home. Nali, can't you recognize bad people when you see them? You are like your mother! Very useless.

Chebwe's construct of manhood is warped. to him, manhood is realisable through the execution of war and the disrespect of women. He thinks and says that women are both stupid and useless and lumps his daughter and wife as unable to detect bad people. The irony is apparent because he is the evil person and both his wife and daughter have noticed it and are fighting him.

The Geneva conventions are expressly mentioned by Kabitho in his discussion with Tungai on the conduct during war. After Tungai gives Kabitho a lesson on the protocols, the latter rebuts:

Kabitho: Unajua vizuri kwamba kanuni unazozitaja ni upuuzi wa kigeni. Tusiige ovyo ovyo mambo ya Kizungu. Sisi so Wazungu. Sisi ni Waafrika. Wazungu wana mambo yao na sisi Waafrika tuna yetu.

You know that the principles you talk about are nonsense from foreigners. Let us not blindly follow white people. We are not Europeans. We are Africans. Europeans have their laws, we have ours.

Tungai: Waafrika wamekuwa na sheria ya kibinadamu tangu zamani za kale

Africans have had human rights laws from a long time.

Kabitho: Tungai, usinichukulie kuwa zuzu. Sijasoma sana, lakini mambo unayo yaita kanuni nimeyasikia yakitajwa katika semina fulani. Na semina ilitaja wazi kwamba mambo hayo yanatoka Geneva. Geneva haiko Congo au Uganda. Haiko Ethiopia, Sudan wala Somalia. Iko nchi fulani huko Ulaya.

Tungai, don't think I am a dimwit. I am not very learned, but those principles you mention I heard about them in a seminar. And it was said clearly that they come from Geneva. Geneva is not in Congo or Uganda. It's not in Ethiopia, Sudan or Somalia. It is in a European Country (p.66)

Tungai argues that even though the protocols were developed in Geneva, they are applicable to Africa. He posits that no community in Africa would kill women and children of the offending community in war. This invalidates Kabitho's argument and he turns to the banal by arguing for localising the war and its protocols. This is obviously used to paint him in bad light and prepares us for his eventual defeat by the solid resolve of Tungai who releases Nali after her capture. Reference is also made by Chebwe when he narrates the desperation, they will push the Wandiku to:

Chebwe: Tutawalipua miguu vilivyo. Wanacheza na moto. Watalilia Msalaba Mwekundu mpaka machozi yao yawe mekundu kuliko msalaba wenyewe (p.62)

We will break their legs indeed. They are playing with fire. They will cry out to Red Cross until their eyes get more red than the cross itself.

But the reason why the much touted war is portrayed as unnecessary and vain is that its basis is unjusticeable. The playwright seems to argue that electoral defeat should not be a basis for hatred and attack to communities aligned to the winning party. However, by justifying the conflict between South Sudan and the Khartoum based government, the play justifies war as inevitable in situations of oppression. Waito, when talking to Chugu and Nali argues that people have a right to rise against an unfair government:

Waito: Majeshi ya Serikali ya Sudan yamekuwa na vita dhidi ya wakazi wa kusini mwa nchi hiyo

The Sudan army has been fighting the people living in the south of the country.

Chungu: Chanzo cha vita ni nini?

What is the cause of the war?

Waito: Kwa miaka kadha, wakazi wa Kusini mwa Sudan wamekuwa wakipinga kunyimwa haki zao …

For several years, southerners have been fighting oppression and human rights abuse (p.58)

The play can thus be said to have contextualised the fight for rights to land and freedom in the African context. I disagree with C. J. Odhiambo, who, having studied this play with Zakes Mda's *Frame of Community Conscientisation through Theatre for Development* in mind, argues that the play and its production had limitations of dramatisation and community engagement due to its "conventional framing and structuring" (p.170).

My argument is that the play did not necessarily have to take this form. In its stead, it takes the narrative and performance mode to create an exposition. The play reads like a rewriting of the conventions, a recasting of the conventions into dialogues. Characters who are put in otherwise normal situations either developed the conditions rife for ethnic conflict or are discussing the application and meaning of the conventions to their lives. Kabitho and Tungai discuss the ethics of warfare (pp. 56-16, 64-68 and 81-83); Chebwe and Nali discuss the morality of killing people; Kabitho, Walila and Chengi discuss the question of child soldiers (pp 46 - 48); Nali and Waito discuss the effects of war and conflict (pp.52 - 54) and Tungai, Walila and Chengi discuss the delineation of the enemy (pp.78 - 79). This is at the expense of the normalcy of human interactions and discourse, the starkest of which is represented by the perversion of the love scene.

2.3.7 Articulation of Democratic and Political Rights in *Kanzala*

Kanzala is a play authored by Kivutha Kibwana and first performed in the National Theatre in 1997. Kanzala depicts the political campaigns of this stultifying misogynistic philanderer - Kanzala - who is pitted against the noble Mama – a widow - portrayed as a paragon of virtue, as a mother and aspiring leader. The play that was produced early in 1997 with the elections coming up in December of the same year. In these elections, a "Mama" – Charity K. Ngilu – was running for president. This was the first time a woman was running for presidency in Kenya. Ngilu was running against a cast of men: Daniel Moi (who was the incumbent president), Raila Odinga, Wamalwa Kijana and Mwai Kibaki among others. Kenyans were especially excited by her slogan - "Masaa ni ya Mbele" *(It is time to move forward)* or Masaa ni ya Ngilu *(It is time for Ngilu).* Ngilu's joining the competition for the top leadership position must have made the men panic. This is what Kibwana dramatises in Kanzala. The panic manifests itself in several ways that are characterised by Kanzala, Mama's opponent in the play. He suffers the "pain" of having to compete with a woman (something he considers antithetical) and thus spends a lot of his campaign time degrading women and in effect Mama.

In this year also, there was a national campaign by the National Convention Executive Council (NCEC) bringing together a number of people from across the country into Ufungamano – a hall run by the National Council for Christian Churches (NCCK) which has come to symbolise the historical venue for the liberation movement in Kenya. Ufungamano house, due to its association with the church, had moral elevation over the KANU law enforcers. Its transformation to a space homing human rights and pro-constitutional review advocates gave Ufungamano House some aura of political invincibility and halo of moral

superiority over the then President Moi's draconian mannerisms. This made to move in stature from a mere building to a politically charged shrine to which believers in human rights and constitutional freedoms went to pray for the expansion of the democratic spaces in Kenya.

This movement also precipitated the "No Reforms No Elections" campaign. Kibwana was one of the key leaders of the movement. The campaign was the brainchild of the NCEC and was predicated on the realisation that KANU was ready to go for elections without effecting reforms to enable a uniform playing field. According to Mutunga (1999), the initial clarion call was "NO REFORMS NO BUDGET" which was spearheaded in parliament by pro-NCEC parliamentarians who lifted placards as the budget was being read with a live broadcast by the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation - then a KANU mouthpiece. "No reforms No Elections" was among many other calls that "emphasised that the constitution making was not about governance issues only, it covered all societal problems (p.171). As such, the issues related to social justice such as human rights, education, healthcare, housing, employment and gender equity among others became mainstreamed. It was inevitable that Kibwana would use theatre to reach the grassroots with these messages. Kibwana (1997) wrote:

> Participatory methodologies are intended to ensure the participants truly see and feel the subject matter of the learning session. Thus, drama and role playing are important components. When people create or watch dramatic presentations and role playing, they receive messages in an emotional and vivid manner. (p.66)

Whereas the play is being analysed from a literary perspective, these critical events and the author's role in them may have shaped its conceptual nature and purpose. The play is titled *Kanzala,* the name of the main character but also a parody of "Councillor". In the Kenya of

the 1990s, a Councillor was an elected or nominated representative at the Local Government Council of the Municipality, Town or City. Councillors were the ground mobilisers of political parties. They also had access to local resources such as land and other benefits accruing to leadership. Reviewing the performances at the Kenya National Theatre in 1997, Philiph Ngunjiri in "Culture: Civic Education Takes to the Stage" argues that the play is a "witty parody" that explores the questions of "real and apparent democracy" in the exercise of the right to vote (p.1). The play therefore was aimed at "teaching" people about their rights in electoral politics. I shall analyse the thematic imperatives under two perspectives: the abuse of power and gender dynamics in leadership

Kanzala is depicted as a weak character who seeks to force the community to be supporters of his political party and therefore supporters of his leader (Kiongozi). He has the ears of the chief, the headmaster and other prominent people. Because of his position, he gets a lot of requests for assistance from many people and uses the opportunity to force them to be his supporters. However, the tide is turning. It starts with the bartender, Sweetie, not accepting his sexual overtures. Mwalimu is angered by the fact that Kanzala is sexually exploiting school children and shouts at him:

Mwalimu: Je unajua kuwa utahukumiwa?

Do you know that you will be held responsible?

Chifu: Usiseme kuwa hukukanywa. (p.16)

Never say you were not warned

Kanzala, like the dictator that he represents, threatens dire consequences (including arrest and incarceration) to anybody that does not do what he says. Although he rejects the proposal by Chifu to have the teacher arrested, he plans to have him fired

Kanzala: … Ni lazima nizungumze na wakubwa wake. Hawezi kuruhusiwa kuendelea kuharibu akili za watoto wetu, vijana wetu. La, hasha. (p.16)

...I must talk to his superiors. He cannot be allowed to continue poisoning our children's minds. No, never.

This is despite the fact that he is destroying the lives of children who seek his help. When he approaches the pastor of the local church ostensibly to help in building the church and to be prayed for, he is irked by the suggestion that he reconciles with his wife and threatens them with arrest for being devil worshippers:

Kanzala: Tutajuaje kama sio nyinyi mnaoabudu mashetani au pengine kuhusika na mambo mabaya zaidi.

How shall we know whether you are devil worshippers or are even engaging in worse things.

…

Pengine mnahusika sana na mambo ya maasi. Mnaficha waasi...guerrillas.

Maybe you are engaged in treason. You harbour separationists…guerrillas

….

Nitaamuru mfanyiwe uchunguzi...nyinyi ngojeni tu; mtaona. Tutafutilia mbali leseni yenu. (p.50)

I will direct that you be investigated…you just wait; you will see. We will revoke your licence.

When Kanzala goes to the elders seeking their help in the campaigns and asking them to talk Mama out of the campaigns, they reject his offer of cash and insist that he has to agree to certain basic things and swear to abide by them: to treat people as the bosses, to respect them, to serve all equally, to put the interests of the country first, to be truthful and to ask for

forgiveness when he wrongs. These he rejects and threatens them with arrest, incarceration and torture for apparently administering illegal oaths:

Kanzala: Nitaangiza mkamatwe na polisi

I will call for your arrest by the police

M'wa 1: Polisi hawawezi kukamata ukweli, Kanzala

Police cannot arrest the truth, Kanzala

Kanzala: Hamwajui polisi wa Zoza...Utumishi kwa wote … *service to all*...watazipinda ndimi zenu mpaka muwe hamwezi kuzungumza kwa mafumbo. Magereza ya Zoza ndiyo yaliyo bora zaidi ulimwenguni. *First class.* Ngojeni tu. *(Anatoka kwa kishindo)*

You do not know the police of Zoza. Service to all…they will beat you tongues so that you cannot talk in parables. Our prisons are the best in the world… First class. Just wait. (He leaves in a huff) (p.59)

Kanzala brags that he and Kiongozi have the police, the army and other instruments of force in their pay. During the rally he rebukes multi-party democracy campaigners and human rights activists in his allegory of crusaders working with foreigners to "dig a tunnel" to statehouse (ostensibly to topple the Kiongozi and his government) and seeks to bribe people with goodies, but no one follows him out of the meeting – the people stay to listen to Mama.

The abuse of power is rampant in the play. He has organised the chief and other government actors (backed by a group of youth reminiscent of Youth for KANU in the 1980s and 1990s – consisting of KANU loyalists identified and kitted by the party in every village) to block political competitors from holding meetings and to advance their agenda. He sees opposition adherents in anyone who does not automatically bow to his whims – including his own son who is determined to marry the daughter of his political opponent. He is a man besieged by

fear and this is best demonstrated by his daydream in the bar when a supernatural being shows him the pictures of the future where there can be peace and co-existence of different ideas and political persuasions.

Kanzala also interrogates the gender dynamics in leadership. The play can easily be dismissed as advancing what bell hooks (1993) refers to as a "phallocentric paradigm of liberation" (p.148). This she explains as the link between freedom and the expression of patriarchal manhood. This to me means that the acceptance of patriarchy, and therefore the place of the woman, is central to the appropriation of freedom.

There are several instances that I would like to cite. The first is the authorial intrusion in naming and thus stereotyping. Kiongozi and Kanzala, the known leaders in the land of Zola, are men. The chief, the community elders and the religious elders are men. These are the people around and with whom the question of leadership is discussed. What this does is to make the place of women, or rather the entry of women, a strange thing. Thus, Mama is talked about in third person, as an intrusion in a world otherwise peopled. That she is discussed by men all the time in her absence except in the political rally is a confirmation of this paradigm. Never once does her merit as a human being get discussed: the perspective is one of womanhood. This is best exemplified by Kanzala's statement when he is talking to the Mbari elders:

> **Kanzala:** Zungumzeni na Mama. Mwambieni kuwa mwanamke hawezi kuongoza wanaume. Mwambieni kuwa mila za ukoo wetu zinasema hivyo. Ama sivyo? (p.52)
>
> *Talk to Mama. Tell her that a woman cannot lead men. Tell her that is what our traditions say. Is it not true?*

As a matter of fact, Kanzala knows no better – he has no historical depth. Also considering that Kiongozi is the one who had suggested that he set up the elders to do this, as he admits (p.54), we also can conclude that he has no social intelligence. He thinks of himself as better because he is a man. (p.53)

Secondly, the objectification of women by Kanzala is stultifying. There are three characters that are sexually related to Kanzala: one as a wife and the other two as victims of his misogynistic philandering. None of these characters are either mentioned by name or do appear on stage. There are faceless and nameless "objects" of his hatred (in the case of his wife) and his sexual appetite (in the case of the other two). Kanzala lacks utu in that he can do anything to satisfy his personal desires – even if at the expense of others. In the opening scene, he is engaged with Sweetie, a bartender whom he makes sexual overtures to. When she stands her ground and demands respectability, he is taken aback – it is unimaginable to him:

Kanzala: Kwa nini wewe ni mwanamke wa kiburi hivi?
W*hy do you have so much pride, woman?*

Sweetie: *(Sweetie anacheka)* Kiburi? Ni nani mwenye kiburi? Ni lazima nihudumie wengine pia. *(Sweetie anatoka)*
Pride? Who has pride? I must serve others too. (Sweetie leaves)

Kanzala: Msichana wa kushangaza. Ni yeye tu ambaye haniiti Mheshimiwa hapa… (p.9)
An amazing girl. She is the only one who doesn't call me Honourable here…

Throughout the play, he pursues Sweetie so that he can "touch" her; he demands that she goes to room 1 (p.17) and later when she jokes about allowing him to her "state house" if he gets a heart (p.44), he gets besotted instead of understanding her metaphoric inference. His reputation as an exploiter of the poor and desperate is portrayed through his sexual exploitation of women: when he is told that there is a school girl looking for him, he says that she should await him in room seven (p.11); later the girl's mother comes and he says that she also awaits him in Room Eight (p.17). We learn, through Sweetie's taking pity of them, that the two are sexually abused by Kanzala in the lodgings. Perhaps his greatest moral ineptitude is seen when he mocks his son for not having had multiple sex partners before he settles on one to marry:

> **Kanzala:** Je, rika lenu halifanyi majaribio tena siku hizi? Ni lazima kwanza uonje bidhaa zote zilizoko sokoni. (p.61)
>
> *…But, doesn't your age group do trial runs? You must taste all goods in the market.*

Mama, Kanzala's political opponent, bears the brunt of his unscrupulous character and faces public ridicule. Thirdly, the acceptability of the woman as a human being is predicated on her acceptance of her gendered roles. The disparagement Mama suffers in the hands of Kanzala who has spoken before her in the rally makes her capitulate:

> **Kanzala:** Mama ni mwanamke mwema. Ni mama mzuri na mtunzaji wa nyumba. Kwa nini anataka kuwa malaya basi? Wanawake wanaoingia katika siasa ni wanawake wasiokuwa na mwelekeo; ni wanawake wasiokuwa na wanaume katika maisha yao. … Na kama ni lazima waongoze basi wanaweza kuongoza bikini…. (p.31)

Mama is a good woman. She is a good mother and takes care of the home. Why then does she want to become a prostitute? Women who get into politics are women without bearing; these are women who have no men in their lives…and if they must lead, let them lead in the kitchen….

Kanzala's argument is not just about Mama, it is about all women in Africa: that they should be led because when they get into politics, they become prostitutes. The "goodness" of the woman, according to him, is seen at home. In her campaign, apart from having to listen to the disrespect that she gets from Kanzala, Mama has to play into the hands of the patriarchal construct: she owns the house chores of cooking, care, house cleaning, teaching children, clothing and creating joy at home. She goes on to say that women stay at home to take care of the family:

Mama: Na kila wakati tuko nyumbani ndipo jamii nzima ijue kuwa ina kwao kulikoimarika… (p.34)

And every time we are at home, the whole family knows their home is safe and good…

Mama has to capitulate this way so as to justify herself, to humanise herself, to make herself (and other women) to be seen as important in the community. Arguing that this was a strategic thing to do so as to capture the vote of women or to play the victim and get sympathy votes is tantamount to dehumanising her further. When she says "Nitasikitika nikikushinda katika uchaguzi *(I will be sad to beat you in the elections)* (p.76), her dehumanisation is complete: she is no more than a space-holder. In Judith Fetterly's construct, she is "immasculated" to the extent that she thinks defeating a man in elections is a

saddening thing. Winnie, her daughter, falls in the same trap of "homemakers". In the wedding reception, she tells the guests:

> **Winnie:** Ninawakaribisha kwa karamu yetu. Ni lazima nifanye hivyo kwa kuwa mimi *ndiye mwanamke* na ndiye ninayejua zaidi kuhusu chakula. (p.75) *(Emphasis mine)*
>
> *I welcome you to our ceremony. I must do that because I am* the woman *and so I know more about food.*

She seems to say that one has to be a woman so as to know about food – and by extension the kitchen and the home. This is the same ruse that has been mooted by patriarchy and used against women in denying them their rightful place in leadership. That this is happening to a child of the character seeking political power is transference of the stereotype to being an intergenerational one.

In conclusion, the presentation of these two aspects – the abuse of power and gender dynamics in leadership is quickly shunted aside by the foregrounding of peace messages and the nuptials that change nothing. Mama is still an underdog and Kanzala has neither repented nor humiliated/suffered in any way due to his evil. This misrepresentation of the feminist agenda is shocking considering that the playwright was considered a frontline gender activist at the time. The themes and the issues surrounding the rights to the vote as an aspect of social justice become the mainstay of the play. It takes the sub themes of intimidation of voters, the securitisation of campaigns, the denigration of women, voter bribery and use of public servants and goods in campaigns. This makes other aspects of the dramaturgy such as the development of characters, language and style suffer.

2.3.8 The Right to Vote in Peace in *Storm*

The play takes place mainly in the house of Baba with only one other scene happening by the roadside. Baba is a civic education enthusiast working with an unnamed Non-Governmental Organisation. He is determined to educate the people on the provisions of the law, especially the right to vote and the role of the government in providing security to people living in any part of the country. The play is set in Kenya, but the characters are not given any local/community names. All but Dada, who insists that her name is Nehanda in a moment of anger at being called Mekatilili (p.56), are given stock names for the role that they play. The prophetess, Jerusha, is so named as a biblical reference. The only other person named is Rev Gume, although he does not come onto stage.

The play also lacks a central conflict - there are a plethora of conflicts that are either not developed or do not reach the climax or are unfounded. Sana has a frosty relationship with the father for no tangible reason except the feeling he has that his father does not like him. Dada too does not agree with his mother because of a love affair with the chief's son – but the love affair is not sufficiently developed; in fact, when she meets with Kijana, they talk more about the country and their families than about themselves:

Kijana: The politicians, the administration: all of them want our people to be ignorant. That way they can behave like colonial governors. All these people have known is the tyranny of the chief, the police and the DO, and the sweet lies of politicians come election time

Dada: They could certainly do with some standing up to some of the tyranny. Even a worm may turn, they say. (p.18)

Baba and the Chief are enemies for reasons of an electoral feud which is only referred to and which is lesser in weight than their friendship – Baba, single handedly, helped the chief's son

go to college abroad (p.45). The children (new generation) are mobilised by Jerusha to destroy their parents on the flimsy and unsubstantiated grounds of being "devil worshippers" who should be cleansed from the land. People of one community attack those of the other community even when the othering has been blurred by intermarriages and, for the case of Man, when they have not been provoked at all and instead reap benefits from them.

The development of characters is also wanting. At the opening, the supposed joyful reminiscences of a twenty-one-year-old marriage is laced with the rights of women in marriage and the political campaign and civil education activities of Baba. When the children come onto stage, the discussion they have with their parents is unnatural: there is hatred and dislike which is not justified and not explained. The Chief, Man, Jerusha, Kijana are presented as flat characters whose motivation for action or purpose in the play is unreconciled. While it is possible to say that the Chief is being used by the government to advance the partisan political agenda of the ruling party (pp. 27, 38), it is difficult to explain his involvement in the arson activities.

The play is a bold exemplification of thematic overdose – a situation where the playwright may as well be giving a lecture on the subject as opposed to creating scenarios that are used to expose the themes. Sections of it read like presentations on civic education where a facilitator is exposing the audience to what the law says on a particular issue. For example, when the chief comes to disperse the meeting, Baba says:

> **Baba:** Chief, the law is quite clear on that issue. I could meet the whole of Kenya as long as I meet them in groups of nine or ten. You see how ridiculous you make it? This is my home. The constitution says my property rights are guaranteed; so are my freedoms of expression and

> assembly and association. I can say whatever I want to say to anybody or any group of people gathered to listen and I can join whatever party, church, cooperative society or society. The constitution says so and since it is the highest law of the land, it cannot be contradicted by any other law. (p.37)

This passage is the regurgitation of the rights to property and its protection, the right of assembly, association, freedom of speech, freedom of political participation, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and the supremacy of the constitution. It is as undramatic as it is cliché'. I conclude that the urgency and breadth of the civic education agenda has robbed the *Before the Storm* of the critical elements of performability and credibility. Even when the purpose of the play could have been civic education, literature and specifically theatre, has certain peculiarities, such as the imbuing of literariness to thematic pursuits, which are entirely lacking in this play.

Overall, the plays analysed in this section have been depicted as having a peculiar bluntness in the presentation of the subject matter. Their special purpose and urgency in the communication of the right or social justice agenda has therefore redacted their literariness and reduced them to "campaign" materials.

2.4. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I interrogated the theme of social justice and its presence in the primary texts. I have shown that the plays under study advanced social justice through the idea of inclusivity of hitherto marginalised population groups, where such marginalisation is based on discriminatory practices of gender biases and socio-economic exploitation. Specifically, I have shown that Imbuga's *Aminata* and Kithaka wa Mberia'a *Natala* use the trope of gender

empowerment to highlight structural and systemic modes of socio-political and cultural exclusion from the political mainstream of postcolonial Kenya. In doing this, Imbuga and Kithaka wa Mberia seem to suggest that access to opportunity plays a bigger role than gender in individuals' quest for self-empowerment. Ultimately, the foundational message in the texts seems to be that building a socially just society entails a shift in the kind of narratives that dominate communal imaginaries, identities, and identifications. That is why, I argue, through characters such as Jumba and Aminata, old constructs of gender roles and biases fail to resolve contemporary social and economic challenges.

On the other hand, collaboratively authored texts such as *Uraia* by CRECO, *Shamba La Mfukeri* by LRF, *and Paukwa* by Kang'aara Wa Njambi (produced by 4Cs) take the position that social justice can only be achieved with greater civic competence and willingness to take revolutionary actions of resistance especially among the economically marginalised communities. These texts seem to extend the didacticism that is associated with popular theatre in general, although they lace their messages with innovative stylistic aspects for greater aesthetic pull. It is to these that I now turn in my next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THE STYLE OF POPULAR THEATRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN KENYA

3.1 Introduction

The theme of social justice, as understood by various artists, varies in perspective and priority of its elements. While some artists view it from gender standpoints, others take a socio-economic standpoint. The differences in these standpoints become apparent in the stylistic choices that the artists make. Therefore, in this chapter, I analyse stylistic choices as part of the aesthetics of popular theatre exemplified in the texts under study. I argue although some critics consider popular theatre's aesthetic feel is compromised by unmitigated didacticism, the examples under study defy this tradition to demonstrate a careful stylistic awareness that enhances their messages on the theme of social justice. I begin by highlighting fundamentals of style in popular theatre.

3.2 The Place of Style in Popular Theatre

I hypothesised that the special purpose of theatre for social justice may have certain effects on the theatricality of the texts chosen for this study. In this section, I would like to interrogate the stylistic imperatives in the texts using a multiplicy of lenses: fluidity of texts, embellishment or decentering of conflict, the presentational or realistic structure and the participation of audience in their structure. Firstly, I look at the text in relation to the improvisational nature of its structure. I investigate how it treats its subject matter as either traditional proscenia play structure or as detachable storylines that can independently discuss a complete issue on their own and which can be embellished by audiences or altered in relation to the space of performance. Secongly, I argued in the previous chapter that the plays, which were produced in what I can describe as an environment of censorship and fear, the theatre was, and continues to be, an "oasis" – a cool place in the cruelty of the desert –

where people converge to discuss their issues without possibility of intimidation or fear, that it provides a platform for open expression and discussion where taboo or restricted subjects can be interrogated. My contention is that social justice theatre practitioners may therefore adopt linguistic choices and character development that have a one-to-one relationship with the reality in a particular community. This enhances the accessibility of the theatre, its meaning and nuance to the audience.

Thirdly, I posit that theatre could have its source in community art forms, language and idiom, while still being used to influence the social dynamics. I shall evaluate whether and how popular theatre in Kenya created a safe space for the discussion of matters of governance in the country. A key aspect of community artforms is narration. Okpokodu argues that:

> The storytelling format allowed an active verbal and tactile relationship between performers and spectators. More than this, it seems to have had a didactic purpose since it permitted telling stories about the history of the people (p.32)

Narration, therefore, becomes both a methodology of the theatre as well as a tool for the creation of theatre. In this section, I shall analyse how the theatre uses the narrative – and other attendant forms of orature such as song, dance, riddles, and proverbs as embellishments – to project the social justice question. A fourth argument is that any theatre that intends to have an impact in the society especially in midwifing social and political change, must of necessity involve the audience in its design and production and poerformance. As such, I intend to investigate how the audience and the Boalian "spect-actors" are involved iun the production of this theatre.

3.3 Cultural Nuance and Symbolism in *Natala* and *Aminata*

I discuss the two plays together, because *Natala* and *Aminata* are by and large conventional plays, ascribing to the proscenium form. Inasmuch as each play is different in how it employs style, the conventions of the theatre, including stage directions, characterisation, the imaginative use of language, the development of conflict and its resolution, are, by and large, pandering to the proscenium archetype.

Natala has been rewritten three times over fifteen years since it was first performed. In the playwright's own words, the third edition, which is the basis of this study, has been revised and enlarged to 82 pages, as compared to the first two editions that were 61 pages each (pg. v). Kithaka says that:

> "Maonyesho yaliongezeka; baadhi ya sehemu zilifutiliwa mbali na baadhi ya majina ya wahusika yalibadilishwa kwa kadri fulani. Baada ya toleo la kwanza kuchapishwa nilitanabahi kwamba bado kulikuwa na uwezekano wa kuuboresha mchezo" (pp.iii – iv).
>
> *Scenes were added, some parts were removed and names of characters changed to some extent. After the first publication I thought that there was a possibility of bettering the play*

There is no evidence provided in the text or by the playwright of any "workshopping" or expansion through dramatic presentation by actors. With regard to the aspect of textual fluidity, characters have "fixed" lines that have an internal logic of plot build-up. This is in keeping with traditional theatre, where the author may vary the text for republication or other presentation. The changes the playwright made, in my view, enhance the conflict and theatricality of the play. The author has introduced three other scenes, one of which was

completely not in the original version (Onyesho [Scene] V which happens in the chief's office), and broken the original Scene V into three different scenes. The net effect is to accentuate the drama and to enhance conflict. The author expands the conflict to include the role of the government in protecting matrimonial property. In the new Scene V, the conflict with the chief, who wanted a bribe to allow the burial to proceed, is complicated by the fact that he refuses to help Natala get her title deed back, because he wants to buy the land from Wakene. Scenes VI, VII and VIII are derived from the original Scene V, though now with enhanced dialogue, a dramatisation of the fight between Wakene and Natala, and a different ending – where the arrival of Tango does not stymie the fight. In effect, the playwright has cemented the ability of women to stave off aggression from men and to assert their humanity. In an interview, Kithaka wa Mberia said that in doing this, he created "a better version, a much finer book" (Interview, 2019)

In keeping with the repertory tradition, the play does not provide a "safe space" as such, since there is no taboo or other conflictual issue presented. In fact, Natala is facing aggression from the Chief, Wakene and the mortuary attendant on two peculiar issues: sexual abuse and corruption/disinheritance. These two issues are not taboo subjects, neither are they "unsafe" to discuss. The fact that they gain prominence in the play is a stylistic choice, and is in keeping with foregrounding the theme of gender equality. This removal of "safe spaces" in effect reduces the potential of the play in advancing social justice.

Natala can be said to be fully employing the presentational style. The play is set majorly in Natala's house. Only two scenes take place elsewhere - in the Chief's office and in Wakene's compound. The action, language and conflicts in the play are realistic, and it is easy for the audience to relate with. The plot itself augments this: it is the story of a happily married

village woman whose husband "dies" in the city and then some members of the family gang up with some members of the community and the local administration to disinherit her, using a perversion of culture and brute force. She is pitted against a not well to do young married man who has taken to alcohol and misogyny as a way to boost his morale. Natala's fate is the fate of many a woman in Kenya and the African continent. The playwright supports this view when, upon my asking him what *Natala* was modelled on, Kithaka said:

> *Natala*...you know sometimes you get an idea from the most unlikely things … it was actually a story that they had written, about maybe two paragraphs in *The Nation* … or some other newspaper … of an incidence where somebody was suspected to have died in Western Kenya ... and then the person came back home much later after they had been "buried" … looking at it, it looked like something that had the potential of very strong drama … so I developed that, and this is why the name Natala was initially Nanjala and the first version has a bit of Luhya culture…. which is something one should not do because you have to free it… so I rewrote it, I recast it to be applicable to East Africa (Interview: 2019)

The play therefore panders to reality, the predicament of the widowed woman in a community that believes in wife inheritance, and that matrimonial property belongs to the man. The corrupt chief, the insouciant brother-in-law, the elders subverting culture and using their age to their advantage and doting innocent children are typical of the social reality – any reader or theatre goer will know a Mama Lime or a Wakene. The characters fit their own frame, and do not have to be dramatic or otherwise accentuated to create the effect that they do in the play. The playwright does not use borderline characters for any effect. It is our considered view that this was/is the fulcrum for community engagement.

The audience in *Natala* is one of passive watchers. Only four times in the play are they referred to. The first by Wakene in the soliloquy at the beginning of Scene II, when he is admiring Natala's picture and singing:

Wakene: [*Kwa hadhira*] Marashi! Hilo ni neno hatari - hatari sana[*Anacheka*]

Dunia ina hatari kweli! [*Anacheka*] Mbona mnaniangalia kama hamwelewi. Au nyinyi ni wanafunzi wa seminari? Kundi la watawa! Dunia ina mengi! Hata watawa! (p11)

[To the audience] *Perfume! That is a dangerous word – very dangerous.* (He laughs) *The world is really full of danger!* (Laughs) *Why are you looking at me as if you do not understand? Or are you seminarians? A group of hermits! The world has many surprises! Even hermits!*

In this instance, the audience is objectified and is the recipient of Wakene's misplaced barb. The reference to the audience is neither structurally necessary nor sustained. The reference to hermits is supposedly a rebuttal to this audience for their "wondering at his love for Natala" – as if it is wrong. The reference only enhances Wakene's delusions, as opposed to creating a role for the members of the audience.

Secondly, the audience is mentioned by the mortuary attendant in the play-in-a-play: Bala (who plays the mortuary attendant), misunderstanding Natala's cry of desperation as an abuse to him, turns to the audience and asks them

Natala: Jamani

Oh my!

Bala: [*Kwa ukali*] Mwanamke unamwita nani nyama? Ningekuwa

nyama singekuwa hapa. Ningekuwa nachemka jikoni! Au labda katika tumbo la mtu. [*Anacheka*] Au katika tumbo la jibwa! Lo! [*Anacheka. Kwa hadhira*] Hebu jifikirie umo kwenye tumbo la jibwa!

[Shouting] *Woman, who are you calling meat? If I were meat, I would not be here. I would be boiling in the kitchen! Or even in a person's stomach.* [Laughs] *Or in the stomach of a dog! Lo!* [Laughs. To the audience] *Try to think of yourself in the stomach of a dog!*

The two words - jamani *[jamani] (Oh my!)* and nyama *[nyama] (meat)* are quite different even in enunciation, and none of them is abusive. Why the mortuary attendant picks on these and subverts them could be an attempt to make him a borderline character, or just to normalise his deep-seated perversion and corruptibility. But the important thing to note is that the reference to the audience is anecdotal and not humanising. He could as well be talking to himself. Thirdly, when Wakene is escorted by Mzee Palipali and Mama Lime to go get the title deed, he demonstrates how he is going to campaign in order to win people's hearts (p.72). Though he climbs a podium and addresses the "audience", there is no dramatic link with them. His empty rhetoric and promises could be verbalised in an empty room. The last time the audience is mentioned, it is in a stage direction at the end of the play:

[.... Mpwitopwito wa ngoma unaimarika. Vivyo hivyo uchezaji. Kuanzia hapa waigizaji wanaweza kuwaalika hadhira kushiriki kwenye uchezaji.] (p.82)

[.... *Drumbeats increase in intensity. From now on, the actors can invite the audience to join the dance.*]

The play has ended, and all the characters are dancing. I am persuaded that the playwright wanted to get the audience involved, but the attempt at breaking the fourth wall of the proscenium and indulging in community theatre was not successful.

In the play, there is very little use of narrative as a form. There are three instances where the narrative is used: in Scene II, when Natala and Bala – through a play-in-a-play – tell the story of their experience in the mortuary; in Scene V, when Natala is telling the chief how Wakene stole the title deed; and in Scene VIII, when Tango narrates his ordeal in the city. In none of these instances does the story contribute to the development of the plot - in all cases, the narration is a response to a query by another character. Once the question is answered, the narrative lapses. This in my view limits the play's ability to engender imagination and scenario building in the audience. The portrayal of characters becomes the only plane to adjudge the realisation or lack thereof of social justice.

The playwright employs melodramatic spectacle in the play. There are three instances of melodrama, and all are connected to the display of the prowess of Natala against abuse by male perverts. The first instance occurs in the mortuary, when in the fight with the attendant, she floors him and when he falls – the picture painted is one of an animal "standing on all fours." (p.22). The second instance is where she fights with Wakene and kicks him on the groin. Wakene doubles up in pain and, "involuntarily holding the hurting part, duck-walks towards the door. (p.77). The third instance is where, upon the appearance of Tango in the house, there is general commotion of the characters, backpedalling and running into each other, as they try to run away from the supposed apparition (pp.77-78).

The three instances of melodrama serve to accentuate the defeat of evil by good, not just by supernatural, but by the real effort of those that are presumed weak or dead. Conversely, in Scene VIII, the arrival of Tango – who had apparently not died – serves no dramatic purpose. As a matter of fact, Natala had beaten Wakene, and as he was going out, holding his hurting manhood, he saw the "dead" man and cried that they had been "invaded". The husband's

entry kills the drama: a character, whose absence was the basis of the dramatic, kills the action. His explanation of where he had been all the time (p.80) – the theft of his wallet and identity card, the scene at the police station and in remand prison and the eventual release – themselves scenes of enacting rights, are not dramatised, and their rendition destroys what would have been a dramatic climax of the celebration of vanquishing of patriarchy by a woman. In my view, the memorability of these Scenes or their ability to ignite a robust discussion on social justice are limited.

There are a number of cases where the authorial voice through commentary intrudes in the play. In stage directions Scene 2, Gane looks at the children with pity "kutokana na hali yao ya kutoelewa msiba mkubwa uliowakumba" *(because of their inability to understand the tragedy that had befallen them)* (pp.13-14). Again, when she is kneeling by the graveside, her face depicts a kaleidoscope of feelings: "hisia mseto - huzuni na uvumilivu, wasiwasi na matumaini na ukiwa na mapenzi" *(mixed feelings - sadness and perseverance, anxiety and hope, emptiness and love)* (p.14). For stage directions, these are hard to depict and constitute authorial commentary.

It can be said that the play makes no conscious effort to stylistically curate the discourse of social justice. The use of popular stylistic devices such as involvement of the audience, melodrama, narration, spectacle and open ended conflicts is not overtly employed. The play nonetheless remains an erudite presentation of a cultural dilemma hinging on a critical theme of social justice that communities resonate with and, if facilitated, can engage with its subject, scenarios and themes.

I now turn to an analysis of style in *Aminata* which is also a "fixed script" play. As such, textual fluidity is unlikely – even when the play was not published. The characters have fixed words and typical language that becomes them. The set is complex, with various elevations created to accommodate multiple appearances of characters. In Part One, the setting is complex with a grave, a church wall with other graves, masons working, Jumba standing further off and different entries and exits (p.1). The setting of Part Two Scene One is even more complex: we envisage a path, a homestead, Jumba's hut (it is far enough to accommodate dramatic distancing), a tree shade where the bed will be moved to and, a space near another house, where Aminata and Rosina will be hiding and holding a conversation with Ababio (p.45). The visualisation is a complex multi-layered setup, where the playwright wants to collapse several scenes together without the danger of having bridging characters. There is even a deliberate obfuscation by the playwright: Part Two Scene Two is titled "The Announcement" ostensibly of the rehearsal – but Agege announces the ceremony for the next day (p.67). Scene Three of the same part is titled "The Handover" – yet the stage directions are that *"This is the rehearsal of the handing over ceremony…"* (p.70). To complete the picture, none of the characters mention that this is a rehearsal; neither is there a backdrop saying so. The audience therefore treat this as the "tomorrow" that Agege announced. When Ababio is pronounced dead, it is unclear whether he died during the rehearsal or he died on the handover day. The play is thus essentially complex and so when Genga and Wanjala in their paper "Francis Imbuga and his Contribution to the Development of Drama in Kenya" say that his mastery of techniques of acting and directing have made him write "more dramatically", using "effective dialogue" as a result of which his "plays are free from the usual heaviness of intellectual plays" (pp.113-114), it is clearly a lack of appreciation of the dramatic complexity of this play.

Like *Natala,* the play does not essentially create a "safe space" for the discussion of taboo subjects. In fact, the play is "too serious" with symbolism, imagery and deep social inferences that make it almost an academic study of culture and leadership. The creation of a strong borderline character in Agege can be said to be the only attempt to create this space. The question of women inheriting land in Membe is a difficult one, just like that of not following the wishes of the dead. This is the basis of the conflict – as a dead man, a pastor at that – had bequeathed his daughter a piece of land as a present before he died. The contestation against Aminata's quest is multi-pronged: that a woman is a lesser being; that she gets married and belongs to other people; that she has no sufficient wisdom to lead the family, and that culture forbids it. Agege ploughs through this with a sterling "illogic" – that he is not a village fool because Ababio is in the marketing drinking when his fathers grave is being cemented so he is the actual fool, and that Aminata is a better child (and therefore should be the fist born son) of Pastor Ngoya.

In the two short speeches (or "advice" to the headman as he calls it (p.9)), Agege deconstructs the basis of the conflict: he intimates that Jumba is not wise (something that eventually unfolds), that Ababio is unstable (later he is unable to face his sister and finally commits suicide) and that women are as good as men (considering that the only cultural reference to goodness is "being a man"). Agege's "idiocy" is a great interlude to the fixated narratives and nuances of the play – it both breaks ice on the difficult topic, and also liberates it from the cultural clutches of taboo. Ababio is being judgemental and this is good for the interrogation of social justice because the audience gets an opportunity to evaluate Ababio's agency in masking these assertions.

Like *Natala,* the play can be said to employ the presentational style. This is because the characters and their situations in life are not exaggerated. A leader of a rural village, who abhors the city for the changes it is bringing to his "known" world of the village, is wont to behave like Jumba - obsessed with resistance and afraid of failure. In what seems like authorial commentary, Aminata sees through Jumba's person and comments:

> **Mulemi:** Your uncle is a perfect mockery of enlightened tribal leadership on the continent
>
> **Aminata:** On the Continent! That is too much credit. *(Pause)* But you know, while there, I got this feeling that he doesn't actually hate me, after all. No. It is a fear, a strange kind of fear, you know, like the fear of darkness, of the unknown. (p.39)

Clearly then, Jumba becomes a type, a dramatic archetype called the anti-hero and joins such characters as Mother Courage in Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children*, who will do anything to survive the war – including sacrificing her own children. Jumba does all he can to dissociate himself from Aminata, including leaving the stool of rule to Rosina, when he finds that the tide of the village has turned against him. Aminata and Mulemi are typical of the emerging elite, who relentlessly pursue their goals in the new professions – everything else being secondary. Ababio is the typical escapist, who blames every misfortune he suffers on the success of his sister – instead of focusing on his drinking problem. The creation of character types in popular theatre is an effective method used to "sign post" for parallels in communities of performance. That the community is able to relate the character in the play with someone among them is good for it becomes a basis for continuing the discussion on social justice issues long after the performance.

In the play, the audience is envisaged as non-participatory - sitting facing the proscenium arch to watch the plot unravel. There is no attempt, unlike in *Natala,* to enrol them or to even refer to them. Also, the fact that the play is happening at the current time – unlike in *Maua* where the action is appropriated from enactment of/or rendition of past events – there is therefore limited use of the narrative. Actually, the past events that are presented are captured in the play-in-a-play in Part One, Scene One where Jumba recollects the chicken eating saga (pp.17-20) and in Part One, Scene Two when Aminata remembers the discussion with her father and the presentation of the land gift (pp.40 -44).

The language use in *Aminata* is rich. The playwright employs figurative language - including proverbs and sayings, to spruce up the play. Examples abound in the text: Rosina says Jumba's ears are "blocked by worms" (p.1), that "a wise man fills his ears before he empties his mouth" (p.3), and that "the thanks of a jealous neighbour are accompanied by a curse" (p.48). Jumba threatens to "stick a saying in (Rosina's) throat" (p.5), that "Aminata's body is the home of evil spirit that sent the red bird to destroy his children" (p.26), and rebukes Ababio by saying that "my umbilical cord was not buried together with yours" (p.28). The elders meet to "chew words" (p.55), and the prowess of Amata, Nuhu, Midambo, Ndururu and Abade in the art of figurative speech is immense. Also, the use of deep characterisation of issues is imperative – for instance, Mbaluto's dumbness as a result of the lightning strike is described as "potential locked up in the silence of a historical tragedy" (p.37), and the taking over of the stool of rule by Rosina is a danger because "she will urinate on our heads" (p.69).

In conclusion, we note that the two plays largely negate the stylistic forms so associated with popular theatre. The two plays adopt the repertory form and style, and only half-heartedly try to integrate popular theatre styles. Irony, sarcasm, double entendre, play acting and play-in-a-

play are the primary stylistic devices employed. The plays are also rich in the appropriation of symbolic and metaphoric language as a means to the actualisation of the contestation of culture. For *Natala,* this is between Natala on one hand and Mama Lime, Wakene, the Chief and Mzee Pali Pali on the other, whereas for *Aminata,* it is between Aminata, Mulemi, Pastor Ngoya and Rosina on one hand and Jumba, Ababio and Aunt Kezia on the other. Whereas these stylistic devices enrich the drama, their multi-layered meanings may not be easily accessible to all audiences. This nonetheless does not make the plays non-political or lacking in the exploration of the social justice agenda.

3.4 *Maua*: A Narrative Enacted

The pre-eminent style in *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi (*further referred to as *Maua)* is the use of the oral narrative. *Maua* adopts the narrative form exemplified in the Horacean *in medias res*. Like in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where the play opens after the death of King Hamlet and makes reference to the crime as Prince Hamlet plans to avenge his father's murder, *Maua* opens with the narratives by Nyagachi and Gachono about their predicament as a result of the ethnic conflict. The use of this technique is to enable a playwright or story teller to avoid superfluous details that may delay a conflict. Conversely, in *Maua*, the two women repeat these stories to Kabitho, who comes to visit them in the camp where they are living. The impact of this is the elision of the conflict: the play begins after the conflict has passed. The immediacy of destitution, war, pain and suffering that one meets at the opening of the book is captured in narratives told by the characters. A key dramatisation mode is remembrance where characters verbalise their past experiences. These include Tungai remembering his days in the military (pp.15, 41), Toiche's remembrance of the attack by spiritual beings in his sleep (pp.33-34), Nali and Waitos's remembrance of the night they fell in love (pp.50-51), Kabitho's reminiscences of his discussion with Tungai on acquiring weapons (pp.64-68) and the recruitment of child soldiers (pp.46-7).

Another dramatisation mode is projection, as seen in Kabitho's reliving of the Watange training to kill his people (pp.17-19). This is presented as a form of stream of consciousness. Of all the instances, this is the one that a character is not involved in what his stream of consciousness has been used to present. Apart from the fact that Kabitho does not understand the Watange sufficiently to portray their "callousness", one is left with the impression that Kabitho's hatred for the Watange is the only reason he imagines and recreates this. It is important to note that Kabitho was married to a woman from the Watange community, and the only narrative we have about that marriage is his version. When he is pushed by Tungai to say how a faithful and loved woman who has been in marriage for more than five years suddenly became different, he falls back to the "evil" nature of the Watange:

Kabitho: Huniamini? Cheptero alikuwa bure. Alikuwa kama Watange wengine.

You don't believe me? Cheptero was useless. She was like the other Watange

Tungai: Naona ninyamaze. Wakati mwingine kunyamaza ni jambo la hekima kuliko kuongea

Let me be quiet. Sometimes there is more wisdom in silence.

Kabitho: Kutoka leo fahamu kwamba Watange ….

From today, know that the Watange….

Tungai: *(Akimkatisha*) Kabitho, tuweke Watange kando. Turejelee mazungumzo tuliyokuwa nayo kabla ya Waito kuja. (p.14)

(Interrupting him) *Kabitho, let us put (the issue of) Watange aside. Let us go back to our discussions before Waito came by.*

This conversation happens just before Kabitho introduces Tungai to the topic of retaliatory attacks on the Watange and the need for training. Its backdrop is the intimation by Waito to the two elders that he was planning to marry Nali, the daughter of the Watange warmonger, Chebwe. It is clear that Kabitho is hiding something, and Tungai, who is related to him by marriage, only alludes to his unfaithfulness that must have irked and turned Cheptero from a faithful wife, as she sought revenge on her philandering husband. Kabitho's stream of consciouness also captures Watange youth being trained and Chebwe's represents a dramatised tussle between his evil self and his good self in a play in a play (pp. 31 – 32)

The narrative seems to subvert dramatisation when, for instance, we see Waito and Nali unable to write a poem and ostensibly unable to perform a play about the suffering caused by war respectively:

Nali: (*Akitaka kubadilisha mada)* Ulikwenda safari uliyokuwa umeipanga? (Wanting to change the subject). *Did you go for your planned trip?*

Waito: Nilikwenda. Jinamizi nililolishuhudia katika hospitali ya Lopindia halielezeki. Hata nimeitunga shairi juu yake. Nitalipiga msasa hivi karibuni. Kisha nitakupa ulisome.

I went. The horror I witnessed in Lopindia hospital is unfathomable. I have even written a poem about it. I will polish it soon. Then I will give it to you to read.

Nali: Nataka kusikia uliyoyaona kabla kulisoma shairi

I would like to hear what you saw before I read the poem.

Waito: Sitaki kukuharibia utamu wa shairi. Ni bora ulisome kwanza, kisha nikueleze kikamilifu niliyoyaona (p.52)

I do not want to spoil your enjoyment of the poem. It is better if you read it first and then I explain to you in detail what I saw.

Maybe this is the exemplification of the wanting style of the play. The violence scene is not enacted, and instead Nali and Waito talk about how this affected them – robbing them of their artistic capabilities:

Nali: Sikuweza kuigiza vizuri. Moyo wangu ulikuwa taabani. Umesema uliyoyaona Lopindia hayaelezeki. Niliyoyaona katika mto Gera hayatazamiki. Ukiyatazama, moyo unabubujikwa na machozi. Nilikuwa sijaona maiti tangu kuzaliwa. Mpaka nilipofika Ranga na kuona niliyoyaona katika mto Gera. Niliona maiti. Siyo maiti moja. Siyo maiti mbili au tatu. Waito, niliona maiti! Mauaji ya kikabila ya Ndarwa yalikuwa na ukatili usiokadirika. Yalimwanga maiti katika mto Gera mfano wa mti umwangavyo majani makavu chini wakati wa upepo mkali (p.52)

I did not perform well. My heart was disturbed. You have said what you saw in Lopindia is unfathomable. What I saw in river Gera was gross. If you look at what I saw, your heart will tear up. I had never seen a corpse since I was born. When I arrived in Ranga and saw the horror in the river Gera. I saw corpses. Not one, not two or three. Waito, I saw corpses. The ethnic killing in Ndarwa was brutal beyond measure. Corpses were dumped into river Gera like a tree sheds dry leaves during a storm.

The conflict is not dramatised, it is talked about as an occurrence of the past. The play seems like an exhibitionist piece, exemplifying the death of dramatic conflict. The characters in the beginning of the play are just remembering the suffering and conflict they have gone through

and there is no twist in the plot is witnessed. It is possible for a critic to argue that what happens in the play is the prevention of war, but this will be far-fetched because there is no war, only remembrances and plans for it. The ending of the play seems contrived, because the supposed marriage is neither dramatically prepared for, nor the love relationship built.

Another aspect of style in the play is how the characters are presented. All the characters in the play are flat and unrealistic. The characters are types, and the depth of their lives is hidden from us by the vile and incongruent hatred that characterizes their lives. This negativity is consumptive, and the characters that have an inkling of humanity and/or positivity (Tungai, Waito and Nali) are both consumed by, and are in the eye of, the storm of mindless war and carnage.

The play also treats the audience the way proscenim theatre does – as external to it and can only get asides or dramatic rubutals from the actors on stage at their will.

> **Kabitho:** ... *[Akimlenga mtu mmoja kwa hadhira]* Mbona unaniangalia kama kwamba huamini ninayoyasema! Mimi, kama jirani *[anaashiria redio]* yule, kama televisheni ya nchi hii, sindanganyi. Nasema ukweli mtupu. *[Kwa hadhira yote]* Wazi kabisa! Kuna amani kubwa! Hiyo ndiyo sababu nyumba za wakulima zimegeuka maskani ya panya na popo … (pp.6-7)
>
> … (Pointing at someone in the audience) *Why are you looking at me as if you don't believe what I am saying? I, like my neighbour* (pointing at the radio) *here, like the country's television, I do not lie. I say the naked truth.* (To the whole audience) *The naked truth! There is*

abundant peace! That is why farmers' houses have become hideouts of rats and bats…

It is clear that Kabitho is telling something to the audience – literary talking at the audience. He holds what he says as truth, a historical reality, which the audience cannot interact with except by listening to him.

Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi envisages a proscenium stage and the positioning of characters during the drama speaks to this. It can also be said to be unlike the major genre distinctions of the traditional theatre, it is neither a tragedy nor a comedy or any of the in-between typologies. It is neither realistic nor absurdist. It is a narrative, a rendition of what happened after the ethnic violence. It does not employ borderline characters or other Carnivalesque methods that would create a safe space for the enactment of social justice. Instead, it curates a storytelling platform where characters talk about their experiences, plans and motivations and others are able to educate them on the avoidance of conflict, war and the greatness of love. It also is a presentational play as most of the characters, their lives and references can easily be related to the actuality of events and happenings – especially to the plight of the victims of ethnic violence in Kenya in the 1990s.

3.5 *Paukwa:* An Allegorical Narrative Drama

Paukwa and *Five Centuries* were plays commissioned in 1996 by the Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs) as part of its project for constitutional education and mobilisation. The group that was formed took its name from one of the plays – "Five Centuries" (5Cs). Mutunga (1999) argues that theatre was considered "a low-keyed form of mobilisation in Kenya and therefore a strategic way of disseminating information … plays

were not ordinarily stopped or disrupted as often as seminars, demonstrations, processions or rallies" (p.132). The organisation was using theatre as a tool for awareness creation:

> The 4Cs commissioned an artist to write scripts for two plays, one in English and the other in Kiswahili. The artist was briefed on the mission of the 4Cs by being given as much background material on the 4Cs as possible. Also, discussions between the artist and the secretariat and the steering committee were held. The drafts of the scripts were discussed with the secretariat of the 4Cs and the steering committee in February 1996… the plays were prepared in a way that would permit the extraction of various thematic episodes when necessary (pp.132-133)

This demonstrates the seriousness with which the organisation took the process of developing theatre and performing it in communities. The artist who was commissioned was Kang'aara wa Njambi, an activist whose fame rose as a teacher in Moi Pangani girls and whose plays won in the national drama festivals but were never performed "for the President because they were radical" (Mutunga (1999), p.148). The artist was taken through the thematic concerns of the organisation to allow him appreciate the intent for which theatre was going to be used. The creative and radical potential that the artist had was further subjected to the essences of participation and the dynamism of performance in the field.

In performance, the 5Cs group got so many invitations, that it could not honour all of them. The scripting therefore panders to textual fluidity - the mention of "thematic episodes," and the ability of the theatre group to perform "bits" of the play, that were relevant to a particular area or theme of meeting, means that the script was skeletal insofar as nuance was concerned:

> The group always held discussions with the audience after their performances; this strategy enriched the content of the play. The 5Cs also encouraged local theatre

> groups to perform its plays with whatever modifications or amendments the locals desired (Mutunga (1999), p.133)

The appropriation of a "safe space" in *Paukwa* happens at two levels. The first is where there is the creation of the make-believe world of the narrative – except for the narrator, the other actors are animals. The story is drawn from the popular African stories of the trickster sub-genre, where a small wily animal sets out to trick a lazy, big ungainly or unintelligent other. In African tales, the hare, the brer rabbit, the spider, among others, become the victors in a contest of brain against the brawn of much bigger animals, like the elephant, the hyena and the lion. The play is set in the mythic world of animals, where Sungura (the hare) has a farm, and Fisi (the hyena) comes to claim ownership, and uses the Mbwa Mwitu (wild dogs) as the enforcers of his edicts. That realm of the animal world is critical, because it moves the discussions on rights and governance to an unfamiliar terrain of the imaginary world.

The second level of appropriating the "safe space" is the inversion of the narrative; that is, the author does by making the traditional trickster the dupe. The hare in this case is at the receiving end of the trickery of the hyena. The orientation of the narrative has been defamiliarised even for audiences that know it from lore. These two methods made the play "safe" to perform in the context of a repressive regime as Kenya had in the 1990s in that it can easily be argued that these are stock characters and archetypes of narratives that have existed in the African communities for many years. The effect is to protect the thematic concerns and the audience from charges of subversion.

Apart from the fact that this play was a statement on the oppression being meted on citizens by their leaders, the distancing of the action to an "animal story" speaks to a general dehumanisation of both the people and the leaders in the country - where as Mutua (2009)

says, “Between 1982 and 1990, the government became increasingly repressive, and the country was characterised by waves of arrests, detention, phony trials and convictions of government opponents, and severe restrictions on basic rights.” (p.67). Torture, killings, detention, harassment and forced exiles were rampant.

In *Paukwa*, characterisation and the thematic issues it raises are done in the presentational style. The play can be said to dwell on the everyday struggles of the people. Sungura, the hardworking *mwananchi* and owner of land, is invaded and dispossessed by Fisi. This happening is rife in Kenya, where the issues of land are considered a historical injustice. The corruption in the city and the exploitative employment terms Sungura suffers resonate with the reality. Whereas this is the reality, the part where the animals gang up and beat down Fisi and Mbwa Mwitu is aspirational and not real. The playwright is using this spectacle to “enact the revolution” like Erwin Piscator, who appropriated epic theatre and who used the theatre to convey radical political instruction in sympathy with the German working class by use of spectacle. Talking about Picastor’s method, Boal says: “For the first time in a theatrical spectacle, Picastor used motion pictures, slides, graphics, in short, all the mechanisms or resources that can help to explain the reality present in the text of a work” (p.84). Like Picastor, Kang’aara was actually pointing to the expected reality – what the people watching or participating in the play were being encouraged or primed to do in order to create a community that espouses social justice.

The play has taken the oral narrative form – both techniques and motifs. The play opens with one of the characters, Msimulizi *(Narrator)*, coming onto stage talking about the attributes of animals. This way he foregrounds the characters. She employs the opening formula in narratives:

Msimulizi: Paukwa		*Narrator: It came to*
Wote: Pakawa		*Audience: It happened*

In the script, the response of the audience is eliminated. It is important to analyse the implication of this. For avoidance of doubt, in narratives from the East African Region - the Swahili, to be specific, - the full opening formula goes like this:

Narrator:	Paukwa	*It came to(be)*
Audience:	Pakawa	*It happened*
Narrator:	Paliondokea chanjagaa,	*There was a crab,*
	Kajenga nyumba kakaa,	*It built a house and lived there*
	Akajenga na vikuta	*Built it with walls*
	Na vilango vya kupita,	*And doors to pass,*
	Mwanangu Mwana Siti	*My child Mwana Siti,*
	Vijino kama chikichi	*Your small teeth like the chikichi fruit…*
Narrator:	Hadithi hadithi!	*Story story!*
Audience:	Hadithi njoo!	*Story come!*
Narrator:	Hapo zamani za kale …	*A long time ago…*

According to Zein Abubakar, a famed narrator in Kenya, the opening formula is important in that the call and response calls the audience to attention and creates the mood for storytelling:

> Again and importantly, it prepares the listeners by telling them that we are going to create an imaginary world – where a crab imagined it built a house yet when the sea rises, the house is destroyed and the crab runs away – to build another house when the tide goes down. (Interview: 2021)

A master storyteller, Zein has adapted the narrator's line (Mwanangu Mwana Siti/Vijino kama chikichi/Hapo zamani za kale) to be:

Narrator:	Mwanangu mwana wa dhiki	*My child, you child of suffering*
	Sikiza uhakiki	*Listen and critique*
	Hapo zamani za sasa	*A long time now*

This, he posits, is an attempt to make the story more relevant to today's audiences, and also to remove the fantasy and romanticism imbued in narratives by creating an immediacy, a connection to their history (of struggle) and Enroling the audience as actors in the narrative. He points out that the formula has also been adapted by other communities, and non-Swahili narrators employ it. The famous one used in most other communities, especially in urban areas and in schools, is:

Narrator:	Paukwa	*It came to(be)*
Audience:	Pakawa	*It happened*
Narrator:	Sahani	*A plate*
Audience:	La mchele	*Of rice*
Narrator:	Giza	*Darkness*
Audience:	La mwizi	*For the thief*
Narrator:	Na kiboko je?	*And a cane?*
Audience:	Cha mtoto mkorofi	*For a petulant child*
Narrator:	Paliondokea chanjagaa,	*There was a crab*
	Kajenga nyumba kakaa…	*He built a house and lived in it*
Narrator:	Hadithi Hadithi	*Story story!*
Audience:	Hadithi Njoo	*Story come!*
Narrator:	Hapo zamani za kale…	*A long time ago…*

I have outlined the various variants of the opening formula so as to demonstrate the versatility that it brings to the narration, and also to point to the absurdity of the elision in the play. The formula sets the stage for a knowledgeable narrator to tell stories from his/her repertoire to children. The opening formula is therefore an establishment of authority of the narrator. It is also a preparation for the entry into the make-belief of the narrative – where the deluded crab builds a house complete with doors and windows when the sea has receded only for it to be washed away before long.

In this play, the reverse happens. When the audience responds saying "pakawa" *(it happened),* the narrator/facilitator presents herself as a historian, an elder and keeper of the memory of the community – she has seen whatever exists to be seen, she has not missed anything that was said – but she is still unable to understand the situation that is about to unfold. She engages the audience to help her solve a riddle. The dilemma she presents is one of an irreconcilable dissonance in the world, a world where the producers of commodities are not the beneficiaries of their production:

Msimulizi: Wamo wanaolima lakini hawavuni mapato?
Wamo wanaojenga lakini hawaishi kwenye makao?
Wamo wanaoshona ilhali watembea uchi?
Wamo wanaopika ilhali hawali?
Wamo waliohitaji lakini hawapati?
Wamo wanaotaabika ilhali hawasaidiwi? (p.4)

Are there those who farm but do not harvest?
Are there those who build but don't live in the house?
Are there those who sew but walk naked?

Are there those who cook but don't eat?

Are there those who need but don't get?

Are there those who suffer but get no help?

The narrator argues that she is confounded by the predicament and turns to the "wise" audience, in the Boalian style of enroling the audience, to help her solve the "secret of the metaphor" (p.4). The narrator in this play plays a central role in the development of the plot, the ensuing conflict, the enroling of the audience, and the summation of the progression of the play. The narrator in this play is peculiar – she does not only satisfy herself with the relaying of third person references but gets emotionally involved in the happenings of the play. Her query to the audience, for example, during the fight between Sungura and Fisi, is rhetorical:

Msimulizi: Nani atabashiri matokeo ya huu mzozo wa masubwi na mieleka kati ya wenyeji walimaji, na bepari wanyang'anyi, baina ya wenye haki na walio na nguvu. Nani atazama? Nani atanusurika? … Mwishowe … shujaa Sungura Mla Chake alinyoroshwa akawa laini kama ambaye amepigwa pasi – lo! (p.10)

Narrator: *Who will foretell the results of this conflict of boxing and wrestling between the local farmers and the capitalist thieves, between the right holders and the powerful. Who will sink? Who will be saved?... In the end, the heroic Sungura Mla Chake was beaten and flattened like one who had been ironed – lo!*

The narrator is no longer just commentating, but making known the side which she supports. She does this by emphasising the positivity of the language of "rights" and by portraying Sungura, even when he is losing, as a hero. When Fisi boisterously celebrates his

achievements and power, the narrator steers away and does not refer to Fisi as a hero or dwell on any positivity about him. Secondly, when Sungura is condemned to prison, the narrator's interjection points to her prejudice:

Msimulizi: Usilie Sungura usije ukaniliza. Hakuna makubwa ya siyo na mwisho, na baada ya dhiki faraja. Kaza moyo ndugu, ushindi utapatikana (p.14)

Narrator: *Do not cry Sungura. You will make me cry. Nothing, however big, goes on forever. After suffering there is joy. Be strong at heart my brother, victory will be had.*

That she is so affected by Sungura's defeat and incarceration - to the point of calling him brother, consoling him, crying with him and giving him hope of a new dawn - is an indication of her position and opinion on the narrative. This is a new kind of narrator prevalent in this kind of drama that is accentuated by its thematic load and purposeful drive. In other plays and narratives, the audience is normally left to make a judgement, and the narrator is an objective commentator. In this play, the audience's empathy and decision is influenced by the narrator towards a particular direction: the play is enacting rights.

Fisi is irked by the narrator's intervention, when he comes to speak about the jail conditions Sungura and his ilk are going through. This is an innovation too – the narrator participating in the drama without changing character or role playing:

Msimulizi: *(Kwa Fisi)* Kina Sungura wala njaa. Wanasema hawajala siku mfululizo.

(To Fisi) *Sungura and his ilk are starving. They say they haven't eaten in many consecutive days*

Fisi: *(Kwa msimulizi*) Nawe vipi? Wajifanya mwanasiasa eti watetea

masilahi ya wenzako? Mambo yasiyokuhusu ndewe wala sikio yakuuma nini? Nakukanya wachana na wao.

(To the narrator) *What now? You pretend to be a politician and start fighting for the rights of your fellows? Why are you bothered about things that don't concern you? I am warning you, leave them alone…*

Fisi: *(Akimwonya Msimulizi)* Sipendi wapumbavu. *(Anatoka).*

(Warning the Narrator) *I don't like fools.* (He exits).

Again, when Sungura has been employed by Fisi, the narrator explains Sungura's predicament, taking his side:

Msimulizi: … "Nimeibiwa, nimepunjwa" awika Sungura. Akimbilia ofisi ya 'mtumishi kwa wote' kutoa malalamiko. Kapteni Mbwa Mwitu, macho mekundu, meno kali ya mamba amjibu…

"… I have been stolen from; I have been raided" says Sungura. He runs to the office of the police to report. Captain Mbwa Mwitu, his eyes red, his teeth like those of a crocodile, responds…

Mbwa Mwitu: Funga mdomo babu, mambo ya kuibiwa utamweleza mkeo!

Be quiet old man, report issues of theft to your wife!

The narrator has become a character, an authorial commentator, and a participant in the drama. This is a unique characteristic of this kind of theatre for social justice. The narrator becomes an interlocutor in the play. She introduces the initial dilemma, gives commentaries on the turn of events as the play progresses, and when finally the animals turn against Fisi

and Mbwa Mwitu and beat them to the ground, the narrator poses the question to the audience for determination:

> **Msimulizi:** Sungura na viumbe vingine wameahidi kutupilia mbali unyonge na unyonyaji, ufisadi na ubaguzi, unyang'anyi na utawala wa kimabavu. Lakini swali lingali linasumbua: Watachukua hatua gani? Watabuni njia ipi? Watafumbua mwelekeo upi?
>
> *Sungura and other beings have agreed to do away with weakness, exploitation, corruption and discrimination, plunder and autocracy. But the troubling question is: what steps...: what steps will they take? What method will they adopt? What direction will they take?*

These open-ended questions (popularly known as Central Divergent Questions in Participatory Educational Theatre) become the entry points for discussion and community interactions. The technique helps community theatre not to be prescriptive in tying up the conflict, but to enable communities to fashion solutions for themselves. Sophie Dowlar, commenting about the ending during performances, said:

> We had many options. One is where we asked members of the community to give their views on what Sungura and his friends should do. The other was where we would ask them to come to the space and assume the roles of Sungura, Ng'ombe and Punda and deal with the evil characters. One time this almost caused a crisis when the audience actors decided to kill Fisi and Mbwa Mwitu. But the discussions would go on and one with people arguing (about the best way to deal with the matter) long after the play was over (Interview, 2019.)

The open-ended plot becomes a critical component of doing one of several things: asking the audience to step into the shoes of the various actors and demonstrate how they would react; asking the audience to craft an ending for the play; and facilitating dialogue on the consequences of the ending.

A critical aspect in the play is the inversion of symbolic characterisation. The character types of Fisi and Sungura, drawn from the wealth of the African narrative, are known. In these narratives, the Sungura character appears as the "hare" (or "brer rabbit" among West African communities) and as a type, the character is also presented as the trickster and sometimes cast as "spider", or the "Ananse" among the Akhan of Ghana and many other variants. The typology is one of functionality. He is presented as a "small, wily and tricky animal" (Finnegan (1970), p.344). Fisi (hyena) is a type of greedy and ungainly character that causes grief and suffering to honest hardworking animals. According to Finnegan, the symbolism that they embody has a one-to-one reference to human behaviour and character: "… what is often involved in the animal stories is a comment, even a satire, of human society and behaviour." (p. 351)

Whereas in most narratives the hare is presented as the trickster, in this play, there is a deliberate inversion of character type. The hare is presented as a hardworking and simple character, even both physically and mentally weak, and pitted against the greed and cunningness of the hyena. This is a significant departure from the typology. The trickster qualities of the hare and the greed of the hyena, as is the custom in African lore, are intertwined in the character of Fisi to enhance his evil. This inverts the search for social justice in that the wise cannot beat the evil of the greedy who are also vested with trickery. This means that it is more difficult to realise social justice because the perpetrators of evil,

where before were seen as blunt characters, are now systematic, clever and more sophisticated since they control the reins of power.

Like the oral narrative, the play is full of exaggerations and hyperbole. The case that is levelled against Sungura for refusing to vacate his farm, which Fisi has ostensibly bought by acquiring its title deed, has nine counts, including thinking outside the law, giving views without a licence, harbouring thoughts of dissent, and airing them without a permit (p.10). He is found guilty of an absurdity:

> **Hakimu:** … kufikiri, kunuia kutenda jambo iliomfaa atulize moyoni; kutoa sauti alipojibika akimye; kujitia kiburi isiyo maana yoyote…
>
> ***Judge:*** *... thinking, intending to do something that he should keep to himself, voicing things instead of keeping quiet; having useless pride…)*

The verdict of the court is likewise exaggerated: he is sentenced for a year each for all his crimes – served concurrently – with hard labour. He is to be caned and to pay a fine of five chickens plus their eggs and one cock. The court further rules that after serving the sentence, Sungura should be reporting to the court every day, accompanied by his parents, children and grandchildren, with a letter signed by the village headman. He is also not supposed to walk more than ten metres from his house or make any noise that can be heard more than a foot away. When in jail, his parents cannot see him without a letter signed by the chief and district officer and authorised by the head of prison. When he gets out of prison, things have changed:

> **Msimulizi:** … kwanza hakuwa na kibarua wala makao. Yaonekana Sungura

> amepandishwa cheo kutoka mfungwa akawa skwota; au pengine mkimbizi nchini mwake. Hana pa kwenda asubuhi wala pa kurudi jioni. Hakuwa na rafiki. Yu pekee yake kwenye umati. Ilikuwa angaiko ya chakula, hangaiko ya pahali pa kujilaza; vita na njaa, baridi na usalama wake binafsi (p.16)
>
> (*... firstly, he neither had a job nor a place to live. Sungura seems to have been promoted from a prisoner to a squatter: or an internally displaced person. He has nowhere to go in the morning or return to in the evening. He had no friend. He is lonely in the crowd. He suffered from lack of food, homelessness: war, hunger, cold and his own safety.)*

This exaggeration of the ruling serves to show that the courts are compromised and that the access to social justice in the court system is untenable. The playwright succeeds in making the courts not arbitrators of justice but part of the system that denies people justice. *Sungura* is unable to get a job or a livelihood in town because of the rampant corruption. He decides to go back home, to his farm. When he gets there, Sungura finds that Fisi has taken possession of the land and farm, and that Fisi cut off the tongues, plucked the eyes and blocked the ears of his parents for complaining about the incarceration of their son, and turned them to his marionettes. Sungura's children have also been reduced to praise singers for Fisi, and he has taken Sungura's wife as his own. In desperation, Sungura asks Fisi to employ him – which ironically, Fisi does. Sungura has been tricked again because Fisi exploits him at every instance: paying him less for work, hiking the price of goods, introducing many taxes, forcing him to contribute to a plethora of causes, and instituting insecurity (pp.22-23). Sungura finally nearly buckles to suffering and addresses himself to God:

Sungura: Muumba wa viumbe…. tutaishije bila kupumua… nakusihi nivalishe

> roho ya haki na ushujaa ya kunitoa mashakani. La sivyo naomba uninyanyue roho yangu hivi sasa nisiwe tena Sungura...nisiwe tena kiumbe...nisiwe chochote...Nisiwe tena hai! (p.23)
>
> *Creator of all creatures... how shall we live without breathing... I beg you to dress me with a righteous spirit and the courage to get me out of trouble. If not so, pluck my spirit out just now, that I cease being Sungura...that I am not a creature any more...that I be nothing, that I am no longer alive!*

This style of hyperbole demonstrates the utter despair and dehumanisation that Sungura suffers. By using this style, the author mobilises the sympathy of the audience to the plight of Sungura. His suffering is inordinate, and therefore appeals to the audience's sympathy .

The use of song is prominent in the play. There is a song of farming (p.4), a song praising Fisi (p.6), a song escorting Sungura to prison (p.13), a song of hope as Sungura languishes in jail (p.14), a song on suffering in jail (p.15), a song on the hopelessness Sungura faces in the city (p.17), songs sung in praise of Fisi by Sungura's children (p.19), a song of the pain Sungura bears on finding the destitution at home (p.20), a song of Sungura's decision to fight for his rights (p.23), and a song when the animals have vanquished Fisi and Mbwa Mwitu (p.30). The songs are specifically used to accompany action in the play, to relieve the tension in the development of conflict, and to articulate the feelings and decisions of the characters. Generally, songs break the monotony of the dialogue, as well as advance the drama. Most of the songs here are responsorial and, in the enactment, the artists sang the songs with the audience (Dowlar, 2019). One is reminded of Moliere's *comedy-ballets* which are viewed as his development of theatre in its fullest and most popular sense. It was "his solution of the problem of fusing allied but separate arts (and) had the advantage that it did not necessarily

require actors who could sing, singers who could act or dancers who had without any obligations other than to their own art. (Wood, p.18). Paukwa may not easily be pulled apart to the constituent parts of the narrative rendition, the dramatic dialogue and the song – but in performance, actor strengths in each constituent part are complimentary. The fact that the songs enhance participation of the audience serves to make the search for social justice a concern for all; they join Sungura in articulating his suffering and in his quest for what is just.

In conclusion, one can say that this play is unique. Its defamiliarization of the theme of oppression and the justification for search for justice by making it twice removed (first as a narrative and then an inverted one) makes it a safe space for argumentation. Secondly, the setting of the play in the mythic past also makes it imaginary as opposed to representational, yet the characters predicament is easy to identify with for the audience. Thirdly, the participation of the audience is expected and required throughout the performance. The enroling that happens at the beginning of the play though is not reciprocated in a final deroling. Fourthly, the use of song in the play is the most extensive of the plays in consideration in this study and the purpose of the songs vary from breaking ice and relieving tension in the drama to advancing the plot. Its allegorical nature and the fact that its scenes can be pulled apart to enact different social justice issues has made the play an active performance to date by the remnants of the 5Cs Theatre group.

3.6 The Contestation of Narratives in *Kanzala*

A critical reading of *Kanzala* unearths for us presentational characterisation. As stated in the previous chapter, the main character, Kanzala, is a direct presentation of the behaviour of Councillors in the 1980's and 1990's; the Chief and "his people" are a direct presentation of provincial administration and Kenya African National Union (KANU) youth wingers of the

1980's and 1990's, who were controlled by the politicians of the ruling party and had to do their bidding. In this play as we shall discuss below, Kibwana employs the style of distancing irony to evoke higher levels of social justice. This is manifest in the development of contrasting narratives spun by the characters.

First, we are introduced to Zoza by a dramaturg who claims to know the story and who welcomes the audience to see the unfolding of events. He exposes the audience to the evil of the Kanzala's leadership who even has his own definition of democracy (and by extension that of the ruling party – OPOP). This is "tii na tenda" (p.4) meaning *"listen and adhere to what you are told and do what you are told."* In contract to this, the narrator profers a poem called "Demokrasia" (pp 6-7) in which he extolls the values of freedom enacasulated in the imagery of flight from the cluthches of dictatorship:

Msimulizi: …Ni lazima watu wako waruke,
Waache watu wako waende (p.7)

…Your people must fly
Let your people go

So we are introduced from the beginning to a contestation of good and evil and of democracy and autocracy. This therefore serves as a basis for the articulation of comparative narratives. It is as if the audience is invited to make a value judgement and to decide swhich of the narrartives is appropriate for being the foundation of society. Later, the narrator explores the narrative of regeneration and hope for a new Zoza when the children of the protangonists defy expectation (and for Joseph an open negation of Kanzala's evil) when they fall in love and plan to marry:

Msimulizi: Wengine wetu tulifikiri kuwa uzuri hauwezekani kuwapo hapa

Zoza…. Kwa hivyo nilishangaa na kufurahi nilipovumbua mapenzi (p19)

Narrator: *Some of us thought that there can never be any good in Zoza… so I was pleasantly surprised when I discovered love*

This, like is the case with ogre narratives, represents the birth of a new community where evil has been defeated by the courageous act of slaying the ogre.

Kanzala as a play is hinged on paralell naratives of the main characters. The narrative of Kanzala is one of exploitation and the misuse of power for personal gain. His relationship with the other characters is based on what he gains from them. At the beginning, he is obsessed with having sex with Sweetie and he cannot seem to appreciate that anyone can reject his amorous offers. By rejecting him, Sweetie confirms her humanity and principled love vis a vis his greed:

Kanzala: Usiwe mkaidi bila sababu. Tusindikize tu. Hebu nipe tabasamu. Siku moja, hivi karibuni, Nyoka atashambulia na wewe utakuwa kijakazi wa OPOP, kijakazi wa chama kinachotawala. Kwa leo wacha nikushike kidogo tu; wanawake wengi wanatamani kuguswa na Kanzala. (p.18)

Don't be rude without a reason. Just escort us. Give me a smile. One day, very soon, Nyoka will attack and you will become an OPOP operative, an operative of the ruling party. But today, let me just touch you; many women yearn to be touched by Kanzala.

Sweetie: Siye Sweetie. Hakuna mwanamume yeyote ambaye atamgusa

Sweetie bila ya yeye kutaka, na ni mwanamume mmoja tu pekee ambaye hunishika (p.18)

Not Sweetie. There is no man who will touch Sweetie without her willing it, and it is only one man who touches me.

As if this is not enough to demonstrate his inhumanity, the playwright introduces a shool girl and her mother who come to him seeking assistance of school fees and he casually says they be placed in different rooms to wait for him. This is parlance of narratives: repetition to enhance and cement character traits. At this point Kanzala is no different from an ogre as cast in narratives. His evil is further attenuated by his attempt to force everybody to lock Mama out of the race. He goes to clan elders and the church leaders to force them to tell Mama that she is a woman and should not bother opposing him – in both cases with disastrous results. When he goes to the church, the leaders ask him to first seek reconciliation with his wife:

M'kanisa: Hatujafurahi kuwa wewe na Mama Joe mmekuwa mbali mbali kwa miaka hii yote. Kiongozi lazima awe na mke au mume…Mwezi…

We are not happy that you and Mama Joe have been separated all these years. A leader like you must have a wife or a husband. A month…

Kanzala: Hilo ni suala la kibinafsi. Nisingependa tulijadili.

That is a personal matter. I would not wish to discuss it.

Pasta: Pia linatuhusu sisi pamoja na jamii.

It also concerns us and the community.

Kanzala: Sasa hii ni nini? Ningelikuwa nimejua. Nani amesema kuwa nyinyi

wawili mnaweza kuchakura maisha yangu ya kibinafsi? Lakini mna bahati mno. Wengine ambao waliwahi kutamka yale mliyotamka waliishia vibaya…. (p.48)

What is this now? If only I had known. Who said that the two of you can interfere with my personal life? But you are lucky. Others who tried to talk like you ended up badly…

Anybody who doesnot bend to his wills is an enemy. He threatens the church elders with being charged with devil worship and sponsoring terrorist groups (p.50) and the clan elders with violence to be meted on them by the police of Zoza (p.59) apparent for administering illegal oaths.

The other narrative that is presented is the political posturing of both Mama and Kanzala. Mama is presented as a faithful woman who, despite losing her husband, relishes his memory and the momery of the love they shared. When her daughter Winnie kept asking her why she did not remarry, she says:

Mama: … Baba yako alinipenda kihalisi hivi kwamba ilikuwa vigumu niamini kuwa mume mwingine angeweza kunipenda jinsi hivyo. Nilikuwa na bahati sana. Niliahidi kuwa ningaliweka kumbukumbu hiyo kikamilifu katika maisha yangu kwa kukaa peke yangu. Sikutaka kubahatisha. Nikiwa Msichana mdogo Sikuweza kudhania kuwa binadamu angeliweza kuwa na upendo wa aina hiyo. Upendo kamilifu. (p. 27)

…Your father loved me so truly that it was difficult for me to believe that another husband would love me like that. I was very lucky. I promised to keep this memory in my life by staying single. I did not want to try my luck

elsewhere. When I was a small girl I did not imagine that a human being could have such love, true love.

In the campaign trail, she is polite and peaceful, does not involve herself in voter bribery or in mudslinging her competiror. Contrasted with this, Kanzala is promiscuous and hateful: he cannot discuss his wife even with his son. He espouses no family values and even threatens to cut ties with his son because he has an affair with Winnie. During the campaign, he abuses Mama by calling her a prostitute (p.31) and engages in voter bribery (p. 32).

The three contestations in narratives help the audience to make moral decisions by evaluating the various narratives of the characters in respect to social justice. The audience is able to discern who among the contestants is humane and is advancing the ideals that lead to the realisation of social justice and therefore make a judgement on them. Indeed the picture painted of Mama and Sweetie appeals to the audience as the champions of respect for women, justice and democratic practices. Kanzala becomes the antithesis of the search for social justice. This particular style of parallel narratives foregrounds the aspirational nuances of social justice – that the present injustices and power bases will not last, and a future of freedom and equality is possible. Again, although situational conflicts exist, their logical conclusions are avoided and the characters walk out of the venue/place of conflict without as much as consequence befalling them – Mwalimu does not suffer arrest, Sweetie does not suffer abuse, Kanzala does not suffer a curse and neither does Kanzala nor Mama suffer disrepute respectively.

It can be concluded that *Kanzala* straddles both realms of participatory theatre and proscenium theatre. Whereas it is set in a stage, the use of the narrator is effective in enroling the audience and even giving members of the audience specific roles in hypothetical play-in-

a-play. The play has also adapted the episodic narrative format as well as allowing for direct rendition of narratives. Being representational, the play is in direct caricature of real-life characters and character roles – the prominent ones being that of the chief (as a representation of the administrator controlled by party politics) Kanzala (as a representative of party stalwarts and Mama (as a representation of the aspiration to leadership of women). Also, the issues at hand (bad leadership, party dictatorship, oppression of women, corruption, etc.) are openly canvassed and this makes the play an exposition drama.

3.7 *Storm*: An Incomplete Narrative

The play is written in the form of proscenium theatre text. Unlike *Kanzala* there is no overt use of the narrator or a mention of the participation of the audience. With respect to the narrative technique, the play constitutes a number of unfinished conflicts or unreconciled narratives. Whereas the title portends the coming of a storm, there is neither a central conflict in the play nor an impending storm. Most of the conflicts in the play are indeed unmotivated. Except for the shop owner whose business is burned ostensibly because he comes from another community, the others have no clear cause. It is not known why both Sani and Dada have verbal disagreements and want to decimate their parents and burn their home. Secondly, the Chief who threatens to arrest Baba and even wears balaclava and joins the group going to burn his house has actually benefitted from the generosity of Baba for the education of his son. Thirdly, Jerusha who accuses every older person of devil worship has no evidence and her hatred is not based on anything that is brought out in the play. As if to vindicate itself, none of the conflicts in the play are fully build up or come to a climax.

The play has features pecular to popular theatre. It has minimum stage directions implying that it could be adaptable to open spaces of performance. Secondly it consists of unwieldy

speeches peculiar with educational drama – where characters regurgitate provisions of law or other educational aspects for purposes of awareness creation. Consider Baba's speech below which he profers in a civic education meeting:

Mtu 1: I think I speak for all when I say we should proceed.

Baba: You had asked me to get a clarification on the question of registering as a voter and having an ID. Although I was briefed at length I am not sure that I understood it all. The point is that an Identity Card is only proof that a Kenyan on reaching the age of 18 has been registered. It is not proof of citizenship because before 18 many Kenyans already have a birth certificate and a passport, both documents proving that you are a Kenyan. Furthermore, the passport like the ID or driver's licence bears a photograph of the holder. Thus since the ID is not the only proof of one's citizenship, the only other purpose it may serve is to identify the holder by way of photograph. The passport and driver's licence do this pretty well too. In the opinion of some of the people I spoke to even a baptismal card or even a photograph signed and stamped by certain people like chief's, DOs, head teachers, priests, judges and magistrates, advocates and others, should be enough to allow one to register as a voter provided one fulfils or the other requirements. In the rural areas, there is no reason why the elders should not be allowed to identify those without adequate identification with a view to having them registered as voters. (p.30-31)

Looking at this passage, one notices that there is little dramatisation both in language and action; that Baba does not use repetition of the ID for dramatic effect; that he goes round the topic trying to cover all arguments and counter arguments for the insistence of use of IDs for

voter registration. It is more of an academic argument. Theere are multiple other passages which are more or less like this one.

We also note the naming of characters is representational. Mama, Baba, Sani, Dada, Mtu etc are character types as opposed to characters. Jerusha's name is an allusion of the biblical daughter of the priest Zadok and the wife of Uzziah (2 Kings15: 33). The reference could, in my opinion, refer to the fact that the bibilical Jerusha was the mother of King Jotham who had become king after his father had been struck with leprosy for daring to burn incense at the altar (whereas he was not a priest) and therefore symbolic of mother of "evil kings." Jerusha in the play clearly adjudges the postulations by the prophetess as heretic because she preaches destruction, hatred and chaos in the name of God – itself an anathema in the Christian faith. Another character named is Dada – whose real name is Nehanda (p.56), an allusion of the royal "mudzimu", a "female" spirit among the Shona of ZimbabweDada's pandering to Nehanda seems meaningless; except for the deduction that she has a petulant spirit, there is nothing that links her to the Shona spirit that we could find. All the other characters have no symbolic or other depth. Whereas the characters are representational, they are also generic to the extent that they lack credibility. The narrative form, the creation of safe theatrical space as well as the enrolling of the audience are lacking as stylistic devices.

3.8 PET Style in *Uraia* and *Shamba la Mfukeri*

Unlike in the other texts under study, that were originated by playwrights, these two plays were developed by artists using the Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) format. Ondanyiro Wamukoya, who was involved in both projects as the Programme Manager, argues that the plays employed the Boalian methodology of forum theatre. Artists were selected and came together in a workshop to be taken over the content of the "project", and

thereafter tasked with developing theatre pieces to address the various themes. *Shamba la Mfukeri* is a play on democracy and governance, with the constitution as an entry point. It is a fictitious story about a land ruled by Mfukeri. The play addresses itself to the clamour for constitutional change, and we see the challenges in the country through the eyes of farmers and the youth, who cannot find employment. It is very close to the story of Kenya as a country, especially the social political issues that were going on at the time. In an introduction to the video recording of the play, Odanyiro posits that:

> ...the play has been performed around the country more than fifty times and it's been received very well. People are given an opportunity to ask questions, to challenge some of the views they see, to take part in the play and even to take over some of the roles - now giving their perspectives as they see them ... it gives people a forum to participate in the crucial issues in the country today (*Shamba*, 1997)

The use of popular songs to mobilise the audience and the space of the performance is a major feature. In *Shamba la Mfukeri*, artists danced round singing to demarcate the space and create a spectacle for people to gather. Some songs were also used to set tones in the various scenes of the performance. In the play, the song below is used to accentuate the dramatic irony and conflict between people welcoming a stranger, and the stranger is surveying and beaconing their land:

Artists:	Karibu karibu	*Welcome, welcome*
	Mgeni wetu karibu	*Our visitor welcome*
	Karibu karibu	*Welcome, welcome*
	Mgeni wetu karibu	*Our visitor welcome*
	Wakaribishwa nyumbani	*You are welcomed home*

When the white man, whom they had welcomed, took away their land and forced them to work for him and taxed them in a pretext of getting money to bring development such as

schools, hospitals and roads, they organised to fight the intruder until they removed him under the leadership of Mfukeri. In the celebration dance, the people sing this song:

Waigizaji: Kanyanga shamba lako kwa nguvu na raha
Hilo ni hakikisho la Mafukeri wetu
Zamani walisema sisi ni namba four
Sasa about-turn sisi namba one
Shamba, shamba, hili (ni) shamba letu x2

Artists: *Stomp on your farm with energy and joy*
That is the promise of our Mfukeri
In the past they said we were number four
Now it is about-turn and we are number one
Farm, farm, this is our farm.x(2)

This is a parody of a patriotic song in Kenya, a song that is used in national celebrations and as a campaign for unity and pride. This was because of the disaffection that the disparate communities in Kenya had after the colonial experience. The song was part of the ambitious "Civic Education for National Unity" project that was instituted by the government soon after independence:

Waimbaji: Kanyanga nchi yako kwa nguvu na raha
Hilo ni hakikisho la raisi wetu
Zamani walisema sisi namba four
Sasa about-turn sisi namba one
Kenya, Kenya, Kenya taifa letu (x2)

Singers: *Stomp on your land with energy and joy*

That is the promise of our president

In the past they said we were number four

Now it is about-turn and we are number one

Kenya, Kenya, Kenya our nation x2

The people elected Mfukeri to lead them for a number of reasons: he was educated, he knew the ways of the white man, he was a brother, he was black like them, and that he was God-chosen. But he soon changed the constitution and consolidated power. Corruption and plunder was instituted, and those who dissented were eliminated. The joy and optimism of independence soon turned sour because essentially, Mfukeri was the new Kaburu. The farmers, who had been organised into cooperatives to plant cash crops, soon became disillusioned with the payment for their labour. As a result, the people rebelled and decided to end that enslavement. Pandemba leads the uprooting of the cash crop plants ("money plant") and is inconsolable when petitioned by neighbours and later by the government. She refuses to listen to them, because she has not tasted the profits and promise of the government. She is beaten by the police for refusing to relent.

In one scene, the leader (Mfukeri) tries to drum the tune of the song "Kata, Mwanangu Kata" but is unable to get a tune for the people to dance to. This is symbolic of the fact that the leaders were out of sync with the population and the people have no joy or have lost their ability to make merry and display their beauty and skills. "Kata, Mwanangu Kata" is a popular Swahili celebration and play song, recorded and popularised by the popular Kilimanjaro Band and Them Mushrooms:

Kongwe: Kata kata ***Soloist:*** *Whine it (your waist) whine it*

Hadhira:	Kata	***Audience:***	*Whine it*
Kongwe:	Kata mwanangu kata	***Soloist:***	*Whine it my child whine*
Hadira:	Kata	***Audience:***	*Whine it*
Kongwe:	Kata usiogope	***Soloist:***	*Whine it without fear*
Hadhira:	Kata	***Audience:***	*Whine it*
Kongwe:	Kata chako mwenyewe	***Soloist:***	*Whine your own (waist)*
Hadhira:	Kata	***Audience:***	*Whine it*
Kongwe:	Wala haukuiazima	***Soloist:***	*For it's not borrowed*
Hadhira:	Kata	***Audience:***	*Whine it*
Kongwe:	Hebu leo jitolee	***Soloist:***	*Today volunteer*
Hadhira:	Kata	***Audience:***	*Whine it*
Kongwe:	Hebu leo jionyeshe	***Soloist:***	*Today show your skills*
Hadira:	Kata	***Audience:***	*Whine it*

The song is usually performed with people in a circle, daring one another to dance into the centre of the circle to demonstrate their prowess in whining their waists. In this scene, the leader is seen drumming, trying to come with a danceable rhythm. He is unable to drum, and the people are unable to dance - with the haphazard singing and the "undanceability" of the drumming. Then the people decide to remove him, but the security guard protects him. This is depicting the social disharmony that is going to follow in the skit. In the next scene, a meeting called to discuss how to develop a new constitution ends in disarray, as the leaders and the people cannot agree.

In *Shamba la Mfukeri* the narrative opening formula "hapo zamani za kale" *(a long time ago)* is the entry into the performance. Like is the case in *Paukwa*, the opening formula is also elided in performance. The reason here is to suspend the make-believe world – so that the

story remains in the realm of the present. The facilitator then proceeds to tell a story about the ancestors and how colonialism took root. In this particular story, the narrator fades into the audience when the dramatisation starts.

Verbal irony and slapstick humour are used to attract the audience's attention. The translation of what the white man says, and what the community responds, are inverted to humorous reception by the audience. When the white man says that the people will be working in his farm, and the people bitterly complain, the translator (now made chief) threatens them, but reports that they agree totally. Consider another example:

Kaburu: ... I will use the funds forthwith to develop this land… to build roads, schools, hospitals and all nice things to develop you, bloody natives

Translator: Atawaletea Maendeleo *(He will bring development)*

This not only creates dramatic irony, but also panders to exploitative governance – the difference between what actually happens, and what the people are told. In the performance of this play, there is a storyboard which has two things - depictions and questions. The key questions are: "Ni wakati gani mambo yalianza kwenda mrama?" *(At what point did things go wrong?),* Je, ufagio utaweza kufagia uchafu kwenye shamba?" *(Will the broom be able to sweep the farm clean?)* and, "Kwa nini Jakaranda hana kazi ingawa amesoma vizuri?" *(Why is Jakaranda unemployed yet he is learned?).* These questions are what drive the conversations with the audience. The storyboard used as a backdrop becomes a mnemonic device for backing up the play and also for referencing in analysis audience participation. The narrator refers the audience to the storyboard, and facilitates a discussion on the question of Pandemba's uprooting of coffee trees from her farm and opting to plant other crops. The story board has four depictions, each of which speaks to a skit in the play – Awinja,

Jakaranda, Pandemba and public participation. Depictions are also done in the play by use of the "freeze technique" – the freeze moments become points of discussion and interaction with the audience. There is also one statement stands out in the storyboard: "Sisi tuna haki ya kuwakilisha maoni yetu" *(We have the right to represent our own views).* This seems to be the rigged response of the play/artists to the theme of constitution making. It is clear therefore that LRF was pushing an agenda and the play was to socialise people to this agenda.

One of the main weaknesses of this play was that the artists, visible as they were in the performance space, overshadowed the intended participation of citizens. They would move to the back of the audience and give "correct responses" to the questions that the facilitator asked. This is ideally a technical issue, and whereas it would not be expected for people in the countryside to know them, a different phrasing and dramatisation would have made the play more authentic, and people participation more genuine. The artists, when they respond, leave the members of the audience staring at them and looking bewildered.

In both plays the use of narration is critical. One of the skits in the performance of *Uraia* is the use of the popular Kenyan narrative about the digging of the well. This is a narrative where there is severe drought, and animals come together to dig a well. The drama is created around how the animals will do the work, and afterwards how to share the water. Sungura/the hare insists that he should get an equal share with the elephant – and if that was not guaranteed, he would not participate in the digging, but would use the water. The artists used costumes to depict the characters that they played.

The *Uraia* play did not have a storyboard nor did it have freezes in performance. Instead, the team built in in-role facilitation and Central Divergent Questions. In-role facilitation meant

that artists would interact with the audience by posing questions to them in the middle of a performance. In one of the skits called "Msichana Mzuri" (the beautiful girl), the girl's parents had decided to wed her to a rich old man. To spite them, she decided to marry the village idiot. The girl would, in-role, ask: "who is being married – me or my parents?" This enroling of the audience was done from the beginning, so the audience was on the ready – knowing that they were part of the performance. For this to happen, the initial mobilisation was longer and more participatory.

In hostile spaces, the *Uraia* group integrated performances in people's ongoing activities. A case in point is the account by Salima Njoki Macharia of an incidence in Machakos town, when the group went to perform in the Marikiti area of the town:

> We had had been followed by the police around. It had become increasingly difficult to perform – as in go through the paces of mobilisation then the performances. So we decided to start with the skit of family violence. The man and his wife were walking around and got to a *sukuma* (kale) vegetables stand. The man proposed to buy *sukuma* for lunch and the market woman started packing for them. So when the wife started quarrelling with her husband, slapped him and ran away with the husband pursuing her, there was no time to mobilise the audience mentally to the play… The man nearly got hurt from being beaten by the market people ... It almost went wrong and it took the facilitator long to calm down the crowd … But even then, the discussion was vibrant because people expressed how they felt (Interview: 2020)

This is the use of spectacle – a man and a woman fighting in the market over whether or not to buy vegetables – to attract the audience to participate and give opinions. The facilitator would then use this as a springboard to discuss the complex issues of democracy, governance

and rights. “The play was based on simple commonplace conflicts and situations that were generic enough to be discussed in any venue across the country” (Salima: 2020).

I conclude that the two productions discussed in this section were not *per se* scripted. They employed the PET methodology where predominantly a facilitator/narrator linked the various scenes through participatory discussion with the audience. As demonstrated, song and dance played a critical role in enabling citizens to participate in the dramatisation. The productions also built their narratives from historical happenings in Kenya – from the colonial time to the present. The use of the joker is prominent in *Uraia* where a designated artist played the “madman of the market” who could interrupt and the village idiot was a supporting character in one of the scenes. In *Shamba* the alterity of discourse is a function of language and status – the white man (Kaburu) and later the government officer (Ngirikacha) bring comic relief because of their language and reasoning.

3.9: Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have analysed the stylistic choices made by the artists under study in the context of regular dramatic technics of popular theatre. I identified some recurrent choices: parody that uses distancing irony to critique and lampoon agents of power; the use of dialogic imagination to provoke political sensibilities; aspects of orality for familiarisation and willing communities into existence; dream motifs and soliloquys.

Overall, these stylistic choices were appropriate for creating “safe spaces” for community engagement at a time when state censorship and oppression were common. They helped in the creation of credible characterisation and audience engagement given that the main concern with social justice had historical valences to which the audiences could relate. Part of

audience engagement entailed reproducing microcosms of state excesses before smaller audiences who had a chance to laugh at, lampoon and mock power agents in a manner that deflected state power over common subjects without exposing the latter to the risk of state retaliation. This was especially so in the fixed dialogues in *Aminata, Kanzala, Natala, Maua*.

I have argued that the performance in community spaces dismembered such dialogues or extracted them to achieve particular ends/programmes, but to a lesser degree in *Maua* and *Natala*. This in itself could have been due to the self-preservationism of the playwrights – Kithaka and Imbuga, respectively – who were serving in mainstream academia at the time they wrote the plays.

In other texts, the textual fluidity allowed artists to embellish their dialogues in relation to the identified themes. I also established that the texts adopted presentational narratives and characterisation with largely a linear dramatic structure. This somewhat harked to the common perceptions of popular theatre as stylistically simplistic, something that is understandable since the primary consumers are drawn from communities with average to low levels of literacy and analytical sophistication. But since the message is meant primarily for such audiences, linear plotlines with few twists are most appropriate. As part of this adaptation to audience needs and capacity, the plays under study employed, even to varying degrees, community/cultural art forms such as narratives, songs and other shorter oral forms, all with the aim of integrating the audiences to the playwrights' ideological and thematic standpoints.

Finally, the involvement of the audience in the performance as "spect-actors" – though not uniformly done, was present in all the texts under study. This was a critical strategy or

recognising the agentic value of the audiences as autonomous individuals with valid interpretations of their socio-economic and political conditions. Such conditions included a historical consciousness to which they, the audiences, had to respond passively or otherwise, as seen mainly in *Aminata's* reliance on oral history and *Paukwa's* adoption of the oral narrative to reconstruct history. These peculiarities in style point to the possible emergence of a new form that transcends the two typologies identified above. Precisely, these peculiarities raise a critical question regarding the present and future of popular theatre as vehicle for the pursuit and achievement of social justice, a question that I attempt to answer in the final substantive chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4: A QUESTION OF RELEVANCE: THE USE-VALUE OF POPULAR THEATRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN KENYA TODAY AND HENCEFORTH

4.1 Introduction

The instrumentality of popular theatre in Kenya has been waning over the years. As a practitioner of some remarkable standing, I have noted that the practice of popular theatre is now limited to small pockets in the country, mainly in parts of Nyanza, Central Rift and the Coast. The dwindling fortunes of popular theatre seem to spite its obvious relevance in many spheres, including in popular education on diverse social problems associated with consumption of excesses and abuse of freedoms. A more complex society with more complex problems is certainly neglecting the potential for popular media to create a more aware populace. These developments lead to the question of what is the present reality and future prospects of popular theatre as a body of art and a means for public awareness creation. Against this background, I seek in this chapter to propose the possible future(s) of popular theatre in Kenya by assessing the functional role popular theatre has played/is playing in other places in the world. I argue that although there seems to be a lull in the use of popular theatre by various players involved in topical issues such as social justice, the potential for a more effective deployment of popular theatre is such that it is a matter of time before these players reach out to popular theatre to push their agenda.

4.2: The Utilitarianism of Popular Theatre

From its origins in the performance of myths, folktales and rituals in ancient communities, popular theatre subverted social norms, and performers were able to satirise the powerful religious and political leaders and, as Prendergast and Saxton argue, it has not lost its "impulse" towards conscientisation and employs the popular community artforms to "clothe

subversion with wonderment" (p. 43). It uses "grotesque, comic and dexterous elements ... and the worldwide traditions of spectacle, pageants and parades" (p.43). These are fused with the education for "conscientisation", as advocated by Paulo Freire in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and "action for transformation" as envisaged by Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed:*

> In the beginning the theatre was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feat. Later the ruling class took possession of the theater and built their dividing walls … Now the oppressed people have liberated themselves and once more, are making theatre their own. (p.119)

Boal argues that the "poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation", where the spectator frees himself to think and act, and to him the theatre, though not necessarily revolutionary in itself, "it is a rehearsal of the revolution" (p.155). Like Boal, I conceive theatre for social justice in Kenya as a continuation of the decolonisation project. I call it a "project", because the effect of colonial occupation has the particular impact of, as Gayatri Spivak argues, "othering" the subjects of colonial occupation – be they indigenes or translocated/imported persons and making them subalterns. In an effort to reclaim their humanity, these colonials "abrogated and appropriated" both language and manner to replace the realities of colonialism.

A key utilitarian value would be the recasting of history. In my view, the politics of history are threefold: firstly, that the conquerors write the history of the war, secondly – that the dominant group rewrites history to disremember the heroics of the dominated and to assert their superiority, and thirdly – that the here and now is stressed as more important than the past. Talking about the American incursion in Pakistan in 2001, referring to how America had invaded Pakistan to flush out the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, which America had helped

create, David Barsamian argues that the agenda of the West in the post Communism days is the killing or erasure of history "as if history has become subversive" (p.2). The West is intent on putting a stop to remembering and reconstructing the knowledge that a truthful documentation of history begets especially with respect to responsibility for events/actions in history. The lesson we pick here is how history can be re-written to distort facts and to advance the agenda of the dominant force. Other examples abound in the African context. Irene Isoken Salami, in the play *More Than Dancing*, a play that "encourages women to persevere in confronting the challenges of each generation by revealing that patriarchal gender culture is often fallacious", appropriates history to recreate a new African woman:

> Salami turns history into a weapon by focusing on female historical protagonists who have emerged significantly in political spaces. By recounting the challenges each heroic woman in history had to surmount to rewrite 'her-story', the playwright teaches the virtues of self-definition, re-socialisation, collective resistance and persistence in the struggle. (Okolocha, p. 75)

Okochola argues that these examples of heroines, whose exploits were spectacular, and who impacted on the politics of their communities, are used in the play to motivate and energise women to continue with the struggle: "historification demonstrates that the quest for political justice has been a battle in every generation, a continuous battle from which women cannot relent …" (p75). The playwright has recounted the heroic exploits of queen Amina of Zazzau, who established the Hausa Empire, Queen Idia of Benin, who defended the kingdom against the Igalas, Moremi of Ife, who was captured and lost her son so as to save her people from further Igbo raids, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, the activist teacher and the women of the Aba riots of 1929, that fought the colonial government's imposition of taxes and marginalisation. By making these women "talk" to the heroine of the play, Nona, historification becomes a bedrock of the search for social justice.

Popular theatre for social justice is to me a safe space for talking back to power and might of the post-colonial governments. As such, an oppressed people find in this theatre an empowerment to be bold and in control of their predicament. When discussing the question of theatre as a tool for empowerment, Richard Boon and Jane Plastow give the example of the Adugna Community Dance theatre in Ethiopia where street children "move from being huddled in corners, effectively obliterating themselves from view, to the point where one of them says he feels 'like God', creating an art on stage in front of an audience." (p.7). They go on to argue that "empowerment is to do not with the amelioration of oppression and poverty *per se*, but with the liberation of the human mind and spirit, and the transformation of participants… into conscious beings aware of and claiming voices and choices in how their lives will be lived." (p. 7)

My argument is that theatre artists abrogated the theatre space and appropriated it to their purposes of curating a new social order. In the case of the texts under study, it creates a space for both criticising, as well as creating a new ethos, a new world in which the people exercise control. This new ethos is appropriated through such avenues as language, education and governance systems. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) argues that language is the carrier of culture. It is the mode of realisation of the collective consciousness of a people, and it communicates their outlook to life (p.13). Picking on the issue of language and writing, Ashcroft *et al* argue that the language may not have been the problem, but the recording of happenings and ideas, basically "the invasion of the ordered, cyclic and 'paradigmatic' oral world by the unpredictable and 'syntagmatic' world of the written word" (p.82). I find this analogous to my argument for three reasons. The first is that theatre – as a performance mode – is primarily oral. In the plays' utilisation of the narrative technique, I find that this orality is

enhanced and writing challenged. The second is that the playwrights have largely been funded in their work by the "colonial" centres to undertake a programmed agenda. All the texts under study have pandered to the explication of democracy and good governance as exemplified in the construct of the West. But for *Aminata*, which is a critique of the cultural imposition of Western values and social models (including fertility experimentation), all the rest regurgitate canonical ideals that the "progressive" powers uphold. A third point is the fact that conversely, the plays under consideration were written and/or performed in a language other than English. I am fully aware that *Aminata* was written and performed in English, but as a text, it exemplifies the use of "linguistic code english" (Ashcroft *et al*: 8), which is full of local "un-English" nuanced expressions and constructions, as well as alterity (as seen in the language of Agege). It is noteworthy that he is the only character in *Aminata* who "thinks" and "speaks" in "English", and yet is considered the village fool. The other "character" to speak in English is the letter from Aminata's brother, who is in India. In *Uraia*, the speaking of English is tied to debased characters, and especially the drunk husband, who cannot provide for his family, and his choice of words such as "matrix" – a socially meaningless word – is used as an avenue for the critique of the new language.

So, theatre for social justice in Kenya suffers this hybridity: it is deriving from the West to address itself to social maladies and governance problems wrought by the West. This ambivalent multivocality speaks to the carnivalesque theoretical framing, advanced by Mikhail Bhaktin, and which Homi Bhabha builds on in his book *The Location of Culture (1994)*. The multivocality I refer to is not one of language, but that of narrative and the curation of "an international culture" of democracy and governance – itself a functional utility.

The functional utility of theatre for social justice is a character of what Prendergast and Saxton (2016) call "applied theatre", which is a "part of a grass-roots arts-based movement committed to community reflections and social change" – a theatre that "offers a seeing-place where people can gather to share their stories; a doing-place to enact new possibilities of what-s, not-yet…" (p. xxi). They articulate the purpose of this theatre as its overt work to either "… reassert or to undermine socio-political norms…" since this has the "potential to be educational, reflective and/or rehabilitative" (p.8).

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

This seems to be the reality that we are faced with in this study. All the plays and productions studied, as argued before, were external to communities, and therefore can only be seen as "for" the people. This does not in any way delegitimize the "popularity" tag, because the productions, relied on artistic expressions and history from the communities, were performed in community spaces, and were, especially in the cases of *Uraia*, *Shamba la Mfukeri* and *Paukwa,* adapted to the community nuances and realities, while maintaining the broad agenda for social justice.

The problematics of creation and curation of popular theatre for civic engagement is something that we have to deal with. Grant Kesters' argument that "professional artists involved in community-based projects may unwittingly become the instruments of someone else's political agenda" (2004:139), is fallacious to the extent that it ignores the agency of the artists. Gardner and Erven (2011), when talking about *BrooKenya*, an experimental cross-cultural and cross continental project that was curated between artists in Brooklyn (New York), Kisumu (Kenya) and Lima (Peru), reflect on this assertion by Kester and find it wanting. *BrooKenya*'s product was a grassroots soap opera, created through a synthesis of old-fashioned theatre with new digital technologies of internet and video (p.21). At the centre of their experiment is the fear that the product will not be understood, or will be dismissed for not fitting in the tradition of literary writing and criticism. They even appropriate the idea developed by the sociologist Z. D. Gurevitch of the "power of not understanding" as a method of developing "new understandings necessary for a more productive coexistence" (p35). They argue that that

> [f]rom the Enlightenment through modernism and postmodernism, traditional criticism has favoured objects produced by individual, divinely inspired artists –

> whose true excellence can only be determined by highly qualified scholars capable of placing a work in a long artistic and philosophical tradition. (p. 39).

This "new" (in the sense of transcending of boundaries) theatre may not fit in the framework of literary normative references that academicians may assign it. That could be the reason why it has (or at least the texts that represent it) been studiously ignored as a literary form – the "unifocal" lens of academia having been attuned to the prominent traditions of proscenium and participatory community theatre of the Boalian extraction.

The Ugandan theatre critic Charles Mulekwa (2011), commenting on theatre that has a specific agenda, a conscious agenda, says that its creation and performance is a "mundane" exercise that defeats artistry:

> Other times the artist is paid by some NGO to follow a certain strand of thought. Thus, a mundane chain follows: the artist is shackled to the NGO, the NGO is shackled to interests and partisan points of view of its funders, and the tale ends up being prescriptive, with very little chance for bold discoveries and surprises. And it is no big secret: that kind of thing pays – organizations and foundations are more willing to put out money for work that seems to have a clear goal or mission, as opposed to work that emerges spontaneously and somewhat mysteriously from the artist. (pp. 69-70)

This is akin to saying that the artist, the creation and curation process, the appropriation of popular cultural art forms, the performance, the audience participation and contribution to the theatrical experience, all these, can be "stage managed" by the introduction of funds and an agenda. I disagree – and, I also find the assertion to be reductionist. As a matter of fact, I argue that popular theatre provides the artist with an opportunity to reimagine the society. This re-imagination is a recreation, a make-believe that becomes the new essence. The world

that popular theatre propagates is drawn from an interrogation of the social reality and the curation of an alternative reality that serves the social justice agenda. It anticipates the replacement of the existing reality with this new reality – a reality that cannot necessarily be tied to an anachronistic baggage of reference/naming and much less the influence by external facilitation.

In an analysis of *Drumbeats on Kerenyaga*, Outa (2009) argues that the intention of the play was to re-imagine the Kenyan nation as a post-colony: an ogre infested space that mirrors the Bakhtinian grotesqueness, characterised by ogres that could not agree on how to share the hippo head – including the cropping up of an "absurd myth" that it cannot be shared (p.68). Yet, according to Outa,

> *Drumbeats* was a daring play that sought to perform its political message in drawing heavily from a pan Kenyan narrative of history; of song and dance in a way that … acutely undressed the empty rhetoric of the nation-state. In this way, it was performing the power of knowledge and political mobilisation at the same time, two feats that the postcolonial state would rather have repressed or deleted. (p.71)

So, we can ask: what genre was this play? Does the fact that it was workshopped by a community of artists make it participatory community theatre? Does its use of historicization technique or its drawing from mythology and the cultural art forms such as song, dance, ritual and narration make it some other genre? Does the fact of its performance in a proscenium theatre space make it conventional theatre? For me these issues are secondary to the purpose for which the play was created, curated and performed: the re-imagination of a new social reality.

In the texts under study, the playwrights and project directors have created imagined but plausible nations and communities, and likewise reorganised the paradigms of power. *Aminata* has created a social movement towards a society where women become leaders and inherit land – a movement that may not be halted by the dying of Ababio – a misogynistic character whose existence is defined by the absence of power in the hands of women. *Natala* and *Kanzala* are hinged on the humanisation of the woman as a human being and a leader, respectively, and the deracination of the pompous architects of brazen patriarchy. *Storm* and *Maua* serve to disrupt the narratives of conflict, wrought by ethnicity, and to glorify the humanity of all persons in their diversity. Peculiarly, in these two plays the characters have intermarried and interacted in peace, until the divisive political agenda of faceless government backed individual surfaces. *Paukwa, Uraia* and *Shamba* enact the removal of the debilitating histories of oppression and exploitation, and celebrate the creation of an egalitarian community, based on the equality of the individuals and the reward of hard work. The plays further interrogate the incongruence of the situation characters find themselves in as a result of the colonial experience. As mentioned earlier, Peter Ekeh (1975) calls this conflict the "two publics" that the "educated" people belong to simultaneously – one moral existence and the other amoral. He is convinced that "the dialectical tensions and confrontations between these two publics constitute the uniqueness of modern African politics" (p.108). Although he says "most educated Africans", I think this applies to both the societies and all its peoples. Education has by and large permeated the social fabric and the "politics" of our society touches on not only the leadership but also other aspects such as service provision and access to resources. In these cases even people without education are victims of the two publics.

Conscientisation movements the world over have relied on theatre and performance as key tools for social awareness building and mobilisation. When talking about the African context of revolutionary movements, Okpokodu argues that most of them (including the ANC, SWAPO, MPLA, FRELIMO and PAC) had "cultural wings under whose aegis theatre is used as a supportive educational and political tool" (p.45). He further argues that theatre in the Boalian sense enables people to plan and take action against oppression:

> Conscientization enables an oppressed people to generate their own socio-political consciousness along a revolutionary path. …Theatre must be extroverted, that is, concerned with the social problems that people must question and change (p.29)

Therefore, the theatre is seen as an instrument of the revolution to construct a better society. History bears witness to this: the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia was accompanied by an explosion of theatrical activity between 1917 and 1921 (Barooshian: p.97); in the United States, the popularisation of the Black Arts Movement is traced to Amiri Baraka's establishment of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS) following the assassination of Malcolm X. This theatre provided the people an opportunity to enact "black aesthetics" in its entirety – including reading of novels promoting black consciousness, poetry and drama. The Negritude Movement, started by Leopold Sedar Seghor and Aime Cesaire among others, also used performance of songs, music, poetry and theatre as tools for articulating the vision of the movement and for popularising it among the people (Diagne, 2010).

In South Africa, such plays as Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *The Blood Knot*, as well as *The Island* co-authored by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, were used to conscientise people and mobilise them against the apartheid regime. In "Theatre and Apartheid", Janice Honeyman, a long-time actor and director, is quoted as saying that in

South Africa, theatre had a huge contribution to the drive towards democratisation and behaviour change in a multi-racial society hallmarked by apartheid: “Theatre was one of the first places where black and white people were in the same physical situation, responding to one experience together … Some plays almost became political rallies” (p. 1). The theatre became the fulcrum upon which dissent of authoritarianism and bad governance was pitched. Theatre is able to recreate the situations that people face on a daily basis as a result of the policies and governance modes, adopted by governments and other institutions. How they impact people is enacted, and a call for alternative and humane systems and behaviour change of authorities made.

The direct conflict with authorities is, however, not the case in all theatre for social justice enterprises. Madhawa Palihapitiya writes that in Sri Lanka, groups such as the Theatre Action Group led by Sitham (Dr Kandaqsamy Sithamparanathan), that had been using the Western form of community theatre called Agitprop, dropped the form in favour of “rituals and performance traditions for inspiration” (p.87). The group was so successful, that it founded the cultural caravans under the slogan “Reclaiming our lives to live without fear”, which mobilised communities throughout the North and East areas of Sri Lanka: “through workshops and performances in several villages, Sitham and his theatre group (TAG) nurtured a movement of self-discovery, self-expression, cultural celebration, and political awareness and activism which became known as the Pongu Tamil” (p. 90).

Though this movement was later – in 2005 – proscribed by proxy, it demonstrated the power of theatre to impact on peace during strife. It was at the height of the movement, that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) announced the first uncharacteristic ceasefire and agreed to meet with the government forces. This is an example of theatre having a utilitarian

value in enhancing a social justice agenda. The artists enacted peace and collaboration – a ritualistic engendering of a people's aspiration for sanity. While we appreciate that the circumstances were different, here theatre became a resource for the building of partnerships and collaborative peace between and within communities, as compared with the abrasive stance taken by the 5Cs performances.

A similar experience is recounted by Charles Mulekwa (2011) in "Theatre, War and Peace in Uganda." He agrees with both Robert Serumanga and Rose Mbowa – two prominent theatre artists in Uganda – when he argues that Uganda's real "national theatre" is the performance practices that uses the already available artistic forms to create new theatre texts. (p.54). He traces the debasement of this national theatre by the introduction of "Shakespeare" in Uganda, drawing a parallel of this with the spectacle of war and strife the country experienced. "Shakespeare" for him represents the colonial theatrical edifice that was imposed on the people – complete with norms and processed action. It is the composite metaphor of bananas (meaning craziness, emptiness and rottenness juxtaposed with usefulness and richness of fruit) in Alex Mukulu's *Thirty Years of Bananas* (hereafter *Bananas)* that is most enduring. The play that was written in a period of repression and curtailment of the freedom of speech became a form of nonviolent resistance to the regime because, according to Mulekwa, "*Bananas* seemed to say, 'The people see what is going on – it is a shame and they don't accept it' " (p. 56). Though presented in a proscenium arch theatre form, the play employed a linear progression, used music and dance, multiple narrators of fables or myths, employed grotesque displays of spectacles and the joker (the buffoon called Kalekeezi) to satirise the community. Mulekwa argues that this is what helped the audience "to articulate a role for themselves in building peace" (p.60).

Another interesting outcome of popular theatre in Uganda was the birth of a "syncretic form of theatre", one that was "made of both indigenous and imported forms" (p.63). Mulekwa says that in creating and performing such plays as *Bananas* and Sam Okello's *Forged by Fire* the artists realised that theatre could "draw on aspects of the colonizer's form while still climbing down into the granary of native folklore and values (p. 63), and hence create a movement that was of consequence. Also, as Patrick Mangeni wa'Ndeda argues, the animation of the voting process for the new constitution, and individual's responsibility on the process, was done through a play *The Shield* that was performed in various venues across the country. Both Mangeni and Mulekwa are arguing that the adoption of the proscenium arch does not necessarily divorce the play from impacting on the people and the social justice agenda. The play comes alive with the adoption of the people's language, its idioms and metaphors, and the songs and dances that resonate with their lives. In so doing, the theatre performs change – it is both the rehearsal as well as the realisation of the revolution.

These are examples of the utilisation of theatre for social justice to achieve greatly for communities of practice, and for the community at large. The 5Cs, TAG and Uganda examples serve to demonstrate that popular theatre, the theatre that "talks" to the people, has to be in the people's own language and artistry. The considerations for typologies, such as proscenium and community, are secondary to the question of impact, and thus "popularity". It will be noticed that in all instances that have been discussed above, the artists appropriate archetypes drawn from Western thought (the proscenium), the experimental methodologies of the Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre and Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, and the community artistic performance forms and genres in their creation and performance.

It is possible to infer therefore that the use of theatre, as Richard Boon and Jane Plastow argue, enables people to "discover and value their own humanity, both individually and in relation to others…and seek to claim the status of creative, thinking beings who have agency over the shaping of their lives and those of their families and communities." (p.8). This, to me, is the final product of the methodology: theatre becomes a medium of positive transformation and humanisation of the participants.

It is critical to note though that where theatre has been deployed, there has been the danger of counter-intent. In this study, we have observed that the heavy front-loading of the content has reduced the edutainment value of the theatre. Also, except for *Natala*, whose thematic imperative is couched in ingenious social setting, natural dialogue and dramatic patterns, the other plays (especially so *Storm* and *Maua*) are thematic dictums with characterisation and plots full of happenstance and theatrical mediocrity. In the same vein, Imbuga in *Aminata*, Kithaka in *Natala* and Kibwana in *Kanzala* dabble with the theme of gender equality and women empowerment, but have critically failed to rise above the social stereotypes of patriarchy. This is because Aminata never gets the soil symbolising her inheritance, Natala's solid fight is watered down by the appearance of her husband, and Mama's quest is neutered by the coming reconciliation between Kanzala and his wife. This counter-intent could also be viewed as a dramatic reversal that, like a Central Divergent Question in Participatory Educational Theatre, creates an opportunity for audience participation and interrogation. It in a way avoids the moralistic nuance of folktale – "lived happily ever after" – and instead invites the society to critically review the postulations or intent of the playwright/artist.

4.3: The Import of Theatre for Social Justice in Kenya

As mentioned in Chapter One, there are two key theatre movements in Kenya that have popularised theatre. These are the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals (now Kenya National Drama and Film Festivals), and the University of Nairobi's Free Travelling Theatre. Over time, theatre has been removed from the proscenium arch spaces and taken to school halls, churches, market centres and other community spaces. Popular theatre in Kenya has taken roots in matters of governance, development and health education. Although the plays under consideration in this study relate to governance only (electoral issues, human rights, gender equality, democratisation etc.), there have been many projects on other issues, like religion, development and health, in both proscenia based or PET based popular theatre.

Indeed, in Kenya the tradition of Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) is long standing. When Kitche Magak and Kater Gardner mobilised theatre groups in Kisumu to the Abila Cultural Centre in order to interest them in the *BooKenya* project in 2004, they had to counter the assumption that they were doing PET:

> Building on Kenyans long history of activist theatre, PET was developed to promote public health campaigns among the country's primarily rural population with low literacy rates, little access to radio or television, and over fifty different languages. PET is a popular tool for Western funded campaigns battling chronic poverty, disease and disempowerment – the HIV/AIDS pandemic being just one example. Many of those attending … belong to theatre groups that compete for whatever funds are available. (p.23)

The popularisation of PET and other community theatre practices can be attributed to the Kenya Drama in Education Association (KDEA), founded by the late Opiyo Mumma, and Lenin Ogola's Participatory Educational Theatre and Development (PETAD), and the work

they did in the 1990's. One can safely say that the Kenyan countryside is filled with groups – whether active or not – that were trained in and performed PET plays. In a study of TfD in Kenya, Victor L. Ladan studied Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals, Artnet Waves and Zamaleo Act groups and their theatre in communities and he found that:

> … though exogenous in nature, the practices employ elements of storytelling, dance and song to make their productions hybridized or syncretic. Through these syncretic forms, the groups have exploited the discursive frames within indigenous performance forms to analyse reality of the Kenyan people … (p. 231)

Ladan as well carried out the endogenous "Enula experiment" of creating with communities in the then Emuhaya District of Western Kenya (now a Sub-County of Vihiga County) and his study revealed that:

> TfD practitioners who tap into a community's cultural modes of communication are likely to attract full participation than those whose practices only use the forms as mere tokenistic frames. The use of indigenous modes of expression and knowledges from the community is more likely to create opportunities for ownership and sustainability than those whose processes are not fully embedded in the context of their target communities (p. 231)

The two postulations are drawn from a differentiated methodology and the conclusion that creation with communities birthed an "endogenous" model that can be more effective in precipitating behaviour change does in no way negate the possibilities of community engagement and civic responsiveness as a result of an exposure to exogenous theatre. The argument that theatrical presentation and performance by people who do not create with and live in communities is not effective is defective and constitutes a fallacy *petitio principii* for it assumes that all other ways of creating theatre are top-down and hence not effective. It should also be noted that being or operating from a national frame does not in any way negate being

in a community. I assert that Kenya (the post-colonial construct) has a collective community experience that can be enacted in the dramatic without negating the individual identities of its constituent peoples' nations.

The proliferation of PET and TfD in Kenya notwithstanding, theatre productions that have had a proscenium form performed at the national level still subsisted. David Mulwa's *Redemption*, like most of the plays under study here, was commissioned by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) to be performed in its conference on "Mission and Calling of the Church " in 1989. While the play dwells on the issue of the Christian values of love and reconciliation, at its heart lies the concept of governance – how to manage relations and people at the personal and community level. Kitaka, a drunkard who risks losing all his land to Archbishop Muthemba, carries a wound in his heart caused by the snatching of his betrothed, Millicent, from him by the same Muthemba earlier on. Muthemba and Kitaka worked in the church, and although he knew that they were engaged to marry, Muthemba drugged and raped Millicent, forcing her to marry him "for shame" when she discovered that she had his child. Kitaka's disillusionment leads him to drinking, and ultimately the delirious "consummation" of his love – which is his life's quest – ends up ironically as his raping of a small nine-year old girl in the church. He was beyond redemption. He is ex-communicated, and only fits in the village as a gravedigger. Yet, like the joker in Forum Theatre, or the other marginal characters in Kenya's popular theatre, such as Agege in *Aminata* and Sweetie in *Kanzala,* he ends up being the pillar that saves the community from the greed of Archbishop Muthemba and the inglorious righteousness of Pastor Mutema, and brings about reconciliation. The play was praised for having a message for all Christians – rebuking the self-righteous, and uplifting the sinner through forgiveness.

In health, a notable home-grown genre is "Magnet Theatre" which is an evolving form. It is a behaviour change communication strategy that has been employed by the Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and Family Health International (FHI) – two leading American-funded NGOs that work in the health sector in Kenya. It usually consists of an hour-long performance in outdoor community spaces. The artists perform a drama that presents a dilemma, and the facilitator involves the members of the audience to participate in designing desirable behaviours for health, how to adopt the behaviours and how to sustain the behaviour change. Such strategies as "hot sitting" and "getting in the shoes of" are popular with the performances. PATH, in a guide to this theatre argues that "because it targets and attracts a specific and repeat audience, takes place at a regular time at a specific venue, and serves as a forum for magnification of behavior change" (p. 1). This theatre form has become popularised all over Kenya as a key intervention in health education - especially in Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Tuberculosis (TB). Its components include research, identification of community artists, training and performance.

These three examples of PET groups, *Redemption* and Magnet theatre point to the proliferation of theatre as a tool and methodology for community education and intervention. Many organisations in the civil society also used theatre in their projects in communities. Outside of its commissioning of *Paukwa* that has been studied here, the 4Cs used theatre to socialise communities on the constitution and constitution making process. Talking about the work that the 5 Centuries (5Cs) group did with the Ilimu Sheria (ILISHE) community constitutional project in Mombasa, Mutunga (1999) postulates that in 1994, the 4Cs assigned a theatre director and the 5Cs artists to work with the satellite project with encouraging results:

> It was found that the theatre talent abounded among members of ILISHE. It was also noted that Kenya's coastal region has its centuries old culture and theatre traditions still intact, for example, mashairi (poem), hadithi (storytelling), vitendawili (riddles), ngoma (dance) and Kiswahili, the national language. The director of the 5Cs then attended a workshop that took place on January 10-15 that discussed the ideas on participatory community theatre. The 5Cs performed four shows during that visit. The director 5Cs has been able to assist ILISHE with seven scripts that touch on the different problems facing communities" (p. 134)

The theatre here was able to do several things: it reignited cultural celebration of art forms, it became a trigger for memory and memorialisation, it mobilised citizens for action, and acted as an anchor for their constitutional project. Indeed, the 5Cs theatre, it can be said, was a great anchor to the work of civil society organisations working on civic mobilisation and action. In a report of a retreat of 5Cs theatre activists, held on 26th January 2002 at the Galexon Hotel in Nairobi, the members stipulated that:

> Literally speaking, (5Cs) has been the 4Cs greatest ambassador to the grassroots constituency. To date, the group travelled to villages, slums and market places and engaged in religious, farming, women and student sectors. It participated in mass actions to pressurize (for) change. It has collaborated with other local civic bodies e.g. Youth Agenda, League of Kenya Women Voters, Abantu for Development, Kenya Human Rights Commission, Release Political Prisoners pressure group, peace and justice wings of the Catholic and Anglican churches, Coalition of Violence Against Women, National Convention Executive Council, Education Centre for Women in Democracy, Women Rights Awareness programme, Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Institute for Education in Democracy, ANPPCAN, National Youth Movement, Kituo cha Sheria, People Against Torture,

> (and) International Commission of Jurists (in) campaigning for justice in Kenya. Amnesty International has also funded it on several occasions because of the good work the group has been doing. (p. 5)

This is indicative of the pervasive nature of the work that this group did. As a matter of fact, the organisations outlined above constitute a majority of the civil society organisations working on governance, democracy and other social justice issues in Kenya at the time (Matiya and Mutasa, 2014: 136). Mutunga (1999), as if to corroborate this, notes that "the group did not have the capacity to accept all the invitations that came to the 4Cs on a daily basis" (p.133). As a consequence of the work that they were doing, the members of the group were variously arrested and incarcerated in prisons and police stations across the country. On 28th March 2000 for instance, eleven activists of the 5Cs theatre were arrested in Tinet Forest while performing and learning with the Ogiek community.

This was such a big issue that the then president went to address a rally in the nearby Elburgon Town the following day, and made the claim that "politicians are inciting Rift Valley residents against the government" and "accused other politicians he did not name of inciting the Ogiek community to politicise their land issue" (*Sunday Nation, April 2 2000*: 3). In the artists' own account, published in the *Daily Nation on 5th of April 2000*, they were taken to court, denied bail and taken to Nakuru Prison, where they were "stripped naked and then forced to walk to the uniforms stores, with the warders jeering at them ... the warders started beating them with sticks immediately they were taken into an office" (p.40). The eleven persons were held for eight days, and were released after paying each a police bond of twenty-five thousand shillings – a punitive amount at the time. Whereas they were charged (Criminal Case no 716 of 2000) and attended over six mentions, finally the prosecutor entered a *nolle prosequi*. The group was similarly arrested as they performed in Wote Town

of the then Makueni District on 23rd September 2000, beaten and transferred to be held incommunicado in faraway Kibwezi Police Station. Art, spectacle and performance had rubbed the authorities the wrong way.

The experience is not unique. In Kenya there has existed conflicts between authorities and artists engaged in conscientious theatre – the Kamiriithu theatre (Ngugi: 1981), the Theatre Workshop Productions (Outa: 1999), and many others. A similar group that was commissioned by the Centre for Governance and Democracy (CGD) to rehearse and perform Bantu Mwaura's play *Jipu* was arrested in Nanyuki. According to Mary Airo, who was one of the artists, the police had been waiting for them, and just as they started mobilising the performance space, a *mariamu* (police lorry) drove in, and police in anti-riot gear surrounded the venue before arresting them. The whole town was brought to a standstill. They were taken to the police station and next day charged in court, denied bail and detained in King'ong'o Prison. Six months later, the case was dropped.

Today, theatre, the staged performance of plays in the proscenium space, is increasingly becoming an irrelevant art form to many people in Africa. There is the real challenge, wrought by technology, where the production of short films, spoken poetic renditions, dramatised poems and comedy has drawn audiences to dramatic experiences and productions without reference to theatre halls. The theatre scene in Kenya at the present time has a unique challenge (or indeed blessing) in the exponential growth of the local film. Social media too challenges theatre. Increasingly, artists are able to record short plays, stand-up comedy pieces and even short films and share them online.

That notwithstanding, theatre projects and experiments have continued to be implemented. Let me share three current scenarios. Firstly, CRECO, HIVOs, Sarabi Band, Inuka Kenya, Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE), DJs with a Cause, and other individual artists carried out an ambitious interactive media outreach programme (iMOP) project named "Jukumu Letu" in 2014. This was a project on popularising the *Constitution of Kenya* in the communities, and especially with the theme of the responsibility of citizens in implementing and observing the constitution. It was performance based, and it realised fusion of dance, social media, fine art, music and theatre – curated differently but performed together. In it,

> theatre artists, graffiti artists, bloggers, twitterati, musicians, deejays and puppeteers worked in the same space curating a performance which we called *mukumbwa* due to its complexity and beauty (Mwendwa Gregory – Interview: 2019)

"Mukumbwa" or sometimes called "Mukimo" (a mixture of maize, beans, cassava, bananas, green vegetables and potatoes cooked together and mashed) is a favourite food in Kenya, especially among the Eastern Bantu communities. The ingredients of the mixture can be varied but the agenda is to ensure that they mesh into each other – creating a unique taste and cuisine. And so is the emergent popular theatre production. This way, every person present in the performance is able to identify with and participate in the aspect that excites them. Although the project was abandoned mid-way due to funding challenges, the individual organisations and artistic groups continue with pursuit of social justice issues.

Secondly, another theatre experience is ongoing in Nairobi city's informal settlements. The Social Justice Center's movement (a recent phenomenon in community organising, based on the pursuit of social justice for local communities) started a theatre wing in 2020. According to Minoo Kyaa, who is the team lead: "This vibrant theatre group harvests local issues and packages them into theatre skits in the Participatory Educational Theatre mode and also

curate poetry and songs. The group also travels across the country, where the organisation has set up social justice centres, and animates the challenges of social justice, especially in relation to livelihoods and extrajudicial executions of young people." (Kyaa, Interview, 2023). Lastly, there is the Field Marshals Band, which, according to its leader, Ndungi Githuku, "was formed by artivists who connected during the Freedom Corner protests of the early 1990s (staged by mothers of political prisoners and which became institutionalised through RPP). The Band performs protest and liberation music, poetry, chants and theatre on Kenyan and Pan-African social justice issues." (Githuku, Interview, 2023). These three examples go to show that popular theatre continues to animate social justice issues in Kenya.

4.5 Is Theatre for Social Justice a Panacea?

In Kenya, the Kamiriithu theatre experiment was a big eye opener to communities and artists on the power of theatre to mobilise people in interrogating history and development in the post-colonial state. Outa (2009), Gichingiri (1999), Byam (1993) and Odhiambo (2004), among scores of other critics, agree that it was a radical departure from the proscenium theatre practice, and that it pioneered as an endogenous form – inasmuch as it mimicked the proscenia. Ngugi wa Thiong'o himself, a co-creator in the project, posits that although he and Ngugi wa Mirii had been asked to draft a play, it was changed by the people to suit their language and aspirations: "I saw how the people had appropriated the text, improving on the language and episodes and metaphors..." (Ngugi: 1981, p.78). Kamiriithu represented hope and the delineation of a true popular Kenyan theatre. In view of this therefore, the destruction of the Kamiriithu dealt a serious blow to the Kenyan theatre. From the 5Cs project, Mutunga found out that:

> Although drama is an effective and ready tool of entertainment and civic education, it is at a crossroads in Kenya; a problem exists in the attitude and attendance of

> audiences. The 5Cs experienced low audience turn outs in areas where the citizenry viewed the regime as harsh and brutal and were, therefore, discouraged from gathering to be educated through drama. … At another level, the 5Cs noted that theatre is regarded as no more than an arena of comedians often laughing at themselves or the society. (p. 135)

A second issue with this kind of theatre is that it is usually funded for it to flourish. The plays under study here were funded for writing and production. 5Cs as a theatre group actually broke up after funding ceased in 2000 and some members were co-opted in other funded theatre projects. (Sophie Dowllar: 2019, Interview). The CRECO theatre of 2001/2 was funded, Magnet theatre is actually a programme of Family Health International (FHI) and the Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) – both of which are USAID funded organisations. The politics of funds, as discussed elsewhere, goes with the determination of agenda, theme and mode of theatre creation and performance.

The third issue is the question of effectiveness – a contested area in the study of popular theatre. In the example of *Nakai*, a play by Amakhozi Theatre Productions, that was sponsored by the Global Mercury Project to increase awareness in Zimbabwean artisanal gold mining communities about the dangers of mercury intoxication, budget considerations led to the shelving of a participatory theatre development process, and instead professional script writers were engaged to write the script. The play was then rehearsed and performed by semi-professional actors and traditional drummers. In commenting about this, Metcalfe S. and Veiga M. (2012) posit that although it attracted huge audiences, "the overall effectiveness of the early didactic theatre programs was considered poor" (p. 59). Clearly, there is no guarantee that the target audience will participate in all the attendant activities and adopt the

anticipated behaviour change. The vulnerability of the poor and less powerful may negatively impact the intended outcomes, while providing the national and local elite with insights on how to consolidate power. In performances, vulnerable people may not speak out for fear of reprisals, and the dominant forces may even use this as an entry point for repression and further oppression. This does not mean that there are no successes achieved - conscientisation is but a single step in the journey of liberation.

It is therefore imperative that we interrogate the change that we anticipate to come about as a result of the use of theatre. Chantal (2020), the climate change drama artivist, presents an interesting prism in her paper:

> I'm not naïve enough to think that a play is going to change the world. Theatre audiences are self-selected and represent a small percentage of the population. An even smaller percentage is willing to go see a new play (as opposed to a classic play written by a dead white man), and a smaller percentage still will consider seeing a play about climate change. I'm talking minute numbers here. And most of these people are from a pretty homogeneous demographic group. I also don't believe that a play is going to turn a climate denier into an activist. Deniers don't go see plays about climate change; why would they? (pp. 229-30)

The same can be said of the bigot, the rapist, the abuser of human rights and the despot. The nexus between social justice and theatre is the paradigm of action. The important point to make here is that the conversation for change must be started and sustained by individuals and communities that are aware, have interest and are invested in the desired change. The danger of popular theatre becoming a source of entertainment is real. The middle-class people who watched Alex Mukulu's *Bananas* may have gone home amused at the representation of history; the National Theatre going audience of Kithaka's *Natala* may have gone on to make

an analysis on how the drama presents women, but not start on a journey to reform the self and the society. This is the real danger of using popular theatre as an end.

4.6 What Role Theatre for Social Justice can Play in Kenya Today

The social justice agenda in Kenya today consists a motley of contra-indications. The passing of the Constitution of Kenya in 2010 was a fruition of the theme that the texts under study were preoccupied with. The aspirations in each of the texts is reflected in the letter and spirit of this constitution. The themes of removal of an all-powerful president (*Shamba, Kanzala*), the separation of powers between the arms of government (*Natala, Kanzala, Storm, Paukwa*), the recognition of the sovereignty of the people (*Uraia, Paukwa*), enshrining of the principle of people's participation (*Shamba, Uraia, Kanzala*) and gender equality (*Uraia, Aminata, Natala, Kanzala*) are all addressed in its provisions. Whereas it could be said that the agenda of the theatre then seems to have been realised, society is dynamic and new challenges have emerged.

Ernest Emenyonu (2014) in struggling with the social justice question and "what else literature can do" calls to mind the Achebean assertion that writers need to explore in depth the human condition in order to show "where the rain began to beat us", and the postulation by Ezekiel Es'kia Mphahlele that such a writer is "the conscience of his/her society." He argues that

> African writers have in varying degrees, painstakingly at the risk of their lives, exposed without fear or favour, injustices, corruption, abuse of human rights, gender inequities, degradation of womanhood, obnoxious patriarchy, religious intolerance, domestic violence, child abuse and trafficking and other forms of crimes against humanity at the hands of the rulers or the ruled (p. 2)

Whereas this has happened, there has been a stone walling from the rulers and the leaders. Politically conscious writers, such as Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ken Saro Wiwa, Denis Brutus, Nawal El Saadawi, among others, have been incarcerated and even killed for their artistic dramatisation of the experiences in their African countries. Emenyonu bemoans that the African leaders plunder their countries for personal gain, looting national treasuries to perpetuate themselves, and using the instruments of state to crush opposition, instead of delivering services to the people. He postulates that

> African writers have depicted these vices and crimes against humanity with flawless accuracy in their imaginative works and performing arts. Novelists, poets, dramatists, short story writers, musicians and spoken word artists have made them subjects of their creativity *to no avail. The criminals are not swayed*. (p. 5)
>
> (Italics mine)

While he gives great insights in the search for social justice, he is a bit pessimistic of the role of literature in the construction of a new social order. I argue that the "criminals are swayed", and their nakedness paraded in metaphor and satire – otherwise why go to such lengths as to kill the artists? Like Ngugi wa Thiong'o's metaphor in *A Grain of Wheat,* the mere act of writing is in itself a resistance, and it germinates and bears fruit. Secondly, the existence of conscientious writers and theatre artists is a bastion against the excesses of the state and autocratic leaders. Thirdly, in the present age of information and media revolution, in which history can easily be forgotten, the acts of writing, curating and performance become goal posts of the retention of memory. Theatre, like all arts, is a powerful tool for social transformation. Chantal (2020) maintains that

> The arts traffic in emotions; it's their most important currency. They talk to us on a level that bypasses our bulletproof intellectual barriers, our walls of cherished opinions and beliefs, and our deeply held values. They reach our most vulnerable

> places and move us in ways no scientific argument ever could. At times, they shake us to our core and provide experiences so visceral that they exist beyond language. (p. 216)

It is possible therefore to argue that theatre breaks down the complex intellectual and official dictums into lived experiences. This means that it is able to translate knowledge and analysis and translocate it to the realm of emotion. In this way, the distant and impersonal delineation of governance and social justice issues become immediate and personal. I therefore argue that the role of theatre for social justice would be to interrogate the social justice agenda in Kenya today and curate platforms for enacting and bringing them to life. The key principles of social justice include human rights, equity, participation, respect for diversity, and equitable access to resources. While discussing the question of social justice in Kenya and its relation with Social Development Goals (SDGs), Kariuki Maigua (2021) argues that social injustices are still widespread, and include economic disparities between the poor and the rich, limited access quality and adequate food, health services, quality education, clean water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy; the existence of gender disparities in the political and economic arena; social injustices in the employment sector, and widespread environmental pollution (p.8). He identifies an eleven point agenda for the realisation of social justice: integrating the SDGs into Kenya's vision and plans; sound planning and resource allocation to education, health, energy and agriculture sectors; financial accountability to prevent wastage of resources which can be channelled towards social justice programmes; empowering the marginalised segments of the community such as the youth, persons with disabilities and minority groups; encouraging entrepreneurship and job creation; improving the representation of youths, women and persons with disabilities in political positions; promoting access to clean and affordable energy; combating climate change;

strengthening the judiciary; orientation of media and higher education to social justice; and enabling county governments to deliver on social justice. (pp.10-17).

Whereas this is an interesting agenda, the dynamics of how this would be done has not been anticipated or outlined – except insofar as it becomes a blueprint for budgeting and operation of government departments. A key problem area is the breaking down of the existing frameworks and policy pronouncements to be in accord with realities of the people for whom the policies are made. For me, this is the nexus between literature (and specifically theatre) and the question of social justice. In creating the above-mentioned nexus between theatre and social justice in Kenya, I propose four ways in which theatre can be used to help actualise the social justice agenda in Kenya.

Firstly, theatre can be used as a tool for the animation of the social justice agenda. There are existing models that can be employed in this journey of centering social justice in governance. The foremost is Caridad Svich's Theatre Action Model. Svich argues that the "Theatre Action Model works with diverse and accomplished playwrights to create a collection of short plays that are easy to produce and to build a critical mass around timely social questions through a network of participating collaborators." (p.227). The model was premiered by Caridad Svich, founder of NoPassport Theatre Alliance in 2003 as an alliance between artists, practitioners and the academy for cross-cultural performances, advocacy and publication. The Climate Change Theatre Action (CCTA), which Chantal and others founded, adopted the model. CCTA has grown to become a "biennial series of worldwide readings and performances of short climate change plays presented in the fall to coincide with the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP meetings)" (p.227). It basically creates an advocacy platform to inform debates and decisions on climate change discourses. This can be adopted

to Kenya through the development of a theatre programme that interrogates the policies and how these are applicable to the postulations of social justice. The theatre would be important to guide policy formulators and government operatives to the realities of citizens and communities. This would connect the policy to practise by curating scenarios that interrogate the practicability of the proposals. Again, it would enable citizens to form a movement of demand for governance practices that enhance social justice.

Secondly, popular theatre can be used for historification. As a literary form, historification was employed by Bertolt Brecht in his epic theatre as a technique of deliberately setting the action of a play in the past, in order to draw parallels with contemporary events, and to enable spectators to view the events of the play with emotional detachment, and garner a thinking response. It is a method of recasting history – and perspectives in it – that can help the audience think about the present. In Kenya today, the country's history is a contested topic, and there are new efforts to write "official history" (Njoya, 2020). Theatre can be used as a means for the unearthing and rendition of history and epicism. For example, and as noted in Chapter 1, the history of the struggle against colonialism in Kenya has not been documented effectively as most of what I called "anecdotal references" were developed by the colonialists. Theatre, therefore, as has been seen in the case of 5Cs and *Uraia* performances, has a great potential for the re-enactment of history, the revitalisation of past exploits, memorialisation and re-contextualising them to present day challenges.

Thirdly, theatre could be popularised as a medium for community mobilisation, action and education. This can be by creating annual festivals from the grassroots to the national level. These festivals could be based on the groups at their localities identifying civic issues and social justice themes that require interrogation, create an interactive performance on it and

present it to their communities to curate community discourses around the issue and to develop local solutions. The ideas harvested from the experiences and the solutions to social injustices could be inbuilt into the theatre and showcased as models for civic responsiveness in respect to social justice issues. These ideas could be brought together in a national festival for learning and sharing on how to deal with social justice issues prevalent in communities. This would be a case of communities searching for and realising resolution of social injustices.

Fourthly, we could invest in creating a theatre for each of the varied functions of government that touch on social justice. This could be modelled on the Boalian archetype of Forum Theatre. Boal experimented on "Legislative Theatre" (Schechner R et al, 1998: 75) in Brazil and in Europe. In Kenya, where there are forty-nine legislative houses, this theatre could be useful in the development of a participatory and effective legislative agenda. The same applies to the government arms that offer services related to the social justice aspects. Therefore, there would be established a Theatre for Budgeting, a Theatre for Health, a Theatre for Housing, a Theatre for Education, a Theatre for Diversity, a Theatre for the Environment, a Theatre for Policy Development, a Theatre for Planning, a Theatre for Community Participation and a Theatre for Policing, among others. Key personnel in departments could be trained in theatre and the processes of creation and curation of theatrical pieces for interventions in the various social justice issues that arise in their departments. The government could also establish a department of civic theatre which would be charged with monitoring the use of this theatre – including documenting success stories for replication and learning.

4.7: Chapter Summary

In conclusion, theatre has a place in the reconstruction of a national social justice agenda. I have argued for four models, and whereas the fourth model of experimental theme based theatre by and for government agencies and actors may not be readily adopted (no government keen on maintaining power would want to deliberately surrender to its citizenry), the first three can catalyse it by creating a civic theatre agenda. The use of the Kenya National Schools Drama Festival as an avenue to create a movement for historification and theatre action can be a key entry point in the curation of a civic theatre movement in the country.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

5.1 A Summary of the Study Findings

In this study, I have examined theatre for community conscietisation and education in Kenya focusing on texts and productions that were commissioned. The texts under consideration were Imbuga's *Aminata,* Kithaka's *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi* and *Natala,* Kivutha's *Kanzala,* Wakanyote's *Before the Storm*, LRF's *Shamba La Mfukeri*, Kang'aara's *Paukwa* and CRECO's *Uraia*. We set out to find what their nature was in respect to thematic orientation and the form they took and from our findings discuss a role for popular theatre in Kenya today.

The study of theatre has hitherto been dichotomised under the aegis of the proscenium and the participatory/community theatre models. This study has had its mainstay in its approach to Kenyan popular theatre from the standpoint of patronage and purpose, and only second did it analyse the form that it took in order to fulfil the agency. As such, it has studied some texts

and theatre projects that have otherwise been in the margins, and whose literariness has not been investigated. A key finding that we have made is that mostly the theatre under study took both the proscenium as well as the participatory modes, while its purpose remained the advancement of social justice.

The predisposition of the playwrights, or project creative leads, is also critical in the form that was taken. Kivutha Kibwana, Wakanyote Njuguna, Kithaka wa Mberia and Francis Imbuga were, at the time of writing these plays, themselves actively involved in the mainstream/proscenium theatre tradition, as writers, or actors, or both. The overt didacticism of Kibwana's and Njuguna's plays can be attributed to their involvement in political mobilisation and education at the time. On the other hand, Ondanyiro Wamukoya, Kang'aara wa Njambi and Oby Obyerodhyambo were involved in community theatre models and experimentation. Kang'aara, who had been producing for secondary schools, suffered the peculiar fate of having winning productions that could not be celebrated nationally, or presented during the gala, owing to the social justice agenda they proffered. Being a member of the Release Political Prisoners pressure group, he was preoccupied with using theatre to mobilise citizens against oppression. Song, poetry and storytelling therefore attracted him. Oby Obyerodyambo had moved away from conventional theatre, and was experimenting with traditional theatre modes, such as Sigana and community theatre practice. Odanyiro was at the time an employee of the Legal Resources Foundation, an NGO that was involved in awareness creation on the law, the constitution and the rights of citizens, and the responsibilities of the government. It is important to note that both Oby and Ondanyiro were artistic directors of collective play development processes. Artists had been auditioned and trained on the projects' thematic orientation by CRECO and LRF respectively.

5.1.1 Thematic Imperatives of the Popular Theatre

I found out that the plays under study are overly pedagogical – educating us on human rights, gender equality, international protocols, constitutionalism, civic responsibility, peace and democracy. Plays purposed for the advancement of the social justice agenda, which are written in the proscenium form, ended up having an overload of messagism. There are three key reasons for this, according to my findings. One is that the playwright tries to creatively capture every aspect of the theme in a non-ambivalent way, so as to avoid it being misconstrued. Secondly, because there is little opportunity for audience participation, the playwright makes the characters "facilitate each other" so as to answer grey areas where the audience would ordinarily want clarifications. Thirdly, because some topics are technical and may not be easily captured theatrically, characters are wont to "preach" and "teach" other characters in the drama. The effect of this is that the theatricality is lowered and the character development is wanting.

I found out that two of the plays that are similar in both style and thematic concerns are the products of different processes: one, *Aminata,* was commissioned to be written, and the other, *Natala,* was commissioned only for performance. This could be attributed to the fact that the two writers were at the time accomplished playwrights and teachers of the proscenium theatre, and since at the time the questions of gender equality were topical, they were predisposed to develop theatrical texts to respond to that societal preoccupation.

5.1.2 The Style of the Popular Theatre

Having noted that the plays had an overload of purposed messaging, we found that their messagism has impacted on their stylistic choices. The overarching finding on style is the adoption of the presentational characterisation and use of community performative modes

such as song, dance, dialogue and oral literary forms such as riddles, idioms and storytelling inorder to endear themselves to communities for education and empowerment on social justice issues. *Maua, Kanzala* and *Storm* as plays can be said to be dissimilar to plays of the major traditions of the theatre. They are neither tragedies nor comedies or any of the in-between typologies. Structurally, all three have a linear structure: a conflict of parents over issues relating to politics and ethnicity, the weak development of conflict (none of the supposed protagonists has a socially meritable case), the ever-present threat of violence that never occurs, and the love and eventual marriage of the protagonists' children (or supposition of in the case of *Storm*). On the other hand, *Natala* and *Aminata* defy the logic of conflict resolution, with *Natala* employing melodrama, and *Aminata* suspending the progression of the resolution by creating an unlikely "death" of a non-tragic character during a harmless event, like a rehearsal. My view is that all five-proscenium theatre structured plays have contrived endings to try to fit in the "moral" or "educational" pigeonhole.

There is a centrality of narratives and stories in the drama. Except for *Natala* and *Aminata*, all the other plays under consideration have extensively employed the narrative form in their rendition and performance. As demonstrated above, and whereas we agree that *Kanzala, Paukwa, Maua* and *Storm* are largely proscenium theatrical pieces, popular and community theatre forms such as storytelling, use of facilitator, audience participation, the use of spectacle and the use of "detachable" scenes are prevalent. *Uraia* and *Shamba* on the other hand are fluid PET pieces with skeletal scripts, and dependent on the improvisation of the performers and the participation of the audience.

5.1.3 The Role of Popular theatre for Social Justice Today

Social justice is a continuing pursuit for the Kenyan community and people. Theatre, as demonstrated in this study, is a catalyst for community social dialogue between people and governments (including institutions charged with the provision of services) on matters pertaining to the enjoyment of rights and the improvement of governance for a better society. Opportunities for intervention abound in the two levels of government and the various platforms for engagement in the three arms of government – Executive, Judiciary and Legislature. As a matter of course, the constitutional requirement for inclusion and public participation could use theatre as an avenue for initialising and sustaining intra- and inter-personal and community dialogue. The proliferation of theatrical creations and curations is necessary for the education of both the citizens and the duty bearers in the realisation of social harmony and the prevention of the breakdown of order through subjugation by violence or a fear-induced silence.

5.2 The Development of a New Form

In this thesis, I set out to study popular theatre that has been sponsored and commissioned, because I believed that it is marginalised from the known and coveted archetypes critics and theatre scholars have been exposed to. A key finding of the study is that owing to the nature of the purpose for which this theatre was conceived and performed, there are certain peculiarities of content, its presentation and the emergent style that pander to the development, albeit unwittingly for the artists, of a different kind of theatre. My contention is that the plays under study present to us a new genre of popular theatre which I have named *civic theatre*.

The plays under study have been depicted as having a peculiar bluntness in the presentation of the subject matter. Their special purpose and urgency in the communication of the rights or social justice agenda has, in some instances, redacted their theatricality, and reduced them to "campaign" materials. This is different from what is considered "good theatre" and that may be the reason why the plays under consideration (but for *Aminata*, *Natala* and *Maua* for reasons earlier presented) have received very little academic attention. The civic theatre that emerges from this is a combination of three things: the performance models of the proscenium theatre, the Boalian methodology (derived from the Freirean pedagogy) and the epic/spectre theatre advanced by Piscator and Brecht. Theatricality as we know it becomes secondary to the intent and the expected educational value that society derives from the theatre. That it uses community centric art forms and draws scenarios that citizens are familiar with (or interact with on a daily basis) means that it familiarises itself to the community while creating aesthetic dissonance to activate community dialogue on its agenda.

Although the term "civic theatre" has been used in the past to refer to professional or amateur theatre that was wholly or partly subsidised by cities it happened in, or to mean theatre spaces for community performance, this is a "place" or "space" name code, and does not refer to the characterisation of the theatre. I use the term to refer to mean a particular character encapsulating the form and content of the theatre that I have interrogated. I content that civic theatre is a sub-genre in the larger sense of theatrical experience. I use it to refer to the kind of theatre that is sponsored for educational purposes and is created (whether by professional playwrights or by being workshopped by artists) for purposes of performance in communities in the pursuit of social justice. The "popular" claim that this kind of theatre that I have studied constitutes an "NGOnisation" of theatre does not, in my considered opinion, deny the creation or the development of a form: it could as well be the standards and lens of

literary appreciation used that may be the problem. I am cognizant of the fact that artists and performances have benefited over time from patronage and this did not void them. The griots of the kingdom of the Mali, the "King's Men" in Shakespeare's time are testimony of the relationship between power, patronage (including monetary support) and artistic work. That a work is not spontaneously created, or is funded to be produced or created, does not in my view invalidate its literariness. Being different from what are considered canons does not necessarily mean that it is non-literary or weak: it may just be different. For this theatre that is mainly characterised by heavy messagism, oraturists orientation in style and textual detachability, a new appraisal standard needs to be developed. The new standard I propose is first a characterisation as *Civic Theatre*. It is a utilitarian theatre developed as part of a particular civic oriented programme, commissioned to be written or workshopped by professionals or semi-professional artists, its drama linear or episodic in nature, borrowing from the art forms of the community of performance and which is presented in those communities for education and civic engagement/action.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

In Kenya, a coherent documentation of theatre creation and curation processes is lacking. The 2001 creation of the CRECO play *Uraia* is not documented as far as I could find out. A search for the script has yielded very little, and it was only from interviews with artists, who participated in the process, that I was able to reconstruct it. The Legal Resources Foundation did much better, and there exists a video of the performance of *Shamba La Mfukeri*. The process of creation is also not documented, and I had to piece it together from interviewing artists who participated in it. *Paukwa* and a plethora of other plays created and performed in the period have not also been documented, published or studied. Outside of the performance of *Aminata, Natala, Kanzala, Before the Storm* and *Maua Kwenye Jua La Asubuhi* in the

events for which the plays had been created (or at the Kenya National Theatre for the case of *Kanzala* and *Storm*) the plays were presented in various forms in communities to push the agenda of the plays. The dynamics of performance and reception have not been appropriately recorded.

This study is not exhaustive as a study of Kenyan popular theatre for social justice for several reasons. Firstly, its scope is textual and limited to a number of texts and, therefore, other texts that have a social justice agenda may exist**.** It is important that a mapping of these other texts be done and an analysis carried out. The 5Cs group, for instance, performed Joseph Murungu's *You Judge* – a collection of three plays – *Talking Nicely, Chicken Talk* and *Shake my Hand* – plays that dealt with the anatomy of corruption. They also developed many other short scripts including *Twafia Kuwa Huru*, *Police Brutality*, *Hope for Street Children* and *Wafanyikazi wana Haki* among others that have not been studied here. A second aspect that merits a study is that of the mutating script. This study has not covered the area of the mutating script. The script for the theatre for social justice, as has been demonstrated, is not only unstable in performance, it is subject to both detachability and fragmentation. This is because the reception by the audience in such texts as *Shamba la Mfukeri* and *Uraia* had the potential to cause a change in the script so as to respond to the reception. This needs to be investigated.

Inevitably, and as we discovered in this study, conventional theatre pieces get performed in spaces other than the proscenia. In the performance of *Aminata* in communities, the artists had to contend with the cultural and social ramifications of the characterisation that the play embodied. Mshai Mwangola argued that in one instance, "the deeply held beliefs on the questions of gender and the respect for the will of the dead was so spellbinding that the recent

death of a patriarch in the village became the focus of the discourse on inheritance… and the play had to be changed." (Interview, 2020). This is something that I have not investigated as it was outside the purview of my research. It is imperative that the adaptation of proscenium theatre scripts and performance in community spaces be studied so that we know what this means for the theatre and for the creation process. Such studies would also be instructive on the questions of textual malleability and fluidity and the implications for practitioners.

Another concern is the recasting of theatre scripts – as a result of performance or as by an author after an initial staging. Recasting of scenes or characters' dialogues also occurs in community theatre owing to community reception and other dynamics of participation. Kithaka wa Mberia has argued in the preface to *Maua* that he has rewritten the play several times. The edition studied here is not the one that was enacted in 1997, nor is it the one that was first published. An investigation needs to be done on what impact the rewriting had to the thematic and stylistic nuances and choices of the play, and what the "improvement" was a function of – meaning or form.

A further area that needs to be studied is the changing scenario of the theatre – especially the impact of the entry of media (film and social media spaces) to theatre spaces. The issues here that require investigation include what impact has the film industry had on theatre, what the adaptation of theatre for film entails and what impact social media and the pervasive nature of the smartphone (having video and audio recording abilities) have on theatre. These questions need to be framed into objectives and research carried out.

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