Review

“I come to bury Shakespeare, not to praise him”. Glocalizing drama as reclamation of the African academy in Raisedon Baya’s Tomorrow’s People.

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The paper argues that Baya’s play, Tomorrow’s People, advocates the transformation and localisation of the African theatrical industries as a part of the educational system that aims at liberating the mind and promoting an Afro-centric worldview within a global framework. It explored the dramatisation of the school system and showed that the reclamation of the African academy requires the enactment of an indigenous curriculum that allowed pupils to relate to the wider global world. Through textual analysis of the play, it was noted that the playwright rejected the anti-creative culture of imitating established Eurocentric artistic traditions and championed the training of independent and innovative thinkers who can improvise, theorise, confidently articulate issues from an Afro-centric perspective and contribute to the enrichment of a multicultural global village where Africans participated as peers. The play was rooted within Zimbabwean histories, realities and sensibilities; whilst proffering solutions to real life developmental and existential problems that enabled Africa to participate in shaping global cultural and intellectual discourses.

Key words: Glocalization, globalisation, creativity, indigenisation, reclamation, African-centeredness, academy, knowledge, discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Tomorrow’s People, by Raisedon Baya (2009), is a post-independence Zimbabwean play that seeks to promote a break with colonialist legacies that entrap African creative industries. It castigates Zimbabwe’s education system for perpetuating colonial legacies and espouses a transformation of the African mindset through a home-grown curriculum that addresses society’s universal knowledge gaps. Baya highlights the need to link theatre, knowledge generation and education in the continuing neo-colonialist struggles of Africans in a global age that is characterised by a multiplicity of voices that daily compete for audiences. He articulates his vision for a vibrant, mind liberating, educative and Afro-centric theatre that facilitates an engagement with pertinent issues that affect both the local and larger global community resulting in subjects ‘thinking globally and acting locally’. This involves tackling sensitive topics that Zimbabweans have banished from the public discursive arena such as ethnicity, political violence, democracy, cultural identities, gender relations, and struggles for individual and artistic freedoms, inequalities and antagonisms over access to national resources. This utilitarian approach arises from a realisation that theatre should be based on the particular, and interrogate historical experiences that inform and keep the audiences abreast with developments that affect their lives at national and international levels to influence their conduct. Whilst acknowledging the inevitability of foreign interferences and influences on African theatre,
Baya suggests that theatre has potential to transform the African intellect through a holistic approach that encompasses independent production and staging of content based artistic works that contribute to the commonwealth of knowledge generation. The African centeredness of the play is a contention that for Africans to be respected members of the global village, they must depart from being mere consumers to creators of knowledge.

Baya assumes the dual role of playwright-cum-drama critic as his play performs the task of 'drama as criticism of drama' through its problematization of the dynamics of theatrical traditions of creation, rendition and consumption. This dimension is similarly evident in the play-within-the-play Hamlet where Shakespeare makes scathing attacks on lack of creativity exhibited by actors of his time. Chombo (1981:1) further espouses this in his poem 'Poetry' wherein he insists that the true mark of good poetry is its relationship with people's historical experiences. Baya's outright rejection of colonialist dramatic forms, herein represented by 'burying' Shakespeare, not only asserts authorial independence and freedom of expression but also reveals a quest for transforming African theatre practitioners from mere performers to involved producers of artistic products that simultaneously resonate with their audiences' worst fears, on one hand, and their hopes and aspirations on the other. Following this line of thought, the school drama group's defiant: "We are not going back to Shakespeare. Time has come for us to tell our own stories" (p.85) alongside their collaboration in improvising a new play, "Shakespeare's Ghost", mirrors Baya's philosophy of nurturing the quality of intellectual development advocated by Fortier (1997:143) whereby "The study of theatre, as much as any discipline, brings with it the drive to make and perform rather than simply to ingest". Characters like the School Head and the Teacher are given a re-orientation in dramatic arts when they are reduced to audiences so that they get to know what relevant drama constitutes- notwithstanding the fact that at the end of the play they have 'learnt nothing and forgotten nothing'.

In view of the foregoing, Tomorrow's People is defined by its revision of the colonialist literary canon that projects Europe as the world intellectual hub. This counter-discursive dimension is part of the postcolonial discourse that strives to enforce a break between the formerly colonised and their colonisers by privileging an African worldview. According to Gilbert (1996:27), "Counter-discourse seeks to deconstruct significations of authority and power exercised in the canonical text, to release its stranglehold on representation and, by implication, to intervene in social conditioning". This locates the artistic enterprise at the centre of the struggle for the total liberation of African minds which involves a rejection and dismantling of all foreign determined worldviews. The artist's world becomes the source of inspiration and raw material for representation. Baya engages in a counter-discourse in order to decolonise theatre and carve a place for the African artist in world theatre corridors. This process finds expression through the character Dalubuhle's opening recital: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Shakespeare, (Caesar) not to praise him". (45). This is a slight but fundamental modification of the famous statement by Shakespeare's Mark Antony in a funeral speech for the slain Julius Caesar. In substituting 'Caesar' for 'Shakespeare', Baya endows the statement with new and contextualised meaning that has far reaching implications for theatrical production and sets the tone for the play.

It simultaneously highlights and attempts to resolve the contradictions inherent in the influence-interference of western artistic traditions on African creative industries. Firstly, this is evident in the black young actor's reference to an African audience as "Romans and countrymen" which shows insensitivity to audience composition and has an alienating effect. The play has not been adapted to the local scenario at that point. Secondly, it shows that the speaker has been exposed to the Shakespeare tradition but consciously chooses to reject him, thereby quashing any notions that African actors are unaware of other theatrical traditions. Thirdly, the playwright celebrates the creativity signified in Dalubuhle's reworking of that famous statement by Mark Anthony to reflect on his own context. It is the key that unlocks Baya's philosophy of art. The revolt against western traditions, metaphorically represented in the burial of Shakespeare, is consummated through the rendition of a home-grown play "Shakespeare's Ghost". Fourthly, the play on death rituals, like burial, emphasizes the notion that colonial traditions are decadent, as further illustrated by the contention that Shakespeare 'is a dead man'. The overarching image of death that pervades the play is also captured in the title of the pupils' play 'Shakespeare's Ghost'. Images of ghosts conjure the horror of alien forces intruding into the human world and suggest that the African theatrical world is haunted by Shakespeare's influence. Gilbert (1996:31) observes that:

The ideological weight of Shakespeare's legacy is nowhere felt more strongly than in the theatre, where his work is still widely seen as the measure of all dramatic art, the ultimate test for the would-be actor or director, the mark of audience sophistication, and the uncontested sign of 'Culture' itself.

The play becomes an act of exorcism that will save the African creative world by eliminating pervasive foreign influences. The play's emphasis on the local is indicative of the quest by Africans to independently shape their creative destinies. Whilst acknowledging that traditions can not just be wished away, in this context, the playwright denounces the uncritical appropriation of western traditions into the Zimbabwean context, to the exclusion
of the local. The influence of Shakespeare on African theatre may be undeniable but Baya sees the development of the genre as lying in rebelling against enslavement to this tradition.

The ideological basis of Baya’s rejection of reproducing western ideas is echoed in Africa and Asia through Nollywood and Bollywood film traditions that counter the effects of Hollywood. However, it is problematic that Hollywood remains the dominant discourse since the names suggest that these traditions are offshoots of, and should be benchmarked against Hollywood standards. As competitors against Hollywood, the two dangle the ‘locally made’ label which appeals to African and Asian markets and addresses under and/ misrepresented by Hollywood. This influence breeds hybridity in their products, either arising from attempts to erase Hollywood influences or building on its successes, though emphasising local elements. Nigerian movies have, as is the case in the Zimbabwean context, appropriated the label ‘African movies’ as opposed to Hollywood films that wear the universal jacket. In the cases of Nollywood and Bollywood, there is no mistake or anything other than African and Asian as they draw from and emphasise local material in their representation. It is noteworthy that both traditions have appropriated the role of telling the local story from an insider perspective as advocated by Baya.

Whilst the play dramatises Zimbabwean experiences, its ‘glocal’ character emerges from situating local issues within a global discursive framework, hence Baya’s ‘glocalization of drama’. Glocalization assumes a relationship of interdependence between the local and the global in the sense that the two mutually influence each other. This relationship may be mutually beneficial or antagonistic, if founded on principles that promote inequality. Robertson, as cited in Ahluwali (2001:131), conceived glocalization as a global-local marriage in which:

globalisation subsumes the local...He traces the origins of the term to a telescoping of the terms ‘global’ and ‘local’ in Japan, where business was oriented globally while at the same time being adapted to local conditions. Glocalization is an attempt to rectify the implications inherent in the term ‘globalisation’ that it is in tension with the local.

This perspective renders the ‘local’ and ‘global’ mutual partners in the globalisation project and waters down its condemnation by scholars, mainly from formerly colonised regions, who view globalisation as a terminology seeking to sanitise the West’s continued dominance of world affairs. Coexistence is impossible because, in their view, globalisation threatens the particular (local). Baya replicates the Japanese scenario in the creative industries whereby indigenous theatrical practices become critical entry points into the global intellectual village. Throughout the play, he emphasises Africans’ need to first understand themselves before trying to understand the external world. This plurality of viewpoints that emphasises the particular is echoed by Ngugi (1993:9) who asserts that:

Knowing oneself and one’s environment was the correct basis of absorbing the world; there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre.

In situating the local within a global discourse, Baya exposes the tensions, hostilities and blackmailing that Africans must endure as a pre-condition for their admission into the global village and commonwealth of knowledge. In this light, glocalization is, of necessity, resistance against globalisation whose untamed effect would see an erasure of the local.

Another important view on globalisation, which sheds light on glocalization in relation to the artistic enterprise, is espoused by Ahluwali (2001:130-1) who characterizes globalisation as an:

articulation between the global and the local, stressing that these formulations are often contradictory…the manner in which two contradictory processes—globalisation and localisation—appear to be operating simultaneously…the intensity and speed and spread of globalisation mean that increasingly it is thought of as a process that is wiping out local cultural identities.

Baya’s play dramatizes this hostile interaction between the local and the global by demonstrating that, within the global village, the African story is not given the same prominence as the western story. Telling the African story becomes an act of resistance against numerous hostile forces, especially internal pseudo-African ones that unwittingly propagate western agendas. This universalising agenda is mirrored in the conflict between the Teacher and her drama pupils when she demands that they perform Shakespeare’s play which implies that the global theatrical industry is a homogeneous entity devoid of diversity. Unlike her pupils, she is blind to the reality that Shakespeare’s story does not belong to all members of the global community and its re-telling reinforces the inferiority complex of Africans who must identify with it or risk being labelled incompetent. The pupils’ rejection of Shakespeare, which is viewed as a revolt by the school authorities, is an effective resistance strategy for preserving the African voice. In telling the African story, Baya’s play must go against the current by way of ‘burying Shakespeare’. It adds a diversity that enriches the global literary heritage and theatrical practice by telling the African story within an environment that
actively seeks to suppress it.

The exchange between the Teacher and her pupils represents the raging aesthetic debate between Africa and the west and mirrors the deconstructionist nature of Baya's play. The intellectual poverty of the pro-western Teacher, whose arguments are easily dismissed by her pupils, is indicative of the credibility crisis faced by education systems in independent Africa. The resultant role reversal compels the Teacher, who is exposed as the inferior thinker, to assume the learner's role. Baya eventually shows that the Teacher has retained the colonial mindset and if any meaningful changes are to be effected to the current system, it is necessary to remove her type that religiously follows a decadent system. The thrust towards a new beginning, which is mirrored in the title of the play Tomorrow's People, places emphasis on the youth who are a new breed of humanity and represent the future. Their advantage lies in their critical thinking, ability to grasp the nature of social problems and a capacity to identify issues that should constitute national discourse. The play highlights and reacts to those characteristics of globalisation that subvert the African voice. For instance, the notion that globalisation compresses the world into a global village is shown to arise from the ease with which transcontinental interactions take place, thanks to technological advances in the transport and communication sectors. This is alluded to through the drama group which, vested with a cultural ambassadorial role, is rehearsing for a maiden tour of Scotland (Europe) on what is supposed to be a 'cultural exchange programme' (p.48). The tour, which is a non event, highlights the contradictions inherent in the unequal relations between Africa and Europe which make it difficult for Africa to participate as a peer in the global village. The idea of 'cultural exchange' entails equality and reciprocity hence the programme's potential to promote smart partnerships and dialogues between Africa and Europe. It offers disadvantaged African children opportunities to showcase their talents to international audiences and this exposure could galvanize the growth of African creative industries. It could promote understanding, appreciation, tolerance and coexistence of diverse cultures by bridging knowledge gaps that usually result in cultural distortions due to distance between cultures. However, Baya dismantles these grand delusions by exposing the discord prevalent in the global village, which, if left unchecked, would result in the erasure of African culture by Western culture. Ahluwali (2001:124-5) further asserts that:

It is now commonplace to speak of a global culture, the global village, as well as of the speed and spread of globalisation processes which are gripping the world. Yet, with such discourses, the absence and nullity of Africa is all the more prominent at this juncture of the millennium. Globalisation can be seen as a product of the massive expansionism of European economic, political and cultural influence throughout the world.

This status is dramatised in the exchanges between the Teacher and her pupils who reject her idea of pseudo-cultural exchanges that entrench western cultural imperialism. They realise that Shakespeare represents western values and performing him entails active participation in marginalizing the African worldview. The hopelessness of telling other people's story is expressed in Miles' candid question, 'What Zimbabwean culture will we be taking to Scotland with a production of Shakespeare' (p. 47) as it exposes the Teacher's ignorance and unwitting connivance with forces that dwarf the African intellectual capacity. On the other hand, Miles' rejection of these cultural imperialist machinations reveals a critical consciousness that enables him to determine how others are to view and relate to him.

The play dismisses the magnetic appeal of Scotland (Europe) by showing that this 'once in a lifetime' opportunity comes courtesy of apemanship. The drama group need not bring their own stuff to the global village. Imitation reduces them to the world's laughing stock as they are unlikely to out-Shakespeare the Scots on stage since Zimbabwean pupils cannot understand and perform Shakespeare better than the English. The exchange programme loses its implied essence as it is not an occasion for cultural exchanges but rather a continuation of cultural imperialist tendencies of the dominant west seeking to invent and apprentice the African artist in an English tradition that is not immediately relevant to them. This seeming tolerance and coexistence threatens African culture with extinction at a time when cultural industries, on the international scene, are fast establishing themselves as major contributors to national gross domestic product. The dominance of western products on the world markets perpetuates the economic dominance of the west as cultural commodity producers and reduces Africans to consumers. Since the creative economy is one of the fastest growing subsectors of the global economy, in advocating investment in producers of art instead of performers; Baya is championing the empowerment of Africans. The Teacher's sole concern with the students giving a polished performance of Shakespeare retards the growth of the arts as it fails to unlock their creative energies and potential. Her refusal to embrace the innovation and creativity of her students underlines her failure to grasp the importance of the individual in the creative process and the role of art in society.

As representatives of third world countries, the pupils' plight highlights that culture is expensive. Poverty impedes cultural dialogue between the rich and the poor and is responsible for the hegemony of cultures from economically and technologically advanced nations. Shakespeare's global appeal signifies the stranglehold of
western ideals in global discourse. He has assumed a global character due to colonial penetration, and control of world economies and global media structures by the British. ‘Shakespeare’s Ghost’ symbolically castigates the control levied on the group’s production by the Scottish sponsors of the tour who demand to see a rendition of Shakespeare. The politics of funding give rich western nations leverage to control and determine the content of performances of the creative industries of poor nations. The total power of the sponsoring Scottish audience-cum-hosts is summed up by the Teacher who says ‘the people who are paying for our tickets to Scotland, the very people who shall be hosting us there are expecting Shakespeare from us. Nothing else’ (47). The finality of the statement emphasises the helplessness of the pupils who are at the mercy of their wealthy hosts whose economic muscle allows them to reduce the African intellectual landscape to a marketplace for western intellectual products.

Baya’s rejection of western art is hinged on the notion that Shakespeare does not immediately relate to the African context because he is not African. This is brought out through Dalubhule who rejects him because, ‘Shakespeare is not Zimbabwean. He is not even African’. The conflict pitting the school Head and the Teacher, on one hand, against the drama students, on the other, mirrors the contestation of the continued hegemonic intellectual stranglehold of the west on the African academy. The group realises that it is bound to fail to impress on its maiden overseas tour because performing Shakespeare invites the application of western standards in assessing their performance. This concern is further buttressed by Gilbert (1996) who contends that “The use of Shakespeare as the gold standard of dramatic art was instrumental in constructing the inferiority of the non-European actor since his/her rendition of Shakespearean text could never be authentic”. The character Miles’ queries "Why Shakespeare in the first place? Is it so they can laugh at us as we fumble and stagger through the difficult lines? ... People in Scotland can do Shakespeare better than us. Why do we need to take a sub-standard Shakespeare to them?”(p.47) highlight this fundamental dilemma.

Shakespeare is generally acknowledged as an authority in theatre corridors and academic circles, having penned celebrated plays that have gripped the imagination of the world, and this has promoted his commercialisation in various forms, including prescribing his plays as literature set books in schools, colleges and universities. In trying to convince her students to embrace Shakespeare, the Teacher supports her notion of Shakespeare’s supremacy by declaring that ‘professors, doctors, and other great writers have tried to compete with Shakespeare and lost’ (p.48). This argument seeks to compel them to realise the futility of their resistance and appreciate the invincibility of the brand Shakespeare. The contested nature of ideas is highlighted in the duel between the academics on one hand and Shakespeare on the other. Professors and doctorate holders represent the intelligentsia and their failure against Shakespeare would confirm the empirical nature of western ideas that may be subjected to various hypothetical tests and still emerge unscathed. What is somewhat obvious is the misconception about the nature of this intellectual contest that is universalised and fatally shaven of any relationship to the Zimbabwean context. Endowing Shakespeare with placelessness and timelessness is misleading as it gives the impression that the world has remained static and fossilised since his days.

From the play’s representation of educational institutions, it is evident that Baya believes that the post-independent state has failed to break with colonialism by unwittingly perpetuating its legacy through a Euro-centric curriculum. This has had the effect of scuttling education’s potential to further the struggle for the emancipation of Africans through a ‘decolonisation of the mind’ as advocated by Ngugi wa Thiongo. The reform vision of the Zimbabwean government, though not successfully implemented, is captured by Zvobgo (1994:94) who observes that, “The new government came to power anxious to dismantle the vestiges of colonial rule... Education was one area in which government set out to reverse the situation”. Baya contends that the Zimbabwean educational system has failed and needs a complete overhaul if Africans are to be moulded into critical thinkers who can contribute to the commonwealth of knowledge. This failure is evident in the defication of Shakespeare by the school authorities who hold him as a gateway to success in life. The teacher tries to convince her students to embrace Shakespeare because, as she puts it, ‘I studied Shakespeare at school and at college and see where I am today’ (p.46). Associating Shakespeare with the world of opportunities has the effect of privileging the western worldview and overlooking the fact that he is a symbol of western cultural imperialism and an enabling philosophy of a system that oppressed Africans. Whilst possessing vast potential to influence her pupils’ worldview, the Teacher remains ineffectual because she remains trapped in a system that is consumed by a colonial hangover, hence is rejected by the pupils. Her shortcomings reflect the deficiencies of the education system.

In focusing on the school system, Baya emphasizes the need to Africanise the African scholar and the entire process of knowledge generation as a precondition for Africans’ entry into the global village as peers. The education system is caricatured through the stock character of the school Head. He disrespects his pupils and impairs their dignity with references such as “you lecherous bastard” (57). His interaction with the pupils is characterised by bellowing military-style orders like “run”
The pupil is deemed a receiver of commands as shown in his advice to Miss Jubane that “you must show them who is in charge” (57). A system that looks down upon its products cannot be expected to develop a complete human who is self-respecting and commands others’ respect. Baya thus shows that the education system pursued after independence remains, against expectations, a vehicle through which Africans are dehumanised and their values corrupted to further the continuation of their mental enslavement. This critique of the system is important in linking the colonial and post-independence eras in a web that compels the formerly colonised and their former colonisers to continuously engage in dialogue within the framework of the global village. This state obtains because the colonial experience, which continues to link world cultures in the independent era, is central to understanding the current education system that requires reforms. Any criticism of present day institutions which were inherited from colonialism ignites dialogue between the formerly colonised and their colonisers. To this end, Tomorrow’s People becomes a scathing attack on an education system that has not shed the undergarments of colonialism and desperately clings to western aesthetics and intellectual values as the standard. This is evident in the importance attached to Shakespeare, which is carried over from the colonial era. Shakespeare represents western traditions and this explains why no specific Shakespeare play is mentioned. By extension, Shakespeare represents the western literary tradition that was an integral element of colonialism’s cultural imperialist machinery meant to turn Africans into black Europeans. As argued by Gilbert (1996:26-7),

Because of its supposed humanistic functions, ‘English Literature’ occupied a privileged position in the colonial classroom, where its study was designed to ‘civilise’ native students by inculcating in them British tastes and values, regardless of the exigencies of the local context…The hegemony of the imperial canon is, nevertheless, still in evidence in many post-colonial societies, as manifest not only in the choice of curricula material and the relative worth assigned to European texts but also through the ways in which such texts are taught—usually without serious consideration of their ideological biases.

The need to reform the education system arises from the fact that the colonisers used it to instil western values in the adherents, to make them pliable subjects of colonialism. Literature, by virtue of being a product of its community and a reservoir of its ideas and value system, would be ideal in propagating an imperialist culture. This explains the prominence given to Shakespeare drama in the colonial education system. The Teacher who is preparing the drama group for its maiden tour of the United Kingdom (UK) is a symbol of the education system and a devout believer in the invincibility of the classic English literary tradition. She endows Shakespeare with an irresistible universal appeal and fixation to time and space that render any attempts at abandoning him futile exercises because, ‘his stories are classical and universal. He is the greatest playwright ever to live on this earth’. (p.46). This blind appeal to the unquestionable authority of Shakespeare rubbishes any efforts at critiquing his relevance in the present age, and especially to the formerly colonised. The ability to give a polished rendition of Shakespeare, regardless of one’s status, is, in her view, a mark of class. Her preoccupation with getting the classic lines right as opposed to the revision of the whole creative concept as propounded by the students in the statement “I come to bury Shakespeare, not to praise him” (45) blinds her to the pupils’ creative genius.

The teacher’s lack of creativity disqualifies her from the role of leading and nurturing talented and adventurous young minds. Her Pupils are sharper and more courageous than her. She sees betrayal in instances of creativity as her allegation that “Someone very mischievous has been corrupting my students while I was away” (p.56) shows a refusal to accept that her students can think independently. This exposes an anti-intellectual culture because a good education system should pride itself in its ability to produce thinkers and artists. In his assessment of theatrical practices, Berry (1999:60) views the role of the performer as being intertwined with the creative process whereby:

Subjects (are) their own cultural and historical creators. We are objects of ideological production and creations of our own socio-cultural history. The important point to keep in mind is that once dramatic processes reveal the intolerableness of social realities, participants are responsible for “re-hearsing” alternative choices and actions that move toward transformation, that is, intervention in the process of construction of our worlds. Subjects become agents of change.

The essence of his argument is that artists must be enlightened if they are to produce socially useful art. It is obvious that the teacher and school head are disciples of the retrogressive philosophy of conformity which does not demand creativity. It is imbedded with beliefs in safety valves of performing Shakespeare who is not immediately relevant to the Zimbabwean context and would, therefore, not invite trouble from political powers.

These political considerations become major impediments to the growth of the arts in Zimbabwe. Consequently, this approach neither enlightens the pupils nor provides them with guidelines to realise and fully exploit their artistic prowess and become competitive in this cutthroat but potentially lucrative creative industry. A
system founded on such defective principles can only succeed in producing consumers and not producers of art.

The weaknesses of the system are further highlighted through the Teacher’s careerist approach to education whereby the learner does not approach it as a lifelong experience but focuses on the short term goal of passing examinations at the end of the year. Shakespeare must be studied because, as the Teacher puts it, ‘Shakespeare is in your syllabus and it will be years before he is removed’. The study of Shakespeare is viewed as being unavoidable and the only means to intellectual success as it is associated with the syllabus. This preoccupation excludes the study of anything else that may enrich one’s comprehension of the discipline. In this case, Shakespeare must be studied in isolation from other works just because he is in the syllabus. Overall, the impression thus generated is that disciplines do not cross-fertilise each other. This kind of education, as advocated by the Teacher and the school Head, will not produce critical thinkers whose ideas could improve society’s self understanding. Rather, it exploits safety valves that are to be found in propagating politically correct, but foreign, ideals that do not adequately reflect on the prevailing circumstances. This is underpinned by fear of courting trouble with the powers that be for producing plays that are critical of the status quo. Ultimately the play is banned by the Head because it makes an unfavourable appraisal of the post-independent state and may be deemed to be anti-establishment which would, in turn, cost him a job.

Tomorrow’s People raises critical issues that have a bearing on the course of the creative process in Zimbabwe, in particular, and Africa in general. It raises the question of independence and freedom of the artist. Obstacles to artistic freedom and creativity are to be found in the educational philosophy as represented by the school Head and the Teacher. Their fear of the so called dissident drama shows that they are operating within an undemocratic political framework which is averse to freedom of expression. The school head’s pronouncement at the end of the play, that, ‘I’m putting all members of the drama club on suspension, pending dismissal’ (p.85) mirrors the prevailing repressive environment under which the creative process is taking place. This stifles the growth of the arts industry. In addition to being performers, Baya’s characters are producers of art and this gives them total control on their subjectivity. They have cooperated in producing the script in stark contrast to the ready made Shakespeare text over which they have no control. The thrust of their play shows that it is produced with a specific audience in mind and is also a product of social reality, which explains the inherent local flavour. Through the play, the artists get a chance to interrogate their social existence and clearly show what needs to be done to improve people’s lives.

Dalubuhle’s sentiments that ‘Shakespeare is difficult and has no immediate connection with us and our future’ (p.46) express Baya’s rebellion against the perceived elitism of western literary works. Conceding the difficulty of Shakespeare’s language does not expose deficiencies on the part of black performers but highlights problems encountered by African performers of Shakespeare. These linguistic difficulties make a full comprehension of Shakespeare impossible for both performers and their audiences. Mastering Shakespeare becomes a struggle where the African practitioner expends immense energy at the expense of creativity. The student performers see progress in rebelling against enslavement to traditions which are removed from their realities. Baya counters the complexities of Shakespeare’s language by using English that is accessible as it incorporates indigenous linguistic features that resonate with his audience’s worldview. Code switching is also exploited to give the play an indigenous complexion as he borrows expressions from Ndebele and Shona languages. Whilst Ngugi advocates a total abolition of English in African literature, in favour of African languages, Baya avoids the pitfalls of prematurely narrowing his audience base by domesticating English to make it bear the burden of the African experience. By virtue of its world-wide usage, it makes sense to employ English in postulating a counter discourse because it allows the playwright to articulate local issues that are comprehensible to wider audiences and stakeholders. Notwithstanding the efficacy of this character of English in facilitating dialogue between Africa and the West, its continued use may exclude a critical section of the local population whilst reinforcing the dominance of English culture on the world stage.

This artistic licence that gives the artist manoeuvring space in this ideological quicksand comes courtesy of the actors’ active participation in the creative process. On the other hand, since the actors have not created Shakespeare’s play, they do not have the authority to modify it to suit their audience’s levels of comprehension as they risk being labelled ‘incompetent’. Ultimately they would be held hostage as they stumble through their lines on stage. It is imperative upon the African artists to ensure that the audience readily relates to their works. To establish a relationship of this nature, Baya has interrogated the question of identity creation. Identities are continuously being negotiated and their fluidity is symbolised in the characters’ acts of assuming multiple roles that require changing identities during the course of the play. Ahluwali (2001:116-8) asserts that ‘citizenship is based upon the recognition that individuals have more than a single identity, that within society individuals occupy a multiplicity of positions, depending upon circumstances at a particular time’. Tomorrow’s People explores the complex issue of national identities that characterize the post independence era and is therefore steeped in the Zimbabwean historical realities.
The play dramatises Zimbabwean material realities by dwelling on political hotspots such as tribalism, pitting the Ndebele against the Shona. Baya mirrors the political power matrix by depicting ruling party supporters mainly as Shonas with the opposition being predominantly Ndebele and therefore gives the contest for political turf an ethnic dimension. This may not necessarily be the correct position obtaining on the ground but dramatises the influence of ethnicity on national politics. Ethnicity has and continues to cause fissures in the national body politic as noted by Kelleher and Klein (2011: 3) that:

*Ethnic identities take priority over the state identity and ethnic rivalries erupt. Differences...in language are used to characterize the value or nature of the individuals within those groups. The differences between ethnic groups can cause minor social discord or minor conflicts which eventually can grow to threaten the integrity of the state, even lead to genocide. The relative power of those who hate and those who are hated anticipates the results.*

These seemingly Zimbabwean dilemmas constitute cutting-edge issues on the global discursive arena to cement the play's universal appeal. For instance, ethnic conflicts have led to genocide in Rwanda. The break-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics also led to ethnic ‘cleansing’ in Eastern Europe. Electoral irregularities led to violent inter-party clashes in post-2007 Kenyan elections, with over a thousand lives lost.

The political and social influences of ethnicity is represented through Ndiweni, whose open hostility towards all Shonas, coupled with hate filled utterances, gives expression to the Ndebeles’ bitterness against the Shonas’ perceived dominance in political and economic spheres and strongly suggests that the Zimbabwean political landscape is defined by ethnicity. He struggles to control his daughter’s sexuality in an attempt to strike at his perceived ‘Shona’ enemies. As a tribalist, Ndiweni sees his daughter as a symbol of tribal purity hence marriage to a member of the rival tribe would result in pollution. The tense relations between the Ndebele and the Shona, characterised by his use of inflammatory and demeaning references like, ‘dogs, thieves, crooks, amamenemene’, make inter-tribal relations a test of character. This individual crisis serves as a microcosm of the larger national ethnic born crisis.

Tribalism is dehumanising because it thrives on denial of the other’s humanity hence Ndiweni suffers mental anguish from fear that his honour would be irreparably damaged by the daughter’s association with a Shona boy, Nimrod. The daughter is, however, resolute, bold and defiant in defence of her rights. The temperamental and predictable Ndiweni, with his threats to use his knobkierrie to kill dogs (Shona), is drawn from the colonial characterisation of the Ndebeles as a warlike people and

his irrational conduct reduces the like minded to a laughing stock. However, Baya dismisses Ndiweni’s archaic values by giving him more bark though, ultimately, he cannot control the daughter’s choices. He tries to save face by emotionally blackmailing his daughter and threatening to unleash unprovoked violence on the Shonas. Tribalism is presented as a social cancer that disrupts social relations and curtails the freedom and happiness of the individual as it affects personal and intimate matters such as love. Like every discriminatory system that thrives on labelling and categorisation, it prevents the objective evaluation of the individual’s worth.

The contradictions that define the Zimbabwean nation in the form of ethnic based conflicts are further played out and reconciled through the lovers, Yakhani and Nimrod, who are forced to contend with tribal hostilities that characterise Ndebele/Shona relations. They are reduced to scapegoats and burden bearers of their respective tribes’ sins and this curtails their freedom of association. Marrying across the tribal and political divide becomes a bold step towards bridging the tribal and political polarisation though it attracts the wrath of their fathers’ and parties’ violent machinery. The two are cast as models of political maturity as evident in their rejection of selective manipulation and distortion of history for political expediency, denunciation of political violence and refusal to be used as merchants of violence. Nimrod’s protestation that, “… as youths we must refuse to be used as hired guns and political pawns. We must not be used to hate, kill or maim each other” (73.) exhibits a high degree of political maturity and tolerance.

Whilst the youths are emissaries of violence in the play, they double as its major victims since they are also recipients as shown later in the attacks on Yakhani and Nimrod. Both the ruling and opposition parties are shown abusing and exploiting the youth into perpetrating acts of political violence as an expression of their allegiance. This violent culture, calculated at eliminating alternative political views, exposes the undemocratic culture being nurtured by the political elite. The tendency to label holders of different political views ‘enemies’ shows intolerance and authoritarianism as observed by Vibeke (2010:239) that “The political regime constructed internal enemies who were accused of allying themselves with colonial and imperial interests”. Human rights are violated with individuals’ liberties trashed in the contest for political hegemony. Individuals must subordinate their interests to the pseudo-national interests of the party. The line dividing individual interests and party interests has been obliterated resulting in the persecution of individuals whose interests differ from the party’s narrowly defined interests. Baya thus exposes state sponsored violence as substituting political activism with thuggery. The ruling party is able to sponsor political terrorism because it controls and uses the state machinery to silence opposition. In this regard, the playwright shows
that the political playing field is not even and needs to be corrected. This scenario highlights the socio-political role of art in Zimbabwean representation that fosters a democratic culture.

The school head’s fear of home-grown plays shows the discomfort of officialdom with creative arts as it has the potential to reflect on the status quo. The play exposes a violence continuum in post-independence Zimbabwean politics from the early days of independence to the post-2000 decade of crisis. This is achieved through references to the emotive question of Gukurahundi massacres. Gukurahundi, (the rains that wash away chaff), refers to the 1980s military operations in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces by the North Korean trained Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe National Army. Whilst on paper, it was aimed at flushing out dissidents who had taken up arms against the ZANU PF government due to dissatisfaction with the status quo, in reality it resulted in the loss of a reported 20000 lives, mainly civilians who were accused of aiding and abating the dissident mission. Atrocities committed during this “moment of madness” had a traumatic impact on the victims and survivors who had to endure the pain of witnessing the butchering of loved ones and other extra judicial executions. As a ‘cleansing operation’ that affected mainly the Ndebeles, Gukurahundi assumes a tribal character with genocidal tendencies hence Ndiweni accuses Shonas of being collectively responsible for the atrocities. This thinking is exposed in his accusation that is directed at the Shona boy Nimrod that, “His people killed my brother and his wife. They murdered a lot of our people.”(69). Violence against perceived political opponents is meant to silence alternative voices and this has restricted the democratic space in independent African states. Commenting on the anti-democratic and politico-tribal nature of this military operation, Vibeke (2010:239) notes that:

There were already signs of suppression of the opposition in the south-west, culminating in the Matabeleland atrocities referred to as Gukurahundi, a Shona phrase which means “the rain that washes away the chaff before the spring comes” many thousands were brutally killed and tortured.

This conflict is viewed as a power struggle, marked by a fallout of former comrades-in-arms during the struggle, following the electoral defeat of ZAPU. It can also be traced to a resentment of Shona rule by the Ndebeles who traditionally looked down upon them and referred to them as amaHole, dating back to the days of Mzilikazi’s conquest. The silences and denials that have characterised the Gukurahundi debate are hinted at as Baya only makes an allusion to it without really getting into a fully fledged interrogation, but doing enough to show that as long as there is no closure for the case prospects of inter-tribal hostilities shall remain in place. However, parading such issues before international audiences would be detrimental to Zimbabwe’s image and the compromise option, which Baya rejects outright, is doing a Shakespeare play that does not reflect on Zimbabwe. Whilst interrogating the Gukurahundi topic has been a taboo in Zimbabwean discourse, Baya asserts the urgent need to interrogate this history which is nastily repeating itself in the post-2000 intra-party conflicts. Silence, denial or finger pointing do not lead to national healing and reconciliation since these require collective national efforts at ensuring justice, peace and tolerance. Coming to terms with the past and the present is a precondition for the realisation of an ideal future.

The culture of political violence, which has transformed the political landscape into a bloody military zone as represented by the destruction of opposition party supporters’ houses by ruling party youths draws parallels with Gukurahundi as an assault on people’s liberties, basic right to shelter, security and freedom of association. As both are represented as government projects, they serve as an antithesis of democracy since, as observed by Magstadt (2009:21), “in constitutional democracies... the public good is associated with certain core values, such as security, prosperity, equality, liberty and justice”. Insecurity prevails due to governance failure and breakdown of the rule of law as marked by the ruling party youths’ immunity from prosecution. The boastful stance and daring attack on Yakhani and her mother in their backyard is evidence that the youths are a law unto themselves. Yakhani’s mother is killed in her own home by the youths who have developed a culture of violence and disrespect for elders and human life. Her accidental neck snapping and subsequent death at the hands of the gang dramatizes the vulnerability of women. As Worell (2002:90) observes, ‘Violence against women is inextricably bound to the social context of male domination and control’. The death is a metaphor of fragility in a world that has supplanted reason with brute force whereby men, who control both physical and psychological force, assert their dominance through physical brutality. Women are vulnerable in the context of violent political clashes as they do not have the capacity to withstand physical confrontation.

The recurrent theme of violence is further articulated through character names such as Bomba, whose name signifies a culture of destructive violence. The play mainly associates violence with the ruling party as Bomba is an influential official in its ranks. Ironically, the name is intended to associate the party with the liberation struggle as it expresses Fanon’s contention on the necessity of violence in dislodging violent colonialist regimes.

However, in the transformed conditions of the post independence era, violence is deemed retrogressive as focus has shifted from destruction to construction. The name Bomba betrays outdated thought patterns derived from a historical phase that is fundamentally different from the present. This attempt at fossilizing history is a self preservative antic by discredited political leaders,
who resort to violence to remain relevant.

In line with addressing cutting-edge issues in the global discursive arena, the play further exposes the patriarchal assumptions underpinning Zimbabwean politics. Inequalities between men and women are played out on the political arena resulting in women being pawned in violent contests for political turf, thereby hindering the growth of democracy. Men’s suffocating stranglehold on the political theatre is seen when only men, like Barnabas and Bomba, occupy key political offices in both the opposition and ruling parties. Women play limited political roles in the play thereby bringing out their subordinated political existence. The only woman political activist in the play is Yakhani and her disadvantaged social position as a girl continuously intrudes into her political career. She is a victim of the Delianal complex that haunts both parties resulting in women being treated as hurdles to men’s political careers. Yakhani is suspiciously viewed as a trap that would ultimately lead to the political destruction of Nimrod and the ruling party. The opposition party’s directive for Yakhani to immediately denounce her relationship with Nimrod and choose someone from within the party reduces her to the status of party property to be exclusively possessed by male activists. Whilst choosing from within the party is projected as a pre-emptive measure against infiltration, it essentially represents control of women’s sexuality for attainment of political ascendancy. The woman’s body becomes a site for waging political hegemonic struggles and her rights are trampled upon in the process. She is deemed a symbol of political purity, with the attendant fears that if left to her own devices she would corrupt the entire body politic. As postulated by Berry (1999:42) “One of the major sites for cultural representation, especially in the dramatic arts, is the body”. The party deems Yakhani’s relationship with Nimrod a betrayal as she is ‘supping with the enemy’ and likely to disclose party secrets to her lover. Barnabas threatens violence, in the opposition party’s name, in a bid to control Yakhani. These self-serving male interests that are veiled as party interests seek to subordinate the girl child’s will. Yakhani, however, stands her ground and refuses to be intimidated.

Unequal access to resources, with scales tipped in favour of men, hinders women’s activism and enables successful business people like Nimrod’s father to use their financial muscles to climb the political ladder. Such individuals are presented in a way that suggests that they have accumulated wealth through the ruling party’s elaborate system of patronage as they are expected to pay back by enforcing the party’s doctrine on their children. Bomba issues veiled threats that Nimrod’s father risks losing everything that he has acquired if he leaves his son to disobey the party. Fathers are recruited into the party’s coercive machinery so that they can, in turn, control their children thus establishing a chain of control.

Closely related to negotiation for democratic space is representation of the media as failing to live up to its tag as a fourth pillar of the state. The media is an essential public watchdog in a functioning democracy but it is projected as an accomplice in shielding the terrorist activities of ruling party supporters. Baya gives glimpses of an uninvestigative media that has abdicated its public mandate to inform accurately. Its reports on acts of violence being perpetrated against opposition supporters gives the impression that the press has the potential to expose unethical public conduct, but its deliberate failure to unravel the identities of the attackers compromises its credibility. There is a protective stance in the half report on the physical and arson attacks against the opposition which suggests that the media does not report freely on issues that project the ruling party in negative light. The ruling party youths feel safe in the knowledge that they shall remain anonymous after committing criminal activities. Given this state of affairs, Baya appears to argue that exposing the identities of the hired perpetrators would not necessarily bring violence to an end; rather, what is needed is political re-education programme that inculcates a non-violent political culture amongst activists, as advocated by Nimrod. The playwright assumes the role of exposing and publicizing unethical practices of eliminating political rivals and advocates a political culture of tolerance. These qualities are essential if Zimbabwe is to be a respected member of the global village where diversity pervades all spheres of life.

This paper has shown that Tomorrow’s People is a reformist African centred play that promotes ‘thinking globally and acting locally’. It seeks to wring out changes to the creative traditions that have influenced theatre in Africa to make it responsive to the needs of the envisaged African audiences. By spelling out the required changes to the educational, social and political institutions, the play is shown to be relevant as it is born out of the experiences of the audiences. The closing episode shows hope for the future in that, despite the brutal assaults they suffer, Yakhani and Nimrod pick themselves up and continue undeterred on their path. The future is not bleak as this indomitable spirit symbolises the triumph of progressive forces over reactionary ones. For young people who are the face of the future, unlike the rigid old Ndiweni, life is an educational journey with every phase being a learning curve. As the play closes, Absalom and company, who have been used as terror merchants, come to a questioning, realisation and rejection of the destructive role thrust upon their shoulders by the elite. Their redemption is made possible by the playwright’s ability to draw characters that have a capacity to learn from their past blunders and thereafter approach the future with a purpose.
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