

PLAYWRITING FOR THE UGANDAN THEATER AUDIENCE: OPPORTUNITIES AND
CHALLENGES

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DECLARATION

I Ngobi Ambrose do hereby declare that this work is my original work and has never been submitted to any institution of higher learning for any academic award.

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Date 29th / NOVEMBER / 2022.....

SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation presented by Ngobi Ambrose was written under my supervision and has been submitted with my approval.

Supervisor's name *Dr. Richard Kagoloba*

Signature..... 

Date..... *6-12-2022*

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my mother, Namatovu Fatuma for the goodness in her heart, and belief in my capabilities. You have put a lot of resources together to ensure that I become a person of substance in this universe, and only you can know how each and every day I am transforming.

Thank you.

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Madam Lilian Mbabazi despite not being my supervisor, was close to me throughout the research process. She availed to me all contact information this study required, and guided me to the last end with great belief.

Lastly, my classmates were the most joyful for the accomplishments in this research, for we were a united front of learners who sought to support one another in our academic progress. At one point, we would have discussions on how best to handle the research requirements of our studies; and encourage each other at another.

ABSTRACT

The major objective of this study was to examine the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda.

In order to achieve the above objective I used a qualitative case study coupled with three research methods, that is, interviews, observation and document analysis.

The findings of this study indicated that there are many opportunities for playwriting in Uganda, for instance, improved local and foreign funding, and the availability of market for plays in local languages. However, the study also indicated challenges such as the lack of a playwrights' guild, and stiff competition with film.

It is hoped that the findings of this study shall be used by policy making organs such as the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development to make better policies that affect playwrights in Uganda.

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the historical background on which this study was based, tracing the origins of theater across the globe and the theatrical practices of playwrights in Uganda. I also present the problem that this study addresses with the significance and limitations of addressing it.

1.2 Introduction to the Study

"Since [theater]...predates recorded history and leaves no tangible trace, the precise origins of theater are cloaked in mystery..."(Felner, Orenstein: 2006: 26). This argument takes us to an understanding that theater has existed as long as human beings have existed. Therefore, human theatrical experiences are ingrained in the very nature of human understanding. Felner and Orenstein continue by tracing the craft and activity of writing plays as an experience that dates from the 5th century BC during the Greek festival of god Dionysus.

The period of this festival implanted a hallmark on the experience of writing plays as celebrated pieces like Oedipus The King, Medea and The Oresteia surfaced. Great playwrights like Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus also became known in the same period.

This gave rise to playwriting as a medium in the creative arts that explores the usage of stage to dramatize events of society and comment on the issues at the core of the social mind. When stage plays started to reflect society and being owned by society— thinkers developed interest in the processes of developing plays. In his research paper: *Research in Theatre History*; Oscar Brockett (1967: 267) says: "it [theater] attracted a number of scholars in the ancient world. Aristotle for example is known to have assembled a relatively complete record of Athenian theater from the beginning to his own time." This interest is also responsible for the emergence of Aristotle's "The

Poetics”, a fundamental narrative detailing the 6 elements of playwriting that have continued to be used across the world till the present day.

Theater then came a long way into the Middle Ages, classical period, modern and postmodern periods. However, notable in the playwriting world is the Elizabethan¹ playwright, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) who left an indelible mark on the English language (Koyfman: 2002).²

His plays like Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream and King Lear, continue to be taught in colleges across the world as a measure of talent and skill in the activity of writing plays.

Nonetheless, the practice of playwriting became a global phenomenon with the global dynamics that have come evolving through the 19th and 20th centuries, and in the contemporary world, the biggest influencer of theater, America’s Broadway³ has given rise to writers like Alvin McCraney, Lynn Nottage, and Terrence McNally (Barnet, 2020: 03).

One example of such global dynamics is colonialism which made sure that the values of the colonists were reproduced in the minds of the colonized, and Great Britain (biggest colonist) ensured that this was heeded to in the most possible ways in all its Empire. Jessica Kaahwa (2004: 84), argues that from 1980 onwards, “the oral culture declined [in Uganda] and was replaced by written culture, which stressed word writing instead of creating things using words.”

¹ The Elizabethan era was the period in which Queen Elizabeth 1 ruled England. This is the same time that William Shakespeare emerged as a playwright.

² Stephen Koyfman wrote that in blog post titled: "Shakespeare and other Languages," for the Babble Magazine. (Check reference list for the link).

³ Broadway is a theater district in New York City. It is considered as the home of America’s theater industry.

From the above, one can argue that the emergency of playwrights in the colonized world, especially in Africa, such as Wole Soyinka, Francis Imbuga, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, and Athol Fugard, was a direct effect of colonialism. The same conclusion can be adjusted to Uganda that its playwrights such as Alex Mukulu of "30 Years of Bananas," and Charles Mulekwa of "A Time of Fire", are a product of colonial activity in Africa.

1.3 Background of the Study

As already remarked, Uganda's exposure to playwriting can be traced from the coming of missionaries and colonialists, which was during the end of the 19th Century. Kaahwa (2004: 84) affirms that writing developed following the arrival of missionaries, giving rise to early playwrights like Erisa Kironde who wrote during the period of 1950's, close to independence in 1962. However, playwriting in Uganda during this independence era seems to have been a disorganized process, and in his blog post titled: "The Harsh Rebirth of Professional Theater in

Uganda," A.K. Kaiza. (2013) wrote that (quoting the words of one proponent of theater during the aftermath of Uganda's independence— whose name he doesn't reveal); "they wrote....well, writing is such a strong word, they had Plays without order, without plans..."

When Kaiza writes that "writing is such a strong word" there is a reflection on the poor quality of written pieces in the theater business of Uganda during those times. But despite such unprofessionalism, the independence period was a time of laying foundation, and kickstarting playwriting in Uganda. There are notable names that can be recognized, and they are: Wycliffe Kiyingi, Robert Serumaga, and Byron Kawada.

The above writers shape the reflections about the journey of playwriting in Uganda before the 21st century. For instance Wycliffe Kiyingi is considered as "the father of playwriting" (Kaiza, 2013) in Uganda who wrote the first African play that was staged at the Uganda National Theatre in 1953, years before Uganda got independence. Robert Serumaga, a theater politician was the most brilliant dramatist whose government life in the cabinets of post Idi Amin got him in trouble. His brilliance can be seen in a number of plays he wrote- including, The Elephants, Majangwa: A

promise of Rains— a play that featured in the 10 masterpieces of Uganda (Kiyingi, 2020). Byron Kawadwa's works, such as, *Oluyimba Lwa Wankoko* (Song of a cock) got him killed by the security operatives of dictatorial Idi Amin.

As it can be seen, Uganda's playwriting after 1962 (a year of independence) got mingled with politics, and “the theater practitioners could no longer sit on the fence and leave it to politicians....” (Kaahwa, 2004: 100). Sadly, this relationship got the theater industry that was feebly evolving to crash the more. When Amin killed Kawadwa, it cultivated terror and self-censorship which later made the theatre business to continuously have plays “without plans” as written by Kaiza.

With the ascendancy of President Yoweri Museveni in 1986, and the promulgation of the Ugandan constitution in 1995 that recognized all fundamental freedoms of human beings— including that of expression— prominent figures started to emerge. Of these is Alex Mukulu, writer of "30 Years of Bananas", and Judith Adong, writer of "Silent Voices". Professionalism has since then taken a gradual but steady rebirth and playwriting can be said to be under development.

However, even though there seems to be steady progress for playwriting, there has not been a study to examine its opportunities and challenges. This study therefore served to examine the current opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda, a research which would be essential toward building the Ugandan theater industry. The major focus of this research was the Ugandan playwrights who have been writing for Ugandan theater audience including, Alex Mukulu, Charles Mulekwa, and Mirembe Ntangaare.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Playwriting in Uganda was introduced in the 1920's after the missionaries had come to the country— at a time they were establishing religious and educational institutions like the Makerere College. It is from this period that different playwrights like Erisa Kironde, and Wcyiffe Kiyingi emerged.

Since then, a lot of research has been conducted about the emergency and existence of theater in Uganda, but less research has been conducted about the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in the country. Therefore, this study aimed at examining the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda with specific focus on selected playwrights in Central and Rubaga Divisions of Kampala.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1.5.1 Main Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

To assess the opportunities of playwriting in Uganda.

To examine the challenges of playwriting in Uganda.

1.6 Research Questions

1.6.1 Main Research Question

What are the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda?

1.6.2 Specific Research Questions

What are the opportunities of playwriting in Uganda?

What are the challenges of playwriting Uganda?

1.7 Scope of the Study

1.7.1 Geographical Scope

This study was limited to the capital city of Uganda, Kampala in Central and Rubaga Divisions. This is because all the major informants of the study had residence within these two divisions, and practiced their craft in theaters that are located in Kampala.

1.7.2 Content Scope

The study was designed to cover and collect all the relevant data that satisfy the objectives of the research topic— examining the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda.

To gather the needed data, this study fused its operation into a mechanism which Scott Reeves (2008: 337) relates to as aiming "to elicit, through interviews, the meanings each individual attached to their interactions and the classifications they employed to make sense of their working lives within this context..."

1.7.3 Time Scope

The focus of this study was from 1980 to 2022, where selected informants were either playwrights or members of the audience. The playwrights were those still alive, whose works have been published and staged. These included Alex Mukulu, Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, and Charles Mulekwa.

1.8 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the data collected will be of use to policy making organs, such as the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, which is responsible for making policies that affect the industry.

The results of this study will hopefully be a source of information for the academia, for example learners in higher institutions of learning who might look for information relating to this study, or course instructors that teach contemporary trends in the theater business of Uganda.

It is also hoped that playwrights in Uganda and abroad shall find the data analyzed in this study important for the development of their craft: understanding the dynamics in the opportunities of playwrighting would enable them to know how to package their work.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

Limited time to conduct the research— the University policy on academic years which was changed during the days of COVID-19 (2020-2022) was one of the limitations of this study. The normal set up of academic years which was distracted by the pandemic had to be re-organized. This put many constraints on us learners as we had a lot of load in the same timeframe. For example, I was conducting this research as I studied in class, as well as I wrote my internship report. However, I designated more time to my academics, such as the weekends— creating more time to work on this research.

Limited funds—which was a challenge somewhat related to the squeezed timeframe for conducting this research. I was expected to start conducting this research before the research funds were released from my academic sponsor: The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at Makerere University. But this was a small challenge as I planned to use part of my monthly stipend allocated for other expenses such as food and study materials.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I review literature that is related to the topic of this research study—advancing three parts of it, such as that containing theater in the bigger world context, and in an African context, and then lastly in the Ugandan context. This chapter also underscores the emergency of film as a vibrant creative field with the comparison that theater has had with it. The choice of this relation is to be able to put the topic of this study, playwriting for the Ugandan audience, opportunities and challenges, to a wider spectrum of thought in the entertainment industry.

2.2 Theater and playwriting in the world context

The methodological set up of the world theater in the 21st century hinges on the blurring relationship it has with film. In its analysis therefore, it is imperative that this symbiotic relationship is not under-looked. And the study of theater alongside film calls for considering the hegemonic masculinity of some of the biggest film industries in the world. Their position as big industries places them at a good point to represent the world of film in the global context—since even all the other emerging film industries strive to be like them. They are Hollywood⁴, Bollywood⁵ and Nollywood⁶.

In all these three industries, theater and film have adopted an interconnected module of reaching their shared aim, which is being a mirror to the society: reflecting and constructing perceptions in

⁴ America and Canada's film Industry combined and the biggest in the world 2021 (rated by JavatPoint: <https://www.javatpoint.com/top-10-film-industries-in-the-world>)

⁵ India's film industry and the second biggest in the world (rated by JavatPoint in the same article as Hollywood)

⁶ Nigeria's film industry, which is the biggest on the African continent (rated by School Drillers: <https://www.schooldrillers.com/best-film-industry-in-africa/>)The choice of Nollywood, though not the third biggest in the world; is to facilitate having a film industry from the African continent since this study primarily brings this discussion back to Uganda, an African country.

it. Writing about Nollywood and Playwriting, Nkemakonam Aniuoku (2021: 54) describes this shared aim of the two:

Theatre practice and film contents could be seen as the major conveyors of the people's cultural practices in modern times, hence: virtually every aspect of the societal cultural practice is embedded and represented in theatrical performances and film productions. The level of verisimilitude and believability inherent in theatrical productions (Stage and Screen) validates the currency of the people's culture in the society and thus places peoples' understanding of 'what has been and what is' in *pari passu*. One of the major functions of Theatre Artists and Film practitioners to any society is to use their dexterities, balance narratives, storyline and creative ingenuities to uphold good principles, human attributes, good tenets and cultural practices of the people, as well as condemning bigotry, nepotism, favoritism, corrupt politicians and chaotic society.

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that theatre and film share a responsibility of being a mirror to the society, and most importantly; a playwright, just as a scriptwriter, is a crucial factor contributing to the social bearing of values, tenets and cultural practices and as well as condemning unwanted qualities such as "bigotry" and a chaotic society. Elsewhere, current trends and revelations show that both theater and film have adopted similar methods of functionality. Laura E. Felschow (2009: 21) compares the relationship that Broadway⁷ theater has had with Hollywood:

Broadway has in recent years turned to Hollywood for models of distribution and exhibition in hopes of expanding their traditionally narrow audience... [it] has taken its lead from the US film and television industries by utilizing three distinct methods: digitally distributing theatrical content via streaming platforms, promoting "special event" theatrical exhibition of filmed plays and musicals, and targeting appeals to the booming Chinese entertainment market.

It's therefore because of this feeble nature of methodological difference between the two that it is questioned whether they have any difference, and more beneficial to this study; whether there is need to maintain a playwright in the face of a scriptwriter. From this, concerns have risen, whether indeed theater is still relevant with the current boom and vibrancy of the film industry. If theater and film have the same aim in a society, and have its methods of reaching this aim integrated into

⁷ Broadway Theater is America's biggest theater center in New York City with a number of 40 theater spaces. It's considered as a home of the country's theater industry.

the same practices, isn't film to replace theater, or come up together to form a new category of entertainment? Factually, paradigms have been created around this question, and many scholars have concluded that the advent of film is a replica of theater, the former being an advancement of the later in the ways it achieves their shared aim. Susan Sontag (1966: 24) agrees to the abundance of thought and material in this paradigm:

The history of cinema is often treated as the history of its emancipation from theatrical models. First of all from theatrical "frontality" (the unmoving camera reproducing the situation of the spectator of a play fixed in his seat), then from theatrical acting (gestures needlessly stylized, exaggerated-needlessly, because now the actor could be seen "close up"), then from theatrical furnishings (unnecessary "distancing" of the audience's emotions, disregarding the opportunity to immerse the audience in reality). Movies are regarded as advancing from theatrical stasis to cinematic fluidity, from theatrical artificiality to cinematic naturalness and immediacy. But this view is far too simple.

As Sontag argues, placing film as a replica of theater, and therefore a screenwriter as a new skilled person or playwright— enriched from theatrical boring slowness, or what she calls "theatrical stasis", is a "far too simple" conclusion and agreeably a misplaced argument. Yet before evidence to this misplacement may be presented, the material building up this kind of paradigm is, as mentioned earlier, extremely abundant, and in Bollywood (which is yet another big film industry), different scholars have taken the same pattern of thought that the rise of cinematic arts has been a product and an advancement of the country's theater practices. Sabrina Ciolfi (2012: 388) explains:

From its very beginnings, Indian cinema has drawn inspiration from the styles, aesthetics and semiotics of a great variety of cultural forms that have followed one upon another in India over the centuries, often integrating them in various ways during the process of evolution, forming a vast cultural heritage. In general the influence of the classical tradition proves of fundamental importance in this process: Their surprising creativity generated decidedly eclectic productions, from original adaptations of Shakespeare and Victorian melodrama to remakes of works of the classical Indian theatrical production of Kalidasa, of the epic and of Persian literary tradition. The performances combined realism and fantasy, music and dance, narrative and spectacle.

However, to wholly carry on this conceptual framework and belief is to hold onto two misconceptions. Sontag has already concluded that "this view is far too simple", and much as the two concurrently hold the same aim and methods of reaching their audience, they are intrinsically different in being. Theater is purely an art, while film is both an art and a medium, and the methodological structure of making theater (as an art) that film (as a medium) lends to it is paid

off by theater's ability to bring the audience close to the stage without blockage of a screen. It's therefore not easy, if there's any indeed, to pinpoint the loss that theatre has suffered because of the emergency of film, and by extension; to understand the obsolescence of a playwright in the emergency of the so-called unadorned screenwriter. Susan Sontag (1996: 24) adds more argument to this difference:

Such over-simplification testifies to the ambiguous scope of the camera eye. Because the camera can be used to project a relatively passive, unselective kind of vision—as well as the highly selective ("edited") vision generally associated with movies—cinema is a "medium" as well as an art, in the sense that it can encapsulate any of the performing arts and render it in a film transcription. (This "medium" or non-art aspect of film attained its routine incarnation with the advent of television. There, movies themselves became another performing art to be transcribed, miniaturized on film.) One can film a play or ballet or opera or sporting event in such a way that film becomes, relatively speaking, a transparency, and it seems correct to say that one is seeing the event filmed. But theatre is never a "medium." Thus, because one can make a movie "of" a play but not a play "of" a movie...

Therefore, there's a separable difference between the two; and there is no course of argument that would be sufficient to eliminate this difference; and because the general practice of film, and the procedures of making it are different from those of theater, it is very agreeable to consider that there is not a small, but rather a big, difference between a screenwriter and a playwright. Whereas the two might have the same aim, or sometimes the same storytelling skills, it is less likely to follow that what one can accomplish the other too can—and therefore that processes that one underscores while scripting their scripts are similar to the other's.

Constructively, even the subtle differences like the nouns used to refer to either of them make a strong argument and where as a writer for theater is called a playwright, or dramatist, one for film is strictly called a screenwriter. This should mean that their area of expertise is different too, and the final outlook of either scripts is different. This analysis also leads to conclude that with these differences, their importance are not similar, and even though they all seem to operate in the creative field, they do not share the same opportunities and challenges.

In Africa, as the next analysis shall reveal, a playwright's role is pegged on the most imperative questions of the society, and this case, which is somewhat peculiar, presents its own dynamics with

different opportunities and challenges than it were altogether taken with screenwriters.. As for this study: it was sought to understand these unique opportunities and challenges for a playwright in Uganda.

2.3 Playwriting and Theater in Africa

Any undertaking that embarks on understanding the evolution of playwriting in Africa, starts by examining the role of plays in particular and theater in general. Aware that the culture of formal theatrical practices including writing plays was imported in Africa with the dawn of colonialism, there should be a clear distinction on the timeframe in which a discussion on the role of plays and theater should be based. As for this study, the reason was sole and clear; its aim was to strictly understand the current developments of playwriting in Uganda, revealing its opportunities and challenges. It is therefore logical to base this discussion on how plays and theater have interacted in the postcolonial states of Africa.

Taking the above conclusion, it is important to state the most imperative question of post-colonial African states; which is development, and as many scholars have created enough research around the topic, it has been argued that the concept of development is synonymous with theater. The argument has followed that different stakeholders in Africa should put a focus on this synonymy. Olu Obafemi (2003: 108) asserts that theater and development have a twin existence. His observation is based on the fact that the two use the same ways of advancing their more or less the same aims. Different people take up different roles in expressing themselves while searching for solutions in either of them. More to what Obafemi asserts is his agreement with Shakespeare's comparison of the world as a stage in his play, *As You Like It*. This comparison puts the similarity of the world and the major activity of man— which is transformation of phenomenon or development— to that of theater where every “man is an actor“, playing many parts in his life; thereby transforming himself into another and as well transforming the world around him. Therefore, as early as this, a playwright, the initiator of theater who does so by writing a script, is placed at the center of the most important question of African society, and any study that would seek to advance his or her opportunities and challenges, would first have to understand this relationship.

Nasidi Yakubu (2003: 04) also argues that theater can be deployed to help people internalize core values and beliefs that are relevant to development. All this makes it clear that the concept of

theater advances development and theater is or should be one of the most sought-out ways of sustaining development in any given community. Its different styles of presentation such as songs and drama keeps it easy to circulate the values and norms important to development in the minds of every member of the community. It does this through the cheapest, and most effective method of performance. It is easy and cheap because theater is symbolic of real life in society, and the community is apt to recognize itself with and in the ideas presented through it. Oluwaseun Kayode Soyemi (2013: 103) affirms this symbolic and symbiotic relationship:

[Theater]...its artistic content emanating from the dramatist to the producing artistes to the audience through an ever widening and deepening symbol, is essentially symbolic in nature...

He even in the same affirmation attempts to shed light on the process of creating theater, which (even as stated earlier), he describes as “emanating from the dramatist”. This alone should ignite the understanding that a dramatist, or a playwright is at the center of African development in these post-colonial days. Therefore, for one playwright to be as valid as his skin color, they should find it a gracious opportunity to lead and take part in the development of Africa. With that in mind, it would therefore be necessary that the opportunities and challenges that the African playwright faces as he or she takes part in the development of his continent are studied, and this research study sought to cover that gap in the case of Uganda.

Marja-Lissa Swantz (1985: 97) takes the discussion of the role of theater in relation to African development to greater heights. She looks at its ability to foster a belief in local approaches to development and to enhance an understanding of cultural dimensions and norms placed in the social fiber. She says;

...not only a mentality of trust in one’s own cultural heritage, but also a deep understanding of different cultural patterns and ways of perceiving and conceptualizing practical life situations is crucial for development in general.

By practically saying that African development is searchable and achievable through the belief in one’s ‘cultural heritage’, Swantz is clearly calling out for the promotion of African culture. And it is very agreeable that culture is best maintained by its practice, and one of the most effective means

of practicing it is enacting and living it in a performance. This process makes the playwright, once more, responsible for the enactment of culture— one that will tell the story of the indigenous people, and at the same time call upon them to take action as a response to their immediate challenge of backwardness/underdevelopment.

Therefore, an African human being who has lived in the chains of backwardness and who currently seeks to better him/herself has to resort to theatre for this task. Eric Bentley (1968: 104) quotes a renowned German theater practitioner, Bertolt Brecht who asks:

How can the unfree, ignorant man of our century, with his thirst for freedom and his hunger for knowledge, how can the tortured and the heroic, abused and ingenious, changeable and world-changing man of this great and ghastly century obtain his own theatre which will help him to master the world and himself?

This question passes a very agreeable conclusion that once the "unfree...and tortured" man obtains his own theatre, he will be able to master the world and himself. This resonates with the already established fact that theater has the power of bringing development to any given society and since the current African state is unfree and has been severely tortured in the past, it's only left to be answered how theatre can be used to make the black continent free and developed. One absolute step is to create commitment towards advancement. Theater as an art has to be combined with commitment towards advancement if development is to be realized in a society. Tar Ahura (2008: 93), adds to this a reflection:

...can the African artist avoid commitment at this present stage of our development and still be valid? It is not possible to see how. The African societies have not yet arrived at the point of the bourgeois decadence of the West at which there is serious economic contentment and moral bankruptcy to enable the African to indulge in idle preoccupation.

Once more, the African dramatist or playwright has been fixed to the responsibility of advancing development in his continent. But at this stage, it is a commitment he has to make, because if he doesn't make it, his work will lose the privilege of being realistic and reflective of the African desire. The African desire, as Ahura has put it well, is not to be found in the " bourgeois decadence of the West... the economic contentment and moral bankruptcy... [That allows western writers] to

indulge in idle preoccupation. It's for this very argument that it makes less sense to assert in Africa that art should be made for its own sake as Ahura continues (2008: 94):

...Good theatre must seek to persuade society to move forward through a process of reflection and meditation so that human beings can achieve dignity. And within the present day socio-economic conditions of Africa, revolutionary action becomes the most viable alternative for change.

The yardstick to the quality of theater in the present social-economic conditions of Africa, is its persuasion of its audience into reflection for change. This again distinguishes the African writer as one who is a caretaker of the African continent. However, this delicate position is with several opportunities and a great number of challenges. The first trail of thought into understanding the complex delicacy of these opportunities and challenges lands us to the obvious: there is an opportunity of 'an already established' audience willing to listen to the playwright, but also to the unique challenge of 'having to know' what exactly to write about and how it would persuade this audience to reflect on changing phenomena around themselves.

Tunde Lakoju (1980: 34) puts the role of the playwright as; "to re-create in imaginative terms, the history of the struggle and all the contradictions embodied in this." He puts this argument on the knowledge that a playwright is well situated with the knowledge of understanding how the consciousness of the people can be driven through theatre to enhance their potential. It is through this potential that change can be implemented. This same conclusion adds an affirmation that African theater, together with its playwright, is owned by the general body of the people. This is the same idea that Bode Osanyin (1998: 02) advances in his research paper; *Committed Theatre: A Corner-Stone of Nation-Building*. Osayin says:

When a playwright is soaked inside himself and uses personal images and allusions which are totally untranslatable and incomprehensible, and goes round to mystify his own person and his art, he has succeeded as a time-waster. That is simply tragic. The life-style or the personality of the writer is not the issue. Committedness must be found in the art, not the artist.

It is committedness to the art that the African playwright must therefore seek. The art that he would use to transform themselves and their immediate society. This is what defines the African playwright, it is what sets him apart from the rest.

2.4 Theater and Playwriting in Uganda

The previous analysis of theater in the African continent has shown that it functions as a catalyst to development. Nevertheless, each country has its own regulations and procedures of using theater for this cause. In this section, I shall review the scholarly literature around the constructional framework of the practice of theater as a business and the role of a playwright in Uganda.

Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare (2001: 03) in her PhD thesis: *The Ugandan Theatre and Market* says that, "...in most cases, theatre audiences constitute the industry's primary market, and, consequently, dictate the nature and design of theatre products. Ideally, these processes, as is the case in other industries providing goods and services on the open market, are supposed to be preceded by market research and definition..." She later concludes that "it [theater] is riddled with internal...conflicts." This analysis underscores great milestones in as far as understanding the theatre business of Uganda is concerned. However, it does not assess either opportunities or challenges that exist in its practice.

Elsewhere, Robert Musiitwa in the "The Challenges Facing the Management of Theatre", concludes of the Ugandan theatre as lacking adequate professional training (2002: 09), and

Augustine Omare-Okure (1987: 61) in "The Evolution of Uganda's Cultural Policy" says of the governance structure in relation to the field of theatre as lacking a regulatory policy. These conclusions, combined with Ntangaare's own, function well in describing the nature of theatre business in Uganda, and the environment under which it operates. They give a clear picture of the failures of every entity—where practitioners are unprofessional, and the government unbothered about the regulations that concern its practice.

More so, there is a kind of paradigm created in all these studies. Theatre business in Uganda is presented as one of the disorganized and a less sought out fields of business. It even seems that from the human resource that could practice theatre, to the government that could regulate it, or even to the Ugandan people that would own it, there is none of them doing their part satisfactorily. Therefore, is playwriting as part of the business docket in theater short of playwrights or full of unprofessional ones? Do Ugandans ever dream and attain their dreams of being playwrights or do

they get shattered at the end? It was left for this study to underscore such questions as guided by its major objective of examining the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda.

However, if the current figures are considered, it is arguably right to state that there are not many playwrights in the country, and even those who practice playwriting do so on a part time basis. That could explain why the “labor stability shows that the labor turnover index of 25 percent leaves the field of theatre each year...” (Bazaale, 2006: 04). And it's also perhaps the reason as to why practitioners in theater end up joining other spaces like radio presentation, or totally dropping out of business altogether (Bazaale, 2006: 13).

This same argument holds more meaning when it is matched with the fact that there's less government interest and citizenship engagement in the business of theater. And Augustine Bazaale (2006: 03) has a point to make on this argument. He gives a detailed study of the level of theatre audience engagement which has often been in a steady decline. He says: “...the cumulative audience turn up at the National Theatre in 1994 was 74,600; 1997 was 31,200 and 1998 was 33,900.” Therefore, it is clear that the inadequacies of practitioners in doing business, the unsupportive government environment, and a decline in the audience participation in the theatre business has made it difficult for the industry to grow. It remains suggested that the role of playwrights in contributing to the development of the country has been hampered. It also means that theater as a whole doesn't play its roles of defining culture, curbing unemployment and increasing revenue. It was on that note necessary that this study which investigates the opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda, be conducted.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the research methodology and design that was adopted, and research methods used to collect the data. I also present how the data collected was analyzed.

John Creswell and Plano Clarke (2007: 41–48) state that most of the research in humanities take a qualitative or quantitative approach, and that designs include the outline of what the researcher does, from writing the statement of a research problem or hypothesis and its operational implications, to the final analysis of data.

As for this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. The difference between qualitative and quantitative is based on the operational specificity of concepts, hypothesis and methods of observation (Mouton and Marais 1990: 146).

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative analysis is more concerned with the meaning of data, and data is a word or pictures or objects, which describe valid information that can help a researcher answer his/her questions (O'Connor and Gibson 2003: 358).

From this background I knew exactly what I wanted and how I would use a qualitative approach to my study. The topic of research required that the data came from practicing playwrights whose plays had been staged before an audience, and part of their audience. Relatively, I adopted a case study design where a group of popularly established and independent playwrights, three in total, and members of the audience, eight in total; were selected as respondents to represent all the other target population of this study.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2007: 29) confirm, "[Qualitative interviews] ...may be used either as the primary strategy for data collection, or in conjunction with observation, document analysis, or any other techniques," interviews became the primary research method of collecting data.

3.3 Sampling Technique

This study was based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique under the form of non-probability where research is conducted based on a quota system. This means that the individuals selected were chosen based on the qualification of having had experience in playwriting for the Ugandan audience. A researcher recruits participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (Denscombe, 2003: 82).

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Interviews

Interviews were my major methods of data collection during my field work. An interview is a method of data collection in a face-to-face setting, using an oral question-and-answer format which both employs the same questions in a systematic and structured way for all respondents (Payne, 2004: 175).

I interviewed playwrights and members of the audience in two divisions of Kampala, that is, Central and Rubaga Divisions. In total, I had eleven respondents, and despite facing a number of challenges, I was able to interview all these targeted respondents. Of the eleven respondents, three were established playwrights and eight members of the audience—six of whom I found at Theater Labonita and two at the Uganda National Theatre.

However, this method was very demanding as some of my respondents were renowned practitioners who were difficult to find. For example, I made two interview arrangements with Alex Mukulu, a busy playwright and TV personality; failing at the first attempt, and the second

one was successful only after a month of agreeing on the final date. Nonetheless, I was patient enough to wait and collect my data.

After making telephone calls to my respondents and confirming interview appointments, I would proceed to make an interview guide. Interview guides are deliberately constructed to collect indepth data from the interviewees devoid of any biases. (Yin, 2009: 87). These guides contained open-ended questions simply to guide me through the interview process rather than to dictate the nature of my questions to the interviewees which would make me subjective.

3.4.2 Direct Observation

This was another data collection method that I employed. I was a participant in some of the theater plays that were staged at Theatre Labonita and the Uganda National Theatre. Plays that were staged are, *Ebony Music Tantal Episode 2* (15th July 2022) at Theatre Labonita and *Shame on Your Hands* (20th August 2022) at the Uganda National Theatre. The audience's natural response to what was being staged was a great way to examine their tastes and preferences which influence the kind of work that playwrights produce. Once followed well, this would certainly lead to forming conclusions on the available opportunities and challenges for playwrights creating artistic pieces for this Ugandan audience.

3.4.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis was another method I used and Ania Lombo (1998: 37) says the following in regards to this method; “Any set of words could be analyzed to reveal not just an individual but also a historical consciousness at a work.” This method involved visiting libraries to read a variety of materials that relate to my research topic. I was helped by a number of scholars in the search for these scripts, especially lecturers at Makerere University, such a Professor Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare and Proffesor Patrick Mangeni. I visited libraries like the Makerere University Main

Library, and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Library, and the virtual New York City Digital Library, a site that Makerere University is subscribed to. I read books, and research papers such as: *Research in Theatre History*, by Oscar Brockett, and *Nollywood and playwriting: Appraising Theater and Film to Nation Building*, by Nkemakonam Aniukwu. It's from such material that the comparison that theater and film share was described, and the role of the African playwright discussed.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis "is working with data, organizing it, and breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others," (Bodgan & Biklen 1982: 182).

After collecting data from the field, more so the interviews, I played back the recordings and later transcribed the data. I started coding and looking for themes and ideas threading through the work.

In the discussion in chapter four, I compared and triangulated the different data sets before coming to conclusions.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study and the interpretations that emerged out of them. I also relate these interpretations to the pre-existing literature, concept, theories and research studies; determining whether the findings have partial significance as well as statistical significance; and identifying the limitations of the study (Leedy and Omrod, 2005: 69).

4.2 Opportunities of Playwriting in Uganda

To understand the discussion around the opportunities of Playwriting in Uganda, it is important to first discuss the theatrical environment in which Ugandan playwrights practice their craft. In an interview with Alex Mukulu, one of my respondents, it was arguable whether Uganda has theater, either as an art, or as an organized industry. He disagreed; "What is theater? It is another completely different thing... [from what is being practiced here in Uganda]...theater in Uganda is not there."

The steadiness and poise in which Alex Mukulu mentioned those words leaves a lot to question. If Mukulu, a renowned playwright (with over three decades of practice) whose indelible play: 30 Years of Bananas made him an international favorite after being published by Oxford University, can question the existence of theater in Uganda, then indeed the existence of the Ugandan theater as an art and as an industry had to be probed. He continued to juxtapose:

Theater [is] about human conflicts, between characters of different nobilities. When you read Romeo and Juliet, when you read Othello, when you read all the books written in theater that is theater. Theater must have drama, drama must have conflict. Without those, you don't have theater.

From his experience, Mukulu concluded that there is no recognizable conflict in the kind of theater produced in Uganda, and therefore that there is no theater. This view was not held by Mukulu alone, the practice of creating plays in Uganda has been looked at as semi-standard even by the government. It explains why it took the government a lot of years to include Ugandan theater plays

on the curriculum of high school literature. When this realization was put to Charles Mulekwa, a writer of "A Time of Fire", he had this to say:

I think 30 Years of Bananas made it to the syllabus, but it is not the only prominent play that came out. Plus, I saw some very interesting, even nonpolitical plays that ought to be on the syllabus, and one of them is Obunkenke. It ought to be, and it was about the insecurity of children, children being kidnapped.

This therefore confirms that the government takes the quality of much of the writing by Ugandan playwrights to be simply unsuitable for academic consumption, and it is why the literature syllabus of high school has been and currently is filled with foreign plays. When this is rightly compared to what Augustine Bazaale examines, that “practitioners in theater are part-timers, some even end up joining other spaces like radio presentation, or totally dropping out of business altogether,” (2006: 14); it is left to be concluded that the frame for the practice of theater in Uganda could better be referred to as a field in the larger creative sector than as an industry. It can’t be an industry when it has no permanent practitioners, when its products can’t be held by the government, a national authority, as of good quality.

Chad Langager (2022: 02) distinguishes an industry from a sector as a series of companies that operate in a similar business sphere, and its categorization is narrower... [Than of a sector]. Therefore, when the fact is known that theater practitioners are part-timers, moving across many fields of the artistic creation: some even not distinguishing the difference between film-making and music or radio presentation or theater, then it is indeed right to say that theater is simply a field⁸ of the creative sector rather than that it is singularly an industry, organized and sustainable. Langager (2002: 03) continues to describe a sector as one of a few general segments in the economy within which a large group of companies can be categorized. An economy can be broken down into about a dozen sectors, which can describe nearly all of the business activity in that economy.

⁸ Field is taken to mean a particular sphere of activity or interest

Therefore, the Ugandan theater field in the 21st century is a growing one. Its audience, which literally is its market base, dictates the final outcome of the artistic pieces presented. And over time, there has been a growing trend, as is with the rest of the world, that this audience gets inclined to the theater of laughter, or comedy. This trend has been very influential to the developments that have occurred to it, and having it as a growth advantage, the theater field has emerged out with a series of opportunities for playwrights that I gathered in this study. Some of my respondents were able to follow through the days at the early start of their careers and the challenges then which have been solved, managing to unpack a number of opportunities of playwriting in Uganda.

4.2.1 The Networking Opportunity

The social nature of the theater industry, which makes theater practitioners, including playwrights, to easily interact with other individuals such as fellow curators and the audience, is a major opportunity for Ugandan playwrights. In this context, in an interview with Charles Mulekwa, he argued:

...unfortunately for the young people they don't see going to watch something as an opportunity, but it is an opportunity for you to learn, to interact, to socialize, for people to remember that you are around.

Sharing more from his experience, Charles Mulekwa gave an example how interacting with people got him an opportunity as a playwright. He got into training under a workshop organized by the British Council. This is where “many times you met professionals. They came, they talked to you as a group, but also if you were keen, you managed to talk to them as an individual and they would tell you, what their approaches are, and you go and try some of these things.” This would give any individual playwright the motivation to move forward and a set of new skills to apply in the playwriting process.

It was from the same workshop that Charles Mulekwa found his own way to graduate school which later set him as an academic instructor in dramatic writing. He said:

The British people started telling me that you have to go back and study because if you don't, what you know is going to run out, you are going to hit a ceiling. And then you will be stranded. So I started applying for universities in Britain, for a masters, and eventually I got into Birmingham University...

When Mulekwa completed a master's degree, it was not late before he got another study opportunity in the United States. He was "...Doing a PhD in theater Arts and Performance..." and later taught at Rhode Island University before he came back home to teach at Makerere University.

But studying is just a simple accomplishment from the British workshop. The play which made him popular, "A Time of Fire", was a product of being a student in the United Kingdom. Therefore, networking, an activity which involves social interaction—fortunately the bedrock of the theater field, is an opportunity for playwrights in Uganda. Theater products, not like in the legal, or teaching or any other fields; are a result of concerted efforts. Even before a playwright can think of writing a play, they are thinking of the director and producer to take interest in it, and the producers look for a crew that comprises a number of people who carry along different backgrounds and opportunities.

In an interview with Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, another playwright famously known for "Semitego" the same opportunity was confirmed when she said that artists are carried along when their artistic pieces are bought; "so my ideas have traveled, and that is an opportunity for us writers. Maybe it [play] can be shared with [others], because when you buy and take it, you are taking an artist as well..." and that means that the very act of selling a writer's name when you buy their play puts the writer at an advantageous point of several opportunities that might come with different people interfacing with their books.

4.2.2 Increased Foreign Sponsorship of Theatrical Activities

In the current structure of the Ugandan entertainment industry, there has been a growing flow of finances from foreign agencies. This is an opportunity for playwrights because in every cash inflow is a new set of plays to be written. In an interview with Charles Mulekwa, he said; "now

what is good for you guys is that finally artists are being paid.... We did not have that advantage. So if it is something for pay then maybe we can put in more energy, and focus more on it.” It is therefore in the hands of playwrights to advance their writing skills and to be able to match with the expectations of the funders.

Alex Mukulu's take on the current availability of finances to the theater field altogether is in the new trend of commissioning plays. In an interview with him, he said; “there are commissioned plays, like they give you money to do something, like the GHOGM thing. So someone comes and says, hey we want you to say this to people. That is how I get money...” This kind of opportunity is plentiful especially when we consider the fact that there are a few playwrights in the country. It is therefore for the playwright to establish themselves as noticeable to the community which seeks their services, like the CHOCCM.

Besides, there is yet another funding opportunity in the global playwriting competitions where Ugandan playwright have continuously been performing well (Daily Monitor, 2021)⁹. An example is Angella Emurwon whose play won the BBC writing prize of 2012. Another is Deborah Asimwe with her play, "Will Smith Look Alike". Arguably this opportunity is not in the precincts of writing for the Ugandan audience, but it can nonetheless be harnessed to stimulate confidence, source funding and create publicity back at home. This in turn becomes an opportunity.

4.2.3 The Available Market for Ugandan Plays

In a conversational interview with a small group¹⁰ of the audience at Theatre Labonita, one member¹¹ argued that the current playwriting culture which does not reflect the desires of the

⁹ A newspaper article about one of Ugandan writers who have won the BBC writing prize was published in Daily Monitor (a local newspaper). Check the reference list for the link..

¹⁰ of them in total.

¹¹ Who did not consent to hr name being disclosed.

audience is in itself an opportunity. Her argument was that they hardly understand a thing in the kind of plays being written. She said; “it is why I dislike all plays written in English that is why we choose to watch plays at Labonita.” This gap of audience dissatisfaction points at the need for playwrights to know what the audience wants before they write for them. Fortunately, it can be utilized to form a whole set of new opportunities which would emerge from their demand. But when this was put to Alex Mukulu, he rebutted:

You know Wole Soyinka said that if I write a book and you don't understand it, it was not meant for you. So it is not about writing about what people want, it is about writing about what you want to say. So don't think about what people want, think about what is within your heart. Be true to yourself, and say something true, but when you go with what people want, you will be in trouble. Because people's wants change from one month to another, year to another.

From the above, the whole idea of the Ugandan theater practice is left to question. Perhaps Alex Mukulu has not considered the influence that an audience has on the final output in theater? Perhaps by playwrights not writing with an audience in mind, it is the reason as to why there is a big gap in audience engagement, and decline, and why, as Bazaale (2006: 04) examined; “ the labour stability shows that the labour turnover index of 25 percent leaves the field of theatre each year...” This finding shows that the gap of audience dissatisfaction is an opportunity to be utilized, and that there is great value in studying the tastes and preferences of the Ugandan audience.

Besides, the inner desire expressed by the members of the audience to have plays written in local languages is an opportunity that points to studying the audience's tastes and preferences, and writing plays for their consumption. This is an opportunity that Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare utilized by translating her play, *Semitego* to Luganda¹². In an interview with her, she said;

I have a book on the syllabus, *Semitego*... Now you see what we should do as writers, building our own languages, because that language will not die, but when you don't write in it, it dies. That is why I am writing another book in my language, and this one on *Semitego* got translated by a friend. It came on stage in 2013, and in 2019, it's now on the syllabus, and I think it grows better that way, and one strong feedback which I didn't have

¹² Luganda is an indigenous language popular in the capital city of Uganda.

when I was writing was the strong cultural references in the play. Because in Buganda, they really love culture...and there is a lot of cultural material there...

It is an opportunity because the audience in Buganda loves culture, and by extension they are willing to pay for cultural material. It becomes an opportunity once we know that there is already a demand and a market for such a category of plays. Louis Levy Garboua (1996: 31) says that; "... [it is] known that performing arts are not exempt from the law of demand..." He adds to clarify vividly that:

The probability of attending the theatre increases with theatre going experience to the extent that the consumer on balance enjoyed what he saw. It declines with the price of the theatre and the marginal utility of wealth. Finally, it increases or declines with other forms of consumption, depending on whether these are complements of, or substitutes for, the theatre in utility..."

Therefore, if a consumer enjoyed what he saw, there's a high probability of returning back to the theater once it's recreated, and if a Ugandan consumer didn't see cultural material, then they would probably not return. However, for playwrights to write plays in any certain language, they should first do market research and understand what their final consumers expect. This is because the two members of the audience at the Uganda National Theatre conceded that they would not care about plays written and staged in English either.

4.2.4 Formalized Teaching of the Playwriting Craft at Higher Institutions of Learning

There is another opportunity in the established institutions of learning that offer training to playwrights. Presently, when someone wants to be a playwright, they can take a course at Makerere University or Kyambogo University. When they want to advance for postgraduate studies, these institutions offer such chances. That was not the case before, and in an interview with Charles Mulekwa, he shared his own story of being a playwright—making a very big contrast to how it is better today. He said that today; “you people have the education that people can go and be trained to be scriptwriters.” This helps in the professional development of any individual scriptwriter.

4.3 Challenges of Playwriting in Uganda

The primary satisfaction of any profession to a human being is its ability to sustain his/her life.

Stanley E. Seashore (1975: 350) affirms that "an individual's job satisfaction is in a substantial part a direct product of the objective characteristics of his job..." However, this is not the case when it comes to Ugandan playwriting. From the demoralizing audience engagement with theatrical plays, which Bazaale (2006: 03) describes as "often been in a steady decline," and from the untold hardships that theater practitioners face, which Ntangaare (2001: 03) concludes as leading "[the Ugandan theater to be]... riddled with internal constraints;" it is evident that there are a lot of challenges of playwriting in Uganda.

4.3.1 Less Monetary Value in the Craft

The most challenging situation of being a playwright in Uganda is that it has been without monetary value. Playwrights are expected in some way to write and publish at a free cost. Even the shows or performances that are staged out of these plays do not certainly satisfy the financial needs of playwrights. In an interview with him, Alex Mukulu gives his take:

I don't earn from plays, or productions. No, it is like let us say Philip Luswata produces 30 years of Bananas, it is not me who tells him. They are the ones who say we want to produce this play, you can choose to sit on them, like the late Serukenya did. He sat on the 'Song of Wankoko', and 'Makula Gakulabako'... Nothing really... I earn from performances, not from the plays written. Oxford published the 30 Years of Bananas. I have [money] there, but I have never collected [it]. I wonder why they don't even send it to me. Why don't they give it to me? Why should I even request them— so how should I go and tell them—that give me my money!

This is further explained by the poor reading culture in Uganda and Africa as a continent. It confirms the already established view that if you want to hide anything from an African, put it in a book as Malcolm X once said. Mukulu added on that note saying that; "...nowadays social media has brought problems that people don't want to read. It is difficult for someone to open a book and complete it."

Therefore, a Ugandan playwright finds himself in competition with other global dynamics and cultural patterns of the African continent. This explains why most of the theater practitioners are part-timers. For example, my respondents were not entirely playwrights. Alex Mukulu is a theatre director, but also part of the hosts at BBS TV in a talent show known as *Yolesa Ekitonne* (Show your Talent). Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare spends much time as an academic instructor at Makerere University than as a Ugandan playwright. In an interview with her, she went ahead to demystify how it is difficult to refer to herself as a playwright:

.... I can't say that for example, my job is a writer and I earn from writing– much as I describe myself as a writer. Because of the poor reading culture, obstacles of your books getting to the syllabus, and all that. You can publish one thousand copies and take many years selling those copies. And when you look at sinking 10M and then you wait 10 years to recover it, no.

4.3.2 The Difficulty of Publishing Plays

Whereas money spent to publish plays is recovered after so many years, publishing itself is a difficult task in the country. This is because the process is so costly, and there are no publishing houses willing to take on plays. In an interview with Ntangaare, she narrated that:

I save money from every book I sell. I save my money after doing sales of these books, I do not take it anywhere, and at the end of the year, I can produce them [books]. At least from my savings I normally want to do those workshops, or saving for the play, and to print or publish them.

The activity of saving proceeds got from selling plays happens because their works have less buyers, and once staged, they have less audience engagement and monetary returns. In the same interview, Ntangaare continued to say:

...even the publishers when they hear a play, they think people will not buy it. Even when I say I am selling a play, I do not see that you will buy it, but when I say that I am selling a novel, you will find interest.

The above shows that published plays attract less attention from readers, which is caused by the nature of plays. They are conversational, and novels attract a lot of readers because they are written in prose, which is highly descriptive. But this conversational weakness of plays might be seen as a

pretext that playwrights hide under, since every play written aims to be staged; however, it not a economically rewarding in Uganda to stage play performances.

Similarly, Charles Mulekwa recounted his tragic experience with publishing saying that:

I have written almost 14 plays, and about only two or three are published. Because publishing in drama works very differently... A Time of Fire got published because it was performed in the U.K., and in the U.K. they expect an audience. So publishers are willing to print the play, or bring it out...

The above challenge shows how difficult it is for playwrights to survive as playwrights, because it is difficult to earn from their efforts. In the foregoing context, Alex Mukulu had a piece of advice to playwright in Uganda: "I wouldn't advise you to write for money, because you can't get it anywhere..."

4.3.3 The Stiff Competition with Film

Intrinsically, the practice of theater in Uganda is uniquely in direct competition with film. As that is happening, scholars elsewhere have maintained an argument that film cannot replace theater. Susan Sontag (1996; 24) argues that film cannot entirely be a replica of theater, and the latter shall continue to flourish as the former flourishes too. She summarizes the argument that film is simply a medium but "theatre is never a medium... because one can make a movie 'of' a play but not a play 'of' a movie." But the uniqueness of the Ugandan situation is that film is developing at the expense of theater. A playwright can write a play and have it staged; but, as Ntangaare concluded, in an in interview, it will have no audience:

The other challenge which would have started as something that would have helped us is the film industry. It seems everybody is now saying film, film, film. But should drama now go? As a writer, writing plays or any book, you want it to be read. You put in a lot of money, and you expect to get some benefits of course after recognition. In the past people used to pay for theater, but nowadays, no one pays. Okay, I want to write, I want to produce, but are they going to watch it? Sometimes of course the tickets may be high, but even if you put up at 5000, you will get no one. Because other arts have taken the audience...

4.3.4 Conflicts with the State and an unfair Environment for Practicing Theater

Playwrights in the country as it is with other creative writers, such as novelists, are faced with the risk of being at loggerheads with the state. This was the case in the autocratic reign of President Idi Amin Dada when one playwright, Byron Kawadwa, the writer of *Oluyimba Lwa Wankoko* (Song of a Cock), got killed by his henchmen. Currently, there has been another case in which a novelist, Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, writer of *The Greedy Barbarian* was persecuted for his writing.

In an interview with Charles Mulekwa, he confirmed:

The hand of the State is tighter than it has ever been before, but it is tight on other forms of writers like novelists, poets, and journalists. It has not yet hit the people on stage because to produce a play takes longer than it does to produce a poem, or to produce a newspaper article. I do know that certain novelists and the state haven't been very good friends. The other was the musicians, but the state instead of fighting them, compromised them. So if someone paid you, it means that they can dictate what you write and what you don't write...but you know when there is a state of— if you hear a story of someone like Kakwenza, people start self-censorship. In their subconscious, they start self-censorship. There is a movie called *Kafa Coh*, it is an imaginary movie based on an imaginary African state but one of the actors was there pleading ahead of time, that ooh, it is not about us at all, it is an imaginary country. And then I was thinking, why? Can you see? The actor may not even be aware but subconsciously he is self-censoring himself that 'aah, me I am just an actor, and this is just a story. Please do not get mad at us'.

From the above, this kind of political atmosphere is not healthy for the success of creative writing altogether. When this is accompanied with other factors¹³ which contribute to the success of the playwriting craft, it is difficult to see Ugandan playwrights succeeding. For example, any sector to succeed needs to be organized and be aided by favorable government policies and programs. But presently, to write critically about current issues of the country attracts government censorship. Even so, there is no public program that financially supports the activities of playwrights. This should partly explain why it is difficult to publish and perform plays in Uganda. Charles Mulekwa gave a detailed picture of the situation:

In our time the only advantage we had was that the nation used to subsidize productions, meaning that you could get money from the National Theater. Go and prepare your

¹³ Factors, such as government subsidy, less taxation, rewarding success; which are limited in the case of Uganda.

production, bring it to the National Theater. So first they would want to see that it is good, after they see that it is good, they give you a booking. Once you have a booking, now you are in contract with them. They give you money, go and prepare your show, come back and produce it, and the first thing they do is recover their money, which they lent you; and then they give you whatever remains. So it was possible to do all these things. These days you cannot do that. If you are going to do a production, it has to be almost ready made.

On part of government policing and programs, the existing copyright law requires that artists hire private lawyers once they have cases of infringement. This process is too expensive and demoralizes artists hindering the development of the theater sector. In an interview with Ntangaare, she narrated:

They lift from you, from another and they come up with new ideas. Now you can't do anything...and again we don't have strong regulations of copyrights. So even if I got you, what would you do? I can't take you to court because also the costs are high... and the biggest thing which we have as practitioners is that we are not regulated. I don't call for censorship, but I call for regulation... Is there like a guild, or an association of dramatists where we can tone ideas in as professionals...So we are all operating just like that, when you are exploited, nobody fights for you, and no one fights for you...we need to get together and talk through an association.

4.3.5 Defective Playwriting Teaching Methods at Higher Institutions of Learning

Lastly, the educational framework of teaching playwrights in the country is wanting and poses another challenge for playwriting in Uganda. The educational institutions ground their teaching mechanism on theoretical and lecture-room concepts where instructors who have attained at least a Master's Degree, show up to lecture students. The other important personalities who are established in the industry have no interactive point with these learners. For example, Alex Mukulu is a prominent and successful playwright, but there are few chances that he will interact with training playwrights at these institutions of higher learning. In an interview with Mulekwa, he argued that:

I wish the institutions of learning would not insist that a person who trains the students has to be an academician, or if they insisted on that— because how do you grade if you are not an academician, I wish they would also find the means to bring in nonacademic people, but who are prevalent in the field, or who are doing stunning work in the field. People like Loukman Ali, people like Magola, Nabwiso, those are not PhD fellows but they are doing

the work, and it is useful for students to interface with them in order to learn how they got there.

That might be the very reason as to why there is a challenge of young playwrights growing into the profession without mentors. A young Ugandan interested in being a playwright is expected to find their own way up without guidance from established individuals. Mulekwa continued to explain:

...in our time we had a lot of mentors. And they were principled, and they were driven, and could look at their lives, and believe that if you commit, you will end where they are or better. These days, I doubt young people really have mentors. I really doubt. I think that you are going around groping for yourselves, looking for who might be your mentors, but you don't really have this..

Therefore, the Ugandan theater space presents unique challenges to the practice of playwriting. It is a field that doesn't know how to nurture its new playwrights, and cannot maintain its current ones. It is as if the theater space combines efforts with the entire Ugandan population and the government; to hinder the growth of the playwright's craft, and more worse; to be oblivious of his or her role in society.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, I present the conclusions and recommendations that were generated out of the study. These were guided by the set objectives of the study, which were assessing opportunities and challenges of playwriting in Uganda.

5.2 Conclusions

As far as opportunities are concerned, there is promise created by the demand to have plays written in local languages. If playwrights started writing plays in Luganda, a locally favored language, they would amass a lot of benefits with the available demand.

As far as challenges are concerned, there is a disorganized industry in which playwrights practice their craft, where there's no functioning guild that would enable them to support each other or lobby for government support, makes it difficult for playwrights to succeed in the country.

Therefore, the general impression from the above facts is that playwrights should be willing to sacrifice a lot to gain from the industry. Passion and a hard-working spirit should be the leading attitudes for playwrights that want to succeed in the industry.

5.4 Recommendations.

Commitment to the playwriting craft- there is need for creating a certain level of commitment where playwrights are willing to do extra-demanding activities for the success of their careers. It is the lack of this commitment that there are no permanent playwrights, and hugely as to why there is an ever declining number of audience participation.

Exceptional field practitioners should be given space to interact with students of playwriting. A new learning model should be implemented, for example one that encourages that each student is attached to a mentor in the field who would offer guidance in the course of his or her upward development as a young playwright. This means that universities across the country should shift their policies of high academic possession as the first criterion for one to instruct a learner.

The government should take its role in facilitating the growth of the playwriting craft. It should guide an inspiring national character that would make all its citizens to be upright. A program of recognizing and honoring excellent playwrights, just as is the case with other professions like Medicine and Army; should be designed to celebrate this craft. It should also offer policies and champion mobilization of funds to support the playwriting craft.

Conclusively, the increased knowledge about the role of plays and playwrights in society, and the new educational institutions offering training to novice playwrights is a great point to start from. These with the opportunity for abroad studies through scholarships that are majorly concerned on training young professionals in the theater space, are of great value.

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