CHAPTER FOUR

Uganda's Theatre Industry: The Constituents

The preceding chapter gave a historical background to the development and growth of conventional theatre in Uganda. The present chapter discusses common trends in Uganda's theatre today born of or shaped by the mentioned historical circumstances. In essence, the chapter discusses market demands, qualities and practice for the different types of theatre in Uganda today, and thus supplements the background information given in previous chapters but only in its pre-occupation with the types of theatre.

Under the nature (including types and forms) of theatre business in Uganda, the research analyses the different forms and market characteristics of the country's theatre. The word business is used here not necessarily to suggest a strong relationship between money and the individual theatre forms. Rather, that the theatre activities have been undertaken in a formal, organised way for the exchange of either value in form of ideas or a service, money as value, or both. There is community theatre in the nature of traditional theatre performances; education theatre as promoted by the Music Dance and Drama (MDD) Department at Makerere University and MOES through schools' MDD festivals and the Performing Arts syllabus; literary theatre as is found in formally published plays and videos; development theatre manifested in Theatre and Music for Development forms; and theatre festivals that may be cultural in nature or those engaged in by schools and colleges. A number of theatre groups, too, have been formed basing on the performance practice in festivals but their organisation is independent of common features traditionally identified with festivals.
Two prominent festivals in this category are the International Anti-Corruption Theatre Movement (IATM), co-ordinated by Sulaiman Madada, and the Uganda Development Theatre Association (UDTA), directed by Stephen Rwangyezi.

Within Uganda’s theatre industry, too, are found the theatre’s own institutions and organisations like the Uganda National Cultural Centre (UNCC), the National Theatre, the Uganda Theatrical Groups and Artists Association (UTIGAA), the International Theatre Institute (ITI)-Uganda office, the Eastern Africa Theatre Institute-Uganda National Chapter (EATI-UNC), the Uganda Drama and Theatre Education Association (UDEA), and many others. Some of Uganda's theatre institutions promote local theatre at the national, regional, and international levels while others oversee the interests of specific groups and stakeholders in the theatre business.

This chapter also examines common practices (managerial or business) prevalent in Uganda's theatre industry, particularly in development and commercial theatre. The advantages and/or risks attached to such practices have largely been left for the next two chapters of the research.

4.1. Community Theatre: The Case for Traditional Performance Arts

Discussing the elements of traditional African drama, J. Scott Kennedy stated:

Traditional theatre or ethnic theatre is an integral part of the society and its living. The audience is usually familiar with its form, its motivation, and its artistic elements. This is so, because the basic forms and patterns have become established over a period of time. Consequently, the audience knows the story and the form. It knows just what is going to happen, and moreover it expects it to happen that way. It expects the drama to express and reveal a traditional way of life or to reiterate life-forms in certain rhythms and patterns as they are reflected in daily life. Repetition is both expected and desired. Moreover, the dramatic experience is more directly shared by performer and spectator as a community activity.¹

The traditional performance art forms of song, dance, mime, folk tales, rituals, proverbs, riddles, etc. in Uganda, which colonialism and Christianity sought to uproot, were an art of the people; communally made and owned by them for their own specific uses. Much of the art was primary for the realisation of a coherent, integrated society

¹ op. cit., p. 47
built on principles of social justice and communal responsibility. The art was committed to the transmission of cultural, social, and moral values; the regulation of social behaviour; the mobilisation of communities; and the validation of family structure and social institutions like kingdoms and their attendant religious rituals. Folk theatre was also encouraged as a major form of entertainment, a tool for socialisation, and, sometimes, as recommended therapy; as in the case of most lullabies and rituals which, in essence, deal with an individual's full existence here on Earth. Below is a brief examination of each of these roles.

4.1.1. Transmission of Cultural, Social and Moral Values

Present-day communication and information systems like the radio, the television, print media, fax machines, satellite broadcasting, and the Internet do not depend on such infrastructure like roads to operate because transmission is either by electronic means or literary forms. The systems are also inter-regional and global which can help bridge social and economic gaps between North and South, through 'exchange' of knowledge, information, and ideas, as per current arguments for a global economy. Philip Kotler observes:

> the world economy has undergone a radical transformation in the last two decades (i.e. 1970s and 1980s). Geographical and cultural distances have shrunk significantly with the advent of airplanes, fax machines, global computer and telephone link, and world television satellite broadcasting. These advances have permitted companies to widen substantially both their markets and their supplier sources. . . . Companies in various industries are also developing their products using a global assembly line.² 

(brackets mine)

But, in much of Africa, the information age is just on its onset. The society is still largely oral, with much of the communication being done by word of mouth or through physical delivery of messages, goods, and services. Naturally, therefore, the radical transformation seemingly observed in some African economies is a result of the widened markets and supply sources for the architects of information technology in industrialised and developed countries, and is of inferior benefits to its recipients in the developing world.

² Philip Kotler, *Marketing Management Analysis, Planning, Implementation, and Control*, ibid., p. 3. Kotler was discussing what it takes one to 'do business in the global economy'.
With regard to their relevance to and adaptation in African societies, modern information and media systems not only help to disseminate the cultural, social, and moral values of given societies, mostly from the West, among interested audiences. They also help to preserve the same values for future generations across the globe, whose ways of communicating with one another are increasingly turning more technological and electronic than physical. One cannot, therefore, expect to promote specific progressive cultural and social values of a local African community through computers, the Internet or mobile cellular communication systems, all of which are the chief means being used in the establishment of the ever powerful and highly elusive global village. The cohesiveness and integrated experience of respective traditional cultures and their performance forms cannot be preserved or promoted that way because the traditions, cultural values, and norms have no place in the global village.

Further, many of such modern electronic communications systems rely heavily on regular electricity supply and the availability of specified transmission and reception equipment and communication gadgets like telephones and computers, all of which are sparsely distributed in Uganda. The gadgets are also largely unaffordable in much of the developing world. Indigenous technological innovations and discoveries have themselves been discouraged and totally thwarted by capitalist economies, ever desiring to dominate the world and looking for a wider market for their own products.

As such, there still exists an immeasurable amount of sense and potential for societies in Africa, both in economic and practical terms, in using such wide-spread and community-based communication forms like folk narratives, the formulative forms of proverbs, sayings, riddles, and tongue-twisters, the sung forms, and the sociological and/or situational forms like dances, rites, and rituals, to impart certain values and norms that might not easily be transcribed into written, printed, or filmed material. The forms are endowed with a rich and highly poetic language that renders graphic and vivid descriptions to the subjects and situations under examination as well illuminating the intended meaning.
Recounting what had inspired him, a white missionary and Reverend Father, to compile a book of the proverbs of Kigezi and Ankole in Uganda, Fr. Marius Cisternino notes:

I became keen on gathering proverbs from the moment I started learning the language at Mushanga Parish, Ankole, in 1965, but particularly so when I noticed how frequently they were quoted at meetings and public gatherings, during conversations and by local spiritual leaders in their preaching and teaching. Their mysteriousness struck me as well, for I could grasp, them better when I remembered the context in which they were quoted, while I would easily misunderstand their teaching- or be completely baffled by them -when I found them listed in the local newspaper “Ageeteeraine” or in Festo Karwemera’s Rukiga booklet of them, or in previous lists gathered by the first missionaries.

Indeed, a story-teller, riddler, singer, dancer, etc. is usually not through with his/her business until s/he has transported the passive message in the item into a vibrant sequential performance whose import gets registered with each action that unfolds and passes. In the case of songs, proverbs, and dances designated to correct and/or regulate social behaviour, the performer uses a lot of satire in the performance to protect him/herself from the wrath of his victims.

Nevertheless, the potency in African traditional performance forms is not altogether lost as the world shuttles into the global village. The performance in oral literature can be enhanced through transcriptions of the oral forms into easily accessible and widely consumable products like books and audio and video tapes without necessarily losing its vibrant performance nature. A good number of Uganda’s traditional (heroic) poetry exists on audio tapes. There are also books and researches containing annotations of Uganda’s traditional music, songs, and dances whose performance nature can be instantly activated as one interprets the annotations. In the area of theatre, Michael Nsimbi’s "Kabbo ka Muwala”, Kironde’s and Macpherson’s Kintu, Omara’s The Exodus, Albert Sempeke’s work with the Buganda Orchestra, and more recently Mary Karooro Okurut’s The Curse of the Sacred Cow are but few examples of the successful transcription and storage of oral performance and narrative forms into literary theatre.

Evolving from the creation myth, Erisa Kironde’s and Margaret Macpherson’s Kintu

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4 Michael Nsimbi, “Kabbo ka Muwala”, Kampala, 1961 (Unpublished)
5 Erisa Kironde, Kintu, Nairobi: EAPH, 1960
6 Tom Omara, The Exodus in David Cook & Miles Lee eds., Short East African Plays in English, ibid.,
explains the beginning of particular systems, values, and norms in Buganda as an instance. Michael Nsimbi’s "Kabbo ka Muwala" documents the Ganda marriage rite. Tom Omara’s *The Exodus* takes us through the process of disintegration of social order in an African society. Mary Karooro Okurut’s *The Curse of the Sacred Cow* highlights the dangers of greed for power in modern societies, on the one hand, and the sacred obligations of friendship in traditional Ugandan (and African) societies, on the other.

Therefore, traditional performance arts do not necessarily limit themselves to giving warnings, caution and advice to the errant in society, or to merely correcting social behaviour through the condemnation of errors and undesirable attributes in the affected individuals. Like the modern literary pieces they have inspired the world over, traditional performance art forms also celebrate aesthetic creativity, intellectual excellence, and social wisdom.

4. 1. 2. Provision of Education

Traditional performance arts are used to impart useful knowledge, life skills, and the craft of communication to participants and the community. In the introduction to his book, *The Proverbs of Kigezi and Ankole (Uganda)*, Marius Cisternino recalls:

One elder told me that proverbs, together with other kinds of oral literature, are to traditional education what a Senior school might be to modern education: a means to develop both the masterly of the language and the potentiality of the mind and heart of the young people. If modern Secondary education had the same effects on our youth there would be no problem, but in fact its contents are only notional (even when teaching religion), and greatly alien to daily life, feelings, interests, needs of the country and of the people.

Traditional performance arts are of particular relevance to the children and youths because the young people are still forming views about and being integrated into their respective societies. But it is also true that every stage in the life of an African, living in or outside that individual’s indigenous society, is a learning session of the values and social norms expected of him/her at particular stages of life. For example, through the

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9 Marius Cisternino, *the Proverbs of Kigezi and Ankole (Uganda)*, Ibid., p. 9
birth rite that may also embrace the twin ritual ceremony, the "new" parents are being taught how to behave in their new status of mother and father. Earlier, the same couple would have been told of society's expectations of them during the marriage rite.

For youths, where such rites as circumcision are not performed, gender roles, social norms, and values are still imparted through songs, dances, proverbs and riddles consciously performed by or for them. For younger children, particular games and poetry are tailored towards integrating the children in their respective societies as well as preparing them for adult life (i.e. social attitudes, experiences, reactions, and activities).\(^\text{10}\) Even upon the death of an individual, certain rituals, songs and dances are performed for the dead to help them graduate into ancestors in the belief that the departed are still in full control of some of their senses. Reverently considered to be just "sleeping" and not dead, the dead are known to be "as sensitive, powerful and demanding of care, love and pleasure as the living."\(^\text{11}\) On the other hand, the songs, dances and rituals performed at death remind the remaining family members and the society at large about the unpredictability and uncompromising nature of death so that, where possible, they can prepare adequately for it.

The educative role of traditional theatre arts is also evident in the practical way the thought patterns and philosophies of a particular society or community are expressed. Usually, information about a society's origin and ancestry - its existing patterns of living like planting seasons, harvesting, etc.; its most treasured activities like digging, hunting, fishing, cattle-rustling, etc.; its instruments of justice and legal system; and many other things - is given dramatically and theatrically through stories, song, or dance. The songs and dances are by nature very involving and participatory. The listeners at storytelling sessions are also not dormant participants but active performers, as they ask questions, respond to the narrator's actions and words, or just cheer him/her on.

\(^\text{10}\) See for example, Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, "The Psychology Behind Children's Poetry: Some Folk Forms in Ankole" A Paper presented at the Institute of Languages Conference, Makerere University, March 1998

Further, as I. Scott Kennedy observes, "technique for the celebration and total creation of theatre in traditional African societies was a learned process, involving hard work, beginning almost from birth. So at that particular time in history, the African child had a predisposition for his skills, his culture, and the TECHNIQUE leading to his art as a master performer, master drummer, master dancer or musician, or what have you. He was almost 'born into the technique of performing.'"\textsuperscript{12}

From myths and legends one gets a historical account of how things came to exist as we know them today, or how ancient tribal societies organised themselves at the family, social (cultural), and political levels. The morals, especially of forgiveness, patience, and friendship, which are very recurrent in the content of legends, stand in clear antithesis to deviant behaviour. The morals favour general principles of justice, good neighbourliness, good governance, and compromise in situations one might not easily solve without the shedding of blood or disintegrating the whole social order. Instances of compromise, especially between members of the same family or clan or among communities sharing a vital physical and economic resource like a watering hole, a forest, a village path or market, etc., used to come about because no-one exists on earth either as a 'perfect' individual or is self-sufficient enough to live as an island. On the other hand, narrative forms like the folktale, the fairytale, and the fable see to the practical means for an individual to achieve his/her own person needs and those of his/her respective societies. In the forms, the virtues of unity, hard work, bravery, loyalty, and the like are highly praised and honoured in the same strength the vices are condemned. Other forms like tongue-twisters, similes, story-telling, riddles, proverbs, etc. take on education in the literal sense of the word. Besides imparting particular life skills and the craft of speech-making, the forms also teach one how to structure literary forms like stories, songs, poems, games and other literary items (pieces).

\textsuperscript{12} I, Scott Kennedy, \textit{In Search of African Theatre}, ibid., pp 147-148
4. 1. 3. A Viable Means of Communication

Closely linked to the two fore-going nature and roles of traditional performance arts is the aspect of communication. In traditional Uganda, and all over Africa generally, music, song, dance, poetry, and ritual are all structured to communicate the desired message to prospective listeners and participants simultaneously. That is, the drum rhythms and tone, the performers' gestures and movements, the chorus, and accompanying rhythms are all used to communicate, accentuate, or emphasise the message at the time of application than modern or technological communication forms that mostly rely on the word to communicate the message. For example, a whole one or more hours' lecture or newspaper article on the consumption of marriage in Buganda is done by the ndongo- mbaga dance, a dance-mime of at most 5 minutes.13

Messages that are not communicated by words, ritual, and body language can be transmitted through sound generated on drums, idiophones, aerophones, chordophones,14 or the mere use of one’s body parts like the hands, the mouth, the teeth, etc. Different local rhythms and tunes of drums, the flute, and other musical instruments might easily give complete stories with different mood patterns and meaning. Most folk dances in Uganda have an accompanying percussion and instrumental rhythm that tell of when the dance begins, reaches a climax, etc., as well as instructing the footwork of the dancers. As for the messages formulated with the help of one’s body parts, the whistling sound made by one pressing one’s upper teeth on one’s lower lip in a certain angle is used by cattle-keepers to herd their cattle either to the grazing fields, the watering hole, or homeward. Outside the particular contexts, the sound will have a totally different meaning or is misplaced. When the occasion demands, any one, two, or all these aspects of traditional communication can be used.

14 Idiophones are sound producing objects “without the addition of a stretched membrane or a vibrating string or reed.” In Uganda, such musical instruments are exemplified in rattles and shakers, ankle bells, thumb piano, and xylophones. Aerophones comprise wind instruments like the flute, horns, and trumpets. Chordophones are string instruments like the trough zither of the Bakiga, bow lyre of the Baganda, harps (adungu), and tube fiddles. See also J. H. Kwabena Nketia, The Music of Africa, New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974, pp 67-107
The type of communication in traditional Africa may still be spontaneous and natural on each time of its performance; but it faces great risk of dying with the performers, especially as traditional societies fast evolve into modern ones. For, as J. Scott Kennedy notes, "in a non-traditional setting, ... life often takes course - the course of the individualist, for self-aggrandisement and self-perpetuation. This, all too often, is the course offered by the forces of modern life and the highly technological age, which are in the race for supreme power and control of tomorrow's world." Hence, despite the obvious advantages in modern communication and information systems, the dangers, as already highlighted, cannot at the same time be underplayed. Africa is in a big cultural, social, and development dilemma.

4. 1. 4. A Mobilisation Tool for Communities

The mobilisation of communities for any activity in Uganda, be it work or war or celebrations, was and, in some places, is still largely done by word of mouth, song, designated vocal or lip sounds and specific percussion instrumental rhythms, especially those played on drums. The "gwanga mujje" drum rhythm that originated in Buganda as a war 'cry' was adapted by colonialists to foster local administration policies like feeder road construction and maintenance throughout Uganda. To-date, outside Buganda, the drum rhythm is mostly interpreted as a call to collective forced labour locally known as "Bulungi Bwansi" or working for the benefit of the country.

In 1986, after the NRM government assumed power, its Mass Mobilisation Department at the NRM Secretariat utilised theatre's traditional performance arts to mobilise people towards unity, peace, reconciliation, and national development. The same drum signal for danger or war was for a long time used by Government to caution Ugandans to be aware of and fight the killer disease, AIDS. The signal was so appropriate and effective that at the very beginning of the campaign, and when AIDS was still so stigmatised, many people felt uncomfortable and personally threatened by the drum. People

16 "Gwanga Mujje" directly translates as: "Hey, strong men of the nation! Arise! It is war-time!"
complained publicly on the radio and through the print media that the AIDS warning signal times should be changed because they were feeling hounded in their beds, at the breakfast table, during their lunch breaks, in the evening after work, and at bedtime at night. The signal always preceded and closed the day's news bulletins in Uganda's 18 main broadcasting languages. In such close together and spirited frequencies lay the power and effectiveness of the warning. After sometime, the complaints died down as the Government was bent upon making as many people aware of the dangers of contracting AIDS hence saving as many lives. The public was also gradually realising the need for public safety.

For people who treasure or still practice communal work, the folk literary forms are indispensable. The song which mobilises the women to go and work in the garden of a colleague, or the men to gather to erect a house will give the workers morale as they work to accomplish their task.

Folk theatre has also from time immemorial been an acclaimed vehicle for political propaganda and mobilisation. The songs, dances, recitations, and chants have either been used for campaigns or as morale-boosters on defensive or offensive missions. The foot stamping and drumming that usually accompany war or hunting expeditions are also intended as a display of health, strength, and agility, which fills the participants and their well-wishers with confidence and pride. In Uganda, communal activities, public celebrations and ceremonies especially, without performance of some folk arts don't look complete. As J. Scott Kennedy noted of traditional festivals in Ghana, this is the period "when the people are reminded of the warrior kings who helped to found their state. It is also a time when the chiefs and their people bring sacrifices to their gods to thank them for the mercies of the past and to ask for protection in the future. Above all, it is a time when people come together to renew their family and social ties. In other words, it is a political, religious, and social festival." Modern day public

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17 See also, Ibid., pp 70-111, where J. Scott Kennedy discusses a number of festival celebrations in Ghana.
18 Ibid., p. 86
celebrations and ceremonies may not engage in such activities openly, but there are always a number of rituals going on, behind the scenes, to ensure the safety and blessedness of the occasion. Many of the songs and dances performed at such ceremonies also usually recall the political, religious, and social significance of the functions.

4. 1. 5. Documentation of Historical and Social Facts

Closely linked to the transmission role of folk theatre is its documentation role not only of history of respective communities, but also of their life-style, dress habits, food preferences, social traditions, and norms. What message is not embedded in literary forms is documented visually in form of sculpture, architecture, paintings, monuments, and crafts. Although the forms are not dramatic in the conventional sense, they are nonetheless a kind of silent theatre, where the theatrical activity is embedded in the article. Many of the transitional societies to which much of Uganda still belongs express, review, and recall themselves by oral, aural, and visual means. Written and recorded/filmed documentaries are very few and recent, and can only be found in museums and national art galleries or schools, colleges, universities, and video or bookshops in towns. The tourism industry greatly enjoys and benefits from such documentaries like photographs, crafts and paintings that tell of the ways of the people.

4. 1. 6. Effecting Therapy and the Release of Psychological Tension

The most basic and common folk theatrical forms performed for purposes of therapy and the release of psychological tension are lullabies, social games, healing rituals, songs, and recitations. The therapy and psychological release comes in the spontaneous and oral performance of the forms, which are both linked to mental activities and processes. For example, as a lullaby lulls a baby to sleep it addresses some of the baby's physical and psychological dissatisfactions and pressures, in the
end offering the child temporary or relatively permanent psychological relief.\textsuperscript{19} Elsewhere, Pearl \textit{Primus} records of her experiences during research in Africa. She writes:

I once knew a herbalist, as the native medicine man is called. When he moved, he was like fire hurling itself with terrifying control into space. He would wrap himself around the trunk of a tree, and, using his long arms and neck, he would become a serpent. Then, filled with the healing power of the deity he invoked, he would unwind himself and encircle the sick (The snake is a symbol of many things, among them the healing power). So he would dance until the spirit crept from him.\textsuperscript{20}

Other healing rituals where traditional performance forms of music and dance play a central role include fertility rites, the twin ceremony, and the rites of passage like puberty and death rites. In each of these rituals, there are specific cleansing or healing rites to perform, with distinct roles and actions assigned to the patient.

In some cases, however, folk or traditional music, both vocal and instrumental, praise poetry, games, and jests, have been performed at chiefs' courts and kings' palaces primarily for the entertainment and relaxation of the chief or king. The same items have likewise been performed among sets of lovers for romantic hence emotional purposes.

A number indigenous games, songs, and recitations also offer chance to a wronged person to vent out his/her feelings, worries, and grievances publicly or in a larger setting. This enables the individual's case to be appreciated widely and publicly and, in turn, he/she may get an equal amount of sympathies, comfort, and support. Adult games like traditional wrestling help performers to overcome their personal fear and public incognito status the same way such activities like hunting and professional mourning bring the person to the public eye and scrutiny, and help him/her to "mature" in the profession. These roles folk theatre arts offer in addition to their other functions like the provision of leisure, entertainment, social integration, confronting the unknown, and the rest.

\textsuperscript{19} Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, "The Psychology Behind Children's Poetry: Some Folk Forms in Ankole" \textit{Ibid.}, pp 5-8
Beside the therapeutic aspects that are evident in healing rituals, games, dance, and song, some communities in Uganda have come out concisely to use a form of modern drama known as dramatherapy in specific therapeutical needs and circumstances. In essence, dramatherapy is a mixture of traditional artistic means to psychological and bodily relaxation, the social sciences of psychology, and modern medicine to get emancipated from depressing realities. The 'patients' are encouraged to tell their frightful stories or the unpleasant realities they live with through dramatic skits using imitative or realist acting approaches like the "mirror exercise." Others enact their depressing realities by word and deed. The successful completion of that phase marks a point of departure in the healing process. Continuous presentation and discussion of the patient's conditions eventually offers him/her psychological relief, and brings one to accept one's physical realities as they are.

Patrick Kirumira, a former postgraduate student of Makerere University's Music Dance and Drama Department, himself physically disadvantaged, did his MA research among the physically disabled in Kampala district. From his work with the Kampala School for the Physically Handicapped, the Abalema Mujje Tubebere (Disabled, Let us Strive) Drama Group of Kalerwe, and the Uganda Disabled Women's Association in Mulago, Kirumira concludes that "dramatherapy or therapeutic theatre is about helping a patient heal psychological wounds. What the disabled groups in Uganda present is not far from this. What is lacking is giving an opportunity to the audience and participants to discuss the issues raised in the performance. It is important for this element to be

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21 Dramatherapy is said to have developed in Britain in the 1960s. See Patrick Kirumira, "Dramatherapy among the Physically Handicapped in Uganda: A Case Study of Kampala District." MA Dissertation, Kampala: Makerere University, 1997, p. 1. See also pp 1-16 & pp 88-110 for a discussion of how the form has been integrated in both Uganda's traditional and contemporary theatre.

22 The mirror exercise is effected by two people where one describes, by action and words, the physical features, mannerisms, etc. of one's partner. The drama exercise is believed to help the participants to conceptualise, present, and appreciate the objects they present and live in general in more realistic and humanistic terms.


integrated for better results. Otherwise the healing process cannot be realised by only lecturing to the patients without involving them. Whether it is ready-made material or not, the opportunity must be availed."

Most recently, in June 2000, Abudalatif Sali n’Egye Ly’Abalema Tubebere literally translating as "Abudalitif Sali and his Army of striving Disabled Entertainers" put up a public performance at the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) building in Wandegeya on Uganda’s first national referendum on the political system of governance.\(^26\) The show, that was crowned with the official launching of the group’s music album, "Wesalirewo" (Decide for Yourself), was intended as a market (product promotion) strategy of their work. The Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Edward Sekandi, was the Guest of Honour. Hon. Florence Nayiga Sekabira, Minister of State for the Disabled and Elderly, and Alex Ndeezi, Member of Parliament for the disabled persons in Central region, also attended the function. Generally, however, Abalema Tubebere’s performance efforts might well a good pointer for similar disadvantaged groups to assert themselves through drama and theatre and a big lesson for Ugandans to appreciate such initiatives.

The Uganda National Institute of Special Education (UNISE) in Kyambogo also carries out joint projects in drama and music therapy with the MDD Department at Makerere University. One of the brains behind UNISE’s establishment, Nayinda Sentumbwe, himself blind, and now working on similar projects in Norway, believes that "intimate interaction between disabled and nondisabled individuals normally leads to changes in the way the latter perceive the former. Closer acquaintance leads to judgement of the disabled person on the basis of personality characteristics other than disability."\(^27\) The same concerns are reflected in UNISE’s objectives, which include "being a resource centre for the production and dissemination of information on persons with disabilities

\(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 111
\(^{27}\)Nayinda Sentumbwe, “Sighted Lovers and Blind Husbands Experiences of Blind Women in Uganda” in Social Contexts of Disability, p. 163
and learning difficulties and initiating outreach programmes to promote greater awareness among teachers, parents and the general public about persons with disabilities and learning difficulties.”

Other civic groups engaged in theatre by and for the disabled include EATI-UNC, which held a circus theatre exchange involving disabled children in Uganda and Ethiopia with Circus Debre Berhan of Ethiopia in August 2001 and Ugadof theatre club owned by disabled people from Gulu (Northern Uganda) living in Kampala as an income generating activity.

Otherwise, many of the groups engaged in therapy theatre activities operate at the self-help initiative level, perhaps because not many sponsors see a lot of returns in investing in or in sponsoring and promoting the physically disabled persons like the physically lame, the blind, and the mentally retarded.

4. 1. 7. Validation of Social Institutions, Religious Rituals, and Family Structures

There are folktales and myths, like those of the origin of human and other life, of death, weather seasons, etc., which justify the establishment and continued existence of social institutions like kingdoms, traditional religious rituals, tribal and/or ethnic identities, and the ideal family picture. For example, the Bugandan legend of "Kintu and Nambi" justifies the establishment of the Bugandan Kingdom and the tribal identity of its people, the Baganda. In addition, the legend accounts for the origin of death, disease, and evil in the world, and designates the social and family hierarchical structure, complete with the stipulated relationship between male and female as human species of creation, and between man as husband, and woman as wife, in total regard with their children and property. Kintu becomes the first King of Buganda as well as the head and ruler over his family. His wife, Nambi, originally a heavenly princess, ends up as his subordinate, a resented dependant, and an obsolete property whose status is equal to that of her hen, and is certainly less than that of Kintu's cow! In the legend, Nambi is stopped from eating chicken, although she is its

28 Information Brochure on the Uganda Mobility and Rehabilitation Programme at UNICEF.
owner. She is also prohibited by her husband from participating in family deliberations, and
is condemned to be the "beast of burden." Kintu shamelessly pronounces his curse on
Nambi, in spite of the fact that he himself took Gulu's warning lightly, and failed to restrain
Nambi from going back to heaven to get the hen's food.

The Luo legend of "Gipir and Labongo", sometimes also known as the legend of "The
Spear and the Bead", accounts for the historical tribal enmity between the Acholi and the
Langi of present-day Kisoro and Lira districts. The Alur, on the western side of River Nile,
are not taken kindly to by either the Langi or the Acholi.29 The conflict that is believed to
have started in the family of Luo's great grand descendants grew into regional hostilities
among the peoples East of the Nile River and those settled West of it. On the other hand, in
the tragic disintegration of the first family and social order initiated by Luo, 'the First Man
and Moulder', lies an explanation for migration tendencies among the peoples found in the
region.

In the same legend is also explained a local belief present in much of Uganda, where the
wife in a family is taken to be a wife to all the members; in the sense that she would be
expected to perform certain chores, like cooking, washing and ironing clothes, etc., for all
members of the family. Sometimes, too, the position of a wife in a home is taken literally; so,
her brothers-in-law, especially the younger ones, can freely sleep with her in the pretext of
learning and/or practising sex play, in preparation for their future marriages! Ironically, the
girls were expected to remain virgins till their marriage else they faced stiff punishment,
including instant death by drowning or, in the case of the lucky ones, their fathers had to
pay a fine to their husbands for their apparent "looseness".30 The cultural practice of wife
inheritance in Ugandan communities also has much of its base in the same philosophy.
Once bride price had been paid for a wife, she became the property of her husband's
family. Then, she is a possession that would not be allowed to be acquired by other men or

29 See the mythical and historical account of the conflict in Tom Omara, The Exodus in David Cook and Miles Lee eds.,
Short East African Plays in English, Ibid.,
30 Benoni Turyahikayo Rugyema, Philosophy and Traditional Religion of the Bakiga in South West Uganda, Nairobi:
Kenya Literature Bureau, 1983, pp 87-88; & Mercy Mirembe, (MA Dissertation) "The Influence of Uganda's Folklore on
Ugandan Drama"Ibid., pp 56-59. The researcher also sees and knows such cultural practices from her own society.
clans since she was bought for good! So, the inheritors would come to her in the guise of giving her physical protection, because women are always regarded as weak and vulnerable, or looking after the dead man’s children. However, with increased enlightenment of traditional societies, some of these undignified practices can no longer be tolerated, and are, therefore, dying away pretty fast.

The Banyoro, Batoro, Banyankore legend of the milk contest God set his three sons, Kakama, Kairu, and Kahima, in South-Western and Western Uganda justifies the establishment of the ruling dynasties and social hierarchy in that area. First comes the King (the Omukama or Omugabe), then the other members of the royal family who are also his chiefs or administrators (usually the Bahima or Cattle-keepers), and lastly his servants and subjects, usually the agriculturist Bairu. That way, the myth seeks to explain the origin of social inequality, life-style, and occupational tendencies among the peoples of the area, where the majority agriculturally-oriented Bairu are destined to be subjects to and provide the subsistence needs for the minority rulers, the Bakama, and to the chiefly cattle-keepers, the Bahima. The order would be enforced and overseen by the Bahima on behalf of the Bakama. Another Ankolean legend, "Mutumo", who was an esteemed leader in his society, accounts for the formation of a geographical physical feature, Lake Nyabihoko in Kajara, Ntungamo district, South-Western Uganda,

Other myths and legends validate religious rituals and institutions like Tanda village in Mityana, the Nyakahuma tale of Bunyoro, and the Chwezi Dynasty tales of Toro. Like J. Scott Kennedy has noted,

the African’s traditional drama is an extremely religious act, just as his music, his dance, and his celebrations are often religious acts. But the reader must be reminded that traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for the community of which he is part, for "in traditional society there are no irreverent people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of that community. Everybody is a religious carrier". Everybody is a participant. From the time he is born to the time he dies or enters upon another journey called death, he is forever a social being participating within a communal setting. Rarely if ever is he functioning or acting for or by himself. Others are involved. And from this, too, he can run, but he can’t hide.31

31 J. Scott Kennedy, In Search of African Theatre, ibid., p. 73
Today, Tanda village in Mityana district, 39 miles from Kampala City, is believed to be the place Walumbe (Death), Nambi's dreaded brother, went underground, and from where he comes (out of the gaping hole) occasionally to stock his victims. For these fads, Tanda is a renown religious and tourist site. So is Nyakahuma's shrine in Mubende district. Nyakahuma, a princess and wife of one of the Chwezi Kings, is one of the mythical women leaders in Bunyoro who, through mystic powers, defeated many of Bunyoro's enemies by sheer ingenuity. Nyakahuma did not die the natural way, but disappeared mysteriously among the gods. In the place of a well she owned for her therapeutical and personal use sprouted a giant tree that even the whiteman's saw could not cut.32 The two sites, Tanda in Mityana and Nakayima in Mubende, are also regarded as great therapeutical sites in Uganda, where the gods are believed to cure one's ailments, even the incurable ones, in mysterious ways. Other mythical sites embedded with magical supernatural powers include the "Eibaare rya Mugore" (The Bride Rock) at Rwakitura, Nyabushozi, South-Western Uganda. The story behind the geographic, and most probably volcanic, feature is an allusion of the Biblical story of Lot and his wife, who disobeyed God's command and looked behind at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra and was instantly immortalised into a rock. Local belief has it that the bride bypassed where King Ruhinda bathed on a rock. She peeped and laughed at his bum. The King then cursed her into a stone (rock).

4. 1. 8. Provision of Entertainment and Socialisation Opportunities

Nigel Forde, one of contemporary theatre's leading personalities practising in York, made a revealing observation in his book, *Theatrecraft*, when he stated, "It should not surprise us: art has always reflected the state of mind of the society in which it was created. That is why we can, with reasonable amount of accuracy talk of The Age of Reason, the Age of Enlightenment and so on."33 In other words, art has always

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32 Myth has it that European missionaries tried to destroy the tree in a bid to stop their converts from worshipping it but failed. Each time they cut its branches, the next day they found bigger and stronger branches in the place of the ones they had cut. Next, they got a big saw and cut the tree from the roots. The next morning, a huge tree with big roots met their eyes. They then 'proved' it themselves that the tree had mysterious powers and left it alone!

possessed not only the emotional but social and historical characters as well.

Elsewhere, J. Scott Kennedy observes:

> African theatre is more directly concerned with the poetry of life and its rhythms and life-cycles, whereas the essence of the current concept of Western theatre is clash or conflict. Another basic difference is this in Africa, people generally GO to see and PARTICIPATE in the theatre, to share and to COME TOGETHER, especially in the traditional theatre. For them, theatre is an occasion of a COMMUNION of VIBRATIONS and a CELEBRATION of LIFE. Often Western theatre thrives on the idea of ESCAPE for its audience. An audience goes to the theatre to escape. African theatre is participatory theatre. Western theatre is player-oriented and often passive from the audience’s point of view. In African theatre a unique relationship exists between the audience and the performer. African theatre utilizes all elements of the art forms and non-verbal and verbal communication. It is a total fusion. At any given time any of the art forms may tell the story or enhance the dramatic or theatrical experience.34

Rarely are items of folk theatre and the other attendant theatre arts in silent or still theatre performed for the enjoyment and appreciation of an individual person. Just as the arts, particularly the traditional performance arts, are created communally, their maximum enjoyment and appreciation is often achieved communally. The primary intention in this arrangement is social. As people gather to entertain and be entertained, they inevitably socialise since the nature of the theatre is participatory. None is a passive listener, unless the situation really calls for such as may sometimes be the case at a traditional healer’s or diviner’s shrine. Even then, those involved in the ritual are all active participants at one stage or another. Due to the coherent nature of such a theatre, therefore, the respective communities also tend to remain closely knit together as an entity, irrespective of the inherent social traditions and values that may have been unfair towards or tend to marginalise certain sections of society at the family, community, and political levels. Yet, like Cisternino, one wonders,

Why...people suffer so much at times, if they have such a wealth of human wisdom codified in proverbs (and other forms of folklore)? But then I look at the Bible and at the people who have had it for thousands of years... Both people of the Bible and bantu of the Proverbs (and the folklore) share at least one thing in common: that of disregarding in practice the wisdom they possess in theory. So many immediate interests from within the person and so many undue pressures from without—guns included—destine the wisdom of God and of our fathers to be cast into the dung-heap of silence and fear.35 (brackets mine)

Cisternino’s primary focus was on proverbs and his own vocation as a Church missionary and minister, but his comments do, to a great extent, explain the social and

34 Op.cit., p. 43
35 Marius Cisternino, The Proverbs of Kigezi and Ankole (Uganda), ibid., Foreword
literary validity of the other traditional art forms; as already discussed. It is also true
that pressures coming from especially outside our respective traditional communities,
and which are multiple in perception, alien in structure and purpose, and often larger
than what the art forms can accommodate or resist, have taken reign over the
Universe. This is a fact that has been widely acknowledged. For example, Nigel Forde,
writing about the vision of the modern artist, noted:

There is a unique difficulty that today's writers have to face....Until recently every artist has been able to
look at the universe as a constant and upon this earth as eternal, at least in comparison with the
transitory nature of his short life upon it, but the modern artist has no such assurance. He has very little
encouragement to build for eternity for it is quite probable that there will not be one. Among all the other
horrors of the nuclear threat, this one has perhaps been given very little prominence, but it must be
there, even if subconsciously, in the minds of all who are trying to create something of a lasting value.
The modern artist, then, is probably tempted more than any of his predecessors to abandon....any kind
of thoughtful, traditional art and resort to pranks, cheats and simple incompetencies. Standards of
performances are no longer measurable; all drop into a great, wild blur of relativism. We are back to 'The
Emperor's New Clothes'; we dare not say anything because we cannot be sure of our facts, if there are
still such things; nothing is worth anything any more. We don't want to look old-fashioned, dull of vision,
philistine, reactionary and so, paradoxically, we end up becoming just that.36

As opposed to commercial theatre, therefore, which revolves around selling and buying
of good, and 'bad' art as well, traditional theatre performances, at least in Africa, aimed
at dealing with individuals' experiences and crises, and with no pre- conceived
monetary or material benefits. The performers knew it all along that they had to excel at
their performance and not disappoint the audience's expectations in them since, in
most cases, the audiences were well familiar with the form and content of the
performance items. The only form of personal or material gain for the performers
mostly came in form of the audience's instant visual and audible acknowledgement of
the performers' skills and, sometimes, through the audience's presentation of food,
drink, or just praise words to the performers at the end of the shows.

Now since conventional theatre, with its attendant commercial goals, cannot be wished
way in favour of traditional theatre art performances - which would in any case not be
universally accepted as true theatre - the best option seems to be to work towards the
attainment of a balance in the elements at play; that is, the literary or aesthetic, the
social, to an extent the humanistic, and of course the commercial. However, it must be

36 Nigel Forde, Theatrecraft, ibid., p. 32
born in mind that, just as Forde says, "humanity must always be the basis of art if art is to have any effect upon us."37

4. 2. Development Theatre

Quite a number of theatre groups and development NGOs in Uganda practice development theatre either by vocation or according to market needs at the time.38 Some NGOs are also relevantly consistent in the use of development theatre for their work in advocacy and mobilisation.39 Generally, however, much of development theatre in Uganda tends towards politics and propaganda.40 Nonetheless, there is no political theatre in Uganda in the sense like such a theatre used to exist in former communist and socialist societies of Eastern Europe, Russia, China, Korea and Japan. Neither is it a kind of political theatre that was at one time advocated in Kenya by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and co-author Ngugi wa Mirii in *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* or by the Ugandan Mukotani-Rugyendo in *The Barbed Me and Other Plays*. The political kind of theatre in Uganda constitutes art theatre on politics in Uganda,41 on the one hand, and a form of mobilisation, conscientisation, and sensitisation theatre,42 on the other.

The remaining traces of political theatre in Uganda manifest themselves through 'biased' political efforts, as in the case of the NRM Secretariat’s work in its Department of Mass Mobilisation. Of one such project in 1987 in Masaka district, Eckhard Breitinger and Rose Mbowa note:

On her way to the market, a woman is held by a soldier. He takes all her money and the best part of her goods, which she meant to sell on the market. This mime scene depicts the lack of security which affects rural women in particular. When the woman returns to the village to tell what happened to her, the other women come to realise that they better start thinking themselves on how to resolve the security problem. First, they agree to form their own political grassroots organisation, their own Resistance Council (RC),

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37 Ibid., p. 128
38 For example, Bakayimbira Dramactors’ performance of “Ndiliira” as commissioned by Ministry of Health
39 For example, ACOFE, FIDA, Family Planning Association of Uganda, and DENNA
40 FIDA’s play, *The Eleventh Commandment*, written by Charles Mulekwa and ACOFE’s *The Time Bomb*, written by Ndere Troupe, are examples
42 The biggest testimony to this type of theatre is currently found in Rose Mbowa’s works (*Mine by Right*, 1985; "Nalumansi", 198617; *Mother Uganda and Her Children*, 1987; and *Maama Nalukataa* or *Mother Courage*, 1997/8)
4. 2. 1. The Theatre for Development Model

4. 2. 1. 1. The Theatre of Rose Mbowa

What I call the theatre of Rose Mbowa includes a consideration of the nature, concepts, and concerns that are recurrent in the plays and theatre productions put up by Rose Mbowa during her professional career. Rose Mbowa’s theatre career stretches back to her teenagehood when she was a pupil of Gayaza High School. She participated in a number of productions, the most memorable of which was “Salongo ne Nalongo” (The Father and Mother of Twins). She recalls her experiences in that production thus:

This author herself participated in a performance of Salongo ne Nalongo at Gayaza High School New House Concert in the late 50s, when she had to understudy the role of Salongo, replacing the original cast member. Being not fully acquainted with the text, the author relied on her experience in improvisation to develop her role as Salongo (the husband), when praising his wife Nalongo as “Nalongo owomerera ngaa ekindazi” (Nalongo, my wife, you are sweet like an ‘ekindazi’ pancake). This reference to the students’ favourite pancake, offered by traders outside the campus gates and strictly forbidden by the school administration, brought the house down with laughter.44

Mbowa’s talent in theatre acting was so outstanding that her English teacher at O Level later arranged with Prof. David Cook of Makerere University and persuaded her to drop her admission to Makerere University to do Human Medicine in preference to Literature where Drama was a subject of study.45 Since then, and till her death in February 1999, Mbowa remained active in drama and excelled at its different parts, both in its literary and performance aspects.

Besides numerous scholarly papers appearing in books and international journals, Rose Mbowa’s outstanding theatre works include plays like “Mine by Right”, “Nalumansi”, and “Mother Uganda and Her Children”. Above all, one could say Rose Mbowa was ‘a living encyclopaedia of Uganda’s drama and theatre; by the very testimony of the experiences and knowledge she had to tell. It was just a pity that due to the ever mounting pressures of work at the Department of Music Dance and Drama, where she was Head of Department for 10 consecutive years, operating with a thin staff

45 Rose Mbowa revealed this information to the researcher during a conversation with her on her career in theatre during 1997
where the ratio was often 1 lecturer to about 30 students, Mbowa never got the time to put together all her knowledge and experiences in book form.

In "Mine by Right", Rose Mbowa discusses or calls upon the women in Uganda to wake up to their legal and social rights as human beings. She also criticises the use of force by security forces, who are also "corrupt through and through." The play gave rise to the composition of the Women's National Anthem, which she did around the same time. The play was first commissioned by the Uganda Law Society to commemorate the International Women's day in March 1986.

"Nalumansi" toes feminist ideology but within the Ugandan socio-cultural context. Nalumansi, Mbowa's heroine, is not allowed by Mbowa to be exploited by her all powerful husband whose arguments, in most cases, are supported by social norm and custom. In the end, Nalumansi gets liberated physically and psychologically only when her husband becomes educated and sensitised by enlightened elements in their society.

Mbowa's efforts in development theatre got consolidated in her play, "Mother Uganda and Her Children." "Mother Uganda and her Children" was the artistic outcome of a request made to her by the Africa Centre in London in 1987 as well as her close observation of the social and moral desolation left behind by Uganda's socio-political turmoil since the 1960s. Africa Centre commissioned Mbowa "to put up a play that depicted all of Uganda's different cultures in order to portray a positive image of the country".46 The play was staged at the Commonwealth Institute in London. Introducing the play on its first regional tour in Nairobi, Mbowa wrote:

> The group's (Nng'aali Ensemble) objective is to educate the people through the medium of theatre, while providing them with the essential requirement of entertainment. In order to cut across the barriers of language created by the existence of various "nationalities" within Uganda, and other countries, the group integrates folklore, music, song, mime and dance in the creation of a theatrical language that communicates to all people, thereby forging and fostering national and international understanding, love and co-operation. Nng'aali Ensemble believes that national differences of any people, anywhere, are a potential source of strength rather than a weakness, if positively and wisely utilised. When people share in each other's cultural arts, they get to know one another better, understand and appreciate each other.

46 Rose Mbowa's own notes to the play, p.5.
more deeply, and thereby bringing about love and co-operation culminating in the realisation of UNIN.

"Mother Uganda is Nng'aali's expression of this hope."47 (bracket mine)

Though Mbowa's work is not political propaganda it was premised on similar ideals. At one time, her group, Nngaali Ensemble, had almost been taken over by NRM Government as a state performing company the same way The Heart Beat of Africa was in the 1960s. Accommodation was provided for them at the Mengo Social centre where, for almost two years, those members of the group who so desired lived. It was lack of financial commitment on the part of the State to maintain a full-time professional performance troupe that saved the literary pursuits in the group. Although Mbowa did not publicly abandon Nngaali Ensemble, she more or less increasingly distanced herself from it, particularly when personal and management wrangles infiltrated the group. That was when Mbowa turned all her devotion and vision for theatre in Uganda to Theatre for Development, where she was a renowned consultant.

Besides the departmental work she did with the students of the TFD course in Nattyole (Luweero) and Katanga in Wandegeya, Mbowa engaged herself variously in TFD work, particularly with the Stepping Stones project in Masaka district, the street children home at Kalerwe, and her Church in Bwaise. In the Stepping Stones project, Mbowa used theatre to, first and foremost, establish dialogue with the beneficiary women in the project. The project aimed at sensitising the women about their reproductive rights, including the dangers of contracting AIDS. Inevitably, therefore, the project had to relate to some aspects of sex education. Normally, however, discussing one’s sexuality, verbally and in public, is never easy amongst most Ugandan and, indeed, African indigenous communities. In such traditional societies like Buganda, where the project was located, Mbowa could easily have played the esteemed role of Senga, the paternal aunt of a girl supposed to teach her the ways of sex. Through dancing, singing, and performance of drama skits evolving from their own specific situations, the women were empowered to be ‘masters’ of their own bodies and sexual health.

The children's home in Kalerwe had about 30 street children, whose home was now this kind of reformatory centre. Each child had a bed and a blanket, and was assured of, at least, a meal per day. Mbowa always encouraged ‘her’ children to do petty trading during the day. Most of the children traded in passion fruit, which they packed and hawked around Makerere University Campus, Bwaise, Wandegeya, and the surrounding areas. Interestingly, Mbowa was one of their customers. In an effort not to discourage the boys’ initiative, she would buy from each of them as they came to her at the Department, and then redistribute the fruit among the staff or the very needful. During leisure time, the children played football or did dramatic performances for their own pleasure.

Mbowa’s other work with NGOs included the Deustche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) programme with Ntuuha Drama Performers in Kabarole district and a SIDA-sponsored project where MDD ran a Theatre Fund for community theatre groups during 1997-98, and supervised a national Play Script Writing Competition. The Fund amounted to US$ 30,000, equivalent to Ug. Shs. 30,000,000/=, and its successful implementation led to the establishment of the Eastern African Theatre Institute, with Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda as founding chapters. The Theatre Institute is headquartered in Dar es Salaam and supported by SIDA through the Swedish Embassy in respective countries. In Uganda, the country chapter has since its founding in 1998 been hosted by MDD Department.

One important distinction to make with respect to Mbowa’s involvement in development theatre is that she was interested in the form not for its financial gains but because of its capability to implement her vision for society. In retirement, which she often contemplated, Mbowa meant to continue her service to theatre and her country through development initiatives towards total peace and the dignity of the individual, particularly the marginalised like women and children.
Mbowa's last theatre production was "Maama Nalukalala n'ezadde lye" (Mother Courage and Her Children), a Luganda translation of Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage. The play run for two weeks at Kampala's National Theatre before it was taken to the Kennedy Centre in Washington DC in April 1998. The Ugandan version of "Mother Courage" is a general parody of Mbowa's former play, "Mother Uganda and Her Children". However, the circumstances which inspired the production of "Maama Nalukalala" lay more in the continued insurgency and pockets of terrorism in the country, which in Mbowa's assessment did not auger well with efforts by the Government and all well-intentioned organisations at rehabilitating and developing the country. In the play, women are especially being challenged to halt the deteriorating situation because, at the end of the day, they are the ones to suffer most with the blunt effects of war. Mother Uganda has been taken to other countries in Africa, like Kenya and the Republic of South Africa.

4.2.1.2. Ntuuha Drama Performers and the Kabarole Basic Health Project

Ntuuha Drama Performers is reportedly the first formal theatre group to be started in Fort Portal, Kabarole district, Western Uganda. The group started in 1990, under the directorship of Stephen Kaliba and Mary Karusoke, both former students of Drama at the Department of Music Dance and Drama, Makerere University. By 1994, the group's membership had grown to include "men and women of diverse training and professional background, students still at school and college, businessmen and women, farmers and health workers, all of them interested in discovering their artistic talent and utilise it for health promotion in the two districts;"48 that is, their home district, Kabarole, and its neighbouring Bundibugyo district. Though not a full-time or professional theatre company, the group and its satellite companies in Rwimi, Katooke, Kamwenge, Kiyombya, and Nyanjetagera operated more or less regularly, in most cases, every weekend. Today, due to increased personal engagements of some of its key members and the occurrence of unseen factors, the mother group's performances

48 Ibid., p. E 19
have turned occasional. But some of its satellites, like Ntuuha Drama Performers in Bundibugyo are engaged in education drama in the district's refugee camps.

The priority occupation of Ntuuha Drama Performers lies in basic health-care programmes. For almost a decade, since 1990, the group has run health sensitisation and conscientisation programmes in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and GTZ. The group's greatest theatre impact came through their AIDS Control Education programmes, within which "they integrated educational drama into their programmes to create a sustainable and continuously improving health awareness particularly with respect to AIDS and other diseases of public health concern."49

Ntuuha Drama Performers played a big role in popularising "Engabo" or "the Shield", a special brand of condom that was reportedly "made to suit the cultural and sexual practices of the Batoro."50 The "Batoro" are one of the major tribes in Kabarole district. Due to local socio-cultural beliefs and sex practices ascribed to the Batoro and neighbouring tribes, "engabo" condom easily became the most favourite brand selling in shops and on the streets of Kampala between 1993 and 1995. That was before the television and the other mushrooming popular electronic media, like FM radio stations, liberalised the condom market with the promotion of other brands of condoms like the Protector, the Rough Rider, etc.

The group's popular appeal and success was also recognised when it performed an AIDS conscientisation play, "Orukanga" (The Skeleton) at the National Theatre in Kampala. The risks of contracting AIDS and its impact on humanity particularly the youth was so vividly and convincingly portrayed that the AIDS Control Programme office of the Ministry of Health was convinced it should broaden its campaign through theatre by commissioning other theatre groups to put up plays about AIDS in their respective local languages.

49 Ibid., p. E.5
50 The New Vision newspaper, December 1996
In 1996, Ministry of Health acknowledged the initiative in Bakayimbira Dramactors and commissioned the group to construct and perform an AIDS sensitisation play, "Ndiwulira" (I Shall Know When The Time Comes). "Ndiwulira" is structured on a proverbial situation where the maize boiler normally ignores the advice and warnings of colleagues for it to leave the maize cob before the farmer comes for it. Each time the maize boiler is warned it rubbishes the caution, arguing that it will 'hear' when the farmer comes. The final moment of cutting and boiling the mature maize cob usually finds the boiler busy with the same sing-song and self-deception. Then, it is too late to save its life.

"Ndiwulira" initially appeared in Luganda language for the Luganda audience. Later, through government and NGO assistance, Bakayimbira Dramactors were able to tour the whole country with the play. Subsequently, the group steeped into development theatre, mostly financed by NGOs, alongside its regular popular theatre shows. Once the sponsored shows were over, the group still run development theatre projects commercially thanks to its great popularity in theatre.

In schools, the STEP Project was set up with big sponsorship from UNICEF to collaborate and strengthened Philly Lutaaya’s efforts to combat AIDS by giving it a face. STEP commissioned Elia Lwanga Kizza, Harriet Masembe, Sara Birungi, and Fred Kiyimba-Musisi who came out with two powerful AIDS productions in 1992: "The Hydra" and "The Riddle". Both plays are in English, and became tremendous successes in and out of schools. The plays were also serialised on television for quite some time. Conscientisation programmes on AIDS and reproductive health continue to run in schools under TFD.51

Other self-help efforts in the fight against AIDS duplicated themselves variously in Kampala and other parts of the country. One of the most popular AIDS play was “Gampisi” (Greedy like a Hyena) performed by the Negro Angels and directed by

51 See for example, Patrick Mangeni Wa 'ndeda, "Change in Two Hours: Theatre for Development with School Children in Kampala" in Research in Drama, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1998, pp 93-95
Godfrey Kijjambu. From the start, the play run on a commercial basis but it attracted full-houses for months on end. In the play, AIDS was graphically portrayed as a very agile, stout, self-propelling object whose sting looked as sure as it was known to be deadly. However, like many other productions, "Gampisi" failed to discuss the problem of promiscuity objectively and without bias. The play identifies sexual intercourse with an infected person as the main way to contract and transmit AIDS. However, the play assigns the blame for the spread of the deadly disease to women. That might well be the reason the play was not picked on by the Ministry of Health officials despite its being a better structured play than "Ndiwulira."

As is the normal trend of premiering theatre productions in Uganda, The Negro Angels had likewise invited Government officials and Ministers to watch the play. Apparently, one such guest, then holding important portfolios in the country, including the Constitutional Commission, and now a Cabinet Minister in the Government, could not sit on her objectivity. Instead of re-considering the criticism, "Gampisi"’s directors made a public mole out of it, with the unfortunate consequence of losing sections among the group’s popular audiences that had not originally seen the play in that light. At the time, rather than apportioning blame, the most important thing the Government, and most Ugandans, wanted was to save as many lives and reduce social stigmatisation towards those living with the disease to the lowest levels possible. "Gampisi" is now a television series on the popular private television channel, the Cablesat Television (CTV). The play is also available on video.

The stable business arrangement apparent in theatre groups that had been picked on by the Government and NGOs to popularise development and other policies as well as the theatre producers' keen study and observation of market forces led to a boost in theatre groups and development theatre activity in the country. By mid-1990s, many theatre companies in Uganda were either co-opting development theatre projects or doing individual consultancies in the form. Since not all theatre practitioners could construct plays, other artists went in for music and cultural festivals.
4. 2. 2. The Music for Development Model
Diplock Segawa and The Wrens

Diplock Segawa Katumba took to theatre, and to music in particular, when he was a child following his parents to Sunday Church Services. He was enlisted in the Church Choir at his village parish at a very tender age. Later, he joined several other choirs, including the Namirembe Cathedral Choir, before he set up his own music group and company, Diplock Segawa and The Wrens, where he is "chief composer and lyricist". That was in 1981, after he completed his College studies. The group currently "consists of 14 young men and women playing instruments, singing, dancing, and acting. The members of the group are teachers, nurses, students, hairdressers, and formally unemployed people."\(^{52}\) In all, the group boasts of over 400 song and lyric compositions, appearing in Luganda, but mostly in English and other main languages in East and Central Africa, particularly Swahili and Lingala.

Segawa's original vision for Diplock Segawa and The Wrens was to become a popular pop music band, having been inspired by the singing career and music business of Jimmy Katumba and The Ebonies. But that vision was later dropped, and it changed with the worsening socio-political situation in the country at the time. The economic environment in the country was also not conducive for good professional business. The pop music and records being imported into the country from Europe and America were so far superior in form and taste. There was also the legacy of Jimmy Katumba to deal with. So Segawa realised from the beginning that the breakthrough for him would not come that easily or fast.

Because of his humanist convictions, he decided for development music, but of the type that would appeal to audiences hence eventually give birth to its own market. In his own words, the group desired to "make people aware of their own situation, and to work together for a better life."\(^{53}\) In general, it would, indeed, seem that Diplock Segawa and

\(^{52}\) Diplock Segawa's Write-up on the group entitled, "Presentation of Diplock Segawa and The Wrens", October, 1998

\(^{53}\) Ibid.,
The Wrens have been consistent in pursuing this their vision, goals, and objectives; not only through their music, dance, and drama, but through their socio-political involvement in Uganda's development processes as well.

On the side of theatre, the group's compositions deal with subjects of wider appeal like personal and love relationships, the craze after Western World fashions, unity, democracy, human rights, and the promotion of good virtues in general. The songs ride lively rhythms and melodies that could pass for pop music as well as theatre. "The Ugandan society is a theatre society. They love action," Segawa says. On the development platform, the work of Diplock Segawa and The Wrens stretches as far back as 1989, when they have since been engaged by the NRM Government in its mobilisation and sensitisation programmes. Their most memorable partnerships with Government, however, are their musical performances aimed at creating a civic and competent society, particularly in issues of democracy, civic responsibility, and electioneering.

Writing about the group's work, Future Now International, the group's main foreign benefactor since 1996, which operates through the Swedish Embassy in Uganda, noted:

All the projects that we have started have always been carried out in co-operation with other organisations, authorities, associations of further education and companies. Through the project "Youth Awaiting the 21st Century" we have met people from a great variety of cultures, who all use art as a means for expressing thoughts and opinions on the situation locally as well as globally. When we first met Diplock Segawa in Uganda in 1992, we experienced the power and vitality of his lyrics and music. We realised the local need for songs about change and a common responsibility for social development in Uganda. The Ugandan people have long suffered through civil war, poverty and diseases such as AIDS. Now the conditions are slowly improving and we are seeing the beginning of social change. In this process the lyrics of Diplock Segawa and other talented musicians play an important part. We chose to invite Diplock Segawa as a representative of Africa when we arranged Homage for the Future at Stockholm's City Hall on March 27, 1996. Diplock's music and message is in the same spirit as Homage for the Future, which focuses on the spirit of young people, optimism and multiplicity. His visit to Sweden, together with members of the group, strengthened our belief that music could be a contribution to development in Africa and in the music world if he were brought to the public's attention. Thus we remained in contact with him for eight months to find out whether our beliefs coincide with reality. After

54 The present business premises of Diplock Segawa and The Wrens are located at Uganda Development Corporation (UDC) Building, above Embassy House, courtesy of the NRM Government. UDC Building is on Parliamentary Avenue off King George IV street, one of the exclusive streets leading to the Parliamentary Buildings and President's Office in Kampala.
This rather long and somewhat promotional appraisal by Segawa's sponsors may, on the one hand, demonstrate the extent to which some development efforts by foreign agencies working through local theatre companies have been successful. On the other hand, such efforts have, as already implied, facilitated the disintegration hence weakening of Uganda's theatre industry and business, and often led to over-dependence of local groups on financial sponsors for sponsorship as well as ideology. In the longer run, Segawa might have his original vision in Diplock Segawa and The Wrens pegged to or sacrificed to the operational interests of the larger "Music for Development" Project. What is being said of Segawa and his group is also especially relevant in the light of the state of his present theatre business and the criticisms that are coming his way.

For a long time, before "Sooka Omunoonye" (First Look Out for the One You Love ...) came onto the scene, Diplock Segawa's number, "Friendship", was his identity hit, both in promotions and at performances. "Friendship" is presented in a mixture of English and Luganda while "Sooka Omunoonye" is in Luganda. The song rides a happy, celebrational, almost ecstatic melody, with its message given through a core structure of phrases repeated, in both Luganda and English, at aesthetic intervals. The key words are:

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55 From the "Future Now International/SKAPA 2000" pamphlet. Besides organising Segawa's Swedish Music Tour, the organisation also facilitated the recording of his CD, *Fundamental Change*.  

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Friendship
It's what makes us sing together
I say, Friendship
That makes this lie a bit better
It's Friendship
That may allow me to see you tomorrow

Friendships have brought us much good,
Friendships have led to the development of many countries.

When people unite
One may wonder what it's all about

The next number on the same tape, "Show That You Love Me", also has a like message, but in different words. Some of the lines go:

Show that you love me
Show that you need me
Make my lie a little better
Show that you need me
When I first we walk together
You seem not to be in favour

But it is the peace that would have come to the world.
Friendships surpass everything else.
When children have love amongst them
Their parents are also happy.
Hold dear what you possess.
Give friendship a special place in your hearts.
When your friend annoys you
Don't quarrel and hate.
Discuss everything openly

In the context of the social and political situation at the time of the songs' compositions in 1988 to 1990, there could have been no better message to give to Ugandans, who, as already numerouslly documented in this research and elsewhere, had been through difficult decades of war, crime, hatred, and other indignities since mid-1950s. Segawa's message is relevant at the personal, family, and community or socio-political levels. The message could easily be universal. What is so scarce among human communities the world over are the virtues of humility and humanness, which would lead us all to the recognition, acceptance, and treatment of others as of a like human value as our own selves. The best medicine and alternative to hope and development, therefore, lay not in apportioning blame and guilt finding, but in the concrete efforts at building friendships.

Indeed, in the period 1988-1998, Segawa could be said to have competed well on the Ugandan theatre market, bringing back the memories of Jimmy Katumba's resounding business despite his heavy didactic messages. He also quickly attracted foreign support and gained tours to many parts of the world, mostly in Sweden and Germany. Then
came the slump in business towards the end of 1998, which has reduced his performance and, most probably, financial empire considerably. Segawa notes that the Group has continued to survive "in spite of non-existing financial resources, mainly through the commitment and love of the music shown by its members, some of whom live in the countryside and have to walk for hours to get to rehearsals."

In the 1980s, Segawa's company had its own offices on linja Road. But the building was repossessed by the original Indian owner. The Wrens also once owned a recording studio, which is now on the brink of collapse. Segawa blames his current business misadventures on market forces launched by the economic liberalisation policies that the group ironically champions in its contracts with Government to popularise privatisation to the public. In Segawa's view of privatisation versus his theatre business, the policy might be good for bigger often government business or the service sector. Otherwise, economic liberalisation policies have encouraged mass production and/or importation of videos and audio cassettes, the establishment and private ownership of FM radio stations, and greatly reduced the desire for formal theatre. Segawa also has to contend with the changing tastes and demands among his fans and audiences; a situation he had foreseen and sang about in one of his numbers, "Bansanyosa Nnnyo":

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56 Diplock Segawa's write-up on the group, entitled, "Presentation of Diplock Segawa and The Wrens", Ibid.,
58 Conversation with Diplock Segawa, Kampala, September 1998
His largest market, the youth, are easily swayed and won over by FM radio stations, cinemas, video houses, tabloids, crude leisure magazines, computer games, and pornography, which all play into the evolving tastes and ever scavenging eyes of the youth and more. The remaining patrons are being shared among him, the 'music hall' promoters of dancing troupes with their "queen dancers", and the other social functions like football, discotheques, etc.

In the song above, however, Segawa is not just worried about the changing consumer tastes among the youth for the sake of his business or that of others. He also sees in such global consumerism the dangers of cultural erosion hence the illusion of development goals and opportunities; the same way Elikia M'Bokolo viewed the situation among the youth in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) when he wrote:

> On the one hand, the phenomena known collectively as 'globalization' continue and, on the other, the inferiority complex and attitudes of servile imitation and submission, so well analyzed by Frantz Fanon over forty years ago, are far from cured. On the contrary, it is as if these feelings were intensified by the growing economic inequalities between Africa and the West, 'Afro-pessimism' and the African continent's persistent difficulties in solving its problems. This insidious alienation acts with particular force among the urban youth, as the 'Miguelism' phenomenon shows. Formed from the word Miguel, which signifies Europe in the slang of the young people of Kinshasa, Miguelism applies to all the beliefs and practices which assume Africa to be 'cursed' and which hold up Europe as an idyllic paradise and encourage its followers to do everything they can to reach this land of plenty, facility and excellence.⁵⁹

Instead of busying themselves in positive and constructive ventures, many youth in developing societies have committed themselves to chasing shadows of Western lifestyles that they may never even ever access in their lifetime. The World runs a market economy any way, which is exclusively cash-backed.

A section of respondents who used to be Segawa's most devoted fans, however, suggest that Segawa, like a number of Uganda's other theatre company directors, has created the market crisis for himself or rather accelerated its impact. In the latter

⁵⁹ Elikia M'Bokolo, "African Cultures and the Crisis of Contemporary Africa", in UNESCO's The Futures of Culture Series, Ibid., p. 147
Segawa performances and recordings, he has dominated the stage hence the shows, leaving no space for the other members in his group to come up and, or continue to, shine. So, people who used to pay to see, beside him, other members of his group, particularly the ladies, perform got disappointed with "his monopolistic tendencies" and, rather than confront him personally or caution him, they "silently deserted him." One such disappointed former fan complained that "even recently, when Segawa could have made it again with the good financial boost he received from the Swedish Embassy, he repeated the same mistake". Segawa's latest CD, *Fundamental Change*, was recorded in Sweden; and, true to public complaints, *Fundamental Change* is dominated by Segawa's vocals that certainly become monotonous minutes into the CD's playing. Otherwise, Fundamental Change is a viable project in developing countries plagued by war, poverty, and gross violations of human rights; all problems that could be solved through concerted efforts, as the music urges.

4. 3. The Uganda National Cultural Centre (UNCC)

Among its functions and envisioned roles, the UNCC "acts as the custodian of culture in Uganda" and is expected to "plan, organise and popularise such activities." The Uganda Government Ad of 8 October, 1956 which established the UNCC, lays out the main duty of its Board of Trustees as:

administrating the trustee property in such a manner as to provide accommodation for societies, institutions, and organisations of a cultural, academic or philanthropic nature.

The trustee property under UNCC's administration includes the Uganda National Theatre, Uganda Museum, Nommo Gallery, and now the Uganda Cultural (Craft) village. In turn, UNCC is supervised by the Commission for Culture in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. That way, the mother ministry through UNCC promotes and supervises cultural activity in schools and indigenous communities all over the country.

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60 This was in 1998. The respondent is a fellow theatre practitioner. He requested for anonymity.
61 The UNCC Brochure
This sub-section, therefore, highlights the nature and types of festivals held in Uganda today, the structure and activities of the Uganda National Theatre, and administrative role of the Commission for Culture, all which give an overview of the prevailing situation in UNCC. Comparisons with similar theatre or culture institutions in other parts of the world are also made. That way, the reader gets a fair picture of the way theatre is organised in the developed as well as the developing world, with a view to charting out possible or relevant improvements for Uganda's theatre industry.

4.3.1. Prominent National/Cultural Festivals

In the organisation of theatre in Uganda festivals fall under the activities of UNCC. Festivals have been described by Scott Kennedy as one of the ways through which African drama and theatre manifest themselves. Often, festivals are the embodiment of not just the people's drama or theatre but their cultural lives as well. To this end, Kennedy noted:

> An understanding of the nature of the African festival and its relationship to the people as a way of life offers many insights about African Theatre. For example, when the "festival way of life" reveals itself through ceremonial drama or theatre, the audience or the people are often instructed or given practical knowledge about the planting of crops or about the nature of the opening and dosing of a lagoon or river.63

But that is as far as 'pure' cultural festivals are concerned, the nearest of which, in Uganda today, can be witnessed in the performance forms of UDTA's Annual National Development Festival, its competitive nature and characteristic aside. The Uganda Development Theatre Association (UDTA) was founded in 1997 by Stephen Rwangyezi "as a peasant theatre movement to use performing and visual arts in order to foster social, political, economical and technological issues, especially in rural areas where reading, writing, radio and television are not common."64 Rwangyezi also says UDTA's other objective in establishing the festival was:

63 J. Scott Kennedy, *In Search of African Theatre*, ibid., p. 19
to stimulate individual, household, community and national development through the use of functional drama and music as well as being champions in adopting appropriate technologies in agriculture, animal industry, crafts and small-scale or home industries.65

Stephen Rwangyezi is also founder, Chairman, and Managing Director of a regular theatre group, the Ndere Troupe. But, whereas Ndere Troupe does conventional theatre and conducts weekly dance entertainment performances for the tourism market, UDTA's structural focus remains cultural, national, and developmental in nature. A respondent in Lira, Northern Uganda, disclosed that the festival was the "only form of serious theatre in the region" and commended the festival for "preserving the people's culture".66

Since its inception, UDTA has organised four successful national development cultural festivals, all ending up at the National Theatre where they run for three to five days in succession. Apparently, however, the last UDTA festival, held in September 2000, deviated from the association's vision and mission. The festival reportedly attracted over 900 artists from 30 districts in Uganda and 140 guest artists from Austria, USA, Holland, Britain, Rwanda, Kenya, and Tanzania. President Yoweri Museveni presided over the festival for which the Austrian government contributed Ug. Shs. 165,000,000/= (or US$ 92,000).67

All of UDTA's festival seasons have been funded by the Austrian Embassy in Kampala, which also proposes to build a theatre structure outside the City Centre for Ndere Troupe of the same magnitude and nature as the National Theatre. The other danger in UDTA's nature and current activities is its general structure and organisation, which is of a limited company or private NGO. In times of crises, UDTA is bound to be limited by and respond decisively to factors affecting its operations, like its budgetary and operational priorities, without social or community considerations. Furthermore, in its present set-up and cultural organisation, UDTA cannot satisfactorily reach every other corner of the country nor can its annual efforts sustain a strong culture development

65 Ibid., p. 3
66 This was a response in a questionnaire sent out by the researcher during September, 1998
consciousness among the people. For, what happens to the 'culture' in the other months of the year when there is no trophy to compete for? Like the Christians' mission work, the sessions of culture renewal need to occur more often, and in an atmosphere that is free of ideals of excellence and the strictures of competition. Unlike literature, culture is massive and accommodative and not limited by rules of style or convention.

The other most popular festivals in Uganda are the Music, Dance, and Drama festivals, normally organised by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES). The festivals are conducted under the schools' educational structure and are in the form of competitions. The competitions take place among Primary and Secondary Schools, National Teacher Training, Business, and Agricultural Colleges the country over. There are no festivals for the local communities or for Universities and other Colleges like Para-Medical schools. Ironically, although it barely controls them, the annual Schools Music, Dance, and Drama festivals are one of the major and regular activities of the Uganda National and Cultural Centre.

The system is such that schools and colleges collaborate with the inspectorate department at MOES to initiate the competitions. The festivals in schools are a mixture of traditional and modern theatre forms in their general structure and choreography, and are 'composed' around themes and ideas handed down by the Government through MOES, depending on what issues are topical at the time. For example, in the last four years, the Festivals ran under the following respective themes: "Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Development" for 1998 and 1999 and "The Uganda Constitution (of 1995) and National Development" for 2000 and 2001.

MOES contributes towards the final production and maintenance costs for groups that make it to the National Theatre in Kampala. Otherwise, the rest of the processes are financed by respective districts or schools in the spirit of good will and the love for theatre art. By law, all schools in Uganda are obliged to participate in the schools music
Service "Mellemfolkligt Samvirke" or MS Uganda. Mellemfolkligt Samvirke stands for and promotes co-operation between people.73

Membership to IATM is by application, and comprises ordinary, affiliate, and honorary membership categories. Most IATM Uganda members are part of the popular theatre movement in Uganda.

Two basic features differentiate the IATM festival from the others. The festival is not run on a competitive basis. Member theatre groups discuss and decide on items of a performance, depending on the invitations the organisation has received or according to its programmed activities for the year. The festival is also regional in nature; covering Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Republic of South Africa, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, and its schedule is always integrated to include plays and poetry than is common in the cultural festivals.

Interestingly, during preparations for the mentioned festivals, neither the Commissioner of Culture nor the District Culture Officers are ever involved; except in their individual capacities as consultant trainers or adjudicators for the different performance items. Likewise, performance arts training institutions like MDD Department at Makerere University and the departments of Music and/or Drama at Teacher Training Colleges have often been kept out of the processes. Consequently, in pursuit of individual excellence and dominance, the festivals have often lacked aspects of collective responsibility, communal ownership, and integrated nature that are very much prevalent in traditional theatre. Thus the festivals have done little to consolidate cultural cohesiveness or to enhance theatre fraternity in Uganda.

4. 3. 2. The Uganda National Theatre

Much as conventional theatre in Uganda and its inherent commercial ideals is traceable in the colonial education policies in the country, it was not until 1959, when the UNCC housing the National Theatre was commissioned, that the theatre in the country began

73 See MS Uganda's general brochure of 1996
to be institutionalised, in its planning, administration, and consumption in relation to the material sense of the word. The material and monetary elements manifested themselves right from the Theatre’s external and internal structures, through the form and nature of the art being presented, to the calibre of the clientele expected to consume this art. Even after its commissioning under the national cultural centre of Uganda, the National Theatre was still expected to put up shows that were not just Ugandan in nature but “those that could appeal to the local and foreign audiences at the same time.”

The existing market for conventional theatre then consisted of mainly whites, Indians and black intellectuals, most of whom were university lecturers. All consumed theatre, basically for the same reasons, although the theatre’s price and its nature were never so dictated by its market, as seems to be the case today. That is to say, the proffered types of theatre were presented to audiences for their enjoyment and economic sense, exclusive of other stimuli like national politics, the economic desperation of artists, and development concerns that set theatre trends in the years subsequent to Uganda’s political upheavals and current social scourges like AIDS.

Secondly, looking more closely at the establishment of the National Theatre in Kampala and its commissioning in 1959, one cannot help suspect the move to have been a calculated political ploy to facilitate the colonial policy, whose administrative seat was in Buganda, at the same time not forgetting the central role Britain played in Uganda’s politics of independence. In that case, it was not only the planning and organisation of theatre in Uganda that were purposely centralised by Government, thus further alienating the communities from the arts. Apparently, theatre was planned as an elite activity, to be produced and consumed within and around Kampala City, and occasionally in established high schools and institutions of higher learning where mini-theatres or assembly halls were available for the purpose. Apart from the National Theatre, which is located in Kampala City, no other theatre halls were established by the

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74 Fad revealed to the researcher by Rose Mbowa during her MA research in February 1990.
75 The Minutes of the meetings of the Interim Trustees of the UNCC reveal that the British Council was very much involved in the processes for the establishment of the Centre.
colonial or the subsequent national governments in other places or the administrative
towns in Uganda. All theatre groups seeking to use modern theatre services therefore
have to travel to Kampala at their own costs or go to schools that have raised stages
and platforms. In that regard, conventional theatre, if that was the theatre form
intended by the colonialists for the whole country, remains a costly and largely an
alienating art, rarely appreciated by much of the prospective up-country markets.

Further, with the subsequent political, social, and economic history of the country and
of the National Theatre itself, a particular kind of audience and theatrical groups'
organisations, mainly from Buganda, have come to patronise the National Theatre. For
example, the main language of communication at the Theatre, both in performances
and administration, is Luganda. Coincidentally, too, Luganda is fast registering itself as
the language of commerce in public markets and transport vehicle parks in big urban
centres in the country.76 It is also alleged that under-currents always work against
having a non-muganda as (Artistic) Director at the National Theatre, whenever such an
appointment is made. Again, by coincidence, all such appointments of non-baganda at
the Theatre have always been terminated for one reason or another.

On the other hand, appointing a Director or Board of Trustees for the National Theatre
is so much of a government concern as is usually the case in public enterprises.
Though recruitment for the post of Artistic Director is expected to be on merit, and the
vacant post is normally publicly advertised and interviews accordingly conducted, the
name of the successful candidate must be approved by the minister hence the
Government. In the end, the Artistic Director is like a "political appointee". The Trustees
likewise become political appointees, and some of them have the least relationship with
theatre. The political meddling occurs in spite of the fact that no post-independence

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76 It should be remembered that Luganda was also at one time during colonialism in Uganda regarded as the language
of the local imperialists, following the appointment and posting of Baganda colonial henchmen as chiefs and public
administrators to other parts of the country that showed the slightest resistance to colonial policies during the
establishment of a British protectorate in Uganda.

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government in Uganda has borne the full responsibility of running the National Theatre or promoting theatre activity in the country.

In privately-owned theatres, recruitment for directors and trustees though different is no better. Directorships strictly go to the person who founded the group, irrespective of whether or not the person is adequately trained and qualified for the position. Hence the directors are indispensable and wield undisputed powers over their establishments.

Not disregarding other political and national circumstances\textsuperscript{77} that dictate the status quo at the National Theatre, therefore, the Theatre is only national in name. Theatre practitioners from other parts of the country find it not only difficult to break ground administratively at the Theatre. They also cannot conduct economically viable and fair business since they are normally fairly new to the Theatre's regular clientele, and the cost of hiring the Theatre, even for a weekend, is always prohibitive.\textsuperscript{78} Besides, the whole set-up of a city environment and its organisation of things are quite intimidating and inhibitive to the new comer. Most up-country performing groups are unfamiliar with modern structures, and their near contact with conventional theatre is in seeing and occasionally performing from raised platforms resembling theatre stages, found in some schools or town halls. The problems for such theatre directors and performers, therefore, range right from orientating themselves to the City environment, the physical and administrative structures at the Theatre, grappling with the language and style of performance at the Theatre, and ensuring that they break through, if not literary, at least economically.

Consequently, among the many amateur groups that populate the country, only about two or three have regularly performed at the National Theatre with relative success.

\textsuperscript{77} Like; the repression of theatre and other forms of leisure by Amin's regime in the 1970s, the obvious advantages of having Makerere University, the only University then, and now the only one with a full-fledged Department of Music, Dance, and Drama, in Eastern and Central Africa, the National Theatre building, and the nation's administrative seat, all on 'Bugandan soil'.

\textsuperscript{78} Performance contracts at the National Theatre are of two types: percentage basis or flat rate hire. In the former the producer receives 60% of the Box Office proceeds less VAT, advances and other charges accrued at the theatre. In the latter, the producer pays for the theatre in advance.\textbf{Any additional shows in both cases require a fresh agreement.}
These are: Kinimba Kigezi Actors and Rugo Actors from the South-West Uganda, and performing in the region's respective language (Runyankore-Rukiga). Likewise, most of their patrons are Banyankore, Bakiga, Banyoro, and Batoro living in the city. The other group was Tic Matek Drama Club from Gulu in Northern Uganda, performing in Luo, and likewise mostly patronised by the people who speak or understand the language. For unclear reasons, Tic Matek Drama Club no longer makes it to the Theatre.

In comparison with similar establishments in other countries, UNCC is in an ironic situation of existence and operations. In the RSA, theatre work is overseen by the Arts Council, whose main objective is "to promote culture, including theatre, throughout the republic. Public Theatre in South Africa is mostly financed by the Government. Government gives money to the Arts Council, and any theatre company or group can apply for money to carry out their projects. The subsidy given to the groups depends on the group's strength. However, even smaller groups found in the communities are usually considered."^79 Linda Bongani adds:

^79 Interview with Johannes Esterhuizen, Bayreuth, Germany, October 1999. Esterhuizen teaches at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa

On the other hand, Bongani complains that "there is a lot of nepotism (in the Arts Council). It depends on who you are before you can get a reasonable amount of money. Otherwise if you are not known, you can come up with a strong proposal, but they won't give you money. If you are lucky to get something, it will be very very small. It is something that cannot even last you a year. It is something that may last a month or two and then it is finished. So the answer is in community theatre, where each member group must sell a percentage of tickets with a minimum of 10,000 Rand. Or industrial theatre, where groups get contracts for performances or adverts."^81

^80 Interview with Linda Bongani, Bayreuth, Germany, October 1999

^81 Ibid.
Discussing the organisational structure of Theatre in Nigeria, Victor Samson Dugga of University of Jos, Nigeria, stated:

There is no trust fund at all. There is no trust organisation for theatre. What we do have is the National Council for Art and Culture. It is supposed to overrule and take care of policy issues around theatre in Nigeria. But, it basically is just an institution in name. We have a Copyright Council... The theatres come under different guise. There is the National Theatre which is based in Lagos. Under the National Theatre is the National Troupe combining drama, music, and dance troupes. ... The National Theatre is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture. Every state – there are 36 federal states in Nigeria – every federal state has its own Council for Arts and Culture and its own theatre troupe. The theatres are state-funded, but they are independent. The state theatres are for patronising dignitaries – visiting Heads of State, diplomats, etc. The theatres are also for the public relations or for the cultural image of the country and for the state. But they are not money-making.82

Dugga’s views were collaborated by Frank Idoko, one-time Post-Doctoral Fellow doing prison research in the Federal Democratic Republic of Germany and stationed at the University of Bayreuth.

While the structures and guidelines for theatre organisation in Nigeria have been provided, it is apparent that as in many other African countries, theatre in Nigeria hovers between state patronage and operational independence. That situation, however, seems to be a result of mismanagement and misconception of theatre by federal states and communities and not due to lack of facilities or the uncoordinated will of the practitioners as is the case in Uganda’s theatre industry.

An interesting parody is found in neighbouring Kenya. As in Uganda, there is only one state theatre, the National Theatre of Kenya. However, the theatre's location is poor, considering the kind of city audiences who would form its most potential patrons. Christopher Odhiambo, a theatre practitioner in Nairobi and lecturer at Moi University, concurs that the Theatre "is a bit removed from the city centre. This has an impact on audience numbers. Most of the time, the Theatre is empty, and only gets redeemed when there is performance of a set book for schools."83 There is no Arts Council. Government neither supports the National Theatre nor theatre activity in the country "because it regards it as mere entertainment. Theatre is taken to be a luxury."84

82 Interview with Victor Samson Dugga, Bayreuth, Germany, October 1999
83 Interview with Christopher Odhiambo of Moi University, Kenya, at Universität Bayreuth, Germany, October 1999
84 Ibid.,
The bad effects of colonialism aside, most post-independence governments in Africa have tended to treat theatre as culture hence an unprofitable industry. We also note that with insubstantial financing either from the Government or its money-making arm, the National Theatre, the UNCC has not lived up to the expectations of both theatre producers and some sections of the theatre market. The financing of theatre has been left to whoever happens to have interest or money for it. Today, there is talk in Uganda about UNESCO's desire to establish an Arts Council to oversee the country's theatre activities. One wonders why UNESCO should seek to establish an Arts Council for Uganda instead of consolidating the work of UNCC or the Commission for Culture. UNESCO is an international body hence not expected to heavily involve itself with the administration and promotion of the Council the same way a local body would. Otherwise, the move might further confuse or hinder the development of the country's culture and theatre industry.

4. 3. 3. The Commission for Culture

In an almost parallel setting to the UNCC is the Commission for Culture in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. The Commission for Culture operates as one of the other Commissions within the Ministry. It has its offices at the Ministry's headquarters in Kampala and operational branches at district level throughout the country overseen by District Culture Officers. At present, Uganda has 56 districts. Among their responsibilities and schedule of work, the Culture Officers are supposed to:

"promote culture, artistic exhibitions, and activities of a like nature in their area of work."89

Hampered by finances and other logistics like transportation, etc. the Commission for Culture had, until recently, been reduced to an armchair culture commission and preserving institution. Occasionally, the Culture Officers at district level were required to organise the district cultural festivals. The festivals are not an annual event "due to lack

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89 Response to a question in the 1997 Questionnaire by Adolu Otojoka, a former Principal Culture Officer at the then Ministry of Culture and Community Development.
of sufficient funding from the government. District budgets in the decentralisation system also do not provide for culture because they expect that vote to come from the centre. What else do we do? We hang around the office until there is work to do. For example, we do a lot to prepare for big public celebrations in the district.”

When a Government official is visiting the area or there is a celebration of national importance, Culture Officers organise for public entertainment. During Obote II’s regime, this nature of ‘public entertainment’ included gathering widows and lining them up to provide sexual pleasure to the visiting officials after the day’s celebrations. The same was true of Amin’s Government.

But, for any country desiring to build cohesive communities and so enhance national development, a neglect of its people’s culture is only a distraction from the goals and speed of its development programmes. With the existence of the UNCC as an official structure as well as the Ministry and other private companies, the Government can harness the opportunity to take issues of culture development seriously. Donor agencies showing interest in this direction could also be mobilised or persuaded to support the official structures in place instead of proliferating efforts by supporting private culture organisations, whose autonomy makes it difficult for Government and the Ugandan society to monitor their activities.

The argument here is not to limit the discretion of donor agencies and activities to specific structures. Neither is it a defence of retaining inefficient Government parastatals and organisations on public financial votes. But there is need to defend and maintain the cultural integrity and independence of the people. Today, embassies support positive culture as a private enterprise. Tomorrow, the story may be different, with some donors supporting retrogressive culture, still within the private sector. Then Government would not find it easy to intervene, or it shall be too late. The time to act is now.

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90 Interview with one District Culture Officer who requested for anonymity.
4. 4. Commercial Theatre

With regard to its general structure, theatre business in Uganda is currently divided into Urban Popular Theatre or Art Theatre and Rural/Country Music Theatre. Urban popular theatre is a recluse of Kampala City and a few urban centers like Jinja, Mbale, Mukono, Luweero, Masaka, Kabale, and Mbarara. The form mostly employs Western forms of drama and entertainment. In Kampala, urban popular theatre competes favourably with conventional theatre and has stretched its structures into directions and possibilities it would never have reached on its own or was ever expected to take. The theatre now embraces stage as well as television drama. The most popular theatre companies in this form are Bakayimbira Dramactors, Impact International, Ndere Troupe, Kigezi Kinimba Actors, The Black Pearls, Diamonds Ensemble, Christopher Mukibi with the Theatricos, and the Ebonies, a re-grouping of the former Jimmy Katumba with the Ebonies. Both Bakayimbira Dramactors and Impact International are publicly 'retired from stage' although they continue to perform as before.91

Rural or Country Music Theatre posits itself in between urban popular theatre forms and traditional theatre structures that define much of its identity in terms of form. The theatre is being described as rural or country not because it is performed in rural areas or by country people. The terms are used to highlight the theatre's generic structures that have much more in common with country music or dance or drama than pure commercial theatre tends to employ. Most performing groups in this genre belong to the "Kadongo Kamu" branch. "Kadongo Kamu" takes its name from the nature of the musical accompaniment used i.e. a guitar. Originally, this type of guitar was very small and had a few strings for strumming. Its founder, Christopher Ssebaduka, had intended his music for "the common people of the working class."92 Soon, the form was adopted and performed before other audiences "and Ssebaduka became the 'grandfather' of

91 "Retirement" from theatre is a gimmick the two groups have been using to ensure their audiences' constant royalty to them. The issue is discussed in context in the next chapter.

the now many popular Kadongo Kamu Musical Theatre Groups or Bands like Luswata Guitar Singers, Ssegamwenge, Entebbe Guitar Singers, Matia Luyima, Matia Kyamakala, Fred and Prossy Sebatta to mention but a few.\textsuperscript{93}

In general, however, there is no big structural distinction between Urban Popular Theatre and Country Music Theatre. The need to manage the market to their advantage leads the artists in both streams to integrate each other's forms. Besides, both genres are part of the popular theatre movement in Uganda. In between the two forms suspend Biwempe (Reed) Theatre,\textsuperscript{94} whose location and patronage is among the urban poor. The selling products in reed theatres are the localised versions of popular movies on show in cinema houses, horror films, and pornography.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 50

\textsuperscript{94} The structures are gradually evolving into video clubs, employing Video Jokers (VJs), and equivalent of the Disco Jokers (DJs) of the disco halls.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Economics of Theatre in Uganda

Theatre business in Uganda is purely commercial; that is, if one considers the general environment under which theatre survives as a business independent of state patronage. Besides market economic policies, the country’s general political economy dictates that every good or service is subject to market rules of demand and supply. As such, commercial theatre is prevalent in Kampala City and the major towns of Uganda. On the other hand, development theatre is popular among rural communities and the urban poor because those are the constituencies that are likely to be successfully mobilised for or involved in collective projects. The rich and more affluent members of society always prefer doing things individually, depending on their personal priorities, abilities, and opportunities. When a poor person is agonising over a decision to go or not to go for theatre, the rich is agonising over the wide forms of entertainment to choose from. Further, the current general organisation of theatre in Uganda dictates that producers of theatre must do everything possible to sustain their business on the market. They must sell and continue to sell, or perish.

In the United States, commercial theatre is reported to be centred in New York "on Broadway and Off-Broadway-and its behaviour in terms of economics, management and production influences all other theatre activity." It is further noted, however, that (while) the term "commercial theatre" is an anathema to some people ... others use it to assert pride in the rather dubious ability of professional theatre to function without subsidy. ... (Nonetheless, commercial theatre remains) one of several economic systems of theatre producing."

In the Federal Republic of Germany, commercial theatre takes the form of Independent or ‘Free’ Theatre which covers all theatre companies that are not subsidised by the state. Peter Henze reveals that,

Independent theatre companies first took shape in former West Germany in the late sixties - as a protest against ‘society’ on the one hand, and ‘established theatre’ on the other. Today, several hundred independent companies

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1 Stephen Langely, *Theatre Management in America: Principle and Practice*, Ibid., p. 87
2 Ibid., p. 87

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have become an integral part of the German theatre scene-no longer as an alternative to established theatre, but as a much needed extension of it.

The established theatres in Germany are subsidised by the state.

As already indicated, commercialisation of theatre in Uganda intensified during Amin’s regime. Today, most theatre groups in the country are registered as business companies limited by shares. Of recent, however, quite a number of theatre groups are registering as non-governmental organisations or both as NGOs and business enterprises. The logic in this is that the groups can still do business as non-profit and service organisations. They can generate and use their own income independent of government economic regulations on business enterprises, and much of their capital investment can be acquired tax-free. In cases of financial crisis or liquidation, the companies can become commercial enterprises without having to seek de-registration or obtaining fresh registration certificates. In general, however, there is no difference in the way ‘pure’ commercial theatres and the NGO theatre companies practice the art of theatre. Both categories aim at making remarkable profits and consolidating their capital assets.

Naturally, therefore, theatre in today’s Uganda is mostly appreciated in terms of the market and its components because, in the first place, there is no longer anything for free with respect to the commodities or services that are not being generated for own or personal consumption. Little, if any, charity itself exists today in the other sectors of the Ugandan society, and it would be almost too much to expect it in theatre, including the National Theatre one of whose roles is to promote theatre in the country. The basic reason here being of course that, like in the production of any goods or services, there are investments that go into theatre. This fact is often overlooked by those not directly involved in theatre or those theatre practitioners who do not seriously think through the processes and corresponding costs that come to make theatre a professional business or industry.

Secondly, the principle behind conventional theatre, introduced in Uganda along with the Western form of education and social values, recognises, among other things, the existence of the Box-Office at theatre halls, from where the intending patrons are expected to purchase tickets for the show. The operating system and order are that the different members of the audience book and rent particular

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3 Peter Henze, “Independent Theatre” in *Die Deutsche Bühne* (Sonderdruck), i.e. *The German Theatre* (Special Edition), 1993, p. 62
4 This particular overriding factor in Uganda’s theatre business was echoed during a workshop the researcher organised for theatre directors in Kampala in 1998.
seats in particular sections of the auditorium to watch a performance, on a particular date and time.\textsuperscript{5} There are no refunds or transfers of bookings, in case one came late or, for one reason or another, one was unable to attend a performance. Whatever tickets have been issued are counted as "goods" or rather services sold, and are, therefore, not returnable.

Unfortunately, unlike the producers and marketers of a number of goods and services, a theatre producer cannot easily call off a production if all indications at the Box-Office point to cumulative losses. The binding nature of the inherent agreement already existing between the producers and their patrons or audiences dictate that they continue the performance goes on throughout the booked and publicised season. What many of the theatre proprietors and producers, therefore, do is to try as much as they can to look for ways and means of producing, managing, and distributing theatre in a way that would off-set production costs, minimise losses and/or maximise profit. In such moments, literary excellence and structural perfection are relegated to a secondary position along with the artistic responsibilities and obligations to society.

Some theatre proprietors and/or directors in Uganda gave personal experiences that were very insightful into the problem. To them, the theatre market was a random chance existing among people for the sale of their numerous and 'inexhaustible' productions. Whenever they contemplated a production involving the whole group, they went about the whole process very carefully because they were "not very sure of the extent of their market, and its ability to buy the show's tickets". Hence they engaged in speculation, the same way any other seller of goods or services did. On the practical side of things, the directors look into and decide on the best marketing strategy from among the different alternatives they have to get the most out of their prospective markets. Then, they consider different key factors affecting or favoured by their prospective audiences. For example, they could prolong performances of popular productions, organise for public launching of plays, reduce on items of expenditure, go by the audiences' popular demands, invoke the publicity machine, or simply diversify their products and methods of delivery. Below is a discussion of some of these strategies.

\textsuperscript{5} An exhaustive discussion of the Conventional Theatre physical and business structure appears in the section on The National Theatre. See also, Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, \textit{Uganda’s Literary Theatre}, ibid.
5.1. Creation of Stars and Stardoms

With the current wind of globalisation, everything worldwide seems to be involuntarily taking on the label, "Made in America." In Uganda, theatre is embracing the ideals of what Stephen Langely describes as the "era of the independent stock companies" which existed in America between 1792 and 1860.\(^6\) That was the era that brought stardoms in America's Theatre. The same scenario duplicated itself in 19th Century England, and Bernard Shaw, in part, describes it thus:

To begin with, the playgoers of their towns grew so desperately tired of them, and so hopelessly unable to imagine them to be any but their too familiar selves, that they performed in an atmosphere of hatred and derision that very few of their members had talent or charm enough to conciliate. The modern practice of selecting for the performances actors and actresses suited to the parts they had to play was impossible: the stock company was a readymade cast that had to fit all plays, from \textit{Hamlet} down to the latest burlesque; and as it never fitted any of them completely, and seldom fitted them at all, the casts were more or less grotesque misfits. This system did not develop versatility; it destroyed it. Every member of the company except the utilities, as they called the worst actors who got parts that did not matter, had his or her specialty or "line." Thus there were leading juveniles with an age limit of fifty. There were walking gentlemen, first and second light comedians, first and second low comedians, first and second old men, heavies who played all the villains, and, as aforesaid, utilities. There were leading ladies and walking ladies, singing chambermaids (soubrettes), and heavies to whom Lady Macbeth was all in the night's work, a pair of old women of whom one played the great ladies and the other the comic landladies, and, of course, female utilities. Each claimed as of right the part which came nearest to his or her specialty; and each played all his or her parts in exactly the same way.\(^7\)

One major and somewhat voguish aspect of marketing and distribution of theatre in Uganda is the creation of stars. If the theatre industry of the 1980s was obsessed with spectacular productions as a means of acquiring and retaining markets, in the late 1990s the craze is on the creation of theatre 'stars'. The trend follows recent title awarding patterns on the international music scene where two of Uganda's top "Kadongo Kamu" musicians, Paulo Bob Kafeero of Kulabako Guitar Singers and Fred Sebatta of Matendo Promoted Singers, were "voted best musicians in Africa" in alternate years (1994195 and 199617 respectively) by the Music Committee of the International Theatre Institute (ITI). Sebatta was supposed to be crowned in Cairo, but he preferred to be crowned on home soil by none other than his king, Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II. The ceremony took place at the Nakivubo National Stadium in Kampala.

Reporting about the two music stars' performance on the fund-raising occasion for the rehabilitation of the Kabaka's official residence, "Twekobe", before his marriage in August 1999, Elvis Basudde wrote:

Sebatta and Kafeero's joint performance is a rare and spectacular event because they are the only Ugandan winners of international musical awards.... The 'Ladies' man, Paul Kafeero with his group came on stage at 4.55 p.m. Dressed in a suit made of bark cloth, Kafeero was received by repeated ululation from the audience. You got it wrong if you thought he was going to perform \textit{Omwana w'omuzungu} (Child of a Whitman). He performed three of his popular numbers which left none seated. Fred Sebatta came on stage franked by six back-up dancers at 7.45 p.m. Wild cheers greeted them. Fans screamed

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\(^6\) Stephen Langley, \textit{Theatre Management in America: Principle and Practice}, Ibid., p. 88

and shrieked in disbelief. Some of them had never seen Sebatta before. He started singing. Never mind that it wasn’t the Kadongo Kamu you were used to seeing. You could call it ‘kadongo kamu-pop music of the 21st century’- Kadongo Kamu melodies with a pop music feel. He belted out ‘Nfizawo akadde (Spare Me Some Time), popularly known as Dole w’Omwaa (The Baby’s Doll), provoking cheers and applause from the fans. Performing Kabaka Wange (My King) Sebatta narrated how he refused to be crowned abroad when he scooped the most prestigious title of ‘Star of Africa’. He told the excited audience that he insisted on being crowned by his king, Kabaka of Buganda, Ronald Mutebi. He was crowned last year on his musical throne at Nakivubo by his king.8

In the present world of competition, such doting, public acclamation, and titles are suggestively equivalent to the World Cup and gold trophies won over a football pitch, the gold medals won over a steeping race, or the golden belts won in boxing championships. In other words, the message seeming to be coming through from Ugandan theatre ‘stars’ is to the effect that they have excelled in their trade and could easily be ‘World Champions.’ But nobody on the local scene, apart from their patrons, takes notice of them. Hence they shall mind their own business, and bestow upon themselves the star-status that is ever in their reach. Those artists, academicians, and professionals who think they know better can continue to struggle for the internationally acclaimed Laureate literary Prizes; as Alex Mukulu insinuates in his play, “Radio Mambo Bado”.

The star-status is fairly a new phenomenon in Uganda but it creates more problems for the artists and the theatre industry as a whole than the benefits it brings. In terms of human resources and development, theatre is increasingly being built along personalities or stars hence limiting independent evolvement and growth of natural talent within and outside the stars. In the 1980s through to the early 1990s, Jimmy Katumba, Christopher Mukibi, Disan Mubiru, 'Omugave' Ndugwa, and Christopher Ssebaduka were the reigning stars of the decade. By mid 1980s, indications were apparent that, like Uganda’s politics, the country’s theatre industry and business were developing along personalities and characteristic economic empires. It took almost no time for the first of such local empires in theatre, The Ebonitas, to sprout into a business giant at the fall of Obote II and Lutwa’s regimes in Uganda in January 1986. Eckhard Breitinger records:

Since the place (The Theater Excelsior) is lavishly equipped with lights and spots, sophisticated sound equipment, and even a giant screen video, one can readily detect the origins of the Ebonitas as an offspring of Uganda’s most popular music and show ensemble, Jimmy Katumba and the Ebonies, which in turn is part of a larger business enterprise that includes the sound studio which produce and distribute the Jimmy Katumba records.9 (brackets mine)

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The 1990s gave birth to its own kind of theatre stars in such names as Alex Mukulu, Rose Mbowa, Stephen Rwangyezi, Charles Mulekwa, Andrew Benon Kibuka, Aloysius Joy Matovu, Charles Senkubuge "Siyasa", Fred Sebatta, and Paulo Bob Kafeero. Each of the mentioned stars pulled crowds to their shows in magnetic but different ways. While some built their fame through favourable publicity others shone because they put up something unique and new. The common factor among audience-woven stars is their apparent knowledge that one day they might wake up to shine no more. Hence they try to innovate ways to stay on by colonising their patrons through either hoodwinking the public or acquisition of indomitable titles. Alex Mukulu and the Bakayimbira directors would fake 'retirement from the stage' while Sebatta and his closest business competitor, Paulo Bob Kafeero, would constantly renew their music titles. Sebatta started as 'The Star of Africa'; now he is 'Lord Sebatta.' Paul Kafeero, who was crowned 'Best Solo African Musician' metamorphorised into the 'Golden Boy of Africa' and he is now 'The Ladies Man'.

Among Uganda's theatre stars, Katumba apparently made the greatest imprint on theatre in the 1980s while Mukulu, Sebatta, Kafeero, and the Bakayimbira Dramactors have taken the reigns of theatre in the 1990s to-date. Many groups in existence today parody the legacy of Jimmy Katumba with the Ebonies, right from the structuring of their business names. One never misses the solo chorus of Jimmy Katumba with the Ebonies, Christopher Mukibi with the Theatricos, Diplock Segawa Katumba and the Wrens, Umar Katumba and the Emitoes. The naming trend can only be an affirmation of the popularity of Jimmy Katumba's company as well as an acknowledgement of the theatre powers and giants that they were. Further, the usage of the name, Katumba, by theatre directors who happen to possess it as one of their names could easily mislead one to think that the directors all come from the Katumba family or that Katumba is an honourary name and every good performer in the country is called by it.

Apparently, the modern music form itself has contributed significantly to the initiation and holding together of theatre companies and groups in Uganda. A closer look at prominent theatre companies in the country today reveals an interesting link with the music industry where either one of the theatre company's founding directors or its major (star) performer is a renowned musician. Aloysius Joy Matovu, one of the directors and a prominent star in Bakayimbira Dramactors at Pride Theatre business Complex, is a publicly acclaimed musician able to pull significant crowds to theatre. The late
director of Diamonds Ensemble, Umar Katumba was a budding singer. That may be one reason why such theatre companies start with impressive financial breakthroughs. The musicians' former patrons in the music hall move along with them to the new careers, in the unmistaken hope of their continuing to get the same entertainment they received from their performances in the past. Sometimes, that hope is met, and the audiences stay and/or even increase. At other times, though, those hopes are disappointed, and the musicians' former fans desert them.

As for Rose Mbowa and Alex Mukulu, they have inspired a number of theatre groups in the structure of their plays. Mbowa pioneered the integration of traditional performance arts of music, dance, and games into formal theatre. This is the popular form in development and education theatre. The recent popular practice in using huge numbers of singers and dancers, spectacular scenery and costume, heavy acoustics, and modern or creative dance choreography stems from Mukulu's theatre practice although Byron Kawadwa employed all the mentioned elements except the last two. Contributions by other stars to Uganda's theatre forms and styles of production are discussed accordingly in the study.

Presenting a paper on audience behaviour and expectations in Uganda, Andrew Benon Kibuka, the Director and Chairman of Bakayimbira Dramactors, made a statement that bears significantly on the organisation, delivery and distribution of theatre in the country. He said:

"The majority of audiences in Uganda come to theatre not necessarily for what they expect to get from it, but to see their stars and support them. Audiences always want their stars. When the star fades and dies, the audience also dies."

Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich describes "star performer systems" as the "less demanding forms of theatre." The star in this case ceases to be just the good performer whose good conception of his or her role in a theatre piece has been naturally acknowledged by the audience. It mostly means that the performer has evolved into a kind of strategy and technique employed by a theatre group to pull and keep audiences loyal to them, if they need to stay in business. It is the star who will pull the crowds to the 'free' shows in development theatre, and the same star who will 'pull' money into the coffers of the group in the priced shows, normally initiated by the group once the sponsored tours are over. The sponsored groups naturally have an unfair edge over the smaller groups without stars to be

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10 See Andrew Horn, “Uhuru to Amin: The Golden Decade of Theatre in Uganda” in Literary Half-Yearly, Ibid., pp 43-44
11 Andrew Benon Kibuka, “Expectations and Behaviour of Theatre Audiences in Uganda”, A Paper for a Workshop/Focus Discussion Group on Uganda's Theatre, organised by this researcher in September, 1998
12 Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich, “Annihilation and Innovation” in Die Deutsche Bühne (Sonderdruck), Ibid., p. 48
hired. The groups gain free launching and wide publicity, which ensures them immediate success in subsequent new or independent productions. Seen in economic terms, therefore, the star is the indispensable packaging trademark necessary to ward off rivals in the theatre business. Indeed, as one participant noted at the same workshop, the creation of stars is not just a means to surviving competition. It is intended to monopolise the market and ensure that no other stars begin to sprout in the other groups, however different their focus. Such would endanger the business opportunities of the preferred individual and group.13

But the creation of stars in America's stock theatre came as a strategy to re-inject new energy and skill into the theatre business and profession: Stephen Langely notes:

To breathe more life into the local stock company and to increase business, managers began to engage individual touring stars. They were greeted by popularity and success largely because they had so little competition from native luminaries. Edward Forrest, the first American actor to achieve stardom, did not make his debut until 1820. If the stock system was less than ideal for either actor or audience, the advent of visiting stars only made matters worse. Stars became so numerous that their appearance with a company was almost essential for drawing an audience. The public was encouraged to ask "who's in it?" rather than simply, "shall we go to the theatre?"14

The "who's in it?" factor is the very reason theatre producers in Uganda are currently obsessed with the cultivation of stars and stardoms in their companies, and not necessarily that they want to revive the industry; because commercial theatre forms have never acted otherwise.

5. 2. Extensive Use of the Spectacular

When the Theater Excelesior was still the leader of theatre business in the country, Jimmy Katumba's The Ebonitas, The Theatricos run by Christopher Mukiibi, and Christopher Ssebaduka of Kadongo Kamu Super Singers were some of the most popular theatre groups in Kampala who competed for audiences. Because of the competitive nature of their business, their performances were progressively tending more towards popular theatre, in the Ugandan sense of the word. Any incident or situation, theatrical or not, which could be exploited for a profit was accessed and put to use.

At the turn of the decade in 1980, theatre practitioners extended their ingenuity to the main annual religious festivals celebrated in the country, like the Christians' Easter and Christmas, and the

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13 See also article on Uganda's 'princess of folklore', "Princess" Hadijah Nassuna, who says "theatre leaden do not give up-coming talent actors opportunities because they fear to lose their fame very fast." The article is published in Drumming Against Graft, A Magazine of the International Anti-Corruption Theatre Movement (IATM), Vol. 1 No. 1, Kampala, August 1998, p. 25

Moslems' Ramadan feast, Iddi-er-Fitri. Mbowa noted that these festivals "became the main theatre-going seasons for the urban audience that resulted in stiff competition among the commercial theatre groups to pull the crowds by stunning and spectacular effects." Among the most successful in the technique of 'stunning and mesmerising audiences' was Jimmy Katumba and his Ebonitas, who ran the Theater Excelesior.

Jimmy Katumba's employment of the spectacular remained with the Company and became the trademark of the shows at the Theater Excelesior for many years, until the Company's disintegration in 1991. Mbowa notes, however, that The Ebonitas' spectacular theatre at times "created an unwanted comic effect", as in the case of their Easter play, "Jesus", presented at Easter 1980 at the Pope Paul VI Community Centre in Rubaga, of which she records:

The scene of the glorious entry into Jerusalem was effected with Jesus riding on a real horse onto the stage. Unfortunately, the horse shied in the glaring spotlights with the excited applause from the crowd, and threw Jesus (played by Kasule) to the ground. Instead of religious elation, the sensationalist form of production created an unwanted comic effect. In the production at the Mengo Cultural Centre in the following year, the real horse was replaced by two actors in a donkey costume. This time, the two actors could not abstain from responding to audience applause by improvising more and more of the donkey antiques, thereby monopolising the scene and distracting attention from Jesus' glorious entry into Jerusalem.... The ascension of Jesus was presented realistically: Jesus was seen in a cloud, rising slowly into the skies. This was effected by a smoke machine with Jesus climbing a smoke hidden ladder.

By 1991, the group had performed many other outstandingly spectacular plays, including The Inspector, where a giant placard of a helicopter resembling a real plane accompanied by the real thundering noise was created to the deafening satisfaction of the audience. Those who watched the show first came out talking of the greatest wonder they had just seen: a real plane on stage in theatre! In The Dollar, real dollars seemed to be flying above one's head whenever that big placard came up, with the lyrical accompaniment of the lively tune, "Nze Njagala Dollar!" meaning, "I want nothing else but the Dollar!" The message was very clear and vivid. Katumba's The Ebonitas wanted nothing less than the Dollar. It was business, clearly stated and introduced.

The dollar billiard, though, appearing in the production at that material time in history was not just being used for its stunning and tantalising effects. It had other peculiar and temporal significances both for the personalities in the group and the theatre Company itself. The Ebonitas' theatre enterprise had grown into a stable financial empire in proportions one could almost liken to the

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stability and reputation the US Dollar has always enjoyed as the financial yardstick for the world's currency. In short, the stars in the group were the Dollar of theatre business in Uganda, and they knew how to make and sustain its position.

The craze about dollars was also not something very removed from the daily lives of the City's residents at the time. A dollar note was something revered, and even sacred. Dollars were very rarely seen in the country, except of course in banks or the pockets of the very rich. Therefore, it was as much a blessing as it was a crime for an ordinary citizen to possess Dollars, even if it was a one-dollar note. One stood to be "feared and respected" by society as somebody who had "finally made it". On the other hand, however, one could easily be arrested by the authorities and prosecuted for crime, unless one bribed one's way out, in this case, preferably, with more dollars! In the typical Ugandan way of managing grim realities, The Ebonitas' dollar parody was a ridicule of the government system that tended to propagate crime as it professed to abate it.

Of course, the Police's harassment of people with dollars might not have all been out of greed and corruption. There were rife rumours at the time, later feared to have been true, that 'the people with dollars,' mostly businessmen, traded in children by abducting and exporting them the Sudan, Zaire, and the Middle-East as slaves, and that the first rich man's village in Kampala, Tank Hill Muyenga, located five or so kilometres south-east of the City, was a result of such ill-earned money.17 In this case, the Ebonitas were grappling with or highlighting an issue of great social and human concern.

Furthermore, however, and perhaps more relevant to the whole issue of the production's timing, is the historically economic fact where, in a bid to cut down the level of inflation in the country's national currency, Uganda's new Government of President Yoweri Museveni embarked on a monetary reform where everybody's earnings and/or savings were to be reduced by 30% and the two end zeros knocked off. So, if a person had Ug. Shs. 10,000/= before the reform, one would end up with Ug. Shs. 70/= by the time one came through it. For many people, therefore, especially the "mafuta mingis", who were used to carrying around many bundles of money notes (there were no coins in circulation then) since the days of Amin's regime, it was not at all a comforting idea, both financially and psychologically, to suddenly end up with a few bank notes and coins in the pocket, although the prices

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17 See for example Fagil Maridy's play, "Bush Trap" written in 1986.
of consumer goods and services had likewise been slashed. People even widely speculated that Museveni had cheated them of their money, either to be able to pay his bills still standing since the end of his five-year protracted bush war or to make himself rich, as he had been in combat since his student days when other people were busy making the money for their livelihood!

However, one cannot say The Ebonitas intended the production as a political criticism of the new Government. If anything, the group's production bemoaned their new business dilemma after the departure of their crowd-puller, Jimmy Katumba, for greener pastures abroad. True to Kibuka's words, star-driven groups cannot survive without their stars. Before long, The Ebonitas and the Theater Excellesior collapsed into insolvency.

Unknown to him, Jimmy Katumba was setting new theatrical production standards, in turn to impact greatly on the whole nature of the theatre business in Kampala. The other groups, and would-be his competitors in the City, were jolted into the popular innovative sphere because without such spectacular theatre as Jimmy's, as he was now fondly known among his hosts of fans, they were for sure out of business. Christopher Mukiibi tried the same strategy in his production of "Liz", but he never came near to Jimmy Katumba's popularity or his earnings. None of these or any other theatre proprietors ever did. They all walked in his shadow, and it might have well been a blessing in disguise for some of the groups when, in 1991, Theater Excelesior finally folded up, and the group 'disintegrated'.

Note that such sentiments are not necessarily absent from some forms of competition, like cut-throat competition, the state Uganda's theatre has reached, where the elimination of competing business rivals would not sadden but please many. Unlike the Music Theatre companies, particularly the "Kadongo Kamu," who, sometimes, mobilise and fundraise for their fellow 'competitors' in the business whenever they are in serious financial problems, none of the theatre companies has done or thought likewise. They all fight to shine and be on top of the other. Instead, it is some of the "Kadongo Kamus" who, in 1997, organised to salvage Bakayimbira Dramactors out of a financial crisis that could have instantly made the company insolvent.

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18 Revealed by Andrew B. Kibuka during a Focus Discussion Group for theatre producers in Kampala organised by the researcher in August 1998.

19 Allegations within the industry abide of rivals eliminating each other. The seriousness of some of such allegations inspired Alex Mukulu's popular song, "Bana Kampala nga Bogera" quoted later on in this research.
5. 3. Playing Loyal to Audience Demands and Expectations

In general, theatre groups in the popular theatre movement all play loyal to audience demands and expectations. The demands and expectations may be in the production's general structure and format, the language used, the production's length, the characters in it, its affordability, etc. Like Andrew Benon Kibuka once stated, "it is never wise to disappoint one's audiences or fans. The disappointment of a group's or an individual's fans can easily lead to a drop, or even losses, in audience turn-up for that or subsequent shows hence the eventual collapse of business."20

The very popular and general nature of popular theatre in Uganda is one reason why it generates its own kind of meaning from the conventional or widely accepted definition of the term. In Uganda, "Popular Theatre" refers to a type of theatre that is voguish, fashionable, ubiquitous, and many times trite. Therefore, while Uganda's popular theatre might be popular in structure, concept, consumption, and is sometimes developmental, the theatre is very much different from the more widely accepted usage of the term to refer to forms of Development Theatre. For example, Oga Stephen Aba defines popular theatre as,

This new theatre which engages in intervention and action, which declares which side it is on... What is today known as Popular Theatre in Africa is a hybrid practice encompassing dialogue drama, which is Western in orientation and origin, and indigenous performance forms, such as singing, drumming, dancing, puppetry and mime. The emergence of this new mode of theatre practice is due to the disenchantment with the elite theatre of illusion and separation as propagated by Aristotle in his Poetics... The agenda of Popular Theatre, therefore, is to provide an alternative medium and approach through which the marginalized rural and urban poor can address their own problems. Popular Theatre does this by making the theatrical medium a forum for democratic struggle.21

In sharp contrast, therefore, popular theatre in Uganda is neither democratic nor champions the cause of the marginalised and the poor although some of its consumers might, indeed, be poor. It is purely commercial in concept, and organised along business principles. The work of the two artists highlighted in this sub-section, therefore, is only representative of the commonest forms of popular theatre in Uganda today. The examples portray the extent of the popularity of the theatre form and its commonality among its regular patrons.

20 Andrew Benon Kibuka, "Expectations and Behaviour of Theatre Audiences in Uganda", A Paper delivered at a Focus Discussion Group/Workshop on Uganda's Theatre organised by the researcher in September 1998
5.3.1. Disan Mubiru and his Goat

Disan Mubiru, also commonly known as Kyamulabi, is another of Uganda's shining theatre stars, whose stardom comprised only himself and his goat. Originally, Mubiru owned a drama group, and their real first hit came in 1987, in a production “Omussaja Gyagenda (gyasanga banne) meaning, a man meets other men only when he moves. Then he was known as "Gyagenda".

When Ugandan artists moved to modernise and orchestrate local theatre with film techniques Mubiru and his one-time friend and business partner, Moses Luswata, turned to lurid performances of everyday life. They would come on stage with stocks of sugarcane or ripe bananas and eat on as they gossiped and performed the very typical village life. Their most popular production was "Batabani ba Kisikirize" (Sons of Darkness) performed in 1988 through to early 1990s. "It was a hit play, and earned the two of them lots of money. Moses died of a long illness. ... The play was a two-man play. Disan restaged it afterwards with Dick Mulima of Radio Uganda and later with Medi Sebuliba (Fundi Jjoogo)." But the theatre's proprietors could also not agree on sharing the proceeds, the typical way of theatre artists in Uganda, and they broke up. It is then that Mubiru turned to acting with his goat, and got terribly obsessed with performances that would largely be conceived as strange, irrelevant, and archaic. Mulekwa reveals that is the time Mubiru figured the idea of "Kyamulabi" or the one who sees many things, to mean he had suffered enough. In self-pity, he appealed to his audiences and it worked. The play "was such a big success! He did what is known as minting money!! But with the money came a flashy and expensive life style. Soon the money dwindled. He thought out another one-man play, "Siyenkomerero" (This is not my end). Less successful, but it sustained him as he was doing it alone."23

Mubiru's theatre business was a one-man theatre, somewhat modelled after the minstrel artists' performances in days foregone. Disan Mubiru used to perform for two or so hours on end with his goat, highlighting different scenes in a man's, and sometimes a woman's, life. The performances had no interludes, and were permeated by the life experiences of a common person, mostly a peasant, in Uganda. The experiences were not far removed from Mubiru's own ordinary existence. In reality, it was the very ordinary Ugandan who felt more the impact of a biting economy, since their own skills and

22 Charles Mulekwa, in answer to a Letter of Inquiry to him by the researcher in December 1999.
23 Ibid.,
market value were often limited to their immediate surroundings. Actions that could not be performed by Mubiru's goat, due to its limitations as an animal, were done by Disan Mubiru himself, through role-playing and short comical skits. By the time he got edged out of business, Mubiru's goat had got accustomed to the stage and the ecstatic response from audiences, and could perform some of its own theatre "tricks"; for example, shitting uncontrollably all over the stage and watch, with a kind of stupid amusement, its master clean up the mess. By this time, the goat's actions induced Mubiru's actions and reactions, as he would then improvise around these ordinary everyday situations and occurrences with humour and logic.

However, Mubiru's theatre was not just an up-dated invention on the formerly rural country minstrel performances or an exhausted political statement. In the "Disan Mubiru n'Ensolo ye" shows, literary translating as "Disan Mubiru and his Animal", was communicated more than the actions being exhibited on stage. The whole performance was a kind of parable, which, on serious considerations, might have come a little bit late in timing, having been launched on the Ugandan scene in early 1990s and survived only through to mid-1990s.

The theatre was also a kind of assertion by the smaller and not so fortunate groups to use conventional theatre forms and earn from them as well. In terms of market economics, Mubiru's theatre was a good cost-cutter, and eased greatly the practicalities of planning and management of the theatre activity, since it was only the proprietor and his goat accountable for their actions, expenditure and incomes. But that was exactly why the duo collapsed out of business. Despite the fact that costs of production were minimal and audiences were ever flocking after Disan Mubiru and his goat, Mubiru still could not balance his books profitably. Without control of accounts from outside himself, he was easily tempted to overspend on other ventures other than his theatre. Before he could realise it, audience attendance of his shows had severely faltered and was being held by new whims and stars in the theatre industry. Greater theatre giants than himself, who could at the same time enchant audiences towards the trendy directions they desired, inevitably trimmed the size of his market hence the demand for his shows. The interests of sections of his former audiences had also shifted to other forms of entertainment like the TV, Video, films, and FM Radios. Mubiru found himself broke, got heavily indebted, and could not recover without any savings. He escaped to his hometown of Masaka before he flew to the US.
Problems encountered by Mubiru in organising and managing their theatre business notwithstanding, Mubiru’s theatre could easily be the only type of serious political theatre to survive in Uganda till late. In the performances are seen different facts and messages, depending on what angle one sees issues from. First, during the days of dictatorship and artistic repression in Uganda, political intrigue was so intense, even among the ordinary citizens, that one could not easily trust another person in confidence, not even the members of one’s own family, as one could easily be a spy and give the other away to the authorities. People always sort of changed colours like chameleons hence none was to be that trusted. They worked in circles of partnerships and intrigues, in a bid to outdo the other to their own benefit. As for the politicians, who, since pre-independence days, often worked underground or in conspiracies to topple the regimes in power, Mubiru’s theatrical statement was a true reflection of the Ugandan political mind and personality. In his analysis of things, it was only safe for one to talk with one’s self. In situations where one needed company, safe and ever-present company was only found in such possessions as animals, whose language and behaviour could only be deciphered by their master. Seen in that light, Mubiru’s art would transcend the absurdity of Robert Serumaga’s, John Ruganda’s, Nuwa Sentongo’s drama way back in the 1970s or Fagil Mandy’s plays of mid 1980s.

The commercial truth in Mubiru’s theatre was analogous to that in Serumaga’s Majangwa, where the woman sells her bunch of matooke (bananas) to four different customers each day, in order to make that very needful extra shilling. During the 1980s and 1990s, the economics of the day themselves preceded by the times of Amin’s Economic War, necessitated a duplication of one’s efforts in a bid to stay alive. Many Ugandans became ‘masters and mistresses’ of all trades. As demonstrated in Mubiru’s role playing of the characters who formed his stories, the human body, mind, and energy ingeniously played a multiplicity of roles when need and situations so warranted. In the context of a modern, competitive Uganda, therefore, Mubiru’s theatre was not only a comment on social reality but unknowingly projected future trends in the job market. Today, the most marketable hence financially well "surviving" people are those with wide training or a variety of skills, and not those specialised in one field. A graduate of Economics would increase his/her prospects on the job market by doing other courses like leisure management, politics and diplomacy, industrial marketing, etc.
5.3.2. The Dramatic Music of Pius Bakeebwa

Pius Bakeebwa is a popular singer and composer whose vocal and acoustic abilities and a gift for vivid language and humour greatly compensate for his physical blindness. Despite the fact that he is totally blind, and so cannot see anything with his eyes, his descriptions are very real and vivid that one, at first, doubts whether he real composes the songs himself. But his benefactors attest to the fact that he actually does compose on his own, with the help of a modern Key Board that he plays so well. His power for apt descriptions and accuracy stems from intuition and what he deduces from other people's conversations.

Bakeebwa started singing when he was a child. In 1988, he found his way into the Katatumbo Resort Hotel in Mbarara, South-West Uganda, where he performed and recorded his first major work, "Kapere ka Bugongi" (Kapere, from Bugongi) in 1990. "Kapere" became an instant master hit and, within a matter of weeks, Pius Bakeebwa was in the limelight, challenging the long-standing fame of seasoned musicians in the whole region, like Stanley Kamparo and John Kabagambe. As opposed to the other country musicians in the Central region, or his own colleagues in the Western region, Bakeebwa structures his incidents on narration. He takes on the role of the omniscient narrator, endowed with firsthand experience and personal testimony. Bakeebwa's style instantly and effortless draws his audiences into his stories, and they believe whatever he has to tell them.

"Kapere ka Bugongi" narrates the adventures and eventual fate of a seasoned thief and robber, Kapere, whose birthplace was in Bugongi, Sheema Sub-County, Bushenyi district. The most unique and appealing fact to the narration and experiences in this song, and which may account for its high-selling rates, is the fact that the story is a real life experience. Kapeere was born and raised in Bugongi by loving parents, before he decided to turn into a thief and robber.

The notoriety of Kapere, which he (Kapere) mistook for fame, went beyond Bugongi to far off villages, then towns, and, later, spilled into countries like Rwanda and former Zaire (DRC). Kapere stole anything from the most trivial things like pencils and cigarettes to the most valuable like radios, wristwatches, and cattle. What was more? No amount of beating, no nature of prison and its dampening effects could reduce or break Kapere's resolve to steal. The more he was caught and punished for stealing, the more did his lust to steal grow, until he graduated into a feared robber. But,
one day, Kapere ran out of luck, and died a very shameful and painful death. That was when he was caught stealing a radio and matchboxes in Rukungiri town. Everybody, including Kapere’s own parents, was fed up of him that nobody pleaded for his life when the Police finally caught up with him. All wanted Kapere gone. A grave was dug up there and then and Kapere pushed into it, now pleading for forgiveness. But no one was willing to listen or give him another chance at life. In defiance, Kapere started bragging and boasting about his imminent end thus: "Other people, commoners without status, are buried by mere men in cassocks; but here I am! Being buried by the police and guns!"24 Meanwhile, more and more soil was being thrown into the pit, and the grave was first filling up. Soon, he would be finally suffocated to death. Kapere relented, and started pleading for mercy and forgiveness. Fearing some faint-hearted among them may plead for Kapere, the police hastened the burial process. Kapere was no more. To-date, one hears a parent admonishing his or her children to behave themselves else they may end up like Kapere ka Bugongi.

Bakeebwa followed "Kapere ka Bugongi" in 1991 with another collection of records, "Amaaruwa" (‘Tonto’ or Local Brew/Beer), but this time with a different popular appeal. Where his work on Kapere was largely developmental, his next was a mixture with more numbers tending towards the ubiquitousness of Uganda’s popular theatre. The work is also a mixture of fiction and episodes of true-life experiences, much of its completeness coming through his personal beliefs, ‘observations’, and experiences. Another significant landmark for Bakeebwa in this recording is that all the numbers except one are premised on a long loud mourning, to signify his mourning state and that of his protagonists for their loss of humanity and other values.25 The exceptional number to this pattern is "Gorreti", which details his experiences when he first fell in love. Hence the general beat rides the fluttering, joyful, and flapping emotions of love.

The release of "Amaaruwa" was followed in 1992 with yet another collection, "Edisa, Mpa Ekinanansi Kyange" (Edisa, Give Me My Pineapple). Unfortunately, the collection tends to be too commonplace and largely obscene. Apparently, Bakeebwa, now composing full-time in a bar environment and pushed by the urge to sell more and more, finally succumbed to and faithfully invoked the bodily passions and cravings of his most immediate fans. The tape is almost a direct antithesis of his earlier

24 These are some of the lines in the song. The song is in Runyankore-Rukiga.
25 Ironically, Bakeebwa was ‘caught defiling a 12-year old in Ibanda, South-West Uganda, in July 2000
work. In the next few paragraphs below, only a selection from among Bakeebwa's music is made; basically, to demonstrate his subjects of concern methods of composition, and general structuring of his work.

One of Bakeebwa's most popular numbers is entitled, "Amaarwa", and was intended as the lead song for his collection under the same name. Beginning with a mourning, painful, deep heartrendering cry lasting nearly a minute, the number goes on to highlight the psychology and behaviour of drink addicts and drunkards, starting with the most outward: "They are always quarrelsome, even among themselves". Bakeebwa tells of how once, on his way to visit a friend, he bypassed a small village drinking joint, which the locals proudly call a 'bar', and, with amusement, overheard the drinkers' discussion. The significance of the setting in the bar to the moral in the song is that the drinkers believed they had reached the apex of their lives. That is, they were at bar or at par with each other, with their families at home, and with the larger society. To consolidate that position, therefore, the drinkers proposed and passed 10 commandments that would also act as their philosophy of life thenceforth. The first commandment is to always beat up their wives, as a way of disciplining them. The second, to sell part of their land in order to sustain their drinking and patronage at the bar. Third, to be promiscuous. Fourth, to practice infidelity. Fifth, to be envious of the rich. Sixth, to seduce other men's wives. Seventh, to steal from those who have. Eighth, to kill or murder the people who trouble them or those they don't like. By the time they come to the ninth commandment, they are already repeating themselves either consciously to emphasise their positions and avow to their stand or, in their drunken stupor, they no longer can follow and know which commandments they have already passed. Pius ends his narration by cautioning all his listeners against drinking and the company of drunkards.

Bakeebwa also composes about marriage and marital relations, where his male chauvinism is exhibited as no different from his contemporaries, and is, in some cases, even worse. His male characters, even when he originally positions them in the wrong, always end up being portrayed as the poor, innocent, and unsuspecting victims of female torture, witchery, and destructiveness. None of his female characters, except his "darling Goretti", have any admirable quality in them. They are all rouges and hard-hearted. Those who are not harlots, like Kyakwera, are still loosely minded but
sexually mean. The married women in homes want to behave like men thus driving the men into the arms of harlots. His numbers, "Omukazi Malaya" (The Harlot) and "Kyakwera" (The Brown Lady) highlight Bakeebwa's views about women.

In "Omukazi Malaya" Jovia, the bad woman, is a towns-lady, whom he later proves to be a harlot. They first met in town on his very first visit. She was very smartly dressed to ignore. The second time they met, she invited him to her house. The third time they met, she forced him into bed. After that, they stayed together, in his blind ignorance of her full plan. Then, she convinced him "to sell all his six shirts, his six pairs of trousers, and his six pairs of shoes so they could start a bar." Jovia made so much profit and, without Pius' knowledge, always sent it home to her brothers. When Pius started to ask too many questions, she bewitched him, and he became her most adored servant and errand boy. He would wake up very early in the morning to fetch water, then collect firewood, prepare water for her bath, prepare her meals, and finally announce to her, "Madam, the food is ready!" At the end of it all, she throws him out of her house, with no penny or means to look after himself. That's when he remembered his ever-loving wife he had abandoned at home! The situation is duplicated in his other record, "Dinah", a girl he met at a local health spur in Kitagata, Sheema.

In "Kyakwera", Pius tells of how, one very cold morning, he found Kyakwera crying, ceaselessly, by the wayside. Reason? Her husband had abandoned her, together with a host of children, for another woman in town. She had heard he now "sleeps behind curtains, feeding on fried food and performing her bodily desires." Immediately, Pius condemns Kyakwera for her "short sightedness and manliness" which drove the husband from his own family. He alleges Kyakwera always barks at her husband "like a cheetah whenever he comes home drunk." She just lets him sleep with unwashed feet, when she could easily clean him up. She leaves her husband to sleep on an empty stomach, and sometimes never bothers to help when he misdirects the food away from his mouth and "scatters it all over himself like a dog. Why do you cook the food in the first place?" Pius asks. In very chauvinistic communities like in Western Uganda, Bakeebwa's stuff sells very hotly. Such pathetic scenes and situations are common and the respective cultural ideology accepted as the social ideal.

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27 Note that a brown skin in Uganda is linked to beauty hence coveted. Brown people are always described as “bazung” (white people). It is such inferiority complex that leads many African ladies to bleach their skins so they can “become beautiful”.

28 The words are from the song. Besides its humorous effect, particularly in the local language it is sung, the recurrent number "six" here is used to highlight the big amount of things Jovia stole from him.
A very important issue to note is that the popular music groups owning production bases in Kampala City and the surroundings are all more or less organised as commercial companies and bands, which fact has greatly contributed to their commercial success and professional advancement. On the other hand, those ‘bands’ and groups in up-country towns and areas have not so successfully managed to rise beyond the founding personalities to identify themselves as independent business entities.

Differences have also been noted in the formal structure, like in the use of language and imagery, where the popular music theatre in Central Uganda tends to address a wider range and mixture of topics of national concern, like systems of governance, women’s emancipation, taxation policies, etc. The structural broadness, focus, and selection is mostly likely due to the region’s near proximity to the City, with all its different social provisions, which is also the seat of national power and operations. On the other hand, the focus of subjects in popular music theatre in up-country regions is more often limited to the day-to-day living situations and social relations within their immediate environment. Despite decentralisation policies, many local people are psychologically still look up to the central government looking up to the central government as the provider of social development. Creative artists in such areas are likewise limited in their vision for society.

5. 4. Introduction of Theatre Brands and Packages

During the last three closing decades of the 20th Century, the uncertainties of the state of theatre in Uganda, as literature, a social art, and a profession have increased proportionately, consequently pushing theatre professionals and/or practitioners into literary and financial crossroads. Many of the structural and business dilemmas are a result of a combination of social, economic, literary, and political realities originating from within and, sometimes, from without the country, which have left no easy way out for the dramatist and the other theatre professionals. Chiefly motivated by the desire to survive, the practitioner has either opted to give the audience what it wants and not necessarily what it may & and/or innovate around the circumstances through substitutions and mixtures of theatrical forms, in order to stay afloat, financially. The threat at hand now is the apparent illogical fragmentation of an already very fluid theatre market, mostly due to the mass invasion of the entertainment industry by the amusement arts in film and video forms, and the growth of the ‘music-hall’ and dance gala enterprise, all coming at the hem of market liberalisation.
This new but steady development has forced theatre proprietors to innovate ways of survival. Consequently, some have imported the formal techniques used in the amusement arts into theatre. Others have sought to integrate commonplace jokes and gimmicks into the plays, creating what Patricia, discussing the character of Emma in Flaubert's novel, Madame Bovary, termed "the inflation of words and their inability to be enacted."29 The "inflation of words" in Uganda's theatre, though, especially the puns, benefits the industry, in particular the Popular Theatre. They constitute the real exchange value between the playwrights and the audiences. Extensive joking and witticism being substituted with 'literary foolery' are also part and parcel of the socio-cultural backgrounds of the people. But the inflation of words creates a kind of floating value, in monetary, emotional, and aesthetic terms. The floatation also visibly manifests itself in the mass production of 'same' or similar plays going to the market at the same time and creating tight competition for audiences within the industry.

The most interesting fact to note, however, is how fast theatre has been in adopting branding and 'packaging' or techniques of presentation of products as they perhaps exist in bigger commodity and service markets. The most common and significant brands of theatre in Uganda revolve around utilisation of common puns and gimmicks, the recent creation of stars and stardoms, and the commoditisation and commercial exploitation of the female body. The "star" craze and syndrome has already been discussed. The use of common pans and gimmicks closely goes hand in hand with improvisation, the main method of dramatic composition in Uganda. It is the commoditisation of the female body that, in its current usage and import, resounds with unique newness and strength.

In his defence of the Black race, value, and dignity, J. Scott Kennedy highlighted the rather unsettling, recurrent images of Black Africa in Western world societies, which, coincidentally, parallel society's general regard, perception, and usage of women. He says:

AFRICA IS A WOMAN She is both the prediction and the promise. She is always the beginning. But never the end. She is a surrealist. Both the image and the object. She is both art and use. She is truly MOTHER AFRICA. Mother of us all. Yet, to some people, she appears as a phantom in the night. As a spirit haunting their existence. As conscience for ever standing over you. But to others, she is their whore. Their pot to piss in. Their scum. Their woman to be raped, ruined, rationalized, exploited. Their exotic delight! And still to others, she is their saint. Their savior. Their survival. Their ritual of life. Their liberty. Their liberation! But to all, she is forever an ENIGMA.30

29 Patricia Reynaud, "Economics and Counter-productivity in Flaubert's Madame Bovary" in Anthony Purdy ed., Literature and Money, Ibid., 139
30 J. Scott Kennedy, In Search of African Theatre, Ibid., p. 22
Indeed, the worldview and image of woman is as contradictory as it is varied. At one time, woman is the most glorious, sweetest, adorable, and respectable creation in the world. She is the indisputable conscience of society, the promise of a new life and, in most cases, the nucleus and giver of that life. Simone de Beauvoir states that, "as a matter of fact, the embryo carries on the germ plasm of the father as well as that of the mother and transmits them together to its descendants under now male, now female form. It is, so to speak, an androgynous germ plasm, which outlives the male or female individuals that are its incarnations, whenever they produce offspring."31

In much of traditional, and even modern, Uganda, a boy gains his social status as a man, or consolidates it if he already gained it through puberty rites, only at marriage. Otherwise, even if he lived to be 100 years old, or rose to the highest office in the land, but without a wife a man remains, ironically, not his father's son, but his mother's child; because fathers, as men, are believed to reproduce themselves! Culturally, men are also expected to rule but not to manage homes. Society claims the respective roles are god-assigned. Like Julie Hankey observes of the Woman Ideal in Victorian England,

this prejudice received extra stimulus from the almost sacred significance attached to the Home, and to women, or rather Woman, as its guardian. It wasn't just that the actress became a public person, but that in doing so she abandoned her private office - a very special function, namely to act as antidote to the bad world necessarily occupied by men. In abandoning her privacy, she unsexed herself, and deprived man of his best chance of spiritual recuperation.32

Surprisingly, the Ugandan or African woman could actually participate in public entertainment, where the "women were just as creative and outspoken as men, whether it was exclusively female forms such as initiation rituals and maize pounding songs, in mixed entertainment and rituals such as spirit possession dances and oral narratives, or as a chorus for the male dancers, as in Makishi masquerades."33

Most times, however, woman's femininity proves an eternal scare to men's masculinity, especially where gainful employment or political power are concerned. As such, woman is both feared and subjected, respected and abused, loved and disowned, protected and used all at the time. She remains the most pitiful, despicable, and plighted creature ever to have been created that she barely knows what to expect next from her mortal designers.

In Uganda's theatre industry and business, woman is likewise contradictorily conceived and treated; be it within educational, commercial, or development theatre. Many dramatists, theatre producers, the proprietors, and the practitioners in general see the woman, first and foremost, from the traditional or cultural angle, and portray and use her just like that. Others add a 'modern', sophisticated, and economic or commercial dimension to her where her body serves not just as a medium of social and cultural ideological but also as an important equation in the theatre's commercial transactions. Some still look at woman as both the necessary missing link from today’s modern settings of self propagation and political power. Without her ironic positioning at the axis of society, i.e. the home or family, society is ever plagued by civil disobedience, corruption, and other injustices that are often committed to the human race, in the name of humanity. The following discussion on the images and uses of woman, therefore, tries to look at these issues in general as they present themselves within the theatre in Uganda.

5.4.1. Invocation of Traditional Femininity

The 'traditional' image of woman in Uganda's literature and society evokes both reverence and admiration, abhorrence and condemnation as well as vulnerability and docility. Sometimes, the female is the fore-bearing, tender, life-giving spirit at the centre of the Universe hence the very source of life. Woman is an enigma, almost a goddess - a Mother Earth-like figure who society can certainly not do without. She is the stabilising force in the human equation where the human being comes to relate meaningfully with the metaphysical world and the whole of the supernatural realm. Outside the Biblical creation myth, woman's link with the supernatural and metaphysics is, traditionally, manifest through her prominent role in traditional medicine and practice, and, scientifically, explained through her special role in procreation.

This is the same figure whom Serumaga adores for her strength and courage in his mythological account of the mother of twins in Majangwa. Nagaddya is the fountain of both good and evil, human perfection and crookedness, as reflected in the nature of the products of her womb: the twin rivers, Mayanja Wasswa and Mayanja Kato. While Mayanja Kato, the supposedly younger river who, ironically, comes out of the womb first, grows into a perfect river, his twin brother, Mayanja Wasswa, has a chaotic life. In the mystic symbols of the rivers and the woman's birth experiences lie Serumaga's own analysis and criticism of Uganda's political situation of her early Independence days. Mayanja Kato
represents his own Kabaka of Buganda, Sir Edward Mutesa II, holding both the Presidency and the Constitutional Monarchy of the country from 1962 to 1964. On the other hand, Mayanja Wasswa represents Apolo Milton Obote, Mutesa’s Prime Minster, later to wrongly institute Uganda’s second government and parliament, just as was his own mythological birth. According to Serumaga or any staunch Muganda and monarchist, Obote, a non-muganda, though indeed Uganda’s Mayanja Wasswa as the legal head of Government business, was not fit to rule over Buganda or Uganda, because, culturally, no-one can rise above the king. Hence, when the twin rivers flowed from their mother’s womb, where they had made a marriage of political convenience, and started growing divergently, “crossing counties and growing along the valleys, below the raised ground”, Uganda’s political and social life became crippled. In the final analysis, therefore, the self-sacrificing deed of Mother Uganda, typified in Nagaddya’s struggles over days, was in vain. Like the Biblical Esau who traded his birthright to his brother, Jacob, for a plate of food, Mayanja Wasswa eventually suffers for his unethical political manoeuvres.

Rose Mbowa’s towering woman figure, Mother Uganda, in her play, “Mother Uganda and Her Children” is woven in like physical and spiritual material. Mother Uganda, conforming to her metaphorical name and role as well as to her traditional reality of a Ugandan and/or African woman, gives birth to tens of children who, like the children of Serumaga’s Nagaddya, are both good and evil. However, unlike in much of Uganda’s, and Africa’s, traditional (oral) literature, evil now inhabits a male character, the youthful Tabusana. Tabusana also happens to be Mother Uganda’s last-born child hence, supposedly, her most favourite. Furthermore, the virtues of forbearance, tenderness, and self-determination in Mbowa’s Mother Uganda come to be tested and proved over time, unlike Serumaga’s Nagaddya who seems to lose patience and leave her children to quarrel between themselves eternally. Faced with the same situation among her children of personal jealousies, selfishness, and intrigue, 


35 During the Independence elections conducted on the Independence Constitution in April 1962, Obote’s Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) and Mutesa’s Kabaka Yekka (KY), with the advice and help of Britain, formed a political alliance for the sole purpose of routing Benedicto Kiwanuka’s Democratic Party (DP) out of office when Independence came. Kiwanuka, a Roman Catholic, was already Chief Minister of the Government Britain would have handed over power to were Kiwanuka not from “the wrong religion.” The DP had won the General Elections of 1961 that constituted the Consultative Assembly/Council. The researcher discusses this very subject as it presents itself in Byron Kawadwa’s The Song of Wankoko in her article, “Democracy and the Proletariat’s Dream in Byron Kawadwa’s The Song of Wankoko” in Charles Bodunde ed., Litératures en langues africaines, Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies Series 56, 2000 (fall)

36 Robert Serumaga, Muganda, ibid., p. 8. The raised ground symbolises the highest Government Office in the land or Seat of Power.
Mother Uganda, nevertheless, devotes herself their physical and moral rehabilitation and well-being. She loves and cares for all her children equally, including Tabusana, the Real Trouble Cause, despite the fact that they often abuse her and plunder their motherland for their own selfish gain. Taken literally, Tabusana’s instigation of his brothers and sisters to undress and rob their mother, leaving her collapsed in shock, tantamounts to her physical, moral, and psychological rape, all evils that confronted many Ugandan’s during the years of political turmoil and repression.

Most times, however, the woman image in Uganda’s literature, cultures, and traditions is that of the daredevil, highly destructive, acidic, and accursed figure who sows evil wherever she goes and her trail can never be something else. In short, she is the exact opposite hence antithesis of the Mother-like figure. This is the woman often metaphorised in legendary material and Uganda’s formulative forms of proverbs, riddles, sayings, and tongue twisters. It is the same woman in Erisa Kironde’s and Margaret Macpherson’s Kintu, who corrupts Kintu, the mythological father of the Baganda. Nambi, the heavenly princess who eventually marries Kintu, is not just the tempter of man’s passions hence the original corrupter of his soul, as she does Kintu’s life. She is also the source and wilful harbinger of disease, death, and evil in the whole world.37

The evil woman, the passionate creature and destroyer of the humanity, is of a like nature as Nyabwangu, the states-person of Mary Karooro Okurut’s The Curse of the Sacred Cow who, through meddling in politics and public policy, a field that was not naturally hers, causes an irreparable imbalance in the social order leading to social havoc. The play’s general statement, though, is a criticism of society’s short-sightedness, maginalisation of and injustice to such women as Nyabwangu who are naturally endowed with leadership potential and qualities, but are often denied public platform. Naturally, therefore, they are bound to make mistakes, and, sometimes, terrible ones, once opportunity avails itself or there occurs a leadership vacuum in the male domain.

Basking in her newfound freedom, on the one hand, and driven by her own egoism, ambition, and the desire for self-projection, on the other, Nyabwangu subscribes to her mythological trademark as “the breaker of the old woman’s thorn” or the desecrator of age-old traditions and custom. Consequently,

she puts the whole of humanity at peril, and all are annihilated by the power of the curse, represented in the raging waters which envelope them. Because Nyabwangu's evil was so great, the whole cosmos became so disordered that even those like her husband, Mutomo, and his blood-pact friend, Mwamba, who could have well survived the catastrophe, because they were away from home when it occurred, are just drawn into her curse and they opt for voluntary suicide!

Quoting Mary Poovey, Susan Brown noted that, "the rhetorical separation of spheres and images of domesticated, feminized morality were crucial to the consolidation of bourgeois power partly because linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self-interest and competition integral to economic success preserved virtue without inhibiting productivity."38 Vicky's professional fate in The Ebonies' TV series, That's Life Mwaffu, where she was remoulded from the powerful position of a Manageress to a middle-class housewife, who jealously monitors her husband's movements and match-makes, or match-breaks, other couples, is another example of such spirited global marginalisation of women from public office and independence.

The same evil and potentially dangerous woman is prevalent in popular drama and theatre to the extent that, sometimes, the audience's expectations of both women and men alike would be severely disappointed if the wife or woman character did not conjure up various images of evil or practice a number of its forms within a given production.

5.4.2. Women Stereotypes

Needless to say, social and cultural prejudices openly attend women in public, particularly among African societies. David Kerr notes of the situation in Zambia and Malawi thus:

38 Mary Poovey, Uneven Development: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988, p. 10
39 David Kerr, Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa, Ibid., p. 206
characters, old lonely women, widows, divorcees, and spinsters all offer soft targets for such stereotyping.

Stereotyping with regard to women in popular theatre extends to women with higher education qualifications, those in politics or business, nurses, secretaries, and other women in formal employment. The general thesis is that economic independence and too much freedom for women corrupt their souls and turn them into domestic rebels, particularly for the first three mentioned categories, while nurses and secretaries are depicted as ever mean and rude; the former, as a consequence of their tiresome profession, and the latter, because they are over-protective of their bosses whom they allegedly sleep around with.

Besides the many popular plays on the subject, 'Lord' Sebatta’s music theatre vividly dramatises the issue. His record, “Amaka g’Abasomyeko” (The Marriages of Educated Women) is a point in case. In the song, Sebatta narrates how one day he went to visit his friend, Fred. He arrived when neither Fred nor his wife were at home. His first shock was the behaviour of children, who almost hit him with the ball as they played all over the place. His complaints about them fetched him confounding abuses. When Fred finally came, he had to hurry and feed the dog. Otherwise, he would be in trouble if the wife returned and found he had not done so. In Sebatta’s view, Fred was no longer a man, and economically independent wives or those who are highly educated are poor managers of marriages and homes. They tended to care more for their jobs and status than for their families and relatives. He, therefore, recommends that, "every home needs a man to take decisions and give commands. The authority a woman has should be measured or checked constantly since she is, after all, a housewife."

Although the song highlights some real problems in the homes and marriages of educated and non-educated persons alike, Sebatta sees and resolves issues in the age-old tradition of male chauvinism and patriarchal authority.

Rarely, too, are the women ‘of power’ at home, in offices, or in Commerce portrayed as human beings with good reason or emotional stability, particularly towards their fellow women. If they do not quarrel and tear each other down openly they, nevertheless, undermine each other through gossip and mudslinging. Housewives demonstrate their power and position over their domestic helps (or servants) while the latter, in turn, seek to undercut their public status and image by rivalling their husbands or discrediting them among neighbours. A similar situation existed within the Commedia
dell’Arte theatre movement in Europe during the late 16th Century. Of the theatre form, Oscar Brockett writes: "The stock characters, commedia’s best known feature, can be divided into three categories: lovers, masters, and servants. ... The lovers were often the children of those characters who fell into the category of masters, and their love affairs were typically opposed by their fathers and aided by their servants."40 Three masters recurred most often with their own love affairs and rivalries while the servants "figured prominently in the action; their machinations kept plots moving as they sought to help or thwart their masters. Most of the servants were male, but there might be one or more maids (fantesca) who served the young women. Typically young, coarsely witty, and ready for intrigue, they carried on their own love affairs with the male servants while helping their mistresses. Occasionally, one was older and served as hostess of an inn, wife to a servant, or the object of the older men’s affections."41

Most women in management roles in Uganda are portrayed with stereo-typed biases of the "Queen Bee Syndrome" and malice-laden phrases like "Pull her Down," a slang substitute for the academic qualification Ph.D. In The Ebonies' Soap Opera, That's life Mwattu, one acknowledges Vicky's malicious stare, which part she plays so well, formerly as an Executive Manager and now as 'ordinary' middle-class woman, that it has become so much of her trademark in theatre and in real life. Many people have come to believe she must be as schemy and dangerous in real life. 'Vicky' herself admits that, at the commencement of the series, she often almost got physically assaulted by her fans as she walked on the streets or did her shopping because of the evil she was playing on television. Consequently, she had to adjust her daily routine, leaving her workplace at certain hours in the evening when she was not likely to be easily recognised. She was also forced to buy a personal car earlier than she had anticipated in order to escape from her fans, even those who genuinely appreciated her role and would want to thank her personally. So did her fellow star actress, Harriet Nalubwama, the "Nakawunde" of the series. Business-wise, the two stereotypes and their male counterparts are very popular among audiences hence winning the Group the many commercial promoters that have, unfortunately, driven the series into a literary and aesthetic dilemma.

40 Oxar Brockett, The Essential Theatre, Ibid., p. 157. About the whole Popular Theatre business especially in Italy during the 16th Century, read Brockett’s chapter on “Popular Theatre Experiences: Commedia dell’Arte and Melodrama”, pp 154-180
41 Ibid., p. 158
Luckily, not many plays, if any, have come out in Uganda discussing the personalities of women currently holding political positions of power, which is the usual menu in tabloids like The Uganda Confidential and some other sensational sections of the mainstream media. This despite the fact that there are quite a number of women in Uganda's political organs, including the Vice-President, and that the media is ever hunting for personal faults to use as criticism on their public performance. What is abundant is drama depicting women possessing economic power and independence. In what is largely a surprise, but a credit to the women's personal efforts and business acumen, their source of wealth is mostly given as wholesale trade in hardware, foodstuff, second-hand clothing, hair salons, "Bikubu" (street alley) restaurants, and "Toninyyira" (Don't Step in my Plate) evening food markets, and not prostitution, usually thought to be the quickest and only way for women to get money and riches of their own. Unfortunately, however, these women are generally feared and described as "nakyeyornbekedde", or the unmanageable (that is, as wives), who are as sharp-tongued as they are sharp-eyed. They are always given divorcee, widow, or single-motherhood status.

Two categories are identifiable among this group of women, and are usually distinguished on stage through their manner of talk, walk, dress, and eating habits. The hardware and commodity shop manageresses are usually women of bodily mass with succulent or well-oiled skins, dressed smartly in the Ganda traditional dress, locally referred to as "Boarding" or "Busuti", and walking or talking leisurely; all intended to reflect their economic standing, financial stability, and personal independence. They are in no hurry for anything because they have everything in life. The women are also made to eat matooke \(^{42}\) with chicken or beef and drink soda endlessly, as they brag about their economic success. At home, they "sit over" (hen-peck) their husbands, usually portrayed as young men they had formerly employed as chauffeurs or shop assistants. Interestingly, instead of calling their wives by name or any other title that would match their partnership in marriage, the husbands always address their wives as "mummy."

The women's 'mummyhood' status here is not just serving to remind them, nonetheless, of their expected role and behaviour in society as women and wives. The reference is derived from the popular term 'Sugar Mummy,' often used locally to describe older, single, or widowed women of material means and class.

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42 Matooke refers to plantain-the local staple food and delicacy in much of central, south, west, and some parts of east Uganda. The foodstuff is usually expensive within urban centres hence people who afford to eat matooke on a regular basis are respected as people of financial means and class.
means who, sometimes, seduce and 'marry' younger men, allegedly to satisfy their sexual urges to the maximum! The opposite is true of young ladies seeking after finances and material wealth who get seduced by 'Sugar Daddies', older men of material and financial means in or out of wedlock who are looking for extra sexual pleasure and entertainment. In theatre, when the hen-pecked and victim husband refers to his wife as mummy, the term is intended, first, as a reminder to the audiences of the advanced age of his mistress compared to his own. Extended further to the ugliest associated meaning of the word 'mummy' as, sometimes, referring to a dead body lying in state, the 'sugar mummies' are, literally, in their 'dead' state of womanhood. They are assumed to have attained their menopause, hence earning their other local, dehumanising description as "off-layers" i.e. hens that are passed the egg-laying phase! Besides, designating their wives as mummies venerates the men from public ridicule, as it defines their terms of marriage very clearly. Like their women counterparts going after the 'sugar daddies', the men are just using the women's provisions to accumulate their own financial and material wealth. When the time comes, they would simply 'liberate' themselves into the arms of new 'sugar mummies' or go for young, beautiful girls, preferably fresh from the University, since they now have the means to demand and command a wife.

The hypotheses advanced by such plays, however, remain the same: good finances or money stabilises men, but it drives women mad, because the women never seem to know how to handle riches and status. Consequently, their arrogance and uncontrollable state often leads to break-up of marriages, as the men "go look for other women who are ready to respect them." Furthermore, and in spite of their riches and personal independence, the women are still being defined in cultural and utility terms as disposable objects. Once their utility value is gone, declines, or no longer bears significantly on their men's current status, the women can be dealt away with! Indigenous literary forms abound where women are described as "grass bands used to cushion one's scalp from the surface of heavy loads sitting on it. Once the grass band grows old, you throw it away and acquire a new one."

The other category of women, low in public status but financially powerful in their own way, are portrayed as careless in walk, talk, and dress. Often, they are also made to shout gossip across to each as they eat. Ruthlessness and swearing, sometimes of an indecent nature, are made a daily feature among them. At home, they are ever nagging and quarrelling at the top of their voices,
banging furniture and hitting the children; in short, giving their husbands no moments of peace hence driving them into infidelity. In most cases, these are the same women who are given the step- and half-mother monster roles, once in their domestic setting. The two most popular productions by the Mulago Theatre Kings in Kampala, "Omukazi muka Sebo" (The Woman of my Father), the nominative title for "My Step-Mother", playing annually since 1988, and "Zinsanze" (Misery is My Life, 1992) ride similar sentiments. Nsinde, the child heroine in "Omukazi muka Sebo" is 'orphaned' at a very tender age, her biological mother having died in childbirth. The step-mother, who incidentally the father loves so much despite her cruel and inhuman treatment of his daughter, becomes a real physical and emotional monster to the child as she is the greatest witch to her husband. Audiences keep flocking to theatre to see the trials and tribulations of the characters in this triangular and complex relationship. But the real moment of the play is when Nsinde breaks out into her song of dejection, "Oooo!... Nsinde nayita ani?" (Woe to me, Nsinde! Whose shoulder shall I cry on? Who shall come to my rescue?) Beside the real sobbing and cursing from the audience that accompany Nsinde’s singing, there is visible appreciation of her, equal to a standing ovation, at the end of her performance. The child heroine is one of the very few child theatre stars in Uganda. The original Nsinde outgrew her role. Unfortunately, nobody seems to know exactly "where Nsinde went or what she is currently doing. But she is certainly not in theatre practice." Sulaiman Kiggundu, the Director of Mulago Theatre Kings could not be traced in time, and none of the group members knew about Nsinde.

Torture and mistreatment by step or half mothers are some of the selling realities that people often live with in their homes and villages. Hence to many people, such performances are psychological and emotional therapies as well.

5.4.3. Women as Commodities and Symbols of Exchange

Looking at and using women as commodities of trade and as symbols of exchange, monetary or otherwise, is not a new phenomenon. At societal level, much of African, even Western world, culture appreciates the female, human and animals alike, in terms of multiplicity and commerce hence material gain. Where some African communities trade their daughters for bride-wealth at marriage, men of marriageable age in Western world societies look forward to acquiring wives mostly as a source of their first real material wealth. Literally, the wife is supposed to come along with a fully furnished

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43 Interview with Charles Kaggwa of The Shavians Theatre Group, Kampala, August 2000. The Shavians also have a play starring Nsinde.
house; from complete kitchen sets to an average number of bed linen and spreads, a trend that is steadily becoming common practice among African elite.

Formerly, in much of Africa and right from Biblical times, women were also used as objects of peaceful 'negotiations' and pacification between societies, in cases of intense social conflict and war. Many times, too, women formed the most important and treasured components of the booties of war. In modern societies, women form an integral part of the economic structure of nations, where they do not merely constitute the countries' population workforce but, more often as well, officially provide their governments with a regular source of revenue through trading their bodies for sex. Interestingly, this is the very surplus of "redundant women" who W. R. Gregory had proposed, in his essay, "Why are Women Redundant?" of 1862 to ship to the colonies in order to safeguard Britain's economic order! Now, Patricia Reynaud notes that,

In the same way that need represents a reduction of desire in a utilitarian society, sexual pleasure (or, jouissance), a corollary of desire, functions in the psychic economy as an imperative, defiant of the notion of right which, at worst, imposes a principle of utility and, at best, channels proper pleasure.

Following wide promotions of the sex culture and shows through mainstream and electronic media all over the globe, a number of theatre producers in Uganda have jumped on the hot selling commodity, the woman's body, to further their business and 'artistic' ends. What was being projected in much of African literature as a clash between traditional and western culture in the 1950s and 1960s is no longer condemned but acclaimed as the ideal path to self-reclamation of the woman body and the beginning of her freedom in the modern worlds of Art and Commerce. Traditional daredevil female characters have been rounded into prostitutes, who through dress, manner, and talk, openly pause as sex hawks. In the allegedly most corrupt of public institutions, like the Police, money and sex go hand in hand.

44 See Elizabeth Nyabongo, Elizabeth of Toro: The Odyssey of an African Princess, ibid., p. 111, with respect to her own great aunt, Akiki Mkakijabara Bagaya Rwighira, who was given away "in marriage by her father, King Nyaika of Toro, to Kabalega, King of Bunyoro, to secure peace between the two Kingdoms." Earlier, Princess Elizabeth Bagaya (Nyabongo) documents how Kiboga, the mother of the reigning King Ntare of Ankole in 1875, was a Toro princess, who "had been given in marriage to the Ankole King as the price to buy peace between Ankole and Toro." (pp 29-30) In Etsa Kironde's Kintu, ibid., we get insight into particularly the literary implications of the transactions that took place between Kintu and Gulu, on the one hand, and Kintu and Walumbe, on the other, in which cases Nambi remains the medium and commodity of exchange. A complete appraisal of this "haggling" process and the eventual transactions appears in Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, Uganda's Literary Theatre, ibid.,


46 See, for example, Alex Muku's play, "Mambo Bado", ibid.
During the 1970s through to mid 1980s, prostitution as a kind of 'profession' in Uganda, particularly in urban settings, was largely seen as a moral weevil that had to be fought and got rid of from the heart of society, at all costs. Ruganda’s Black Mamba attributed the exploitative sex trade going on between the white Professor Coax and his numerous indigenous mistresses, and facilitated by his house boy, Belewa, to the Professor's own sex extravagance and greed. Serumaga's Majangwa linked the escalation of the problem to electronic media, particularly the cinema, which he argued, even at that time, was drawing scores of people out of theatre. Fagil Mandy's criticism in "Bush Trap" pointed to the erosion of family morals hence the break-up of the family structures among upper-class Ugandans, as a result of their indefatigable craze for material wealth and money.

It is Serumaga’s predictions in Majangwa, about the erosion of aesthetic literary standards in theatre and the decline of the general artistic morality among the dramatists, however, which bear relevantly to Uganda’s theatre today. For example, the continent-famous erotic dancer, Shara Muana, shows where "she does her thing" or the performances by visiting popular dancing troupes and musicians are not limited to the world of fashion and dress. In the world of art and theatre, Shara Muana and the dancing troupes with a host of "Queen dancers all the way from Paris!" are the measure of aesthetic standards and commercial success. The female character is used seductively as if to match Shara Muana’s style or that of the dancing queens. Consequently, women characters, particularly those playing the role of the modern woman, are costumed to a minimum, with a large part of their thigh, belly, and upper breast exposed; because that is what sells in popular forms of amusement art, and has come to sell hotly in theatre. Furthermore, love scenes in any play, which have now become the trade mark of most popular plays, are treated with ecstatic screams, whether among young or middle-aged audiences. The experience is a regular occurrence during Peoples Theatre tours by Makerere's MDD Department, which are largely educational in nature. The audiences never even wait to hear the lines. When a girl or boy, a man or woman hold each other by the hand or embrace, the next thing the audiences imagine is that they have fallen for each other sexually, and would be hoping into bed the very next minute! The same way Serumaga's Nakirija often responded to Majangwa's advances that were largely publicly inspired; "Five lousy shillings in your pocket and your trousers would go down. Like a flame tree sprouting flowers you'd stand before me, and I in my silly spell would prepare to receive you. Then down on the pavement, right down on the concrete, before those gaping eyes, to
give pleasure to the crowd." While Majangwa generally had a problem of seeing Nakirijja in terms of his sex object and property of pleasure and male dominion, the audiences were no better. The question, then, is: were the audience's demands and reactions a result of the commercialisation of the Ugandan mind and economy by Amin in 1972 or the trait, as has often been suggested, is as old as humankind?

Besides them being conduits of popular ideology and a means to commercial transactions, the women in Uganda's theatre, as in mainstream media and Tourism, are also portrayed as consumable. They are food to be eaten, a car to be driven, a bed to sleep on, the pleasure of a journey, etc. Promotions of the women's consumerability stem from age-old perceptions of women as pleasurable, sensory objects that are weak and vulnerable. Patricia Reynaud notes that,

Non-value characterises a feminine economy, disparaged by basic economics. Non-value asserts itself through the non-inscription of women in circuits of exchange, by non-work and spending for illusionary aims, in pursuit of a jouissance never obtained and losses impossible to control (of blood as well as meaning). In addition, this surplus (encore)... is the excess which escapes the norm, in that women, being "not-all", are defined by a position of lack, of negative value. If women acquiesce in their exclusion, they have... a supplementary jouissance, a residual one with respect to the phallic function. This "not-all" reappears as an excess over the symbolic order or that which is represented by the hegemonic culture. Such a residue destabilises knowledge by admitting its myth and by exposing the nature of difference in concepts that appear untouchable in their integrity.48

Raynaud's concluding remarks above come after her exposition and discussion of, among others, the social view that women were non-entities because of their biological make-up which, outside numerable other supposed limitations, causes her to lose blood monthly, and at an age when she should be assumed to begin to boost her productive potential. The blood is often mistakenly seen as a residue, a kind of poison that if it stayed inside her would not only endanger her body system but make her perpetually unclean as well. Yet, instead of advocating for her protection, traditional societies and now the capitalist, monetised, modern societies demand for her consumption. But like any consumable properties, the end of the road for her is most likely that of distortion, destruction, and total annihilation.

Other popular themes and ideas playing into the ideology of the sexual power of women often manifest themselves in seductions of innocent boys by girls and subsequent elopements. One side of Byron Kawadwa's other most popular play, "Makula ga Kulabako", toes this very ideal; of the irresistible

47 Robert Serumaga, Majangwa, Ibid., p. 13
seduction powers inherent in women. Kulabako, a princess, falls in love with Nyonyintono, a popular dancer, who is unfortunately a commoner. But nothing would dissuade her from her infatuation. They eventually elope. "Rutamirika", the play that first won the up-country-based Kigezi Kinimba Actors a booking at the National Theatre in Kampala in 1991, is a documentary in which the protagonist, Rutamirika, an orphan and character of no credible background, is courted by the daughter of a very rich man who was once Rutamirika's employer. At first, Rutamirika is timid and respectful of the girl's high social status but she insists on befriending him, and eventually wins him over. Both plays use fairy tale-like structural patterns to discuss and resolve issues of social status and class divisionism, which are still very prevalent in the Ugandan society, both within and outside aristocratic structures. The infatuated women act as bridges over social gaps and as antidotes to social conflict, through their eventual marriages to their lovers.

5.4.4. The True Modern and Truly Liberated Woman

It would be a great misreading of Uganda's theatre if there was no mention of efforts being made by the Women's Movement and its allies towards change and positive portrayal of women in society. But, as to be expected, such instances are very numerable, and have their own structural limitations; resulting mainly from the subjects and themes being treated and the methods (packaging) used to put them across to the intended audiences. Outside Rose Mbowa's and Charles Mulekwa's fairly realistic portrayals of the ordinary Ugandan woman, most plays advocating women's rights are always tailored to realisation of visible results or measurable impact within a specified time-frame, usually shorter than what would be demanded by reality. Change of social attitudes and behaviour, the fore goal of such plays, are tied in with the people's own lives and, so, may last over generations before real impact can be registered. But influences exerted by donor pressures and goals on NGOs or theatre practitioners involved in Development Theatre should not be overlooked.

It must also be noted that until after 1986, when the NGO Culture descended on Uganda and Development Theatre came to be a good constituent of it, no single dramatist had come out strongly in open support of and dedication to women's rights and cause. Fair character portrayals of women sometimes filtered through the works of dramatists but not as conscious efforts towards the general improvement of the woman's image in society. Most probably, as it is with most kinds of literature, the time was not yet ripe for such proclamations-though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has
been in force since 1948. In any case, with its struggles out of colonialism and the subsequent tumultuous socio-political life, the general environment in Uganda was not yet the ideal for such efforts, forms and levels of advocacy.

The most famous playwrights in this branch of Development Theatre include Rose Mbowa in "Mine By Right" (1985), "Nalumansi" (1988), "Mother Uganda and her Children" (1987/88), "Stop Bambi's Tears," a film script, (1998), and "Mama Nalukalala n’Ezadde lye" (1998); Charles Mulekwa in "The Woman in Me" (1991), "The Eleventh Commandment" (1994), and "Where Power Lies" (1997); and Action for Development (ACFODE) who commissioned Stephen Rwangyezi for "The Time Bomb" (1994) and John Bosco Mukiibi for "Mending Fences". All of Mbowa's plays above, though she eventually retained the copyright, have been commissioned by The Uganda Law Society, The Human Rights Commission in Uganda, the Africa Centre in London, ACFODE, and the Ford Foundation through the USIS offices in Kampala, respectively, while Charles Mulekwa has worked with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Uganda, the Federation of Uganda Women Lawyers (FIDA), and the DISH Project.

The true modern and truly liberated Ugandan woman is that who is enlightened (it does not matter if she is very highly qualified or not, although education is certainly an added advantage in her struggles for total or meaningful emancipation), well-informed about her personal rights and social environment in general, assertive of her rights, vocal and articulate, responsible for her personal life and actions, economically independent, politically active and civically competent. Her dress, style of walk, speech and general manner of import must all be tempered to fit the desired image. Such a woman, however, is a stereo-type in her own way, and mostly acts as a vehicle of ideology. She is almost too good to be true or alive, and as her philosophies become more and more idealised they lose their vested levels of credulity.

In the final analysis, therefore, the literary and market challenges to theatre proprietors (the directors and performers) are as formidable as they are difficult to solve. If the artists continue to pander to the whims of the audiences, then theatre in Uganda risks being plunged deeper into a mere art of amusement that is never likely to attain international literary recognition, as we, for example, have in Yoruba, South-African, Greek drama, etc. or as in such individual prominent works like those of Wole
Soyinka, Athol Furgard, William Shakespeare, Bertlot Bretcht, etc. On the other hand, if the artists decide to rediscover their social and literary roles and start to promote theatre in Uganda not just as mere entertainment or business opportunity but primarily as a humanistic and literary art, they risk closing shop sooner; especially since there seems to be no immediately foreseeable subsidies to or investments in theatre from the government or other noble sources.

5. 5. Creating around or Writing about Topical Issues

The other "most obvious and cheaper alternative" for theatre producers to make good money out of theatre is to compose around a topical situation either in politics or the general public, tolling the line most favoured by their prospective audience, and only once in a while interject personal or more objective perceptions. That way, the producers are sure the audiences would patronise them as long as their interest in the topic was still alive. Some of the hot issues which are "crowd-pullers" were revealed as the kingship in Buganda, federalism and decentralisation, women emancipation, multiparty politics, election campaigns (e.g. the different strategies adopted by different candidates), Value-Added Tax (VAT), the Land Bill, the AIDS epidemic, Universal Primary Education (UPE), corruption in government, the war in neighbouring DRC, and innumerable others. That demonstrates, in part, how far the companies, particularly those engaged in popular theatre, go in carrying out market identification and research. In some cases, however, as shall be demonstrated elsewhere, the producers guess at the needs of their prospective clientele or they base their productions on their analysis of consumption trends in the other entertainment business enterprises, like the video and film industries, the cinema, FM Radio stations, visiting dancing troupes, and even sports.

Some of Uganda's modern playwrights who have successfully composed around the topics are Alex Mukulu of Impact International, Charles Mulekwa of Team-Line, and the Bakayimbira Dramactors. The Bakayimbira Dramactors have composed on all the mentioned topics and more. In general, however, the impact of their theatre on some of the issues has not been widely felt as in the theatre of Mukulu or Mulekwa, mainly because of over-duplication of same themes and performance styles and hurriedly packaged plays. Besides, the group is being used elsewhere in this section to demonstrate other market conditions in theatre.
In the more recent years, Alex Mukulu and his Impact International could well be the equivalent of Jimmy Katumba with the Ebonies during the reigning years of Theater Excelesior. Alex Mukulu has been involved in theatre since his childhood. His days of fame came around 1993, soon after staging his *Thirty Years of Bananas*. This is a play in which Mukulu chronicles Uganda's tumultuous post independence history.

Alex Mukulu also has to his name *Wounds of Africa*, "The Guest of Honour", and "Radio Mambo Bado" as some of his most successful plays. Though locally not as popular as any of his other plays listed here, it is "The Guest of Honour" which earned Mukulu the international placing as the 62nd best playwright in the world. "The Guest of Honour" is about the ironical dilemmas that a government may easily entangle itself in if it becomes too good to everybody, locals and foreigners alike. The play tries to satirise the influx of Ugandan-born Asians back to Uganda at the beginning of the 1990s, after Museveni's Government reversed the order of their expulsion by Amin in 1972.

Although the Asians and British nationals were inhumanely treated and their hard-earned property unjustly confiscated, Ugandans, and many African countries, in principle, supported Amin's action.49 The question of Asians and their exploitation of the black citizens in Africa goes back to days of the construction of the East African and, later, the Uganda Railway. Like Elizabeth Nyabongo records,

The Asian community had dominated the commercial sector ever since the late 1800s, and its integration in the African community, and the Africanization of commerce and industry had long been a problem. Initially, Asians had been brought by the British from the Indian subcontinent to help construct the railway from Mombasa to Uganda, and the colonial state encouraged them to settle and develop the country's commerce and trade. At the same time, it directed its administrative machinery toward the repression of African traders. As an alien community, the Asians were a safe bet politically segregated as were from the indigenous peoples of Uganda. From starting as commercial workers, the Asians progressed to being independent small traders but eventually, with the arrival of big capital from Bombay, their control went beyond the retail to the wholesale trade and processing industries. While they were under colonial protection, the Asian community thrived, trading largely in British manufactured goods and coming to control more than 80% of Uganda's commerce and trade. African traders came late to the commercial sector, and they had to wage political struggles to create room for their expansion. Their grievances over prohibitive licence fees and the centralized hierarchical nature of trade turned into a national grievance whereby Asian shops and businesses were boycotted and racial conflict came to the fore. .... The Asians were offered an opportunity to adopt Ugandan citizenship, but most of them chose to remain of British nationality.50

In addition, Harold S. Morris notes:

Licensed traders in Uganda in 1952 numbered 16,908. Of these 11,634 were African and 4,809 Indian. Although there were more than twice as many African traders as Indian, the Department of Commerce estimated that non-African traders (most of whom were Indian) handled almost three times as much business as the Africans. ... heavy concentration of Indians within the five principal towns was mainly due to administrative rules which prohibited any non-African or his agents from setting up

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Consequently, the Asians who had come to East Africa as porters and workers, in Alex Mukulu’s eyes, as real house boys, of the railway engineers had risen to be masters themselves! In Uganda, chaos between the locals and the Asian traders came to a head during the riots of 1945, 1949, and 1952. Hence in the eyes of many Ugandans, Museveni was doing good to foreigners, and rehabilitating Uganda’s image abroad, but at the expense of his own people. He was encouraging the re-integration of an ‘evil’ that had cost many Ugandans opportunities of economic growth and prosperity to be reintegrated in Uganda’s society. But in an effort to hide his criticism of Museveni’s Government, about which many people are still very positive, Mukulu used a lot of local symbolism and some intricate dance patterns that masked his message and blurred the play’s form. It could also be possible Mukulu was at the same time trying to produce for the international market with whom they were good bed-fellows at the time.

One thing which Alex Mukulu did differently from many of the other Ugandan dramatists and playwrights before him, notably those from Buganda, was that he did not so much dwell on Bugandan politics but considered what was happening in the whole of Uganda as a nation. This was one important departure and a good development, in theatre in Kampala, which had now been suspiciously dubbed a Ganda thing; because that is what the theatre pre-occupied itself with, and was thus increasingly being avoided by some larger sections of the paying audience. Buganda Kingdom and the Baganda had suffered great humiliation and discrimination from the State since 1966, but many other Ugandans had suffered likewise suffered at the same hands of Obote and Amin that Bugandan sentiments alone would not easily sell nationally. The recurrent years of war and instability, much of it riding ethnic, religious, and political sectarianism had produced a broader-minded Ugandan. Otherwise, the fighting and conflicts would never end.

With Alex Mukulu, the attendance of theatre by non-Baganda increased from almost nil proportions to some good percentages. Audience levels though were still negligible, basically due to two issues: the language issue and the apparent problems with the aesthetic structure of Mukulu’s plays. Although Mukulu tries to overcome Uganda’s language barrier problems, by employing a mixture of Luganda,
English, and a few other local languages, the bulk of his message is still expressed in *Luganda*. In conformity with modern trends and tastes, Mukulu adopted the use of heavy technological equipment including sophisticated acoustic gadgets, higher fliers, and big posters cutting across the stage. His characters were also dressed mystically and, sometimes, to a minimum. On the other hand, his employment of dance, sometimes with weird choreographs and accompanied by ‘foreign’ musical codes rotating between the guitar strums of pop music and the noise of the discotheque, and all that in what he otherwise originally premised as a local production in a local setting, constitutes the beginning of his problems with aesthetic structure. Nonetheless, because of his effort to communicate to the majority of Ugandans at a go and bring them together for general causes, Mukulu was, for some years, able to attract a fairly wide stratum of Uganda’s audiences. Such an opportunity is most probably enjoyed only by a few other artists and theatre groups in the country like Ndere Troupe, Nyonza Singers, Kigezi Kinimba Actors, and Charles Mulekwa albeit for different reasons. At least because of Mukulu’s theatre, some academics and other middle-class people became regular at the theatre, and seemed to enjoy what Mukulu was doing.

On the other hand, Charles Mulekwa and Team Line have made their name in theatre on the gender ticket. Team Line was formed in 1995 with Charles Mulekwa and his uncle, Michael Wawuyo, as directors. Charles Mulekwa is the group’s lead scriptwriter, the group’s production director, and, sometimes, takes on performance roles. To-date, Team Line counts 10 stage plays, 2 radio plays, and 4 consultancies to its name, all the scripts being written by Mulekwa in collaboration with others. Their policy is to stage one production per year at the National Theatre. The group has, so far, been lucky in meeting its ambition, particularly knowing how hard it is to get a booking at the National Theatre. Mulekwa is a staff of the National Theatre, and may, therefore, use his position to secure a booking. But, if he was not likely to sell, there is no way the National Theatre would stake its money and a public building for the sake of their staff. Two of Mulekwa’s plays, “B’Omusaawo” (1987) and “The Woman in Me (1991)” were commissioned by the National Theatre.

The women constituency has always been ignored in public matters as a voiceless and powerless section that would not matter anyhow. Among theatre audiences, too, the women are placed in the same category as children, because most do not have an independent vote on expenditure. But the women Mulekwa performs for are often women of means and status, most of them working with
powerful women NGOs in the country, or serving in different public positions in the Government and its parastatals. By associating with such a calibre of women, Mulekwa has been able to win occasional writing contracts among them. Where the other groups are rivaling among themselves for audiences, Mulekwa is riding the wings of modest, but financial, success all the same. That way, he never makes losses. Renowned theatre practitioners ridicule Mulekwa as "the one who writes for women!" Most probably, due to socio-cultural belief and prejudice, they do not see why one should try to speak for or about such an 'irrelevant' constituency as women. Otherwise, the goldmine in such theatre seems to be abundant, at least for the moment.

Theatre market economics aside, Mulekwa says his inspiration to write about and champion women's cause stems from his close relationship with his mother, "who really sacrifices a lot for me, even now." Mulekwa believes women have a special love for humanity, "which would take us all very far if we promoted and consolidated their efforts." Hence his select audience for his plays are the women and men in positions of power and decision-making, who have the easiest means to achieving positive results in the campaign to better women's welfare and that of society in general. Mulekwa's two latest plays, though, "Bond of the Knife" (1998) and A Time of Fire show a steady departure from his initial 'woman' focus. The former examines a personal enmity between two families in a local village among his own people, the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda. The conflict is saved from degenerating into a bloody fight by the fact that the two men, as boys, took the circumcision rite together, where the same knife was used, resulting into a kind of mix of blood in a shared vow to the gods. That way, the two initiates became bonded by the knife, and for life. A Time of Fire is a recollection of his own experiences in the tumultuous Uganda he was born into and grew up, of which he writes:

My memory of being rewinds ... to 1972, when I was age six. We were made to witness a firing squad, by Amin's military. One of the victims was a sixteen-year old boy who lived a few houses away from our home. In the wars between 1979 and 1986, I had a gun held to my head a couple of times. Now that's just me. Uganda has a seventeen million population. Multiply that. War is a time of fire of sorts. It was, nevertheless, a major feature of my time I had not written about. In 1977, Amin's men chopped leading playwright Byron Kawadwa to pieces. The next generation of dramatists was intimidated during Obote regime of the 1980s. To feel free to present these happenings is a sign of hope that I neither ignore nor take for granted. I am glad for the freedom. Having made the decision to write about war, it took two years for the story I wanted to tell, to ripen.54

52 Charles Mulekwa interviewed by the researcher in Bayreuth, Germany, in October 1999
53 Ibid.,
54 Ibid.
The Royal Court Theatre has commissioned Mulekwa’s next play. Further, the Delivery of Improved Services for Health (DISH) project in Uganda has commissioned Mulekwa for a film, *Time to Care: A Question of Children.*

Couldn’t Mulekwa’s current diversified involvement in theatre result from his economic reading of the theatre market?

Besides writing on gender issues, Team Line is also one theatre group in the country to have ‘risked’ putting up full plays in English. Traditionally, English plays are known never to raise audiences at the Theatre, except if they are set books. In his introduction to his latest play, *A Time of Fire,* Mulekwa gives reasons why he mostly writes in English:

> When I was drawn to writing, I made a decision to write my plays using the English language. For one thing, there are enough Ugandan dramatists writing in local languages. For another, I wanted to reach as wide an audience as possible. Having said that, it is the stories I tell, their location and the era and experience of the characters that will always dictate the terms of the language. From that, the rhythm will be born, taking the shape that it must. I then directly translate into English.

From recent observations of audience attendance of plays in English at the National Theatre, there might well be good opportunities for dramatists writing in English. There are increasing numbers of intellectuals, the middle-class, and non-Ugandans showing up for performances at the National Theatre. For example, the Theatre was fairly attended throughout the week-long premiere production of Patrick Mangeni’s "The Prince" staged by students of MDD Department.

Many other groups still compose around common themes and situations like infidelity among couples, child abuse, the plight of orphans, the deadly stepmothers, etc. Such producers always have as their intended audiences not necessarily people in such situations or those who practice the social evils but any members of the society to whom such a theatre would appeal. Apparently, therefore, market research and identification are never practiced or even contemplated by theatre producers in this category; or if done, at least, not all the time. Such theatre draws significant amounts of appeal and support from among audiences whose main concerns lie with their everyday life experiences, and not the larger, often, national or universal concerns. The concluded discussions of plays by Mulago Theatre Kings demonstrate the factor.

There are other groups that still reap off historical incidents in Uganda like, the outright persecution and humiliation of the *Baganda* and the desecration of Buganda kingdom, especially between 1964

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55 See Lillian Nalumansi, “A Film You Shouldn’t Miss” in *The Other Voice* newsletter, July 31 2000, p. 6
and 1967. In this category are Nyonza Singers, who have capitalised on annual productions of Byron Kawadwa’s and Wassanyi Serukeny’a “Oluyimba Iwa Wankoko” (The Song of Wankoko). The play documents the abolition of the Buganda kingdom by Obote in 1966, and the subsequent forced escape into exile of the then King (Kabaka) Sir Edward Mutesa II, from where he never returned alive. Christopher Mukibi and The Theatricos still stage their play of the 1980s, “Sagala Agalamidde”. The most recent shows were at the National Theatre in July 2000.

5. 6. Re-Staging Popular Shows

One trick that used to work very well during the 90s to maximise a group’s chances of reaping significantly from theatre was revealed at another forum by Andrew Benon Kibuka, the Chairman and Director of former Bakayimbira Dramatic Society. Once a certain production had been popular with the audiences, and had run for sufficient time, the groups would announce to the public that they have only two weeks to watch the production before its final close. Towards the end of the two weeks, the group would give the audiences a last chance, which, in most cases, lasted another two weeks. Meanwhile, audiences scrambled to the shows so as not to miss out. On the other hand, the directors knew they would still extend the shows for at least another two weeks. Then came the real last chance that was justified by performing groups as “due to public demand”. In some cases, “public demands” for a show would last a complete month. By playing such games at the audience’s psychology, the group would end up getting 8 weeks of extra shows outside the originally scheduled performances.

The performance culture in conventional theatres in Uganda is such that shows usually start with one show on Thursdays, normally designated as student show days, where show tickets go for Shs. 1,500/= (or about US 1 Dollars). Student tickets are cheaper by more than half the price of a normal or regular ticket to theatre, which costs Shs. 5,500/= in most theatres in Kampala. In up-country towns, except for “Kadongo Kamu” shows, the regular price for a ticket is Shs. 3,500/= (or US 2.3 Dollars). Fridays in Kampala have two shows; one in the afternoon and another in the evening. The afternoon show is the Artists show, where teachers and other get a discount on the ticket price, usually 1/3 of the price of a regular theatre ticket. The artists pay Shs. 3,500/=. The evening show is

57 Andrew Benoni Kibuka, “Expectations and Behaviour of Theatre Audiences in Uganda” A Paper delivered at a Focus Discussion Group /Workshop on Uganda’s Theatre organised by the author in September, 1998
regarded as a weekend show and costs Shs. 5,500/= (or US 3.6 Dollars), the price of a theatre show ticket in Uganda. Weekends have two shows each on Saturdays and Sundays.

Even if performances were restricted to weekends, the group would have made enough, and even surplus, money. A rough estimation shows that Bakayimbira's Pride Theatre which seats about 500 people at a go would, in a single week, net a gross income of between Shs. 10,000,000 if the theatre is for some reason not completely packed to capacity, and Shs. 10,750,000/= if the theatre is totally booked out. The figures exclude expenditure on such things as taxes, guest tickets, contingencies, and production costs, which would be minimal in case the production was not completely new. The estimation also ignores such practices as the under-pricing technique, where it is difficult for either the director(s) or the group to know the exact amount of income realised from a single show. In eight weeks of the extra performances, the group would have made a profit of Shs. 86,000,000/=, assuming income from the scheduled shows over the first three or six months before the 'last chance' off-set salaries of the performers, electricity and water bills, government tax, promotional and production costs, and other emergencies.

Another trick used recently by the Bakayimbira Dramactors to earn an extra shilling out of their normal theatre shows was to encourage Charles Ssenkubuge to stand for President of Uganda in the March 2001 Presidential Elections in Uganda. Ssenkubuge was nominated by Benoni Kibuka and seconded by Alyosius Matovu, both fellow directors of his in Bakayimbira and Pride Theatre Complex. Right from the start, the public was skeptical of the genuineness of Ssenkubuge's bid for presidency. Others ridiculed his bid as the most "katemba" or nonsensical act of the year. The comical bit came in almost handy when, after only one week into the contest, Ssenkubuge pulled out on allegations of state harassment and exhaustion of campaign funds. Then, the Election Commission demanded back the Ug. Shs. 15,000,000/= (US$ 15,000) he, like the rest of the candidates, had received to facilitate his campaign process. Ssenkubuge turned panicky and the public became gleeful, pronouncing the Election Commission's demand as "good punishment for such thieves." It is alleged, however, Ssenkubuge clinched a deal with his main rival, President Museveni, of Ug. Shs. 50,000,000/= (US$ 50,000) from which he off-set the Election Commission refund of Ug. Shs. 15,000,000/=.

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59 Ibid.,
60 Ibid.,
Bakayimbira Dramactors conceived a play, "Kagutema Bamwongere Ecupa?" (Should he, Museveni, be Given Another Term?), that was a direct campaign effort for Museveni's re-election. The play answered the question the affirmative. Next Ssenkubuge was seen shaking Museveni's hands at the latter's victory rally at Kololo Airstrip, amid speculations and rumours he (Ssenkubuge) would be made minister as well. In the economic sense, the play was a big success as it always played to full houses because people wanted to see for themselves an ex-presidential candidate on stage. The play was also taken to London during June/July 2001 where it sold well, and each of Ssenkubuge's campaign posters were going at 100 Pound Sterling.

What all these scenarios present to an outside eye is that the theatre market, once well manipulated, can assure one of steady and sufficient incomes throughout one's career life. That way, theatre business acts as an insurance against unsteady and insufficient incomes for those practitioners employed or engaged in other regular jobs, and for the realisation and sustainability of the individuals' coveted life-styles. When Mukulu put up a big mansion in Ggaba, described by some as a palace just before his retirement from theatre, many people said theatre was the source of his riches. The fact may or may not be true. But in his usual comic and satirical way, Mukulu boldly took on his critics in his popular song, BannaKampala nga mwogera". The song was part of his play, "Mambo Bado", but it now plays on FM radio stations as an independent composition. Below are some lines in the song:

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BannaKampala nga mwogera!
"Mukulu ssenteazigya wa?"
Omussaja mubbi nyo
Eza kanisa zalliko."
Kasockanga mbawo sirabangako
Sente zwandikidwako: 'Ssente za Church'.
Sente zonna ziba zwandikibwako: 'Ssente za Banka ya Uganda.'
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You people of Kampala can talk!
"Where does Mukulu get his money?
That man is a thief!
He is eating church money."
Ever since my existence here I have not seen
Money written on: 'Money for the church'.

Similar allegations were made about other rich theatre stars like Jimmy Katumba and Hope Mukasa. In the more popular theatre mainstream, the "Kadongo Kamu" music artists allegedly make lots of money. On the other hand, however, that may not always be true, and in some cases, production costs far outweigh the prospects of income from a particular show. That partly explains the collapse of many theatre companies.

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61 The play’s promotion emphasised Ssenkubuge’s pull-out of the race in a way that enticed audiences to go and watch. The catch phrase was "Charles Ssenkubuge Siasa-Eyavamu", implying Charles Ssenkubuge Siasa, the one who stood down for the president.

62 Translation of the song from Luganda into English was done with the kind assistance of Susan Kiguli of Department of Literature, Makerere University.
Most theatre directors in Uganda conceived public launching of their plays as one of the most effective and ways to promote and publicise their plays. Depending on the official supposed to launch the play, the method is the quickest and cheapest to promote and publicise the production. The more prominent the guest of honour the greater the prospects. Attendant benefits also come with free publicity and wide media coverage. Consequently, it has become a fashion for every theatre company in Kampala to organise a public launching of its new productions. While the strategy has worked generally well for most groups, it has tremendously enhanced market prospects of other groups like Impact International, Ndere Troupe, Team-Line, and Bakayimbira Dramactors.

For example, the sudden upsurge in attendance of Mukulu's shows by sections of the audience that are normally 'new' at the National Theatre could not all be attributed to their personal love and recognition of good art. It is a well-known fact that Alex Mukulu used to give out as many as 50 Guest Tickets or complementaries a week to his shows. Mukulu's shows used to run for at least three months at the National Theatre in Kampala. During Mukulu's season at the Theatre no other groups would be allowed to perform there as the stage would be permanently set for Mukulu's shows. The most beneficiaries of Mukulu's guest tickets were government ministers and officials, ambassadors, the media, prominent business people in the country, and other dignitaries. Sometimes, Mukulu would even run whole performances for a select section of this dignified audience; say, the diplomats or government ministers and the Parliament. Rarely, however, did Mukulu give out free tickets to Makerere University, particularly the MDD Department, because of the longstanding ideological grudges and differences between the two. Neither were his fellow artists and theatre practitioners, the community workers or civic leaders regular beneficiaries of Mukulu's noble gesture. Most probably, with regard to the theatre artists, the fear of possible market competition still loomed large and wide although Mukulu was at the pinnacle of theatrical success.

While many of such invited guests were being coaxed for tangible benefits like material support towards production costs, invitations and sponsored trips abroad, and the mere good feeling that normally comes with wide publicity hence fame, some of the invitations aimed at cultivating a market base among the more affluent of Ugandan audiences. But the more regular theatre audiences in Uganda are those without so big a pocket designated for leisure to comfortably keep spending within
Mukulu's price limits. Mukulu's ticket prices stood between Shs. 20,000/= (US$ 20) and Shs. 30,000/= (US$30); and the normal concessions to students and the artists were not always honoured. Apparently, Mukulu was unwilling or not brave enough to lower his prices to normal levels, especially with the aura of local and international success all around him. This is the section of the market Mukulu should have invested most. Without the regular attendance of ministers, diplomats, and all the relevant personalities designated in the 'Who's Who' ranks, Mukulu's theatre soon began to dwindle. In the meantime, most probably driven by forces of demand for his theatre on the market, Mukulu had also embarked on somewhat careless and hurriedly packaged productions which could not so much appeal to middle-class audiences. Mukulu suffered a blow when audiences deserted him during performances of his play, "Diana". That annoyed and scared him so much that in August 1997 he announced his retirement from theatre.

Interestingly, however, it was later revealed by some sources close to Mukulu and people who know his psychology so well that Mukulu's public announcement of his retirement from active theatre was a trick, a kind of strategy to shock the audiences and make them restate their loyalty for him, almost by force. By such an announcement, Mukulu so much believed that the audiences, almost like in the proverbial Ninive story, would cry themselves hoarse, through the media, of course, go down on their knees in despair, beat at their chests in sorrow, and spread their faces with shame at their realisation of what a golden boy they were committing to the gallows of an early retirement! But that was never to be. The audiences, including Mukulu's critics and competitors, mostly kept mum, and went about their business as if nothing unusual had happened. Then, only months after his aborted public plea, Mukulu resurfaced in theatre with a new production, which also got a lukewarm reception. At present, Mukulu is a radio presenter at a private FM radio station, Radio Simba, in which company it is stipulated he is a shareholder. His formerly steadily rising career in theatre has thus slumped back to part-time practice and semi-professionalism. Most likely, at the time he tried to make the consciences of his audiences prick with guilt, Mukulu had already contemplated and resolved on his next career in broadcasting, and was only still hanging around in theatre as he consolidated his new business efforts.

63 Besides Charles Mulekwa's public criticisms of Mukulu's gimmick on radio talk shows soon after Mukulu announced his supposed retirement, interviews conducted on Mukulu's theatre among theatre practitioners in Kampala revealed the same sentiments.
The media was one of Mukulu's most loyal constituents. Whenever they set out to review, or rather praise, Mukulu's productions many, especially those who could not raise the money for tickets to his expensive shows, almost hated themselves for missing such rare kinds of chances. Sometimes, even when one had already been, a review might make one consider going another time. Consider, for example, this review by Joseph Were, one of Uganda's few (and part-time) theatre reviewers. He writes:

Why should I commend a two-hour play in which only one thing happens as a must watch?...because it is a typical high-flying Mukulu Drama. Sometimes, it is a cliche, sometimes fun but mostly it is not ordinary. ...Up market theatre goes like Mukulu because, like most of them, he is drowning on a sea of unknotted ends but is determined not to show it. On the opening night, for example, a few of them slept through the show but I am certain they told friends later that they had been to see Alex Mukulu's latest play, Mambo Back.  

While it is apparent from the review's undertone that Joseph Were was himself not necessarily taken in by the nature of Mukulu's theatre, he, nevertheless, sought to promote the play for Mukulu's sake and that of his patrons. The larger prospective audience is thus always cheated, and the playwright misdirected, by insincere artistic appraisals. Unfortunately, the media could not save Mukulu's name when he sank. The best it did was to keep quiet about the whole issue. However, some of the foreign media did not abide by this code of silence, most probably because they had not reaped off personally and/or tangibly from Mukulu's material world like their local counterparts had done. Angella Johnson, a South African-based journalist expressed open disappointment in Mukulu's work, who had been recommended to her as "Uganda's top playwright". At the end of an interview she held with Alex Mukulu, at the height of his fame, in 1997, Johnson wrote:

It was not until later that I realised I'd been hoodwinked. If he (Mukulu) is among Uganda's best artistic talent, the years of oppression have left a visible void in the country's cultural life.

5. 8. Aggressive Publicity and Lurid Advertising

Related to public launching of plays and media coverage is the lurid advertising and media campaigns usually carried out by theatre producers of popular theatre. For quite a long time, even after the commissioning of the UNCC in 1959, the relationship between theatre and the market in Uganda could be said to have been as conventional as expected. Once a play was ready for public performance, billboards, radio spots and posters would usually be mounted to promote the shows to prospective

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clients (the patrons). However, there was not the practice of „hounding“ patrons all over as is the case today. The promotions are usually not regarded as potent and complete without „spiced“ and lengthy adverts over the radio and television, newspaper slots and, sometimes, expensive flies and mounted monuments, all intended to out-rival other competitors in the field. The more adverts run and the bigger the size of the flier or monumental cardboard, the better the business prospects.

During the life-time of Jimmy Katumba and The Ebonitas, a giant placard stood at the junction to their Theatre on Bombo Road to supplement big fliers hang at main road entrances into the city. Around 1996197, the Bakayimbira Dramactors adopted a publicity mode that was an instant hit on the theatre scene. Over the years, the Company maintained for its TV slots the group’s melodious performance anthem that contained the following words:

Abakuyimbira, nebakunyumiza,
nebakusanyusa
Nebakudigiza, nebakusanyusa,
nebakuwomeza...

The ones who sing for, entertain, and make you happy;
The ones who play for, amuse, and make you to relax...

The stars in the group- Andrew Benoni Kibuka, Aloysius Matovu, and Charles Senkubuge Siyasa- would then be flashed onto the screen in their most comic and humorous poses. In one of their most comic adverts, Senkubuge and Kibuka came on in a short skit showing the wonders of city life. Kibuka wore heavy-rimmed eye-glasses that were fixed with a kind of self-wiping hence self-cleaning technique which made him look very eccentric. Senkubuge would then gaze at him in admiration and amusement before pronouncing, “Nze kino sinakilabangako. Galubindi eziriko ne wipers!” meaning, "I have never seen such a wonder in the whole of my life; eye glasses fitted with car windscreen wipers! The mysteries of city fashions and styles!" No "fan" would want to miss watching such a show live on stage. One could even readily sacrifice money for a day’s meal to go and see for one’s self how eye glasses fitted with car windscreen wipers really work. New fans who could not be recruited that way got carried away by compliments and commendations of the productions from those who had already been.

Needless to say, however, that such marketing strategies are not uniform throughout the country. They are mostly applicable within and around Kampala City and, to a lesser extent, the other main urban centres. The degree of application also varies, depending largely on the size of the ‘woo-bles’, the nature of the audience, its financial abilities, its literary appreciation levels, and its social values.
and inclinations. Nevertheless, the situation still reflects the nature and practice of mainstream theatre promotion and distribution in the country.

Such is the largely attendant selling concept reigning on Uganda's theatre market today; as it is on the open commodity markets. Many theatre producers and promoters believe that buyers of theatre left alone would not ordinarily buy it hence their commitment to adopt selling tactics to promote the theatre's products to their prospective buyers and patrons.

Ironically, the theatre producers' suspicions that their respective audiences would not demand theatre willingly are, to an extent, very true. Like everybody else, there have occurred significant changes in the tastes and purchasing trends of the theatre market. Furthermore, with the introduction of a market economy and the liberalisation of commodity markets and the service sector, manufacturers and suppliers of goods and services have revolutionised traditional marketing methods. In most cases, the old market adage of "Customer is King (or Queen)" is very operational due to the wide and quality choices existing on the market, and the people's increased abilities to demand or afford them. In that case, producers, whether of goods or of services, are left with little option but to sell, instead of marketing, their products.

5. 9. Price Cuts in Show Tickets

It is common practice among directors of independent theatres in Kampala to negotiate different ticket prices for members of the audience. The price for a show ticket officially stands at Ug. Shs. 3,500/= or Ug. Shs. 5,000/= depending on what day of performance it is. But a director can agree to reduce the price according to what picture members of the audience cut while they purchase their tickets at the Box Office or the number of tickets the "fan" wants to purchase. If one looks to possess the money to spend then ticket prices remain fixed. The reverse is true for those who appear to be 'poor' or the fans that have newly been worn over. Elsewhere, Aidah Tibasiima, a theatre practitioner in Uganda, collaborates these facts when she states:

Corruption in theatre sometimes also manifests itself in gate collections. Here you find that a fee is charged according to one's social status. The rich are often cheated to pay more. And those known to persons responsible for a particular show can either get free entertainment or pay less.\(^6\)

\(^{66}\) Aidah Tibasiima, "Corruption on Stage" in Drumming Against Graft, A Magazine of the International Anti-Corruption theatre Movement (IATM), Vol. 1 No. 1, Ibid., p. 21
Likewise, the greater the number of tickets one desires to buy the greater the chances of a discount. Bargaining and haggling for a reduction in the price ticket is also possible if one is lucky to find an agreeable sales person at the Box Office. In the end, one can easily purchase a total of 5 tickets or more for the price of one weekend ticket of Ug. Shs. 5,000/==. That way, the theatre's seats get sold up, and improvisations for sitting made for what would appear to an outsider to be overwhelming audience numbers due to the play's great popularity.

Inside the theatre, viewers who paid Ug. Shs. 3,500/= or Ug. Shs. 5,000/= for a ticket would be highly impressed and psychologically counselled that the play on stage is very popular and worth its price despite their own set of doubts. Outside the theatre, different members of the audience would recommend the shows to their acquaintances. Pressed to say what is particularly good or appealing in the play, they would similarly simply assert, "Nkugambye! Abana bali bazanya!" meaning, "Just take it from me, friend. Those boys can play (act)!" What else would remain but for one to want to go and see for oneself?

The other and often larger section of the audience who have come to theatre by virtue of a discount ticket, and which secret they would have been strictly warned to keep since "they had been the only ones who had got helped and on personal terms", would equally be mesmerised by the many people who had 'paid' highly to watch the particular performance. Each individual of those would most probably be counting him/herself the most fortunate to get a discount in such uniquely exceptional circumstances. But, sometimes, it becomes too heavy a secret to keep that some members begin whispering to their friends about their rare stroke of luck only to learn that their friends are battling to keep the same secret inside themselves.

After that, neither the directors nor the audiences are able to withdraw from the "secret" arrangements. The practice becomes a kind of contract between the two for that season and during subsequent shows, whether within or outside the City. The audience especially is morally obliged hence indirectly bonded to remain loyal to their newfound partners among the theatre groups if only to ensure their presence is constantly registered by the directors as a kind of insurance against their future desire to attend theatre. The same practice explains why popular audiences faithfully trail their stars to performances all over the City and accompany them to up-country towns. Such fans are the groups' worthy patrons and supporters who deserve a discount more than any other.
Unfortunately, for most directors and companies practicing such uncontrolled undercutting of ticket prices, the result has been to run their companies broke or into serious debts. Further, that system of managing the Box Office is prone to misuse and misappropriation of the collected cash by whoever so desires in the company since the genuine price of the ticket is not reflected anywhere, be it on the admittance ticket to the show or the company's financial statements.

5. 10. Diversification of Theatre's Products and Conventions

In the sub-sections below are discussed the main forms of diversification in theatre in Uganda, and its impact on the nature and market of the theatre. Theatre has been diversified as a saleable commodity, to be distributed and consumed variously. As such, much of Uganda's theatre today is not easy to define by genre because, in most cases, it is a mixture of many theatrical and entertainment forms. Consequently, conventional roles of theatre have been broadened and diversified to meet the audiences' varied demands. In addition, some theatre proprietors have also started side economic activities that bear the least relationship to the theatre profession. In the end, theatre is only getting divided attention from its producers, calculated or no attention at all from its would-be major patron - the government, - and the donor is being entreated, as usual, "to come in and help," as is happening in many other public organisations. Naturally, every Aid is bound to have some strings attached, and the pulling of different strings, both at local and foreign levels, with no uniform policy at the centre, would leave theatre as an art, a profession, and a service industry precariously disintegrated by those who seek to 'save' it. Hence theatre shall not only lose its identity of creative composition but its social direction as well.

5.1 0.1. Collaboration with NGOs

The majority of theatre practitioners who have significantly advanced and actualised their individual selves and business are those involved in development theatre. Uganda is a country with a multiplicity of tribes and languages and a significant number of an illiterate population. Hence, occasionally, Government uses theatre to impart policy or propagate its development programmes, obviously aware of the mobilisation, socialisation, and communicational powers inherent in the art form. The NGOs, too, have found in theatre a tool for social mobilisation, community sensitisation, and education as well as a massive form through which they can make their presence in the country noticeable hence promoting their social image.
Noble intentions in development theatre forms like TFD and MFD have often been manipulated by stakeholders for individual purposes, and the theatre practitioner has provided the necessary practical link. The practitioners seek, first, to suit their own goals and, then, those of the sponsoring bodies. For this very reason, there is currently a big influx of theatre practitioners in Uganda, including the would-be-well-established ones, who are abandoning mainstream theatre for the sponsored forms of development theatre. Many theatre directors seek or accept offers and sponsorship from the Government and the NGOs to use theatre to promote specific messages, in most cases tailored to the sponsors’ needs and programmes. The commitment of the artists to physical infrastructure development and other macro economic policy implementation is motivated by economies of scale and not necessarily by the development needs of beneficiary communities. It is business, and the sponsors have the money. Naturally, therefore, such incidental diversions from the normal functions of theatre are golden opportunities at a time when investments in ‘pure’ or mainstream theatre do not bring in sufficient returns for the sustenance of theatre groups and their activities.

Besides, the theatre practitioners personally bear minimum risks, be it for their business or that of the sponsor. In the true practice of Community Theatre, where the beneficiary communities are expected to do most of the performance work, the investment by the theatre practitioner or proprietor is even less, remaining to be summarised by such titles as "Facilitator", "Projects Coordinator", "Trainer -of- Trainers", or "Technical Adviser."

The bad side of development theatre is not in the money that theatre practitioners get paid for the professional and expert services they render. Rather, it is the precedent that is draining theatre of its nobility and decency. Naturally, one would find it hard to criticise the hand that feeds one, in case such a circumstance was warranted. In addition, the theatre professionals expose and allow themselves to be treated no better than jesters in spite of their performances being no mere jestering. That is, they become economic beggars; and, as such, they have to conform to the main principles of begging, including the string of abuses that often goes with it. The theatre’s literary value is also almost impossible to sustain due to constant consideration of sponsor priorities and the formal considerations one must always follow while working with informal communities. Furthermore, in some cases, a naturally talented performer suddenly finds him/herself grappling with the profession of theatre directing to which s/he may present a totally different and, sometimes, incorrect picture of the
theatre profession because it is not his/her area of training or natural endowment. In the end, the
theatre profession gets malnourished through the inconsistent and unstable practices the
practitioners engage in as they switch from one project to another, and from one sponsor to the next,
each with different sets of demands, working patterns and work objectives, social and/or political
vision.

The NGO business especially has further commercialised almost every service sector in the country,
including those of a very self-help nature. For example, it is not easy to convene a meeting or a
seminar at the University, LC setting, etc. without being obliged to reward the participants in cash and
kind (except, perhaps, in Churches where there still exists the fear of the mystical). Else the people
would not come. Yet in 1986, soon after the end of the five-year Museveni guerrilla bush war, people
were readily willing to do a lot self-help work without expecting any kinds of remuneration, except that
which the beneficiaries chose to offer amongst themselves as a sign of hospitality; like drinks or eats.

5.10.2. Shopping for Advertising Contracts with Business Companies

Unfortunately, the business community in Uganda, which would in a stable economic environment be a
good promoter of theatre, is currently still pre-occupied with the success of their businesses and the
expansion of their original markets. In such cases, the other role they are called upon to play in
society can only come as a second or farther away priority. Usually, their acceptance to be 'appointed'
patrons to theatre groups or to agree to sponsor particular programmes in the media is not
necessarily out of genuine love and support for theatre. Many business companies tend to see the
theatre from the narrow angle, as the advertiser of their goods or services, rarely minding how and
where the new role comes to fit in with the functions of theatre or whether the artistic essence they
have paid for is actually taking place.

It is always amazing to watch the Ebonies’ TV serial productions of That’s life Mwattu and Bibaawo
(These Things Happen). One could easily conclude it is the promoters, and not the Ebonies, on show.
The 30-minute programme is always preceded by 2 minutes of the Ebonies’ signal, and a whole 5-
minutes of adverts by the sponsoring companies. Then, after 6 minutes of play, the show is
interrupted again with the same messages and adverts from the sponsors, lasting another 5 minutes.
The documentary continues for another 5 minutes, before it is brought to a close in the same style as
the beginning: 2 minutes of the producers' message and another 5 minutes of the sponsors' messages and adverts. Of the 30 minutes allocated to the programme, an approximate 12 minutes are covered by the play. Then, the transmissions appear at least twice a week on a single TV channel. Considering that The Ebonies appear with the same productions on two more private TV stations in a week, that makes something between 54 and 57 wasted minutes per week of so precious an item in Uganda like airtime.

Again, the business economics in these programmes are clear. In the first place, the Ebonies have struck a sure business deal covering several months, from which they are individually earning supplementary and good incomes. So, whether or not the public (audience) is losing out on content and message is none of their business. Complaints from the public/audience to the effect that they are being cheated have at best been ignored since this sponsor promotional tendency cropped up at the end of 1996.

Secondly, The Ebonies have 'eaten' some companies' money which they must now acknowledge and account for publicly. It is common knowledge albeit ironical that justice seen is justice done. Most importantly, The Ebonies do not certainly want to risk losing any of their financial sponsors even if one or two would now be enough; for the simple logic that they are reaping bounteously from the project. For some years now, some of the Ebonies productions are replayed to same audiences twice or thrice, and the plots of the series have themselves become so meagre in literary terms and the incidents so commonplace and static that one can easily predict what scene or resolution of a problem is coming on next.

Thirdly, the sponsors all want to snatch the popularity with which the two TV serials are received among the buying public to advertise themselves and coax as many new buyers through their association with The Ebonies as they can possibly reach. With the ever-present imagination or actual knowledge of the extent of the threat of competition from rival companies, it would be too much to expect the sponsoring companies to stop and think of the distraction and destruction their many messages in a single transmission are causing to a once genuinely popular TV series.

Fourth, Government and private TV stations are all eager to cash on airtime. Shs. 300,000/= or Shs. 500,000/= per 30 minutes and twice a week from a single customer is not bad business. Naturally, it is not
the problem of the TV stations if the Ebonies are duplicating themselves or whether the programme they are relaying has lost its aesthetic value. As long as they can rent their services at a profit nothing else shall matter. At most, they can complain 'silently' and from outside the studios, as members of the viewing public.

Fifth, the Ugandan economy has been privatised and liberalised, and is fast developing into a market economy. Government may still have the right to know what private and public businesses are in operation, but it cannot at the same time control or have the right to oversee the specific programmes of the business ventures. When a certain product on the market does not suit the consumer's tastes, the consumer is free to choose another product from the market from which s/he shall derive the required satisfaction. To an extent, that is what happens with the Ebonies' TV series. The cinema and discotheques are taking away a good part of the market. In sections that cannot raise the entrance fee into cinema halls, Reed Theatres are meeting the gap. The critical market can try to influence the branding and packaging of theatre products, but it all depends on how the producers value the criticism in comparison with commercial prospects of the business. If the prospects are still good, the producers or marketers of the products may have little need to re-design or re-package their products. In the case of The Ebonies' soaps, the issue may easily be that the sponsors, at least within the short-run, are weighing more than the value of the series and the needs of the consuming public. As long as the group is making no financial losses and the sponsors continue to expand their economic empires, anything else can hang.

But in a country like Uganda, where the majority still live below the poverty line, it is not enough for theatre to just exist like any other market commodity. Many communities exist out there in the field where the services of theatre are still very much needed, even within an urban setting. If used more constructively, therefore, such airtime and opportunities as are available to The Ebonies can go a long way towards the promotion and realisation of development in the country.

Sometimes, the publicity demands of the sponsoring companies on the theatre industry are outrageously trivial. For example, when there is a selling/promotion function by the business sponsor, the sponsored group has to come and perform songs or dances at the ceremony, relegating the performers to the 'Katemba/Kazanyirizi' status in society. Whenever the sponsor wants a slot for the TV or the radio done, the beneficiary group has to come and do it.
Ironically, however, theatre has sometimes benefited from such exploitative tendencies from the business community. Besides gaining opportunities for publicity, the theatre has been able to cushion itself from market uncertainties that way. As Christopher Odhiambo argues for the situation in Kenya, "in a free market economy, there is a lot of advertising to be done. That means money. It means employment, and opportunities for publicity and self-promotion. So, one has to keep close to the National Theatre and active on stage. It is a complex game."67

Sometimes, too, in developing economies like Uganda, one might not afford to be completely independent of the hands that feed one, even if one so wished. Poverty dictates that people do not say the whole truth sometimes. As such, beneficiary performers may likewise be obliged to offer 'good will' performances or publicity services to the sponsoring company.

However, there are few exceptions among the business sponsors to this recurrent pattern of demanding publicity and promotions from the beneficiary. The National Insurance Corporation (NIC), for example, with which the researcher has worked on a number of projects. Bakayimbira Dramactors is also an old-time beneficiary. NIC, like all sponsors in the business and NGO community, would insist on publicity but that is where they stop. They never dictate on what you do in the field or call on you time and again to 'morale-boost' at their public-sales functions. The beneficiary is left the freedom to operate according to his/her goals, and within the limits of his/her art and profession.

5.1 0.3. Collaboration with the Tourism Industry

As has already been implied, not all innovations in Uganda’s theatre industry have been free of the corrupting nature of the larger money-run world. Other groups have sought to perform in big hotels, as permanent or resident troupes of amusement to tourists and other guests! Ndere Troupe is now permanently stationed at the Nile International Hotel, a 5-star hotel in Kampala, adjacent to the Uganda International Conference Centre.68 The group is also often hired by public institutions to entertain them. In August/September 2001, Ndere Troupe was flown to Libya to entertain Colonel Muamar Gaddafi on the 32nd anniversary of his revolution. Such assignments jeopardise the group’s theatre role.

67 Interview with the researcher, Universität Bayreuth, October 1999
68 Steven Rwangyezi, The Director of Ndere Troupe, also coordinates an Annual Cultural Festival under the auspices of an NGO, Uganda Theatre Development Association (UDTA), sponsored by the Austrian Government through its Embassy in Uganda. Mr Rwangyezi was Artistic Director of Uganda’s National Theatre for six years (1990-1996)
Stephen Rwangyezi's Ndere Troupe started as a splinter group from Rose Mbowa's Nngaali Ensemble. Ndere Troupe came into existence in 1987, as its mother group was winding up its performance tour of "Mother Uganda and Her Children" in London that same year. When Rwangyezi arrived back, speculations were rife that he was going to form his own performing group. Indeed, only a few weeks later, Ndere Troupe was born in a new production, "Munaku" ("The Reject"). The play's structural concept and format closely followed Rose Mbowa's "Mother Uganda and Her Children". It is only the message that is different, but only in terms of the plot. Otherwise, the motivations and struggles of the two protagonists are the same.

Mbowa's Tabusana is a youth full of energy and potential which he chooses not to use. He later becomes a menace not only to his own kin and kith, but also to the whole neighbourhood. It took whole villages, a lot of patience, love, endurance, forgiveness, and instruction to reclaim the human and social values in Tabusana. Rwangyezi's Munaku, is a fresh graduate of Makerere University, whose vices are only different from Tabusana's in their manner of intensity. The political edge in "Mother Uganda" is missing from Rwangyezi's play. Otherwise, Munaku also gets redeemed through social virtue and effort. Both plays use a mixture of Uganda's folklore interspersed with English dialogue, and aim at reclaiming Ugandans, particularly the able-bodied youths. The youth in both plays despise dignified labour, because they can easily earn money through hoodwinking and exploiting others. Moral bankruptcy and exploitation of others by the strong were both attendant evils in the dilapidated Uganda of the 1970s and 1980s.

In his book Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa, David Kerr discusses the debasement of folklore and commercial exploitation of indigenous cultures in Africa by Africans, which occurs within the Tourism Industry, on diplomatic displays, and on national and other public state occasions. He notes:

The debasement of folklore is, of course, not unique in Africa....However, the contamination of folklore with the worst excesses of the tourism industry has had a particularly perricous effect in Africa because it regenerates some of the colonial stereotypes about Africa in the guise of costumes, dance and folkways...If you were to ask most African intellectuals for the associations of the word "folklore" it would very likely have nothing to do with science, but with the shoddy masks, carvings, baskets and ivory paper-knives on sale in airport shops, the erotidzed pseudo-traditional dances performed at tourist night-clubs, or the cheap panegyrics for politicians, forced from the mouths of dependent praise-singers.69

69 David Kerr, Dance, Media Entertainment and Popular Theatre in South East Africa, Ibid., pp 221-222

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In the eyes of the local public, including performers, a tourist is that person, mostly foreign and white, who comes to a place basically to have a bit of holiday packaged with a different kind of leisure or amusement from that provided in his/her country of origin. The commonest image of a tourist is that of a carefree man or woman in shorts and wearing sun-glasses, knapsack on the back, a bottle of mineral water in one hand and a camera in the other, gaily walking the city's streets or touring national parks and game reserves in the countryside, taking pictures of scenes of interest, and buying local crafts, batik, and carvings as souvenirs to take back home with. In short, tourists are seen as persons of cash, style, class, and with a lot of free time at their hands which they must kill with all sorts of leisure, amusement, and, sometimes, romance. Tourists are known to pay good money for any services they receive and, as such, everything has to be done by the hosting countries, through the business sector, to maximise their income from such freehanded opportunities.

Therefore, one performing before a group of tourists strives to satisfy the above image. Any dance or song item would be so packaged to satisfy not only the curiosity of the tourists but their sense of amusement as well. In the process, many performance items usually reserved for specific traditional settings and 'sacred' functions have found their way to the floors of hotel lobbies, being prostituted for the sake of money of which the respective traditional societies do not even get a shilling. Such items as the Larakaraka courtship dance, the Bwola war dance, the Imbalu circumcision ritual, the Amagunju royal court dance, etc. are not performed to teach the tourists something about the respective cultures or to show them the richness of the roles and significance of the items in their respective societies. The items are performed as mere pieces of amusement and baits for cash, choreographed and mixed together anyhow, oblivious of their nature and significance in respective traditional societies. Costuming, props, rhythms, and style of presentation are all chosen and designed towards the main goals of sensory amusement and commercial entertainment. Sometimes, sexual innuendoes are overtly intended in the dances as a silent invitation to the tourists, particularly the male, to engage in a kind of sex tourism, which is also modestly being whispered about as "the natural hospitality of Ugandans!" When the tourists snap pictures, laugh, or clap their hands in appreciation, the performers know they have hooked their market, and would apply all tactics, mostly jests, to keep their present clientele or even enlarge it. That way, more reasonable cash hand-outs for the individual performers
are certain, the group’s fame among the tourists would increase, with chances of some performers or their leaders bagging sponsorship or a trip abroad through the acquired contacts.

Furthermore, promotion and sale of tourist services like hotel accommodation, leisure tours, specially prepared dishes are packaged with the shapely and agile body of a female dancer, a traditionally-attired modest-looking girl, the animated step of a ritualist, the naturally tanned face of a local beauty, etc. The dances, rituals, drum rhythms, and costume perform no traditional role, and are just being exploited for commercial gain, amusement, and sensory fun.

Closely linked to the sale of tourism services is the political and diplomatic roles traditional performance and theatre arts in general have often been put to. Many times when Heads of States and other foreign dignitaries are on political and other missions to Uganda, performance troupes are mobilised to go to Entebbe International Airport to welcome the guests with traditional dances. The different troupes attired in their different costumes and carrying the necessary accompaniments for the dances line up the tarmac in muted anticipation. Whenever the awaited dignitary disembarks from the plane, all breaks loose - drums, excited voices reciting or singing praises of the leaders, and music from other traditional instruments and dance accompaniments - as each group performs their prepared respective items. The dignitaries walk gleefully by, giving an occasional handshake or a smile to the dancers in return. In such a chaotic display of items in the name of a cultural performance none of the dignitaries, even if one desired, ever has a chance to listen to or watch an item and appreciate its aesthetic beauty. Naturally, one cannot get at the value of an artistic performance in such haste. Furthermore, the items are selected at will, according to what the groups think shall amuse the dignitaries most. They are performed in any order, and get concluded or broken any how hence grossly abusing performance ethics as well as the profession of art performances. Within a matter of minutes and depending on how many different groups of visitors are being received, all is over. The hullabaloo and all activity among the performers die down immediately the dignitaries disappear into their chauffeur-drivencars.

Behind the basic entertainment and amusement purposes for which such performances are staged are projected summaries of political messages and statements the leaders want to impress upon their guests. In Uganda’s case, such a hilarious display of the items, in most cases selected widely to
represent the major ethnic groupings in the country, suggests the Government's overt intention to show not just the richness and variety of Uganda's cultural diversity. In such a display is also underscored a political statement about the Government's able leadership which has finally brought and held together such delicate entities of tribal/ethnic and cultural diversity as people of one nation. In other words, the performances are used to take stock of the nature of progress registered by Government in the political, social, and economic areas as is being reflected in the healthy, harmonious performance, and jollity of the performers representing the larger Ugandan population. Anybody then would be welcome to invest or to take a holiday in such a politically stable, culturally rich, highly accommodating, and peace loving country. This is irrespective of whatever political and other realities that might actually exist in the country.

The same insincere and exploitative display of cultural items, values, and dress happens at other national and/or public functions, like the Independence anniversary, Liberation Day, Heroes’ Day, and other functions that may not necessarily be of a political nature. Once again, David Kerr notes:

Another usurpation of folklore in many African countries is the staging of traditional songs and dances to praise the achievements of post-independent politicians. This often leads to the expropriation of vital indigenous oral forms for naked sycophancy directed to the political leadership.70

Ironically, the exploitation of traditional performance arts is spearheaded by culture officers, the official custodians of culture. Culture officers are posted in districts at a rate of 1 per district, presumably to oversee issues of theatre as well. In most cases, however, the culture officers stop at organising for district cultural festivals or mobilising performing groups to entertain at Government and other public functions.

Just like with tourism, where the diversified nature of the industry is likely to lead to the performance arts being exploited by enterprise structures and market forces, politics and diplomacy are two broad and strong political fields that may easily corrupt and/or destroy the dynamic, humanist natures of theatre arts. Once the theatre arts begin to be reformulated into political statements, they become the property of politicians, another group of people whose primary utilisation of and concern for the arts bear little relevance to artistic and aesthetic properties of the art forms. The life span of the art forms become limited to the present political structures they serve, and other considerations and/or

70 Ibid., p. 221
applications can only be secondary. In other words, the end would always be accepted and expected to justify the means, which must not necessarily be the case in Art.

By these criticisms and observations, however, the researcher does not suggest that the performance of folklore and other traditional pieces should be indiscriminately restricted to their traditional settings since life and society cannot be held in stationery positions. Or that the roles of the items in traditional performances cannot be amplified in situations that demand it. The researcher has already discussed the role Nng’aali Ensemble, led by Rose Mbowa, played in reclaiming Uganda's image in 1987. "Mother Uganda and Her Children" was a fair presentation of Uganda's cultural and traditional performance arts. The stringing together of the different items achieved the sponsors' aims although it inevitably led to distortions of the aesthetic and performance roles of some items within their respective settings.71

The remaining groups and 'companies', with little or no opportunities to attract big sponsors and promoters, and those that can not be sported to be hired to promote the country’s tourism industry, have resorted to putting up public performances when they can. The groups' operations are limited to school term-time of primary and secondary schools within their vicinity, where show tickets can cost as cheap as Ug. Shs. 200/= or 100/= each! Needless to say, many of these amateur groups, some of them with great artistic potential, have splintered themselves up in the hope of getting a reasonable share of the Box Office proceeds or have just dwindled away into oblivion.

It is also no coincidence that a number of theatre groups have started other commercial enterprises in the vicinity of their theatre’s premises, as a way of displaying the theatre’s products to a larger prospective market, whose initial interest may not necessarily lie in buying tickets to watch a performance in theatre. To mention a few; the National Theatre has, in addition to a Coffee shop and a bar inside the premises, in the more recent past revived its cafeteria services in the Karoli Gardens, located at the back of the Theatre. The Theatre also rents out much of its office space, has established an all-year round local Crafts Village in the compound, and runs a car park. The Bakayimbira Dramactors, owners of the Pride Theatre, started a secondary school in 1995, the Pride

71 A literary appraisal of Rose Mbowa's Mother Uganda and Her Children appears in Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, Uganda’s Literary Theatre, Ibid.
Academy, and runs a video shop and cafe services within the theatre. People who come to the National Theatre or Pride Academy premises for any of these other services may easily stray into theatre, increasing its prospects in business in turn. In Kabarole, the Ntuuha Dramatic Society has attached self-help projects and workshops to the group’s main theatre activities. They also do consultancies with the Ministry of Health and NGOs, particularly the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). In Kabale, Kinimba Kigezi Actors have put up shops to support their theatre business.

The MDD Department, though not a formal performing group, has, due to financial pressures in a privatised university education proposed the formation of a Dance Troupe and a Brass Band for public hire. The Department has also started to insist on ‘charging’ a performance fee or to be formally hired like is done with the other troupes who entertain on certain public occasions, whenever it has been called upon to provide such a service. The Department’s new stand does not even favour such functions like the Annual Graduation Ceremonies at Makerere University, which have now evolved into two ceremonies in a year: one for the graduands of what are normally designated as “professional courses” and the other for students graduating with what are labelled “general degrees,” mostly found within the Arts, the Social Sciences, and the Science Faculties. The basic arguments here are that such functions are usually preceded by intensive training sessions that cost the individual students and the Department’s staff money, time, energy, and enormous emotional reserves. It would, therefore, be illogical for the Department not to charge some fees since as a non business or non theatre Company, the Department would have no resources to invest in such productions and performances. Furthermore, the Department is always taken for granted to entertain the public anytime it is called upon. Such tendencies, if not resisted, can easily chain the Department under the Kazanirizi/status.

In the final analysis, therefore, the community and professional services performing groups and theatre institutions in Uganda offer are ingenious steps towards raising funds for the country’s theatre and laying base for its eventual industrial growth and development. But the strategies must be and remain in harmony with the aesthetic and humanist values of theatre as an art.
5. 11. Blackmail and Espionage

This strategy and the next that theatre companies in Uganda sometimes employ to minimise business losses are exploitative in nature and ethically wrong. Blackmail and maligning of one another, espionage, abuse and exploitation of amateur talent are all practiced in the name of competition and business survival. In all ways, however, these are neither sustainable nor commendable business practice for the country's theatre industry.

It is widely alleged that, often, proprietors of theatre groups infiltrate production rehearsals of feared rivals with 'spies' who relay their 'special' discoveries to the groups they pay allegiance to. The observed special techniques are then improved upon or incorporated wholesale into the other's play productions, which are then normally staged before the parent group has itself become ready to perform. Thus the cheated company remains in a kind of experimentation while the 'stealer' companies go on to make more money and consolidate the size of their market. On the other hand, such unscrupulous production practices promote the staging of 'shoddy' productions. But that is not the only or major reason why many productions, particularly within popular theatre, always appear unprofessional and incomplete. The artistic, aesthetic quality of Uganda's theatre is affected by many factors as have been highlighted in the relevant sections of the research.

Other theatre groups allege that rivals stifle them out of the market by blocking the avenues by which they could have improved their investment hence business opportunities, like with the donor community. The rivals go and malign their competitors on issues of accountability so they could have an edge over them once the sponsors stop supporting the 'corrupt' group. Others competitors simply buy off the 'stars' (if they happen to be only performers and not directors or proprietors of the feared groups) or try to influence them into forming their own groups. The question, however, remains: whether such cutthroat competition is at all necessary or even healthy for theatre, an industry that is not only a business venture but a social service as well.

72 For example, the Director and proprietor of a prominent theatre company in Kampala is known to have gone to the Austrian Embassy in Uganda to persuade them off supporting another local theatre company to erect a theatre building in the country. Some other groups try to sabotage their rivals' prospects of projects funding.
5.12 Abuse and Exploitation of Amateur Talent

The extreme cost-cutters among the producers and proprietors of theatre apply means that can at best be described as exploitative in the sense that they aim indiscriminately, without remorse or sound rationality, at the human resource involved in the making and distribution of theatre. In such groups, performers are changed at will almost with every "new" production. The reasons are not necessarily to tap the best talents available as they come. Rather to avoid paying for the talents they have used so well. Two prominent theatre companies in Kampala are fond of the habit. One apparently uses the would-have-been salary of the performers to pay for their up-keep or to keep them in school. The other simply dispenses with their complaints and reminds them of how heavily indebted they all are to him for giving them such big public profiles and taking them on trips abroad.

The most affected of this talent, mostly amateur in composition as well, are students. Students and other amateur performers are preferred because their demands are not many or stringent as those of the professionals. They can also be easily managed or controlled, as many have no alternative but to listen to their employers and obey their instructions. Many students in Kampala's Day Secondary Schools are from single, mostly, mother homesteads with no substantial means of livelihood.73 Hence they have to do odd jobs in order to earn a living, pay their school fees, or supplement family earnings. The other category of students are those formerly attached to or still with a performing group who seek to further their education, either at Makerere University or other institutions of higher learning where privately sponsored and evening study programmes and courses are offered. At Makerere University, tuition alone, excluding the cost of subsistence and scholastic materials, runs to Ug. Shs. 800,000/= (about US 800 Dollars) per semester for courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The fees for pure science courses are higher, averaging between Ug. Shs. 1,200, 000/= and Ug. Shs. 1,500,000/= per semester.

It must be noted that full-time performance or any other type of employment is not normally allowed for University students, particularly those on regular programmes. One of the basic requirements for employers of such students is to give them study leave, paid or un-paid, in order to allow the students to concentrate on their studies. While many employers sign the agreements, they go behind the

University's back and break them. Others refuse to release the students and advise them to either abandon their ambitions to study and stay with the group or resign from the group and pursue their own ambitions. Both options are unpleasant to choose from, especially as the students themselves do not have strong financial backgrounds to rely on. The courageous ones resign from the groups in the hope of making ends meet somehow, in the future.

In the face of such dilemmas, the student-performers usually sign contracts with their groups where they surrender many of their entitlements, including salaries, during the time of their study. They also put themselves at the will of the group's proprietor to interrupt their study during rehearsals or performances by the group. But most students are still able to somehow make good personal understanding with their directors, to be able to sit for their theory and practical examinations. In the class and lecture rooms, however, such students are always the most burdensome to teach because, apart from genuinely absenting themselves from classes against University rules, their concentration abilities tend to decrease with the increased work and social pressures they have to cope with. In the end, their general academic performance is naturally affected. Yet, they need good qualifications if not to account for their stay at College or the University to, at least, stand better chances in the cultivation of their careers or on the open job market.

Responding performers, both female and male, revealed other problems of exploitation and personal abuse that naturally cut across the sexes indiscriminately albeit differently. In the case of ladies, many were forced to sleep with their male directors in order to get admittance into the group, particularly in the most famous ones around the City. Once recruited, they had to safeguard their stay with the group by continuing to honour the sexual advances of their employers. One lady performer, Agnes Nambalirwa of SAMAMU Group, was bold enough to complain publicly. A mother of three, two girls and a boy, Nambalirwa is reported to have "accused leaders (of theatre groups) of promoting corruption in the field of art. (She also has) no kind words for male bosses who sexually exploit their female subordinates."74

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74 Agnes Nambalirwa in Drumming Against Graf, Vol. 1, No. 1, Ibid., p. 27
A good number of lady performers, however, insisted ladies who slept with their directors did so out of their own choice, and not as a requirement for recruitment or retention. For the men, particularly those who were very talented performers, they tended to be overworked by their producers so as "not to live off them for nothing". Fortunately, exploitation and abuse of amateur talent is not widespread among up-country groups. Life in the rural countryside is not as biting as in the City, and up-country theatre groups are not as popular hence as marketable as their counterparts in the City, which, sometimes, get many other opportunities, including trips outside the country.

The most abundant and widespread type of performer exploitation was reportedly in the form of too much work and poor remuneration. Revelations were to the effect that in many of the theatre groups, even the renowned ones, directors were everything in the group. They conducted recruiting 'interviews', decided on who to participate in which production, what roles the performers were to play, where the venues of production were going to be, what price the production was to go at, and for how long it should run. The directors also always "involved themselves with such smaller duties, like the printing of entry tickets, the physical collection of gate fees, keeping of books of accounts, and physically handing out wages to the performers" if such need arose and according to their desecration. I have said if such a need arose because directors often claim the shows have made losses, or that there was a lot of expenditure during the preparatory stages, the money of which had been borrowed hence the need for the performers to sacrifice their would-have-been earnings from the show.

Many of the aggrieved performers say they would not very much mind their being kept off management and organisational responsibilities. What hurts them is to be told they've made losses when they "clearly see the money entering the theatre." On the other hand, however, with ticket price undercuts and concessions going on show days, it is possible the groups never make a lot of money, or any profits at all. It is the directors' overprotection of the business process that fuels performers' suspicions. If directors were not controlling both the proceeds and expenditure, and

75 The problem and its controversies were generously cited in the interviews and completed questionnaires that were administered among theatre practitioners.
76 Responses to interviews and questionnaires administered among the same respondents as in the footnote immediately above.
77 Ibid.,
78 Ibid.
allowed every member to look at and know the group’s true financial situation, such allegations might not easily occur. That is what Charles Mulekwa and Sulaiman Madada do in Team-Line and the International Anti-Corruption Theatre Movement (IATM) respectively, and the system apparently works.

Mulekwa was jolted into a theatre career during his teenage-hood, in order to raise money for his own school fees. That was in 1983. His mother group was Linda Dramatic Society in Mbale, Eastern Uganda, where, at 19 years of age, he was challenged to take on the leadership of the group. There was so much disagreement and mistrust among the group members that despite his young age and study commitments, Mulekwa was the inevitable obvious compromise. After graduating from College, Mulekwa got a teaching job at Kings College, Budo, and settled in Kampala, with the unfortunate consequence of Linda’s eventual collapse and disintegration. However, for two consecutive years, 1987 and 1988, Linda Dramatic Society brought shows to the National Theatre in Kampala. Outside Serumaga’s “Renga Moi”, Linda Dramatic Society was the first theatre group in post-war Uganda early 1987 to pioneer a mixture of languages, including English, in their plays. The group “wanted to beat the communication or language problems existing among Ugandan societies.” The experiment was later echoed in Rose Mbowa’s “Mother Uganda and Her Children” (1987) and much of Alex Mukulu’s dance-drama in Impact International.

Team Line has eight regular members, whom Mulekwa says have equal say in the running of the theatre Company hence the name Team-Line. He demonstrated his claim by revealing that the group actually elects its own executive regularly, to oversee its necessarily organisation and management. It was also interesting for the researcher to learn that the group’s Treasurer or accountant operates with minimum or nil interference from the group’s directors. The treasurer plans financially for the group, including the salaries the members are to get at the end of the month. Mulekwa pays his members a certain amount of money he termed an allowance, per month; because he sees his company as semi-residential. Their rehearsals, like in many other groups, are always conducted at night and during the weekends, sometimes going on into the wee hours of the morning.

As for Sulaiman Madada, he started off as a performer in Flamingo Dramatic Society. He went on to found his own theatre, the Nile Theatre. They hired a building and operated a Theatre under the same

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79 Interview with Charles Mulekwa, in Bayreuth, Germany, in October 1999
80 Ibid,
name. Nile Theatre is one of the few private theatres in Kampala, and the home of SAMAMU Group. In turn, SAMAMU Group is the convener of the International Anti-Corruption Theatre Movement (IATM). At IATM, "official duties are performed as in any public office. There is a Chairperson, yes, who happens to be Madada himself. But every member group is represented on the Movement's Executive Committee. The office is actually run by an Administrator, who is a full-time employee." Fred Musisi - Munnagomba is the Director, Administration, at SAMAMU Group while Sulaiman Madada is the Group's Director General.

The human resources management and business organisation in Team Line and the IATM may offer a significant departure from that in most of the groups under survey, where the director(s) always have the greater, almost independent and unchallenged, say in matters of their Companies' finances, be it fund-raising, managing other sources of income, or in expenditure. Nonetheless, the groups' heavy reliance on their chosen stars is visibly apparent. For instance, Team-Line could not run the scheduled productions during the whole year Mulekwa was at Birmingham University pursuing a Master's Degree Course in Playwriting. Pressed to give possible reasons for such an occurrence, Mulekwa could not substantiate. He only explained that the group had communicated to him by mail that they had failed to put up the productions. On the other hand, Sulaiman Madada never misses either in the Movement's productions or the cultural exchanges abroad. Reason? "He participates because he belongs. All of us are around because it is our job." Whatever the reasons, such instances can only raise concern about the group's future managerial sustainability, in case Mulekwa, Madada, or Munnagomba left the groups. Furthermore, circumstances where managers employ and administer themselves barely allow for good business organisation and administration. The circumstance creates inbreeding, not only of good practices but of bad ones as well. Besides, the theatre business seems to be that performers shall always see themselves as marginalised, exploited, and financially cheated by their directors. Hence, they usually break away to form their own theatre companies in the hope of accessing themselves a reasonable share of the proceeds. Ironically though, many of the groups formed that way have ended up being exploiters themselves, in the same way as the groups they set out to oppose. Hence the whole problem of

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81 During a conversation the researcher had with Fred Musisi – Munnagomba in July 2000
82 Ibid.
splitting up of theatre groups always revolves not around the establishment and realisation of patriotism and justice in theatre but around the size of the slice one can get for oneself from the general theatre cake that is itself small and inadequate for all.

What seems to be coming out of all this myriad of presentations of the relationship between theatre and its market in Uganda today is the fact that the country's socio-economic history, governments' apparent neglect of theatre, and the different government economic policies have all come to play a significant role in the planning, financing, marketing, and distribution of the country's theatre. With increasing liberalisation of economic activities theatre, particularly in urban centres, has become so competitive in nature that its operations are akin to any other industry producing goods and services in a free market economy. Apart from diversifying theatre's products, the proprietors are zealously concerned with changing what they have at hand into cash as they, at the same time, seek to play loyal to the wishes of their different patrons. While all these might be strategies for survival by theatre proprietors in the face of competition from existing rivalry with other theatre groups, the television, and film industry; from the new entrants coming on to the scene with new enthusiasm, new bargains and new offers; and from the economic demands of the day, in the end neither shall the price of theatre nor its consumption levels reflect its value. Literary forms, and theatre at that, cannot be equated in form and substance to any of the industrial goods, which are tangible and whose value can mostly be quantified. Theatre is a superior form of product. It is a social service and, above all, a human experience whose value lies in the systematic refinement of the human soul. That is why through theatre, one can easily reform or refine the soul of a whole society, or vice versa, something which no tangible good can do.