

Edutainment for Political Reconciliation in South Africa: a Comparative Analysis of Mtwa's *Bopha!* And Fugard's *Valley Song*

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Introduction

This paper examines entertainment education with an emphasis on the role of theater in promoting political reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. It provides a historical background of the apartheid regime and refers to its oppressive policies. The paper uses Paulo Freire's philosophy of "conscientization" as a theoretical framework and articulates it in the South African context. The paper foregrounds the role of theater in the struggle against apartheid. The paper focuses on its central theme, which is edutainment for political reconciliation in South Africa. It examines two plays written by two South African playwrights. These works are Percy Mtwa's *Bopha!* and Athol Fugard's *Valley Song*. The paper analyzes *Bopha!* which is written by a Black South African in 1984, and *Valley Song* which is written by a white South African in 1996. The paper treats these two plays as a continuum. Though the emergence of democracy in 1994 constitutes a watershed in the South African history, the problems of the past remain inseparable from those of the future. From this perspective, the paper attempts to analyze these two artistic works and to study their value as vehicles for promoting political reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa.

Freire's philosophy of "conscientization"

"Conscientization" is a process that involves the people and engages them in dialogue to identify their problems and take action to solve them. "The term 'conscientization' refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality"(Freire 1972, p.16). It is a methodology used by the people to subvert what Freire calls the domesticating "culture of silence" through cultural action. Freire gives us fascinating insights in this respect. He argues that "the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed not the situation which oppressed them; for the more, the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated

(Davis, 1981, p.54). Thus the apparatus of the state was used to mythologize the consciousness of the masses to perpetuate the apartheid rule. The apartheid regime tried to undermine South African indigenous cultures and impose its Afrikaner ideology. To liberate themselves, the people of South Africa had to destroy the shackles of cultural "domestication" to get rid of the Afrikaner hegemonic rule.

The process of conscientisation requires the involvement of members of society in identifying their problems and finding solutions for them. Biko (as cited in Kavanagh 1986) asserts that "conscientization implies a desire to engage people in an emancipator process, in an attempt to free them from a situation of bondage"(p.157). Mda (1993) suggests that "[f]or theatre to act as a vehicle for raising critical awareness, or conscientisation, the target communities should be active participants not only in performance of the plays, but in the actual planning of the programme, the selection of the content..."(p.23). Watts (1989) mentions that African writers "recognized the need to direct their work at the black community, and to use it to transform the consciousness of their people, to reverse the process of alienation"(p.30). Thus, Freire's philosophy of "conscientisation" proved to be pertinent to South African artists who struggled to liberate their country from the apartheid regime.

Theater under the apartheid regime: A historical background

Black South Africans resisted the apartheid regime since its inception. Fanon (as cited in Kavanagh 1985) articulates the situation in South Africa by saying "[e]xploitation, tortures, raids, racism, collective liquidations, national oppression take turns at different levels in order literally to make of the native an object in the hands of the occupying nation"(p.154). The struggle of South Africans against the apartheid regime intensified in the

sixties. Theater in South Africa was a site of cultural struggle in the fight against apartheid. Popular theater practitioners used their talents in Black townships to mobilize the people against the apartheid regime.

Township Theater that flourished by utilizing music and dance in the 1960s gave way to a theater of resistance in the seventies. In 1972, the Black People's Convention (BMC) was created to act as an umbrella organization for adherents of the Black consciousness movement. Political themes started to dominate popular theater in the mid-1970s. Gibson Kente's *How Long*, and *Too Late* and the works of the People's Experimental Theatre (PET) are good examples of this genre. However, it was Athol Fugard who was the pioneer in introducing "political theater in the western mode in South Africa." (Mda, 1992, p.39). His plays depicted aspects of segregation and exposed its inhumane nature. In the 1980s Market Theater started to appear, and performances moved from townships to big cities. The apartheid regime persecuted and harassed Black Consciousness dramatists, and revealed its intolerance of critical plays like Mthuli Shenzi's *Shanti* and Workshop '71's *Survival*. The murder of Stephen Biko in his detention cell in 1977 epitomized the bestiality of the apartheid regime and its disregard for artistic forms of expression.

Post-apartheid theater

By the 1990s theater-for-resistance's audiences were almost liberal Whites and some middle-class Black South Africans. Nelson Mandela's release on 11 February 1990 paved the way for a smooth transition to democracy. In July 1993 a transitional government was established, and an interim constitution was adopted in December 1993. Elections were held under international supervision on April 26, 1994. "The official results, released on May 6, 1994, gave ANC 62.6 of the vote; the NP, 20.4 percent; and the IFP, 10.5 percent." (Byrnes, 1997, p.84). The National Assembly elected Nelson Mandela as president on May 9, 1994.

During the 1990s, an informal theater that is performed on streets is gaining ground in townships. The themes were multifariously reflecting the multiplicity of problems facing South Africa. "Today's discourse is that of reconciliation, and we are keen to see what role the arts are playing or can play in promoting reconciliation." (Mda, 1992, p.41). According to Angove (as cited in Mda) theater of reconciliation gives perspective "in which the reality of a polarized society is defied to present human beings from all racial and cultural groups, communicating, sharing and understanding...and transcends present reality to display to its audience a potential South Africa." (Mda, 1992, p.41).

The present democratic atmosphere has opened political space for various forms of expression representing the mosaic of the South African society. However, the problem is the impact of "the influx of foreign productions which might well overshadow indigenous work" (David & Fuchs, 1996, p.11). In such a situation Theater-for-resistance has to retool itself to adapt to changing conditions. "There is now some silence, perhaps momentarily so, in the Theatre of Resistance front, until the practitioner finds a new voice with which to respond to the new situation" (Mda, 1996 p.206). Reflecting this silence is Fugard's assertion that "what do I have to do now? Am I in fact going to be South Africa's first redundancy?...my creativity will leave me before my life has" (BAM, 1995, p.1). Fugard believes that there will be desperate people in South Africa for years to come. Mda (1992) agrees and thinks that Theater for Development will be the wave of the future in South Africa.

Percy Mtwa: *Bopha!*

Bopha! means detention in the Zulu language. It is a play written in 1984 by Percy Mtwa, who is a Black South African playwright, singer, dancer and an actor. In addition to *Bopha!* Mtwa wrote *Woza Albert!* In collaboration with Mbongeni Ngema. Mtwa's works were performed successfully in South Africa and abroad. Kerr (1995) argues that "Mtwa was a diligent proselytizer for a return to pre-colonial African values and culture and particularly for the revival of a form of Zulu ritual theatre known as *umlinganiso*" (p.221). Orkin (1991) describes Mtwa as one of "the most successful theatrical practitioners in recent decades with township as well as city audiences..." (p.221). Mtwa's fine theatrical skills are reflected in *Bopha!*. The play revolves around a Black policeman (Njandini) who could not realize the brutality of the apartheid regime. He becomes a victim of the system's ideology that portrays the police as a neutral force serving the interests of the people. It is a play that embodies the ideology of the Black Consciousness movement, and protests against the atrocities of the apartheid regime. In *Bopha!*, Njandini teaches cadets that if they hear people describe them as PIGs, they should not be angry, because P stands for power; I, for intelligence; and G, for guts (Mtwa, 1986, p.240). *Bopha!* deals with themes of family relations, oppression and resistance. Narrative framing which sets the stage for action is one of *Bopha!*'s characteristics.

Thus, in "The opening scene of *Bopha!*, a police drill parade which transforms into a dance, establishes the theme and setting of a Black policeman a white police state with an impressive dance performance"(Balme, 1996, p.70). Njandini, wants every member of his family to be a policeman, particularly his son Zwelakhe. However, the son becomes a rebel, and works with other students against the system. He leads a student protest against using the Afrikaans language in school. This protest is a rejection of the ruling ideology that relied on the Afrikaans language as a tool of cultural hegemony. By highlighting police parade and Zulu dance, the play "retains a clear connection with the action and them of the play: the predicament of Black policemen in the apartheid regime"(Balme, 1996, p. 81).

Bopha! exposes the injustices that characterized the apartheid rule. Zwelakhe who becomes a student leader, informs his uncle Naledi that "fifteen of our school kids have been shot by police" (Mtwla, 1986, p.241). Pules was tortured to death, and his death was considered a suicide (p.250). Tortures and killings of detainees were pervasive in the South African prisons during apartheid. The South African regime used heinous methods to eliminate its opponents, including torture in detention. The case of Stephen Biku who was tortured to death in 1977, has inspired many South African writers to highlight the bestial treatment that Black detainees receive at the hands of white South African police (p.251). Naledi, Njandini's brother, could not find a job, and decide to work as a policeman. He is described as "strong head" because he sympathizes with Black detainees (p.248). The arrest of a Black man for using a lavatory reserved for Europeans only indicates racial segregation. Moreover, demolishing of Magogo's house despite the mayor's permission symbolizes forcible removal of Blacks from their homes and lands. These scenes reflect the contradictions among white South Africans, as Zweli has said, "Botha versus Botha"(p.250). Captain Van Donner, a white police officer he is brought to pacify the situation in the town, made it worse. His arrogance, prejudice, and heavy-handed approach ignited a popular uprising.

The apartheid regime described everyone who opposed it a communist. Thus, a policeman (Piet) tells Njandini that his son is a communist. Njandini replies "He's just a small boy and doesn't know what he's doing"(p.254). Njandini knows that protesters have burned his house and the police have injured his wife. He becomes angry and talks to his son in detention. He says "Where's the Black Power... Is this freedom?". His son replies "It is your job baba...can you see your job has made you an enemy of your own family."(256). Zweli, and Naledi informs Njandini that the system is disintegrating. Njandini listens to the voice of reason, resigns from the police force and joins the struggle of his people. His brother and his son become glad.

Bopha! is an important play because it enables young South Africa to understand their history. According to Mda (1992) "there is no doubt that for this country to survive and prosper, reconciliation is essential. But true reconciliation will only come when we are big enough to confront what happened yesterday, without bitterness"(p.43). He calls for tolerance, forgiveness, and restitution. Fugard realizes the legacy of apartheid and is aware of the need to redress it. He argues that "if a man is honest enough to confront his soul and ask for forgiveness, I believe the miracle can happen."(Mda, 1992, p. 215).

Athol Fugard's *The Valley Song* (1996)

Athol Fugard is one of the most recognized South African playwrights. His mother is an Afrikaaner, and his father is an Anglo-Irish. A glimpse at Fugard's *The Blood Knot*, *Boesman and Lena*, and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (wrote it with John Kani and Winston Ntshona), and *My Children, My Africa*, reveals his protest against the apartheid regime. The existential philosophy influenced many of his works. Peck (1997) argues that existentialism attracted liberal writers "because it allowed them to preserve liberalism's emphasis on the individual in the face of the strong pressures toward conformity that arose out of the struggle between competing nationalisms that developed in the worst years of apartheid South Africa"(p.123). Fugard's theatrical format is simple and often relies on few characters. "Athol Fugard's choice of a small number of characters and emphasis on actors 'striking' their 'personal truths', derives in part from the influence of Jerzy Grotowski's 'theatre laboratory'"(Shava 1989, p.132). Purkey and Steinberg (1992) argue that Fugard is known for his liberal humanism, and "his unique blend of naturalism and absurdism, and his carefully crafted three-dimensional characters battling to define their existence in the apartheid world"(p.26). Some Black South African theater practitioners praise Fugard for his " 'humility', truth, and sincerity"(Kavanagh, 1985, p.64).

Fugard wrote *Valley Song* in 1996, two years after the birth of multiracial democracy in South Africa. What is new in this play is that it depicts the reversal of power relations that occurred in the South African society. The play revolves around Abraam Jonkers (called Buks), a seventy-four year old mixed-race (colored) tenant farmer, and his granddaughter Veronica.

The Author, a white man in his sixties, representing Fugard himself, intervenes to talk with Veronica, as well as Buks on various occasions. Fugard poses as an actor and plays the role of Buks, as well as the role of the Author interchangeably. *Valley Song* opens with the Author showing the audience white Boer pumpkin seeds, and informing them about life in Karoo valley, a place in Sneeuberg Mountains in South Africa. Then the Author fades into the character of Buks. Buks knows the Author wants to buy the land, and tells Veronica that he may be expelled from the land (p.6). He shows her pumpkin seeds and says "they are miracles". Veronica tells him she is bored with the village, and wants to go to Johannesburg for "adventure and romance". Buks remembers his daughter Caroline (Veronica's mother) who died in Johannesburg, and says in pain "if that Railway Bus hadn't been there and made it easy for her...may be she would still be alive and sitting here with us today"(p.11).

Veronica wants to know more about her mother, and wants to know whether Harry Ruiters was her mother's boy friend is her father. Buks tells her that she looks like her mother. But he does not know who her father is. Buks tells Veronica how her grandmother loved her, and liked her singing. He also tells her that he fed her and washed her after Betty's death. "It is a moment of deep union between the old man and the young girl"(p.14).

Buks, remembers Betty, and talks to her. He is in deep pain and anguish. He expresses his worries about Veronica, who becomes an adult. He says to Betty "She's nearly as old now as Caroline was when she ran away. And she looks so much like her, Betty, it really does frighten me"(p.16). He also tells Betty about his fear because a white man wants to buy the land. He says to Betty "I know what you want to say...Have faith in the Lord, Abraam Yonkers...and I do...it's just that He's asking for a lot of it these days"(p.17). He remembers the good days when Betty used to sleep by his side and says "there is nothing left... it's all gone"(p.17). In these powerful dramatic scenes, Fugard sheds light on Africans' relationships with God. This refers to the role that theology of liberation has played in the South African struggle. Fugard also underscores the Africans' relationship with their dead. These relationships have played essential roles in shaping the African character, not only in South Africa, but also in Africa at large, and in Diaspora as well. Reconciliation and atonement cannot be attained unless the living self is reconciled with the beloved people even if they are dead. Thus, the present and the future are inseparable from the past. Forgiveness can not be achieved in the absence of spiritual strength. Therefore, those who suffered during the apartheid regime have to be restituted. The issue of reparation is one of the most critical issues facing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was formed in 1995 to redress injustices committed during the apartheid rule.

Fugard refers to an essential element facing the young generation in South Africa. It is the issue of foreign cultural influence. Veronica used to sneak out after Buks sleeps, and go to watch TV, through a window outside Mrs. Jooste's house. Mrs. Jooste is a white rich woman who lives in a big house, loves music and drinks whiskey. To give the audience a sense of how Veronica watches TV, Veronica stands on an empty apple box, with mike in hand and she starts "mimicking the pop star she sees on the TV."(p.18). When she sings the Author in the shadow applauds her. Fugard's reference to the effects of TV is interesting because the apartheid regime refused to introduce TV to South Africa until 1976. The apartheid government feared that foreign influences might endanger the survival of the apartheid regime.

In a revealing scene, the Author talks to Veronica about her aspirations and dreams. She says to him "I'll be on TV. Ja. Then you can stand here on the step and lower through the window and watch me singing"(p.20). That is her dream. The Author argues "But it's a big one". She replies "A dream must be big and special ...Don't you have dreams like that?". He replied, "Not anymore, but I used to."(p.20). This scene symbolizes the aspirations of young South Africans, which some old South Africans, mainly whites, see as unrealistic. The scene also highlights the vision of some left-wing South Africans who want Black South African to regain what white South Africans have appropriated during the apartheid regime. This scene portrays how South Africans deal with the issue of class conflict. It highlights economic and social disparities between the white minority and the Black majority.

Fugard sheds more light on the issue of class struggle. He questions the government's credibility and its support for the poor in South Africa. When Veronica tells Buks to write a petition to the government if the white man tries to buy the land, Buks says "Government is trouble. I will be very happy if they don't know where we are."(p.66). Buks prefers to talk directly to the white man, who seems to be a good person. Buks thinks that if the white man buys the land, Veronica can work as a housekeeper for the white man. Veronica says she will not work for a white man. She argues that things have changed. "Our lives and ...everything. Isn't that why there was an election"(p.28).

However, Buks tells Veronica that he and his wife worked for white people and suffered to sustain their family. The Author intervenes and tells Veronica to be realistic because big dreams hurt if they do not come true. She tells him that "You will never see me on my knees scrubbing white man's flour"(p.37). Veronica wants social change and decides to go to Johannesburg, despite Buks's dissatisfaction. These scenes reflect the difficulty that young people face in accepting gradual change. Some young people want immediate and revolutionary change. Many young people want to be in charge of themselves. This scene manifests the young generation's determination to decide for itself, and detach itself from their parents' complacency. The Author sympathizes with Buks and tells Veronica to remain with him because he almost lost everything. Buks reminds Veronica of what his father has taught him. To be a "good man you must be good to your family, neighbor, and land"(p.50). This is a clear message of reconciliation. But Veronica is preoccupied with her dreams. She says, "my singing is my life. I must look after it the way Oupa looks after his vegetables"(p.55). The Author tells the audience that he wants the Valley to remain unspoiled because he is selfish. He is also jealous of Veronica because she is young and has big dreams (p.58). He says to her "You. Your youth. Your dreams. The future belongs to you now...be careful of us"(p.58). Fugard talks like an old South African and believes that the young generation will take care of everybody regardless of the color of his or her skin. His tone is full of hope and cautious optimism.

In the closing scene, the Author goes to Buks and talks to him. "Tell me the truth now Buks, think back to your young days and tell me...Did a woman ever smell as good as the Karoo earth after a good rain? Or feel good?"(p.60). The Author gives Buks a handful of pumpkin seeds and says "Imagine Buks. An akker full of shiny, Flat White Boer pumpkins as big as donkey-cart wheels!"(p.60). Fugard artfully conveys a powerful message of atonement and reconciliation. All South Africans have to come together and plant seeds in the valley, to reap a miraculous harvest. Fugard's love of South Africa is unquestionable. The beauty of the *Valley Song's* scenes and its poetic language attest to his passionate love for the country.

Commenting on *Valley Song*, Fugard (1997) says "possibly my most successful attempt at balancing the personal and political in its examination of the inevitability of change, of loss and renewal. It is a play which ends like all the others with a note of hope and affirmation"(p.viii). Fugard adds that "*Valley Song* is not a story I could have told 10 years ago because I was not the person I am today...It was the perfect story for me two years ago when South Africa was experiencing momentous changes. At the same time, there were also changes inside myself, in terms of age and reconciling things" (Lee, 1997, p. 2). Fugard knows that there will be desperate South Africans for years to come. The task of South African artists is to build bridges of racial understanding and promote political reconciliation. Fugard argues that "nation-building...That is finally what we have to take on now". (BAM, p. 1). A critic of *Valley Song* argues that "both Abraam and The Author learn that, in the post-apartheid world, where one's possibilities are limited only by the outer limits of one's dreams, they can only stand in awe of young dreamers and get out of their way, planting the seeds of the future together" (*People's Light & Theatre...*, p.1).

In *Valley Song*, Fugard expresses his lived experience and challenges the audience by what he calls "a truly living moment in theatre"(Crow, 1996, p.17). Some critics describe Fugard's protest against apartheid as mild. One critic argues that as a white South African, Fugard cannot transcend his class affiliation. "He can not understand the true nature of the struggle of the majority in South Africa and has, in his plays of sole authorship, presented black characters as capable only of stoical perseverance"(Shava, 1989, p. 163).

***Bopha* and *Valley Song*: Resonating themes that call for social change**

The need for an immediate change constitutes a significant theme in *Bopha!* as well as *Valley Song*. Family relations and impatience of young generations are also highlighted. In *Bopha!* Zwelakhe resists his father and does not want to work as a policeman. The father believes that he is in charge, and his son should obey as long as he lives in the house. However, Zwelakhe has a different vision. Zwelakhe emphatically tells his mother, Rosie that he does not want anyone to decide his future. He will judge it by himself. Similarly, in *Valley Song*, Veronica disagrees with her grandfather Buks. She is bored with the village and wants to go to Johannesburg. Like Njandini in *Bopha!*, Buks in *Valley Song*, believes that Veronica should abide by his rules and listen to what he says. But Veronica is like Zwelakhe in *Bopha!*. Both of them are vibrant young people who reject the status quo that their parents have accepted.

Lack of jobs for Black South Africans is one of the dominant themes in the two plays. In *Bopha!* Naledi could not find a job during the apartheid regime because of the color of his skin. In fact, he does not have qualifications because he was not given the opportunity to have an education.

In *Valley Song*, Mr. Buks mentions lack of job opportunities in the valley. He thinks if a white man buys the land, he might furnish his granddaughter Veronica with a house keeping job. However, Veronica ignores scarcity of jobs, and continues to nurture her “big dreams.”

Lack of land is also an important theme in both plays. In *Bopha!* the majority of Black South Africans were living in poverty, whereas White minority lived prosperously. Magogo's house is demolished unjustifiably. In *Valley Song*, Mrs. Jooste has a big house and a TV set. This contrasts with Buks's small crumbling house, which has no TV set. Moreover, Buks's fear of losing the land is reminiscent of forcible removal of Black South Africans from homes and lands during the apartheid regime. Forgiveness and reconciliation are central themes in *Bopha!* and *Valley Song*. However, themes of reconciliation with white South Africans are muted in *Bopha!*, because it was written in 1980. *Bopha!* alludes to understanding by depicting a white police officer who is critical of the apartheid oppressive policies. Thus, not all whites are seen as repressive. But the theme of reconciliation among Black South Africans is clear in *Bopha!*. Therefore, Zwelalkhe becomes happy when his father decides to resign from the police force and join the people. But in *Valley Song*, the themes of reconciliation among all South Africans are clear. Buks perceives the white man as a good person, and the white man cares about Buks. Also, Buks and the Author can live together, farm the land and grow the pumpkins.

Conclusion

Edutainment can play an important role in promoting political reconciliation in South Africa. Though *Bopha!* was written in 1984, and *Valley Song* was written in 1996, the two plays complement each other. They can entertain and educate future generations about the South African history. The process of change in this regard should be seen as a continuum. The two plays can be performed to enhance ethnic understanding and racial harmony in South Africa. In *Bopha!* the oppression of the apartheid regime is contrasted with the heroic resistance of the South African people. Students' resistance to learning in Afrikaans language is symbolic of the people's rejection of the apartheid cultural hegemony. The play highlights the atrocities of apartheid rule and emphasizes the need for dismantling it. *Bopha!* is important because the legacy of apartheid constitute the basis of the present inequalities in South Africa. Black South Africans should not be prisoners of the past, and white South Africans should accept paying reparations to those who suffered during apartheid rule. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is of prime importance in this regard. Inequities of the present can not be addressed unless injustices of the past are redressed.

In *Valley Song*, Buks represents the old docile and subservient system, whereas Veronica represents the new democratic government. Both Buks and the Author have similar concerns regarding the future of South Africa. Both old men look with cautious optimism to the role that future generations can play in South Africa. Both old men can overcome the past. They can live together, farm the land and grow the pumpkin. A minor limitation in *Valley Song* is that the Author expresses what Buks and Veronica feel instead of allowing them to express their feelings. *Valley Song* is a positive and a life-affirming dramatic play. In a nutshell, *Bopha!* and *Valley Song* is important artistic works that can be utilized to promote political reconciliation and social cohesion in South Africa.

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