

## **Black Consciousness Aesthetics and Post-Conflict Mediation in South African Theatre: A Reading of MaisheMaponya's *The Hungry Earth* and Jane Taylor's *Ubu and The Truth Commission***

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the theatrical literary representations of conflicts and mediation techniques in Post-Apartheid South Africa from the perspectives of MaisheMaponya and Jane Taylor. The study asserts that the literary articulation of post-conflict mediation strategies in MaisheMaponya's *The Hungry Earth* and Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* tell the South African experience and constitute experimental praxis of social reconstruction. The two playwrights offer an example of the difficulties of putting in place a successful model of Truth and Reconciliation Commission capable of rallying Whites and Blacks after the long run segregationist and oppressive system. This study investigates the post-conflict reconciliation strategies as the bedrock and main stay of social peace, itself a springboard toward social cohesion and sustainable development.

**Key words:** *Reconciliation, peace, social cohesion, forgiveness, truth, justice and reconciliation commission.*

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**Résumé :** Cet article discute les représentations littéraires théâtrales des conflits et techniques de médiation dans une Afrique du Sud post-apartheid des perspectives de MaisheMaponya and Jane Taylor. L'étude affirme que l'articulation littéraire des stratégies de médiation post-conflits dans *The Hungry Earth* de MaisheMaponya et *Ubu and the Truth Commission* de Jane Taylor relate l'expérience sud-africaine et constitue une application expérimentale de la reconstruction sociale. Les deux auteurs offrent un exemple des difficultés à mettre en place un modèle réussi d'une commission vérité et Réconciliation capable de rallier les Blancs et les Noirs après une longue période de conflits sociopolitiques causés par l'Apartheid, un système ségrégationniste et oppressif. Cette étude fait une investigation sur les stratégies de réconciliation post-conflits comme toile de fond et pilier de la paix sociale, elle-même un tremplin vers la cohésion sociale et un développement durable.

**Mots clés :** *Réconciliation, paix, cohésion sociale, pardon, commission vérité, justice réconciliation.*

### **Introduction**

The dramatic literary images projected by MaisheMaponya and Jane Taylor of South African post-conflict society reveal peace and development strategies in African societies as an important literary project to achieve. Post-conflict reconciliation in South Africa has preoccupied MaisheMaponya in *The Hungry Earth* (Maponya 1976/2014) and Jane Taylor in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, (Taylor:2007). Yet few critics view these two South African playwrights as peace mediators whose literary contributions to the promotion of reconciliation and peace in South African literature can no more be overlooked and ignored. Michael Etherton in examining the development of South African drama concentrates only on the works of pioneers like Gibson Kente and Credo Mutwa, ignoring contemporary playwrights MaisheMaponya whose play does an in-depth analysis on different aspects of apartheid's oppression, showing its state-sanctioned and legally enshrined racism (Etherton, 1982: 52). Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996) overlooking these writers, concentrates on the works of Alan Lawson and Stephen Slemon to assert that post-colonial drama resists imperialism and its effects (Gilbert, 1996: 1). Charles E. Nnolim (2006) contends that the African writer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is challenged to envision a new Africa which has achieved parity politically, technologically, economically and militarily with Europe and America (Nnolim, 2006: 9). And, making a further comment, he adds that protest literature over apartheid irrigates Africa's tears without addressing the issue of post-apartheid national reconciliation (Ibidem). It is Olga Barrios (2008) who has given careful thought to the South African post-conflict reconciliation problem by stating the socio-political commitment of the Black Theatre Movement in its struggle for equal rights between Whites and Blacks (Barrios, 2008: 59). The fact that critics have side-tracked the literary contributions of MaisheMaponya and Jane Taylor to peace seeking strategies through post-conflict national reconciliation in South African literature gives me the opportunity to study how national reconciliation can be used as a means to attain sustainable development. In this article I will analyse how Maponya and Taylor

critically address the atrocities of apartheid regimes in South African and by so doing call for reconciliation and peace as strategies to attain national cohesion and development. My methodological approach is New Historicism. New Historicism focuses on issues of power – with a particular interest in the ways in which power is maintained by unofficial means such as the theatricality of royal display in the Court (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 506).

### **1. Conceptualizing South African Conflicts in Maishe Maponya's Dramatic Aesthetics**

Conflicts in South African Apartheid contexts and the way to handle them have fueled theme and subject matter of several South African playwrights' theatre works. Maishe Maponya and Jane Taylor advocate in their respective plays *The Hungry Earth* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* interracial conflicts between Black and White communities as one of the social decimals that inform the necessity of mediation. Using drama as a means of communication, they seek to address the fundamental question of how to find back a peaceful society after violent conflicts. Theatre for Black African consciousness emerged in a context of post-apartheid injuries that needed to be healed. Olga Barrios has shown how Black theatre emerged in South Africa parallel to the Black Consciousness Movement, which reached its peak in the 1970s and had Stephen Biko as its main spokesperson (Barrios, 2008: 145-146). Yet Black theatre suffered from continuous banning and theatre artists were imprisoned most of the times. Therefore, Black South African artists were prevented from formulating in a written manifesto the principles that were already establishing the birth and subsequent development of Black Theatre. Olga goes on to show how after the Soweto students' uprising in June 1976 and Biko's death in 1977, Black theatre took the torch kindled by Biko's spirit (Ibidem). Olga also informs us that Black artists raised their torch with a tremendous sense of power, as if the bloodshed of the Soweto children and Biko had infuriated and given them an invincible strength to fight back. Nevertheless, every attempt pursued by Black South African artists in theatre was hindered (Ibidem).

Black theatre of the 1970s and 1980s is comprised in this study under the denomination of Black Theatre Movement because the playwrights of this time sought the same principles and goals although they were not written in a manifesto (Barrios, 2008: 146). Black theatre developed out of the Black consciousness concept and its artists were committed towards the same objective: to raise Black people's consciousness about their need to take an action in their liberation struggle and that of their country through the recovery of Black history and self-affirmation. Black consciousness aesthetics expressed in Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* and Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, then, are ascribed within the theatrical Aesthetics of self-affirmation that equally defines the African American theatre of the 1960s and 1970s. When studying the two plays of the black consciousness movement, I will examine the specific sociopolitical and historical situations faced by black theatre artists in South Africa. In spite of the aforementioned restraints, theatre continued to exist and demonstrated to be a powerful weapon for action and social change, as the two playwrights Maponya and Taylor have aestheticized regarding the situation in theatre and poetry performances. They were successively discontinued by police force, a situation which confirms that theatre was a dangerous threat to the White government's policy of apartheid because it conveyed the power to move the masses into action.

Taking the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as inspiration, they showed that social cohesion would be possible only if citizens could forgive and forget past wounds in a context of national conflicts. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has spawned the bold imaginative artistic works of Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* which is lauded as the touchstone artful work of social reform. The playwright brings to the fore the guilt of those who committed atrocities during the apartheid regime. According to Helen Gilbert, "In doing so, the play enters a politically volatile terrain, asking difficult questions about the moral value and social effectiveness of reconciliation as an official nation-building strategy, but refusing to provide easy answers (Gilbert, 2001: 25)." No other time than during the anomy of apartheid were acts of atrocities and unheard barbarism like killings, rape, genital mutilations, limbs chopping, burning people alive, child labour and trafficking committed. The character Pa Ubu in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is one of the male characters who witnessed such inhuman barbaric acts:

Pa Ubu: They put the makarov pistol to the top of his head and pulled the trigger. The gun jammed. We got another gun from one of the askaris. That didn't work either, so in the end, we beat him to death with spade. Then, we each grabbed a hand and a foot, and put the body on the pyre of tyre and wood, poured petrol on it, and set it alight. Now of course, the burning of a body to ashes takes about seven hours; it is – ah – and – ah – whilst that happened we were drinking and even having a braai next to the fire (*UTC, PP: 40*).

This is a living testimony of how uncivic citizens committed reprehensible acts of ultimate barbarism on their fellow citizens. Brutality, beating, torture, killing, mutilations chopping, and many other crimes were committed. Now the conflict is over and the victimized people must outlive the pains of their mental torture. For the society to continue to exist and progress toward development, reconciliation and forgiveness become imperious necessity. Jane Taylor's approach is conciliatory, seeking to raise consciousness about the intricacy and delicacy of post-conflict reconciliation, as the moral and psychological scars are still rife in the minds and souls of the victims. For that playwright, reconciliation must proceed from forgiveness, a desire to overlook others' guilt and forget. Reconciliation is more than a concept, it is an act of volition and the insightful decision of people who envision to live together as a nation looking into the future. The people must see themselves as bound by fate and history to live together. According to David Bloomfield et al, reconciliation means different things to different people. It is both a goal - something to achieve - and a process – a means to achieve that goal (Bloomfield et al, 2003: 19). Reconciliation prevents the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict. It consolidates peace, breaks the cycle of violence and strengthens newly established or reintroduced democratic institutions. There is necessity to commit reconciliation problems to the Truth Commission: "My advice would be to pre-empt it all. I hear there is to be a Commission to determine Truths. Distortions and proportions" (*UTC, PP: 32*). The role of such commission is to investigate on the immediate and the far-reaching causes of violence in the society in havoc, going back into history to dig up facts and propose solutions for sustainable reconciliation and peace.

From a historical perspective, a glance at the political millstone of South Africa reveals that Blacks had been governed by White minority and remained foreigners in their own homeland (Barrios, 2008: 29). Most violent conflicts in South Africa as fictionalized by MaisheMaponya and Jane Taylor have historical origins and can be traced to the refusal of the transfer of power by White colonizers to the African post-independent leaders. In *The Hungry Earth* MaisheMaponya establishes that the White community's settlement and power mismanagements were printed with incompetence mistakes marked by accusations of ethnocentrism, economic corruptions, money embezzlement, religious conflicts, and dictatorship. In the context of South Africa the Apartheid regime spearheaded by White minority gave little power to Black communities and created social strife and political tensions. Political power being concentrated in an oligarchic White minority's hands, Black majorities were marginalized and cheated in their rights. The character Matlhoko attempts to reconstruct the context of that socio-political dystopia through the explanation of the past memories:

Matlhoko: When this land started giving birth to ugly days, things started going wrong from the moment of dawning and peace went into exile, to become a thing of wilderness. Yes, we experienced the saddest days of our lives when umlungu first came to these shores called Africa, a total stranger from Europe. We received him kindly, we gave him food, we gave him shelter, we adopted his ideas and teachings [...] Whilst we were still smiling, he set up laws, organized an army and started digging up the gold and diamonds; and by the time our forefathers opened their eyes, umlungu was no more - he had moved to Europe. He had only left his army behind to 'take care of the unruly elements that may provoke a revolution' (*THE, PP: 17*)

This passage is a literary reconstitution of the historical apartheid settlement in South Africa with its discriminatory practices. Maponya like all South Africans had been personally affected by the discriminatory practices of the apartheid system. Land expropriation, looting of gold and diamond, over-exploitation of mines workers, arbitrary arrests and detentions without trial, properties seizures, torture, killings and abuses of authority by the state are rampant practices. The social atmosphere is replete with terror, violence, insecurity, fear and mistrust. It results that the social peace is put in peril and the climate of insecurity and terror has settled in the society for years. Helen Gilbert explains that the playwright MaisheMaponya has developed an increasing interest in the political theatre that emerged in the 1970s and became actively involved in the Black Consciousness Movement (Gilbert, 2008: 16). A combination of socialist and essentialist ideology, this movement owed as much to black American cultural politics as it did to the Third-World theories of liberation inspired by such scholars as Frantz Fanon. As Olga Barrios explains,

By the end of the 1950s Frantz Fanon had established a revolutionary line of thought that African Americans, Africans and other people of the Third World countries would adopt in their political, social and artistic agendas. Fanon was determined to change the status, identity and history imposed upon Black people by Western Culture. He advocated self-determination for his people and the people of the Third World against an intellectual and political imperialism that had colonized their land and their minds. He proclaimed the need for national consciousness that could help the colonized unveil the lies by which they had been subjected

to a dominant culture which had denied and/or undervalued theirs. He insisted on the need to look at their own past and to study and find new strategies for their present in order to build their future. He envisioned the necessity for a re-evaluation of their history by breaking myths and stereotypes dictated by colonizers by searching and discovering their true selves (Barrios, 2008: 47).

Here, the key idea that transpires is the contribution of Fanon to the sensitization of Africans to the appropriation of black consciousness struggle for freedom in a context of social violence and injustice caused by apartheid. It is a

For the African Black Consciousness Movement, pursues the critic Gilbert, political and cultural liberation were inextricable. Black Consciousness theatre is a kind of committed literature that launches an offensive literary attack on the social injustices bred by the apartheid regime, seeking to overhaul the political apparatus of White oligarchy, the military junta who, like cankerworm, palmerworm or locust ate up all the rights and prerogatives of the Black community including decent living, access to education, employment, land and property owning, to mention but a few. David Bloomfield et al observe that it is necessary to understand the past, and to understand how people interpret their past [...] The intensity of violence that has taken place directly affects the depth of response of those involved and partly defines the scale of the problem to be addressed... (Bloomfield 223: 40). Maishe Maponya in Scene One of *The Hungry Earth* calls for an urgent militancy of all the African Black Community to arise and protest against the ravages of apartheid. The central role that such art form plays is the dissemination of ideas to debunk the superstructure of racial discrimination. It seeks to dismantle the ill-practices due to social disparities, oppression, corruption, arbitrary imprisonment and detentions without trial as the message is encrusted in the introductory passage of *The Hungry Earth*:

Stand up all ye brave of Afrika  
Stand up and get to battle,  
Where our brothers die in numbers  
Afrika you were bewitched  
But our black blood will flow to water the tree of our freedom (*THE, PP: 18*).

.....  
Wake up Mother Afrika  
Wake up  
Time has run out  
And all opportunity is wasted  
Wake up Mother Africa  
Wake up  
Before the white man rapes you.  
Wake up Mother Africa. (*THE, PP: 16*)

It is against such background that political violence took place in South Africa, according to the play's storyline. Thus, the sociopolitical turmoil set up by the discriminatory violent apartheid regime inform the turn in the historical upsurge and violent black/white communities conflicting interactions over the years. The literary message conveyed here by Maishe Maponya is that violence breeds violence and inter-racial hatred nurtures hatred. Such a situation is anti-life and can never help society to make progress:

TWO: If we would really feel, the pain would be so great that we would stand up and fight to stop all the suffering.  
THREE: If we would really feel it in the bowels, the groin, in the throat and in the breast, we would go in the streets and stop the wars, stop slavery, destroy the prisons, stop detentions, stop the killings, stop selfishness – and apartheid we would end. (*THE, PP: 16*)

If community life should be made enjoyable, it urges that social actors under the supervision of political actors commit themselves to promote peace and social cohesion, human values that are the bedrock and main stay of development. The vibrancy and vitality of Black South African theatre inscribes in its cultural agenda peace seeking strategies as the pivotal point that sustains the masses struggles against the oppression of apartheid. Art here is being used to sustain political struggle, to boost and galvanize the socio-political aspirations of the people towards the achievement of decent living environment where black community and white community can be weighed on an equal social scale of human value. Looking closely at life in society, one can infer that social strife, anomy and mistrust impinge on the atrocities committed by some citizens against their fellow citizens during the apartheid period, and which the victims are unable to forgive and forget. Therefore, it urges

that true reconciliation begins by a mass sensitization on the necessity of social cohesion. To arrive there, the playwrights Maponya and Taylor think that there should be a cultural revalorization that restores Black South African cultural values in the concert of other nations'. The cultural disruptions caused by apartheid prone white communities that crippled the blossoming of dramatic performances is also a remote cause of social tensions, for the Whites overvalue their cultural practices and disparage Africans'. It is to advance the postulate that cultural equation is a source of social cohesion while cultural chauvinism demotes all efforts of peace building strategies in society. The evidence of such a critical stance is adumbrated in the following position taken by J. NdukakuAmankulor. According to him,

The vibrancy and vitality of contemporary Black South African theater is the result of an ideological commitment to promote the image and views of Black people in their struggle against apartheid. The creative vigor that has flourished in the 1970s and 1980s corresponds with the heightening of awareness of the role art must play in the fight for freedom and a distinct identity (Amankulor, 1993, 170).

This statement underscores the propitious assertion that Black South Africans use theatre as a tool for seeking freedom. In the struggle for cultural freedom, theatre becomes an ideological weapon that serves for self-affirmation in the face of unjust White oppression based on colour, race and ethnicity.

## **2. The Symbolism of Mediation Fostering Black Consciousness: Jane Taylor's Model**

Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* addresses national reconciliation between White and Black in a post-Apartheid context using symbols and images. The puppets in the play act like human beings who are themselves archetypes of parties in conflicts: the black and the white. Three puppet-types, — the vulture, the witnesses, and Brutus the dog and Niles crocodiles are symbols alluding to the treacherous people who act wickedly under the masks of disguised humans. The playwright uses symbolism for double purposes: first to unveil the hypocritical tendencies of some citizens who do evil without wanting to face the punishment of the law, hence covering up their true identity to be unveiled. Secondly symbolism is used as a thought provoking device. As artists the playwrights prefer to have spectators or readers think out the meaning for themselves. Yet no matter the perspective from which one stands to gauge facts, mediation strategies stands out as the ultimate goal of MaishaMaponya and Jane Theylor. To better grasp the contextual meaning let's bind Sara Horowitz to our purpose. The word mediate according to Sara Horowitz means to act between two conflicting parties as a peace-maker (Horowitz, 2007: 51). Given this framework, he defines mediation in a dispute or negotiation as the intervention of third party unfamiliar to the conflict, trustable, unbiased and intending to be neutral:

Being a mediator involves artful skills to assist the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement on the issues in dispute. The task of a mediator is creating the conditions for an open dialogue and assuring the parties involved in the conflict freedom of speech and, above all, autonomy in decision making. The mediator is 'a facilitator, educator or communicator who helps to clarify issues, identify and manage emotions, and create options, thus making it possible to reach an agreement avoiding an adversarial battle in court' (Ibidem).

The goal of mediation as explained here is assisting the parties in conflict to solve their differences. Fisher and Ury (quoted by Sara Horowitz), and other Harvard scholars, speak of joint problem solving to reach a win-win settlement or integrative solution (Ibidem). In *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, Jane Taylor aesthetically represents the images of post-apartheid society in search for a true model of mediation and reconciliation. Characters, very often the epitomes of parties in conflict express their emotions and feelings after being witnesses of social injustice. Jane Taylor's play makes reflect that Dates, deadlines, scarce resources, different needs, and especially emotional issues that raise feelings such as hate and resentment, makes mediation a hard task for the commissioner. Bloomfiel has reported that although Landau et al. listed the following 'goals of a mediator' as typical of family mediation, Jane Taylor the playwright suggests through theatrical illustrations that they can be perfectly applied to mediation in other fields (Bloomfield, 2003: 151). To emphasize their comprehensive nature, the comments about aspects specific to family conflict have been omitted. From the first scene of the play through the last one, the steps of mediation seem to follow Sara Horowitz proposal scheme as credentials for a true post-conflict mediation:

- To develop trust and cooperation between the parties, so they can share relevant tasks and information.
- To improve communication between the parties, or, in other words, to understand the feelings of their counterpart, and share the decision making.

- To assure all the relevant parties their perspectives will be heard, and therefore, make them feel they are fairly treated.
- To reduce tension and conflict, so those who have a close relationship with both parties are not involved in a conflict of loyalties.
- To help the parties appreciate relevant information, in order to make decisions based on proper data, after having considered alternative proposals to solve the same issues.
- To favour confidentiality, while developing a voluntary resolution to the conflict.
- To reach a reasonable and fair agreement, unlike what usually happens in court. The mediator's role is crucial, but his skill must focus on granting the continuity and successful conclusion of the process rather than substituting the parties at the moment of proposing or deciding on a solution (Bloomfield, 2003: 40).

These are some important mediation and reconciliation tips that emerge from the reading of *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. It is crucial to underline that in every conflict, the impartiality of the mediation stands prime. The mediator's role becomes even greater when negotiations come to a standstill and are at risk of breaking of for reaching a stalemate. The mediator should guarantee a favourable environment for negotiation, allowing parties to listen and understand themselves and each other; acknowledge and appreciate their own interests and needs, and arrange them in order of importance; and build – together with the mediator – options that would let them reach a fair, feasible and long-lasting agreement, flexible enough to consider the possibility of future adjustments to its clauses. Jane Taylo's dramatic ideology points to the fact that when the mediator meets the parties at the beginning of the process, he finds them entrenched in their own personal views regarding their perspectives and demands, which they consider to be the best and fairest. Both parties are fixed in those positions, since they are unwilling to resign their values and views. Taylor's art further give hints to the fact that the mediator must build an atmosphere of trust in himself and the process, which will allow working towards the conflict resolution, each party leaving aside their fantasy of recreating life according to their own wishes. Where Taylor's philosophy of reconciliation mostly blends with the South African realism is that it starts by repositioning the debate on the aim of cultural struggle by hosting both South African theatre and literature as cultural media, to reinforce African culture and replace the imposed English traditions to South Africans as the standard cultural medium:

This cultural struggle is not confined to South Africa but can be observed as well in other parts of the continent where the legacy of European theater conventions is being challenged, modified, or replaced with new forms of performance expression. Such replacements have not been based on mere cultural chauvinism. On the contrary, they are the benefits of research into indigenous African performance traditions in the effort to take theater down from the ivory towers to the grassroots of Africa's population (Amankulor, 1993: 166).

Adding to cultural denigration are physical violence translating into acts of kidnapping, killings, mutilation and rape. It is a sum total of criminal and barbaric assaults, that suppress peace and concords among the citizens of the same nations. In *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, some of the atrocities committed during political turmoil are reported by a Witness: "The police came to fetch me in my house. They said they had found the bodies of our children, they must take me to see them. When I saw them, they were without eyes" (*UTC, PP: 37*). Reading such a testimony about criminal infanticide and cruel manslaughter may arouse in the listener a feeling of disgust, hatred and contempt for the torturing faction. At the same time, intellectual judgment and moral probity call for a sense of self-examination and a critical propensity that considers peace perspectives as an exit door to stamp out violence, build social cohesion and a peaceful environment. For peace and national cohesion to prevail, forgiveness becomes an imperious necessity. This should be a free choice of the people who want to live together as a nation. It is not imposed on them: Pa Ubu asserts "we have opted for concealing rather than revealing" (*UTC, PP: 37*). In other words, it means that, establishing the framework in which to implement peace education as praxis of post-conflicts reconciliation in the South African context can help design a sustainable reconciliation policy. Peace education may mean different things to different people and in different contexts. It is the context that can dictate the strategy to be adopted. The ethos of national reconciliation in South African context viewed through the specter of Jane Taylor's drama recommends a fostering of a culture of peace through a social integration that takes into account the interests of all ethnic groups, an equal treatment before the law. It should promote a sustainable economic, social and cultural development that targets the eradication of poverty among the black majority or minority groups.

According to Kofi Annan, the former UN secretary general,

Prolonged armed conflicts don't only kills people: they destroy a country's physical infrastructure, divert scarce resources, and disrupt economic life, including food supplies. They radically undermine education and health services. A war of national liberation or self-defense may sometimes bind a nation together – albeit a crucial and unacceptable human cost. But almost all today's conflicts are civil wars, in which civilian populations are not incidental casualties but direct targets. These wars completely destroy trust between communities, breaking down normal social relations, and undermining the legitimacy of government – not to mention investor confidence (Annan, 2006: 49-50).

This critical assessment is decipherable through the dramatic art of Jane Taylor in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* through the dialogic discussion between Pa Ubu and Nile:

PA UBU: I have heard of Truths, and know distortions, but what are these Proportions you talk about?  
NILES: An inquiry is to be conducted by great and blameless men who Measure what is done, and why, and how.  
PA UBU: And just what can these brilliant mathe munitions do?  
NILES: They can beyond all ambiguity indicate when a vile act had a political Purpose.  
PA UBU: And if they so resolve?  
NILE: Then they can and must absolve. The righteous have to forgive the Unrighteous. (*UTC, PP: 33*)

Nile is the character who espouses Taylor's authorial ideology that true reconciliation entails forgiveness, tolerance and the respect of inalienable human rights. We can say with Christof Heyns and Karen Stefiszyn that the African continent and South Africa in particular provide a clear reminder that human rights is a dynamic concept and that it cannot be seen in isolation from the context and environment in which it operates (Heyns and Stefiszyn, 2006: 1). Adherence to human rights norms could simultaneously be a response to conflict and one of the mechanisms that can be used in the pursuit of a lasting peace. As such conflict is the ever-present shadow, the permanent alternative to human rights, and much is to be learned of human rights by understanding the nature of conflict and methods to combat conflict. This critical stand is corroborated by Barbara Mbire-Barungi who asserts that politically, a niche for the harmonious coexistence for both traditional leaders and progressives will have been found (Mbire-Barungi, 2001: 96). Sound governance structures that combine the old and the new ways will be erected. There will also be greater awareness and recognition of our deep ethnic diversity and the need for universal democratic participation alongside preservation of the vast and diverse cultural heritage.

MaisheMaponya and Jane Taylor sustain the philosophy of empathy in mediation process. Empathy allows mediators not to get trapped in the negative feelings that are part of the mediation process but identify themselves as human beings, seeking legitimate goals based on respect for human rights, especially those related to the fulfilment of basic needs. Every party to a conflict, over and above violent means or expressions, has valid and legitimate goals and demands on which nonviolent and creative solutions can be built. Dehumanizing a party (the opposite to empathy) prevents the mediator from identifying the legitimate claims present in every dispute. The mediator needs to stimulate the search for a settlement which would not make parties feel rejected. We must remember that sometimes to understand is to forgive, and that the role of the mediator is assisting the parties to end a situation by nonviolent means, opening a dialogue between them. Generating empathy has to do with establishing a respectful and deep relationship with the different people. It may also be necessary, in order to build mutual trust and generate empathy, to allow parties to share their feelings, establish an open dialogue with each party and, after achieving a deep understanding of each one, foster communication between them. At another level of interpretation, the symbolic message in the plays *The Hungry Earth* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* functions to work out the principles that attitudes should be softened, trying to reach the goals without violence, without the intention of hurting the other, and working with nonviolence at four levels:

1. In thought, meditating and promoting an inner, self-reflective dialogue.
2. In speech, avoiding labelling, blaming, demonizing the other while searching for common roots and sharing the future responsibilities, calming anxieties and fears, helping the parties to visualize a future in which they could live.
3. In action, making use of different resources, meeting to negotiate, avoiding repressive answers and the use of weapons.

4. In creativity to overcome contradictions. Creativity implies that the solution transcends the conflict; it goes beyond saving the 'honour' or 'face' of the parties or the actual situation.

This is a possible reliable way of implementing creativity to prevent the parties from building defenses and opposing new ideas; it is considering the new situations as possibilities rather than statements, since the original ideas suggested by others tend to be rejected by those who have not considered or proposed them. In order to get people to transcend contradiction and become creative, it is necessary to enter a new perspective, a new dimension.

The basics of the mediator's profile, as Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* let them read though, are to be a trustworthy and honourable person, unfamiliar to the conflict or problem, who has the skills and the will to help in an empathic way, understand and assist in an unbiased way the parties to the dispute. In mediation, there are three central issues that all mediators should learn and consider:

- The communication, including the divergence of perceptions present in every conflict.
- The conflict process, since it has a predictable path, the mediator should recognize and predict escalation, stalemate and other variables that may arise during the conflict. His or her own negotiating style when facing a disagreement situation, as well as identifying the different negotiating styles of others. It is also important that the mediator should know how to ask, listen and recognize differences in a sensible way; consider each party as a human being; and be able to follow each party's speech without getting involved or imposing his personal values. The mediator should be a person who asks a lot and generates empathy in the response; who is external to the society or group he will try to assist. Mediation is a confidential process, embedded in the parties' values and wishes rather than the mediator's. In order to help solve a conflict, the mediator seeks to create an appropriate atmosphere; share the existing information on the parties' interests; and help them suggest and reduce options, until they can make a rational decision, located in some point between the prospective agreement and what they claimed.

Dealing with traditional mediation, we must insist that the mediator's role is crucial, but his skill must focus on granting the continuity and successful conclusion of the process rather than substituting the parties at the moment of proposing or deciding on a solution. In the transcendent transformative mediation, when a mediator knows enough of the local culture, he should be recycled, go to another place and start the task once again, as diplomats do. Finally, a transcendent solution is oriented towards a legitimate, positive and constructive future. Sometimes this solution does not agree with the law or with the structural violence that may exist in a society in which there is enough food but the population is starving because they do not have the money to buy the food. Therefore, it can be legal – according to local laws – but not legitimate. Human rights and basic needs are non-negotiable, and so should be for the whole of humankind. If mediation implies opening the dialogue between two parties which see themselves as antagonist, maybe the education of future generations should be focused on the development of the virtues which, according to Comte-Sponville (2004), are applied values, instead of on teaching theoretical values which have fallen in disuse.

Modern South African drama and theater spearheaded by Jane Taylor and MaisheMponya have been prominent and successful on the cultural front of the war against apartheid. Not only have these playwrights combated the unjust system of Apartheid with its white supremacy ideology, but they have actually sought to mediate conflicts, promote peace and peaceful coexistence to lay the foundations of true nation building. Contemporary Black South African plays reflect the material existence of Black people under the apartheid government. Theater is considered an effective method of portraying that existence.

Both Mponya and Taylor wrote plays that pitch out racial integration and tolerance as important decimals of a society's survival. In Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* an experimentation of the national reconciliation organ, the Truth Commission highlights the ideological stands of a creative writer in search for pragmatic solutions to conflicts through the advocacy of forgiveness. If in *The Hungry Earth*, Mponya foregrounds the ideological stand of colonial effects on the people during and after European colonization, the era of post-independence should see the renewing of the society in the concerted effort of forgiveness, tolerance and mutual concessions. The wounds and scares of civil strife are not easy to heal but volition and determination towards that end can initiate the change. Mponya and Taylor have eschewed the intrusion of such personal problems by devoting their energies to raising the consciousness of their fellow Africans in the light of the historical and cultural contradictions inherent in apartheid.

The vibrancy and vitality of contemporary Black South African theatre couched in MaisheMponya and Jane Taylor's plays are the result of an ideological commitment to promote the image and views of Black people in their struggle against apartheid. The creative vigor that has flourished in the 1970s and 1980s corresponds with the heightening of awareness of the role art must play in the fight for freedom and a distinct identity. This cultural struggle is not confined to South Africa but can be observed as well in other parts of the



continent where the legacy of European theater conventions is being challenged, modified, or replaced with new forms of performance expression. Such replacements have not been based on mere cultural chauvinism. On the contrary, they are the benefits of research into indigenous African performance traditions in the effort to take theater down from the ivory towers to the grassroots of Africa's population. Playwrights like Maponya and Taylor have succeeded in converting the traditional African folktale convention into a contemporary dramatic form. It is not far-fetched to see their dramaturgy as being influenced by revolutionary theater techniques. Nonetheless, Maponya is simply using an indigenous African performance format that may have been lost to those Africans who seek cultural and artistic validation from without the continent. Maponya has continued to experiment with storytelling and other dramatic forms rooted in indigenous South African traditions.

In his approach to Maishe Maponya's dramatic works, E.J. van Alphen has focused on *Letta*, an unpublished play to establish that Maponya's theatre "tends to stress the political and social urgency of the contemporary South African predicament" (Alphen, 2011: 143). The significance of Apartheid and post-apartheid events in South Africa is that it was the height of political activism, culminating in the Rivonia Trial that resulted in the sentencing of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki to life on Robben Island (Ibidem). This political drama was strongly reflected in the theatrical literature of many South African playwright among whom Maishe Maponya, as the critic Alphen puts it:

Maponya starts his play by recreating the atmosphere and scenery of life of ordinary people in the townships and villages of South Africa. There is heavy smoke hanging in the air from numerous fires whether in the form of stoves or open fires as people prepare their evening meals. He observes that often these fires are made by older children since parents leave early in the morning to go to work and return late in the evening. As a result, older children are left to take care of the domestic work. This makes things easier for their parents, on their arrival home, to finish off what the children had started while the children go and play (Alphen, 2011: 143).

The critical assertion that literature which operates in the form of drama here concurs to promoting authorial ideology about the contemporary South African reconciliation problem stands. Something what catches the eye with this exposition is a direct violation of the children's rights as can testify the child labour in mines. However, Maponya seems to argue that it is the way of life for many Africans and South Africans are no exception to have suffered blunt socio-economic injustice. The playwright uses child game as a symbolic device to convey the message about reconciliation. Through the frictions and reconciliation of the children, he releases the message that a national social cohesion and peaceful coexistence is possible. The first thing that Maponya engages is the rivalry between boys and girls before the courting stage. Letta and her friends listen to a group of boys as they sing. The girls pick up the same song as soon as the boys stop, but sing it better, which makes the boys jealous. In real life, the defeated boys often disrupt the girls' singing and chase them around, with each boy chasing after the girl he likes. Most of the time this ends with each couple hiding in their little secret place. In this scene Maponya captures the harmony and peace for which blacks strived, despite the oppressive system that governed their daily lives. But it is the artistic talent amongst young black South Africans and the need to identify and develop it that he pursues further. In the next scene one of Maponya's characters, James, mesmerized by the talent of the girls and especially Letta, takes the matter further.

There are two issues here Maponya attempts to instill in his audience, especially the youth and talent scouts. First, that youth should avoid engaging in activities without the approval of their parents, as has become the norm contemporarily. The possible reason is that youth are likely to be tricked and trapped in things without being aware that they are taken advantage. Second, according to African cultures, children are answerable to their parents and anything that concerns them should be dealt with through their parents.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this article are that Maponya and Taylor through *The Hungry Earth* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* exposes conflicts in Apartheid and post-Apartheid contexts as challenges to take up in order to build social peace in cultural diversity on the one hand; and on the other, the possible ways in which conflicts can be transformed into peace seeking strategies. Two key ideas emerge: firstly, Black consciousness Movement was sustained by a spirit of reconciliation which was mandatory in the Truth and Justice Commission. At this point in history South African intelligentsia has to build a form of organic African discourse that puts the African subject at the centre of existence. Secondly, for a long time now Africa has been an object of outsiders' reflections. Time has come to reposition discourse with the ambit of African constructive mind through art.

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