Lawino Staring Down at Clementine: Dress Politics in the Days Of "My Dress, My Choice"

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Introduction

While acknowledging that *Song of Lawino* is a work of art that is Ugandan in origin, this article reads the work within a contemporary Kenyan space. It advances the idea that the work can be staged and it explains how a costume designer can enhance the politics of its performance. Of particular interest is the specific question regarding women, dress, and identity. In short, the article addresses the problem posed by the question: how can a costume designer reinterpret *Song of Lawino* in a moment where the politics of the "my dress, my choice" campaign is echoed in our society?

The beginnings

The circumstances that birthed the "my dress, my choice" campaign of November 2014 included a video uploaded on the Internet that captured the horror of the violence directed to a young woman by men said to be matatu [minibuses] touts on Tom Mboya Street of Nairobi. This video showed the woman being stripped off of her clothes by the rowdy mob of men. She screams and fights to save herself from the mobs' viciousness but is overwhelmed. There are efforts from other women to help her but these are also met with even more violence. The video's exposition of grotesque, if not beastly, acts aroused anger in viewers. It was promptly taken off the YouTube website from where it had been shared many times over the Internet. But by then it had spawned some considerable online buzz especially with the hashtag #mydressmychoice.

Ruthann Robson in her book *Dressing Constitutionally* paints an interesting picture of how dressing has been legislated upon in the United States, over time. She posits that, in an age where democracy in its multiple forms offers us choices beyond measure, there is still an element of control over what band of choices one can make. Freedom is not absolute as there are thin lines over what is decent, or indecent, and what is provocative, or risqué, or what promotes a religious ideal or suggests hatred. These arguments propose that dress provides a spectacle that can come loaded with meanings that are political; therefore, the "my dress, my choice" campaign is not merely about the

right to wear clothes in as freeing a manner as a democratic space can accommodate, but rather the idea of what dress means. Dress and dressing are taken as sites and events that are political in themselves.

Indeed, as was widely reported on 17 November 2014, the "my dress, my choice" campaign was taken into the streets of Nairobi to demonstrate, among other things, the variety of dresses. The campaigners turned the demonstrations into a site for the enactment of their power of choice. Many were dressed in the miniskirts and tight clothing that had been derided by the vicious matatu touts as being "indecent" or "immoral" and also as "unAfrican." This choice of dress purported to perform the power of choice. The campaign's demonstrations attracted the interest of women politicians, who came out in support of the rights to dress freely, but who were heckled by participants for coming too late in the day. The videos of the demonstrations as aired on various television channels and their Internet versions captured the demonstrations in carnivalesque moments, where song, dance, chant and gesticulation were employed as part of the machinery of expression. The demonstrators did not need politicians to get their message across, the heckling suggested; all they needed was a platform to show might in their numbers and suggest that they were not ready to toe the line of offending presumed patriarchal mindsets that may have refused to move with the times.

In a piece in the *New African* magazine of January 2015, Nanjala Nyabola linked the need to check how women dress in Kenya to evolving political processes. Sex and sexuality threatened the colonialists, so they sided with the religious orders in a process where dress was for covering up. But upon the attainment of independence, Nyabola avers further, women in the 1960s celebrated freedoms through miniskirts, and what previously may have been deemed "scanty" dressing. Yet, with the political strife that came with the economic strains of the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s, conservatives pushed women in a direction, again, of covering up. Groups like Maendeleo ya Wanawake which were in some ways extensions of KANU (Kenya African National Conference) became the preferred centers of disbursing the idea of how to dress. This trend suggested, then, that with the freedoms wrought in the repeal of section 2a of the Constitution, whereby Kenya came from a single party state to a multi-party state, and with the further freeing of the airwaves for more media players, there arrived new freedoms that gave room for the exploration of dressing (design) as a form of expression. People could discuss more easily; they could chart new paths fashion-wise since groups like Maendeleo ya Wanawake no longer held the greater say on how women could view themselves. Nyabola's argument is that the 2014 incidences of violence against women through the stripping of "scantily" dressed women was a sign that the

conservatives were fighting back, trying to reclaim a lost space, especially one that had been seemingly undone by new ways of living freedoms, such as the 2010 promulgated Constitution that decentralizes governance or that goes a long way in affirming rights of the individual.

Kenya@50: Trends, Identities and the Politics of Belonging, by Joyce Nyairo, points to the interaction that politics plays in fashion and design, giving a commentary on the processes of designing some form of "Kenya uniform." This, she says, is fraught with the difficulties of deciding what should be Kenyan. Indeed, on the question of identity she wonders whether ethnicity, for example, is something one is born with or becomes. This certainly points to the problem of deciding, for example, how to dress based on the idea that one belongs to some kind of identity which one has to perform. In Goffman's estimation, identity is performed, especially where it tends to pursue norms that have been crafted out of trends which are created by others. Obviously, individuals will constantly flout these norms and attempt to chart their own paths, with imaginations of how to dress. This expression of freedom is a threat to the known and trodden path that thrives on predictability, often patriarchal, and therefore resists change, through violence as the case of the November 2014 stripping events suggest.

In *Song of Lawino*, the main character carries with her ideas about the performance of identity through dressing; she creates a contrast between her choice, which she describes as belonging to the acceptable "old type," and the choice of Clementine, whom she calls "modern woman." Her clamor is similar in tone to the carriers of the "my dress, my choice" campaign. This article is interested in the visual interpretations of *Song of Lawino*, and the complexity that a costume designer faces in trying to fit Lawino's lamentation in contemporary times, particularly with the sensitive issues raised by the "my dress, my choice" campaigners.

Who is Lawino?

Perhaps one of the most interesting questions to ask, in an attempt at giving a visual interpretation of *Song of Lawino*, is whether Lawino is real. Can there be an authentic Lawino? Or, is Lawino merely an idea?

Donna Pido, in a "conjectural analysis" titled "Lawino is alive and well," speculates on the idea of Lawino as a woman who, having outlived Ocol, has gone into some new kind of transformation. She no longer is the Lawino that is "just a village woman / […] of the old type / and no longer attractive" (Pido, 2007: 22), or with "a head as big as an elephant […] / (which has) no brain in it." Instead, Pido brings to

life an interesting Lawino, whom she has found in New York, where she has immigrated after an invitation from her son. Pido finds her but is doubtful at first since the neighborhood suggests that she is a maid, but no:

> She was there alright, in front of a panoramic view of the Hudson River, pedaling her exercise cycle in bright pink spandex tights and tank suit, her snowy dreadlocks bouncing to her vigorous rhythm. The tattoos on her shoulders rippled and glistening with sweat - a butterfly on one side and a star on the other. The diamond studs in her ears were, well, uncountable at that speed and some concealed beneath the earphones (Pido, 2007: 45).

Lawino has become a successful peanut butter entrepreneur. She also trades in "stocks, bonds, futures …" and all that has to do with the stock exchange. She lives with a professor friend called Mary Anne. She is completely transformed. She has moved on from being the Lawino in Okot p'Bitek's imagination who is a common villager. Is this transformation possible?

There is a sense in which Lawino is not real, or cannot be real, according to Ogundipe-Leslie. The context of the production of *Song of Lawino* might give a false sense of the identity of Lawino. In a literal sense, there is indeed a gap; is it possible to have a Lawino who eschews Christianity, and instead is steeped in the ways of her people to an extent of preferring polygamy in a modern-day situation where HIV and AIDS (as Pido has argued) have caused such devastation? Can we have a Lawino whose aversion to all things "white" leads her to express her love for the hallowed African past devoid of the ills of colonization? Can we have a Lawino that can imagine pre-colonial purity in a modern-day staging of *Song of Lawino*?

Of course, a literal interpretation of *Song of Lawino* would be problematic in the fashion suggested by Ogundipe-Leslie. Instead, there can be a way of imagining Lawino as part of an Africa that is quickly choosing and picking how to define itself. In this light, Francis B. Nyamnjoh has mooted the idea of the endogenous in contrast to the notion of indigenous. This means that if we can imagine Lawino, for example, preferring indigenous knowledge especially "Acholi herbalists" at one point, we should not find it contradictory if, at some point, she begins to dabble in aspects of "the white man's hospital" (Nyamnjoh, 2004: 169) if only to augment her supply of medication. In Nyamnjoh's estimation, Africa is not stuck in a non-living museum; instead it is an entity that is constantly being redefined by the encounters in its interaction. This similarly means that the Lawino of 1966 changes with the times to accommodate the shift of time. So, this shifts Lawino to a 'present-day-ness.'

In the eloquent teaser into the meanings of the term *jaber,* that is used amongst Luo speakers, Odoch Pido suggests that while the term is "traditional" it has since been re-appropriated to define present-day women. He states that "the term *jaber* has its lexical root in the root *ber* (good, right and beautiful) which has a wide range of literal and metaphorical meanings" (Pido, 2007: 3). It is possible then to refer to Lawino's sense of self in terms of the word *jaber,* mostly on the metaphorical level. Still, a further reading of Lawino's sense of being a *jaber* is observed where:

> In *Song of Lawino,* Okot p'Bitek distinguishes modern from traditional beauty; the latter is my concern […] since I see *jaber* in the context of traditional beauty moved into the so-called modern context. In general, Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* depicts an Acholi beauty as someone young, warm, strong, and agile, with a smooth and shiny skin, not foolish and not shy (Pido, 2007: 41).

It is this movement, that shift from "traditional" to the "so-called modern" context, that we can trace in Lawino's journey. In other words, Lawino must change, she cannot remain the same. The implication, then, is that the visual presentation of Lawino has to necessarily move. The Lawino we can stage, with all the contradictions, is a hybridized Lawino. Here, we borrow Homi K. Bhabha's idea of hybridity as that which is non-reliant on a wholesome essentialist, if not pure, form of cultural root—the character has interacted within the colonial experience and beyond to create an almost undefinable space which she occupies. Our Lawino, then, on stage, should seem to have assimilated aspects from the West, which she derides, in a manner that still retains aspects of her identity as an Acholi woman. Is that possible?

Feminisms

One way of understanding Lawino's (dis)location within a "modern" world, as opposed to the "old type" of the world she refers to, is through trying to understand her politics as feminist. In *Song of Lawino*, the persona must be seen as a feminist. In some spaces, she has been referred to as belonging to that crop of feminists under the umbrella term "femafricanist" (Echendu and Ogunyemi, 2014: 14-15). Accordingly,

> femafricanism focuses on African women's struggle to free themselves from age long subjugation. This struggle is carried out bearing in mind that those things which are good in African culture should be upheld, hence Lawino's persistent cry that the pumpkin in the old homestead should not be uprooted. It is not a struggle against men, but by women and

> men against negative and harmful cultural practices (Echendu and Ogunyemi, 2014: 14-15).

The character, then, is pursuing an agenda of bettering her life through agitation. Therefore, her lament in this song is a statement of politics. She is questioning even where society wants her not to question. In her estimation,

> I am not a shy woman / I am not afraid of anybody / and I am not easily browbeaten. / I know that the person who asks / has done no wrong. / I will not be frightened / By those who say / asking questions is mortal sin / that will take a person / to the place below (P'Bitek, 1989: 74).

The poem is a long series of questions. In as much as it is an artistic expression that evidently has the capacity to entertain, it does drive an agenda.

And yet, were we to place Lawino as an avid defender of women's rights, how would we compare her politics vis-à-vis those of the agitators in the "my dress, my choice" campaign? In a world where patriarchy still reigns, and where the place of the woman in society is still a question of negotiation, the idea of being feminist is constantly under scrutiny. Oftentimes it is given negative attention. bell hooks reminds her readers:

> Say that you are feminist to most men, and automatically you are seen as the enemy. You risk being seen as a man-hating woman. Most young women fear that if they call themselves feminists, they will lose male favor, they will not be loved by men. Popular opinion about the impact of the feminist movement on men's lives is that feminism hurts men. Conservative antifeminism women and men insist that feminism is destroying family life (hooks, 2004: 107).

Does the lament in *Song of Lawino* as a feminist work express anti-men sentiments? Or does it not try to reclaim a lost space, where Lawino as a woman is reminding her husband Ocol of his role as a man in society, or within her life? In many ways, the poem is, in fact, a gesture against the ills of colonialism, and the transaction that is "Uhuru" (freedom) where "buffalos of poverty" still "knock the people down" (P'Bitek, 1989: 74). The charade that is political freedom is satirized, and criticized. To some extent, then, Lawino's lament is about politics beyond the quest for mere comforts within a domestic home. But it is still about reordering a situation that subjugates women. One may therefore argue in the fashion of the popularized phrase that Lawino's lament is simply another exploration expressing the idea that "Women rights are human rights!"

To that extent, Lawino's concerns are similar to those of the campaigners of "my dress, my choice." But after that, their differences are stark. Firstly, while Lawino seems to suggest that her ideas are well grounded within Acholi traditions, the "my dress, my choice" campaigners do not claim any traditional theory of knowledge as their anchor. Secondly, while the "my dress, my choice" campaigners have embraced what Lawino might perceive as "western" or "white people's" ways, in their dressing, she has derided it. In fact, her view of Clementine, who speaks English, is that she wants to "look like a white woman." Lawino uses colorful language to describe an emaciated Clementine who believes that "white" people's values should be employed as universal standards. She is a slave to white people's imagination of beauty and style.

To some extent, several of Lawino's statements may be an attack on the idea that women should be dressed the way they wish. In terms of make-up, for example, she claims that

> some medicine has eaten her face; / the skin on her face is gone / and it is all raw and red, / the face of the beautiful one / is tender like the skin of a newly born baby! And she believes / that this is beautiful / because it resembles the face of / a white woman! / Her body resembles / the ugly coat of the hyena; / her neck and arms / have real human skins! / She looks as if she has been struck / by lightning; or burnt like the Kongoni / in a fire hunt (P'Bitek, 1989: 23).

This hostility against everything "white" can be contrasted to the hostility that the "my dress, my choice" campaigners have against anything that curtails the freedom to dress as one wishes. There is a stifling tenor in Lawino's laments about how one should dress akin to the statement "don't dress white" while the militant tone in the campaigners of "my dress, my choice" is "let us dress as we wish." The meeting point of Lawino's idea and the "my dress, my choice" campaigners' is on the notion that fashion is a statement on freedoms. So Lawino's idea is that freedoms should be expressed in an "anti-white," if not negritudist fashion, where the purity of a culture is explored, while the "my dress, my choice" campaigners want to explore the idea that they should not be limited by notions of decency, or indecency or "unAfricanness."

It is possible to argue that both Lawino and "my dress, my choice" campaigners are on the same side of the femafricanist debates, as posited by Echendu and Ogunyemi, but their clamor for freedoms is placed on contrasting planes of culture. The latter seem to want to embrace all and not be limited in scope as to what they can borrow, while the former is seeking to draw heavily from tradition (particularly Acholi) as a basis of projecting independence from colonialist notions. Both seem to be turning against any form of taming, whether

colonialist conservative, within a Christian anti-sexual explicitness, or, ironically, against a religious-inclined conservatism, again inspired by some sense of Christianity, where women ought to cover up. Of course, there are political forces therein as Nyabola has shown for the "my dress, my choice" campaigners, and the same goes for Lawino.

This complexity becomes necessary to bear in mind for a designer who will be confronted with the idea that he or she does have to contrast Lawino, on the one hand, with Clementine, on the other. Lawino's sense of freedom, through a choice of dressing that embraces tradition, but eschews "white" dressing will have to be designed in a way that marks a difference from Clementine's choice which is seemingly an unquestioning embrace of "whiteness." But as has been argued before, Lawino is not trapped in a time warp, she has "moved" in Pido's portrayal, and in Nyamnjoh's argument of endogeneity (2004: 161).

Song of Lawino as essentially visual

Taban lo Liyong, in his book *The Last Word*, observes that p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* is a watered down version of what should have been *TeOkono pe Luputu*, a more carefully crafted work where Acholi proverbs were richer and where there were deeper, more nuanced, ways of looking at issues. Lo Liyong buttresses this observation with the claim that

> from the moment Okot embarked upon the translation of *TeOkono pe Luputu* into *Song of Lawino,* he had already forsaken the message for the medium. It was literary honors he now sought. The upholding of Acholi virtues has already been forsaken. Lawino will never hear her *kijira* except in a gramophone record, or over Radio Uganda, broadcast to the victorious Kelementina in our newfound tongue (Lo Liyong, 1969: 140).

One must observe, however, that Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* comes alive precisely because it is rendered in a direct fashion where the imagery employed is accessible. The circumlocutory nature of philosophical musings is given room in Lawino's lament for the most part through imagery. This paper argues that indeed the very nature of Lawino's being can be "seen" through the images conjured in the mind from the writing. Whether this is disadvantageous, as lo Liyong has argued, is not apparent since the richness of *TeOkono pe Luputu* is not available to the non-Luo speaker, and would, in any case, be lost in translation.

Discussions of pertinent issues are broached through representation, imagery (which includes metaphor, simile, exaggeration/hyperbole, etc.) and the basic literary elements that make

the work accessible for dramatization. The important element of conflict that is the key in drama is brought to the fore through the suggested contrasting of Lawino and Clementine. The work has created a persona who is in conflict with another major character so that there is a case of a love triangle that forms a basis for the interrogation of selves that represent types of peoples. On the one hand, it is easy to identify Lawino and her politics; on the other hand, we can distinguish Clementine's way of life as well as Ocol's journey through some kind of metamorphosis –from a village boy to an educated adult who now frowns upon his people's ways.

The issues dealt with are complex. They involve assessments of selves, in terms of identity, its loss, the hope for its recovery, as well as the interesting problem of political disillusionment. These are complex issues, where the African needs to interrogate the direction of democracy vis-à-vis new realities such as the need to diversify the economy and deal with the questions of disease and illiteracy. *Song of Lawino* is able to navigate through these issues through simple imagery whose power, this paper suggests, can be brought to life in a visual and dramatized presentation of the poem.

Through costume design and an imaginative employment of make-up, Lawino's principal question of identity in a swiftly changing environment can be brought to life. These identity issues are best articulated in the imagery in section two under the headline "The woman with whom I share my husband." Here, the mean Lawino lampoons Clementine's choice of make-up, especially in the lines: "Brother, when you see / Clementine / the beautiful one aspires / to look like a white woman" (P'Bitek, 1969: 23). It is possible to choose whether to play along hyperbolic explorations so that the choice of how to apply make-up is practically exaggerated, or to present Clementine in a more sympathetic light, depending on the designer's or director's overall vision for the performance. The interpretations might come to greater bearing especially with Lawino's observation that:

> Her lips are red-hot / like glowing charcoal, / she resembles the wild cat / that has dipped its mouth in blood, / her mouth is like raw yaws / it looks like an open ulcer, / like the mouth of a field! / Tina dusts powder on her face / and it looks so pale; / she resembles the wizard / getting ready for the midnight / dance (P'Bitek, 1989: 23).

This part already suggests how Clementine should look were she to be presented in a performance where her costumes bear out her having given in to aping "whiteness." Yet, with hindsight, the dilemma of the designer has to be that she could re-imagine a situation where the said Clementine, in her bold red lipsticks, is actualizing the dreams of the

campaigners of the "my dress, my choice" call. To what extent can the said presentation above, especially with some element of exaggeration, not be a vilification of the "my dress, my choice" campaigners?

The illustration on page 24 already leads readers in the direction of exaggeration. The caption invites us to marvel at the provoking portrait of a confusing, if not amusing, Clementine: "She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face / and when little sweat / begins to appear on her body / she looks like the guinea fowl!" (P'Bitek 1969: 24). In the third section titled, "I do not know the dances of white people," the costume designer would find an opportunity to contrast what Lawino considers authentic dances and movements with those from the West. Costumes become essential in detailing how bodies interact in these dances, with suggestions of incest on the part of Western dances, and the abandon that is suggested in the free space-liberated movements of the Acholi. The Western dances themselves seeming to suggest a minimalist use of space, and the Acholi dance described as one that must work under the throb of energy become sites for the explorations of the dramatic differences of what Ocol has come to imagine is his lifestyle, and what Lawino idolizes.

To some extent, if one were to adapt *Song of Lawino* into a stage play, there can always be the option of giving it an operatic inflection, especially with its claim to "song," and follow in the path pursued by Richard Wagner, as discussed variously in Craig and Appia. The idea of the complementarity of design (the visual) and movement (also visual), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the technicalities of acoustics become important in the telling of Lawino's lamentation, following a Wagnerian direction where image is key.

There could be certain obvious challenges in the process of bringing *Song of Lawino* to life that are to do with the practicalities of staging a "song" performance to an audience largely nourished on dialogue as a mode of performance. Yet, these challenges, with a good directorial vision, can be overcome especially where there is a will to explore contradictions that so sharply arise in imagining a Lawino that is hybrid. The performance becomes a metaphor, and yet, there can still be some element of literal translation of the material for purposes of greater clarity, for example.

Possible directions in interpreting costume

There are obvious undertones of Afrocentric nationalism in *Song of Lawino*, as Mwangi has argued in an essay entitled "Literature, Gender and (M)other tongue," in which he claims that writers mostly write to the empire in a gesture of blaming the colonialist for the upheavals

suffered by the African subject. But there are also undertones of a conversation that, as Mwangi notes, exist in African writing where Africa is writing back to itself. This latter conversation contrasts with the former in the sense that the colonialist is not necessarily blamed but rather that the African is speaking to a fellow countryman in a process of critiquing each other. While *Song of Lawino* appears to be mainly a "quarrel" about how colonialism has changed the African from the good old ways, it also has an element that castigates politicians for their failures in following the obvious path to peace and prosperity. The differences between Ocol and his brother are an indication of the unnecessary tensions that politicians create instead of concentrating on questions of development:

> When my husband / opens a quarrel / with his brother / I am frightened! / You would think / they have not slept / in the same womb, / you would think / they have not shared / the same breasts! / And they say / when the two were boys / looking after the goats / they were as close to each other / as the eye and the nose, / they were like twins, / and they shared everything / even a single white ant (P'Bitek 1969: 91).

The ideas explored in Lawino's lamentations, as has been shown, are sometimes subtle, even complex, despite Taban lo Liyong's argument to the contrary. However, as has been argued above, *Song of Lawino* lends itself to visual interpretations, especially for stage productions, with implications for costume design. It is through this project, then, that we can devise three broad ways of imagining the interpretation of the poem into a work that can be staged. Firstly, there can be a literal interpretation where the objective is faithfulness to Lawino's statements. Firstly, this means that Lawino, for example, is dressed in what the designer considers African, or Acholi, for a *jaber* of the times. Secondly, there can be an interpretation where metaphor is employed to tell the story of Lawino. Here, Lawino is a *jaber*, alright, but with persuasions that suggest a hybridized individual. Lawino's statements are treated as suggestions where there is a liberty of giving them a "modern day" understanding, for example, of what being African means, or what being "white" might mean. The third broad way of imagining *Song of Lawino* for the stage is by giving it an alienating feel, in the fashion of Brechtian theater; where historification, and distanciation are employed as strategies in developing Lawino's ideas.

The literal project

This would entail pursuing Lawino's statements literally, or at least to a point where a certain "authentic" feel is given. This would be in line with the suggestion that *Song of Lawino* is negritudist (lo Liyong) or a project that promotes some Afrocentric nationalism (Mwangi). The

strategy is to make a distinct demarcation between Lawino's "good," "pure" or "moral" self and Ocol's changing, betraying sense of self, which goes with Clementine's rejection of her Acholi self and her ultimate mimicry of a white lifestyle.

Towards this, the designer may dress Lawino in the fashion of the traditional *jaber* as explored by Pido. In this process, the point is to project an essentialist quality in Lawino that announces her place as a dignified Acholi woman. But this could also mean that in section three, for example, where the authentic dance is to be engaged in, the beautiful Acholi girl must come to life as is suggested in

> You adorn yourself in Acholi costumes / you tie *lacucuka* rattles / or bells on your legs. / you wear bead skirts or string skirts / or a tiny piece of cloth / and a ten-stringed bead / around your waist; / bangles on your arms / and giraffe-tail necklaces on / your tall neck (P'Bitek, 1989: 29).

This certainly should be contrasted with the clumsiness that the African look is made to have when dressed for the "dances of white people." The contrast should be clear enough so that the characters involved can live up to the simple dichotomy suggesting "white" as borrowed and inadequate, "African authentic" as befitting and imbued with confidence.

The critique of this approach is that while it goes well with a sense of nationalism, it refuses to assimilate trends that may have annihilated styles that were previously revered. Designers cannot fit the "my dress, my choice" discourse in this project as the essence is wholly African with the need to ridicule what is "Western." In that sense, Africa retains a sense of purity, and an innocence akin to a museum which can be visited by "real people—Europeans" who want to rediscover a prehistoric world, as Nyamnjoh has argued. A literal interpretation negates the idea of interactions that have taken place within Africa which have changed the continent's and people's cultures.

The metaphorical approach

This project would be run on the idea that time has moved, and that the Lawino of 1966 is not the Lawino of 2016, for example. It would not necessarily be as dramatic an interpretation of Lawino's plight in the manner discussed by Pido, but it would be a projection of characters that have attempted to navigate their way within or around interactions that they have encountered. Here the employment of synecdoche, or metonymy and metaphor would be encouraged, if only because there would be a need to show an association. The approach would

appreciate the idea that the characters involved in *Song of Lawino* have moved with the times and might not necessarily be dressed in the fullness implied in section three, as the "authentic" dance suggested. In contrast to the earlier idea of a literal interpretation, the metaphorical approach would only costume design on a character that only suggests, or symbolizes an idea of Acholi-ness without showing the essentialist or perceived authenticity. The Acholi girl in section three who is dressed appropriately for the Acholi dance need not be fully costumed as suggested in the literal project; instead there could be aspects of the described dressing. It would be possible to put on clothes that suggest Africanness, for example a dress that may have African prints, with bangles and necklaces that provide an aspect of Acholiness. The idea of a dignified *jaber* for Lawino would be made through a dressing that suggests a leaning to her African roots but which also has bearings of modern tailoring. This would give Lawino the look of a successful African woman, who has retained some aspects of "the village woman," but who is also aware of the change in time. Her ridiculing of Clementine can be explored through a presentation of a Clementine that may have aspects of bleaching, where her body, Lawino laments, "resembles / the ugly coat of a hyena / her neck and arms / have real human skins! / She looks as if she has been / struck by lightning / or burnt like the *kongoni* / in a fire hunt" (P'Bitek, 1989: 23). This description may be employed only in parts, so that in the end the presentation gives us a picture of an ill-fittingly dressed Clementine.

The idea of only playing with suggestion, as opposed to going fully out to make a clear picture that suggests Acholiness in Lawino, gives the designer a chance to infuse aspects of a hybridized person. It also gives room to suggest that Lawino is an idea, more than an individual. This would free Lawino to have some kind of interaction with the campaigners of "my dress, my choice." Her sense of fighting for freedoms to love, or to choose how to treat her co-wife, or to have hope for a better political future can be toyed with in a way that gives room to suggest that a "my dress, my choice" idea based on individual needs (or wants) can be achieved.

Alienation as an approach

This approach would suggest presenting an alienating environment. Everything is estranged. It cannot be identified as Acholi, Ugandan, or Kenyan. The whole performance is taken out of the known contexts. Words may be said as played out in *Song of Lawino* but the approach given refuses to be identifiable. The performance's directorial vision is simply to take everything away and create new contexts and situations. The major proponent of this alienated approach on stage is Bertolt

Brecht whose plays such as *The Good Woman of Szechwan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* employed these methods. The idea is to give the audience room to reflect on the actions on stage, instead of being soothed into engaging with the play only from an emotional perspective.

This approach avoids the problems of identity in terms of how it has moved with the times, but can actually project it in its display of non-fixed costuming. The approach could involve a wild shift from known human contexts to presenting the characters as objects or animals in a world where objects are personified. Lawino and Ocol could play herbivores and be costumed to reflect a world in which herbivorous animals, after interacting with carnivorous ones, are struggling to come back to some acceptable selves. Clementine in this case would be presented as a herbivore that is struggling to look carnivorous. The costuming would then take an interesting angle.

The idea of how to wear, how to approach "looks," becomes interesting, as its political take is given prominence. Indeed, this approach, while not necessarily agreeing with the "my dress, my choice" questions, would be most agreeable as it would not be condemning those seeking to dress as they wish (including in what may be perceived as predominantly Western styles). The approach would delight while giving space for the enactment of a performance that would engage the mind.

Conclusion

This article has sought to explore how *Song of Lawino* can be given visual, stage interpretations, within a space that is critical of the way women have been policed to dress by society. It acknowledges that a costume designer, tasked with the formulation of ideas on how characters in *Song of Lawino* can enhance the politics of the performance through their dressing, faces difficulties especially in light of the 2014 campaigns in Kenya dubbed "my dress, my choice." It proposes ways through which a designer can approach the work, especially within a frame of mind that consciously brings to life the politics in Lawino's lament.

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