

Reading Two Ugandan Sketch Comedies as Social Critiques¹

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Abstract

YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp – among other social media platforms – circulate many sketch comedies by Ugandan artists, such as Siraje Sebbanja (stage name: Muzei Kalali), Allan Mujuni (stage name: Amooti Omubalanguzi), Dickson Zzizinga and Anne Kansime, to mention but a few. This article investigates the manner in which two of these comedies – “*Embaga ya Mayor*” and “*Kwanjula kw’Omuyayye Ganja*” – offer social critiques on pertinent issues in the Ugandan society. Through a close reading of the comedies, while cross-referencing them to other Ugandan oral and written literary texts, and interviews with selected people, I tease out what I consider the major critiques of some aspects of Ugandan society. In the two works I focus on, as well as the major dramatic techniques the directors of the works use to carry their message across to the intended audiences, I discuss each comedy’s major theme and the techniques used to develop it. It is my hope that this article will draw attention to Ugandan sketch comedies as material worthy of scholarly investigation.

Key words: Honour, respect, etiquette, greed, satire

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Introduction

Studies on Ugandan theatre usually concentrate on many theatrical practices – traditional (Mbowa 2000:204-206), conventional (Ntangaare and Breitinger 2000: 224-249, and Imbuga 2000:250-261), or developmental (Kaahwa et al. 2000:185-203, and (Benge and Kiguli 2000: 109-119) – but rarely on the popular, where stand-up and sketch comedies fall. While Sam Kasule's (2007) work is in the area of popular performance, its focus is on songs, not stand-up or sketch comedies.

The scarcity of studies on popular literature affects comedies in a special way. Ebenezer Obadare (2009:244) observes that in Africa, “humour remains relatively under-investigated and is still far from seriously regarded, even though it appears to be one of the most important means by which the majority define, ‘get even with’, and ‘resist’ the power elite and the dominant power relations.” I read the phrase “far from seriously regarded” to refer to the fact that the performance of humour on the continent has not yet received adequate scholarly attention. Further still, studies on humour generally privilege other sites other than Uganda. More importantly, these studies are written from disciplinary vantage points rather than literary studies (Blakes 2007:xi).

As I discuss the two comedies that I focus on here, I am aware that it is difficult to communicate in print even a quarter of how humorous

they are in actual performance. This is because a “joke explained is a joke killed”, as Simon Critchley (cited in Seirlis 2011:514) observes. In any case, what I find humorous may be boring to other people. This is because jokes usually work within particular cultural, social, political and economic contexts. It is for this reason that Alison Ross observes that a “joke can work brilliantly in one context and die in another, as stand-up comedians find, travelling from one venue to another” (1998:1). This means that while I find the two sketch comedies strikingly humorous, it is possible that a different person may find them boring.

I used three data collection methods to gather data for this article. The first one is close reading. This took the form of watching the video clips of the two sketch comedies several times, in order to understand the plot, subject matter and theme, as well as the key dramatic techniques used to develop the message in each piece. I paid careful attention to the actions of the characters in the skits, and the attributes or traits these characters have. This is because writers use characters as vehicles through which they convey their message. I also closely read secondary sources on humour in order to enrich my interpretation of the primary texts.

The second data collection method I used was interviews. John W. Cresswell (2014) argues that in-depth interviews create an amiable

environment between the researcher and the interviewee, thereby enabling the elicitation of data. I interviewed two categories of people: selected scholars of literature and linguistics, and the lead actors in the two sketch comedies – Emmanuel Mubiru, whose stage name is Omuyaaye Ganja, and Siraje Sebbanja, whose stage name is Muzei Kalali. These people were purposively selected because of the rich knowledge they have on the subject I was investigating.

To ensure I captured rich information, I prepared an interview guide for each of the categories of interviewees. For the scholars of literature and linguistics, the guide comprised questions on the meaning of the word ‘*ekitiibwa*’ (honour) which is central to my investigation. For the sketch comedians, the questions were mostly on the video clips themselves, for instance the circumstances surrounding each clip’s composition and performance. It is worth noting that the interviews were conducted via email (for the scholars) and telephone (for the lead actors) because of two major reasons. First, the possibility of the ease with which to reach people in different locations (for instance Prof. Helen Nabasuta Mugambi is based in USA); and second, time limitations made it difficult for me to meet the lead actors face-to-face.

The final data collection method was cross-referencing to other Ugandan oral and written literary texts in order to explain how what happens

in the sketch comedies relates to what happens in these other texts.

Data analysis involved subjecting the two comedies to close scrutiny in order to understand each piece’s subject matter and how it was communicated to the audience. This involved “not only understanding the surface meaning of the sentences, but comprehending the deep underlying meanings within and connections among them” (Kusch 2016:30). I used thematic and stylistic analysis to determine the occurrence and recurrence of certain aspects in the skits in order to explain why they were prominent in the texts. Three of these aspects were characterization, nomenclature, and satire.

A Critique of Greed and Monetization of Love in “*Embaga Ya Mayor*”

The subject of food and the semiotics surrounding it are quite pervasive in African literature. Dan Ojwang (2011:69) observes that in African literary texts, food and eating appear as “metaphors of political corruption, greedy acquisition of material goods, and social inequality engendered by the latter in both the colonial and post-independence eras”, and serve to mediate “social relationships”. Ojwang’s reading is informed by Arjun Appadurai’s observation, “... in its varied guises, contexts, and functions, [food] can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, and intimacy or distance” (1981:493). It might depend on the

number of courses one is served, by whom, and the order of serving (that is, before or after which guest) at a public event, such as a wedding ceremony. Ojwang's and Appadurai's views resonate with what happens in this skit as I explain below.

The sketch comedy entitled 'Embaga ya Mayor' (Luganda, translation: 'The Mayor's Marriage Ceremony') dramatizes a common happening in Ugandan society: hundreds of relatives, neighbours and friends gathering to celebrate a marriage ceremony. The skit features four characters: Hajji Manisuru (real name: Kyolaba Wamala), his son, his daughter, the daughter's fiancé, and Manisuru's neighbour, Muzei Kalali (real name: Siraje Sebbanja). For Muzei Kalali, the main character in the comedy, the ceremony is an occasion for a free meal. This is why his attention is more or less entirely on getting food. It is his fascination with eating that the comedy ridicules in the sense that it brings him dishonour since he fails to observe the etiquette surrounding food/eating in his community.

In one instance, his desire for food is stretched to the point where he is prepared to eat even what is forbidden by custom (the lungfish which is his totemic animal) and by his doctor (fried foods which are not good for his health). By doing this, he goes against the wisdom carried by the Luganda proverb, *Olya kuntuono, netalumira*, which Kizza (2010:90) translates and interprets as: "It is better to eat a

palatable small amount of food than to fill up on distasteful food." This proverb reminds "people that quality is often better than quantity", since "one would rather have less and have peace of mind than have plenty and be restless because of the burden that goes with having plenty" (Kizza 2010:90). As an old man ('Muzei', 'elder', is a Ugandanised form of the Kiswahili honorific title Mzee), Kalali is expected to behave with decorum and propriety. Unfortunately, he does not. Consequently, eating what is forbidden by custom (the totemic animal) brings dishonour to him for it empties him of his dignity as an elder.

Clearly, he is depicted as giving a bad example to the young people who have been socialized to believe that eating tabooed food comes with "a penalty to the offender such as illness, death, drought and disappearance" (Risiro, Tshuma and Basikiti 2013:22). The penalty that comes to him for committing this offense is the ridicule the host's son pours on him when he nicknames, in the Luganda language, "*nnantagwa mikolo*", a disparaging term which translates as "he who never misses a ceremony". This nickname has at least two implications. First, that Kalali is a feast-scavenger of sorts, since he attends every ceremony, even those where he is not expected or desired, not to socialize, but to get access to free food.

The second implication is that although he attends every feast, he himself does not organize any ceremony to which his relatives and

neighbours could come to socialize and eat. In other words, his actions are not located in the social logic of reciprocity that Mikael Karlström (2003:65) identifies in Buganda, where “hospitality and generosity with food are the pre-eminent means by which a properly constituted household opens itself to generative exchanges and solidary relations with neighbours and kin.”

The antithesis of this hospitality and generosity is “eating in secret or behind closed doors in order to avoid guests,” which is considered “an archetypal violation of proper social flows and connections, [thereby] exposing the household to isolation and misfortune” (Karlström 2003:65). The misfortune, in Kalali’s case, is what Appadurai (1981:506) would call “gastronomic humiliation”, since the host’s son, with the tacit support of and encouragement by his father, ensures that Kalali gets nothing to eat throughout the ceremony. The humiliation that Kalali suffers points to the moral of the skit: that attending parties without hosting one in return is against the social morality that governs Ganda communities. For this reason, this is a deed that should be avoided.

Perhaps Kalali’s status as a deviant in his society is made evident when he asks for a meal that nobody has ever served at a marriage ceremony. This meal is *ebisijaga*, a Luganda word for a homosexual affair. The host, Hajji Manisuri, is scandalised upon hearing Kalali’s request. He observes that

this meal is illegal in Uganda because President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has signed into law a Bill that criminalizes homosexuality (Strand 2011, Wahab 2016). That Kalali asks for this kind of “food” which is considered taboo in Buganda shows that his appetites do not fall within acceptable social limits.

In an indirect way, however, his request is meant to serve as a commentary on the socio-political discourses taking place in the country. By imagining a socially proscribed sexual practice as taking place in a particular place in Kampala, the comedy contradicts the view that homosexuality is alien to Ugandans. In other words, the comedy makes it possible for homosexuality to be debated. This is in line with Michael Karson and Janna L. Goodwin’s (2006) view that sketch comedy as a genre is especially suitable for discussing difficult topics. Equally important is the fact that the mention of homosexuality in the skit serves as a suitable guide to the socio-political setting of the comedy, particularly for the viewer is aware that the Uganda Parliament passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act on 20 December 2013.²

Another folly that the sketch comedy ridicules is the monetization of love. It turns out that Hajji Manisuru’s daughter brings home a fiancé who is so ugly that her father

² For details on this Act, see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/14/uganda-anti-homosexuality-acts-heavy-toll> (accessed on 7 September 2020).

flees the ceremony upon seeing him. The reason for her choice is that he is very rich. In the comedy, the person who acts the role of fiancé is called John Senyonjo, whose nickname is ‘Mayor w’Abaabi’ (Mayor of the Ugly), which is why the comedy is entitled the ‘Mayor’s marriage ceremony’.

The nickname owes its origin to a real-life ‘beauty’ pageant for Uganda’s ugliest man held in 2014.³ This pageant should have been called “Pageant for the Ugly” since it was intended that the winner would be the ugliest contestant. The real-life pageant was won by Godfrey Baguma, who was given the nickname ‘General w’Abaabi’ (the General of the ugly), with John Senyonjo coming second. When the directors of the comedy (Siraje Sebbanja, Kyolaba Wamala, and Charles Kikaaze) called for auditions, Senyonjo turned up for the role of fiancé. When I asked Siraje Sebbanja what message the directors had wanted to send to the audience through their choice of Senyonjo, he replied thus:

We were ridiculing girls who care about money to the extent that they will marry anybody who comes with sacks of money, irrespective of his looks or moral background. Money has destroyed young girls, so much that some of them will not care to know if the man they are going out with has HIV. All they care about is whether or not he is rich.

“Embaga ya Mayor” uses satire which M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham (2012:353) define as “the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn of indignation.” Muzei Kalali is ridiculed for three major follies: greed, selfishness, and foolishness. Greed as he moves from one ceremony where he has just eaten to the next one where he is keen to eat more. The selfishness comes out when he is seen all the time to think about himself and his stomach; and thirdly, foolishness comes out when, instead of respecting the medical doctor’s advice for his own good, he only cares about eating, regardless of the impact the food might have on his health.

The use of irony lies in the fact that he is willing to eat food forbidden by custom and his doctors. Besides, because he is an old man, we expect him to be able to govern his appetite in a respectable manner. On the contrary, he does what dishonours him. For her part, Hajji Manisuri’s daughter is ridiculed for monetizing marriage, which should be premised on love, to the extent that she sees nothing wrong with marrying an extremely ugly man (not because she is in love with him but rather because he is very rich).

For greater impact, the producers of the comedy use hyperbole. This technique is highlighted by Kalali’s request to be served a meal called

³ See: https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1339597/battle-ugliest-uganda (accessed on 23 April 2019).

homosexuality. Perhaps there is no better evidence of his greed than this, since he mistakes the sexual practice for a food item in the same category as liver. Besides this vividly highlighting the way his desires deviate from what is considered the norm in Buganda society, it also serves as a symbol of excess in the sense that the depths he is willing to reach in order to satiate himself seem limitless. It also signals the fact that greed blinds the greedy for when he hears of “okulya ebisiyaga”, the only word that registers on his brain seems to be “okulya” (to eat). In other words, in his greed, he assumes that all things that can be eaten must be a type of food.

A Critique of Dishonour/ Disrespect in “Kwanjula Kw’Omuyaaye Ganja”

“*Kwanjula kw’Omuyaaye Ganja*”⁴ which I translate into English as “A Rascal’s Traditional Marriage Ceremony”, is a video clip from a movie entitled *Amadda ge Pama*, directed by Joseph Ssendagire, who is a sketch comedian known by the stage name of Muzei Bakiddaawo. According to Emmanuel Mubiru (the man acting the role of *Omuyaaye Ganja* in this film), the decision to cut the work into short video clips was to enable it circulate easily on the online platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

In the clip at hand, the prospective groom and his party go to the

prospective bride’s home to meet her parents to seek their blessing for the marriage. In Kiganda culture, this ceremony – called *Kwanjula* – is a highly formal event that follows very stylized etiquette on the side of the prospective groom. To ensure that every detail of the etiquette is performed well, the groom usually hires a consultant known as *Omwogezzi* (spokesperson). This is somebody with the expertise to perform the mandatory poetic speeches expected by the girl’s family. He needs to be adept at the use and interpretation of proverbs, sayings and riddles that the hosting family may bring up to bamboozle the prospective in-laws. Professor Helen Nabasuta Mugambi, one of the scholars I interviewed for this article, explains, “... a stray word or behaviour deemed inappropriate by the party begging for the hand of the bride is punishable by big fines, sometimes spelt out in monetary terms.” She adds, “... all etiquette around this ceremony, which could last for a whole day, is structured in word and deed around reverence.”

One of the activities in this ceremony requires public display of substantial gifts brought for the in-laws to underscore the appreciation of the great role that the bride’s parents played in bringing up such a beautiful and well-behaved girl. For instance, “the bride’s mother must be provided with a dress (*busuuti*), formerly a bark cloth, the father and the eldest brother must each get a tunic (*kanzu*), and a paternal aunt, a *busuuti*” (Nsereko

⁴The video clip for this comedy is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ulcFv1SIE0> (accessed on 23 April 2019).

1975:685). Acceptance of these gifts “serves as conclusive evidence that the bride’s family have consented to the subsequent marriage, where such consent is necessary” (Nsereko 1975:695). Needless to mention, this expected code of conduct is not a matter of choice, but an obligation, since honour itself implies “a right to respect” as John Iliffe (2005:5) observes. In other words, the prospective groom can only win the respect of his prospective bride’s family if he acts in a decent manner as dictated by tradition.

To give a clear picture of the etiquette expected of prospective in-laws, I would like to refer to a fictional depiction of an introduction ceremony in Timothy Wangusa’s second novel, *Betwixt Mountain and Wilderness*. Nakintu introduces her fiancé, Mwambu Kiboole to her parents, Reverend Simon Kintu and his wife, Mukyala Mary. Mwambu’s entourage consists of “four saloon cars and a pick-up truck” and smartly dressed people:

the men in navy blue suits, white Kanzus and black shoes, and each carrying a walking-stick; the women draped in *busuti*, each of them terminating in glossy dark-brown low-heeled shoes (Wangusa 2015:122).

Among the several gifts Mwambu brings to his prospective in-laws are “huge gourds of banana juice, crates of soft drinks and beers” (Wangusa 2015:125) and

assorted items of foodstuffs for general consumption and various pieces of attire with labels of

specific recipients – the bride-to-be, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, brothers and cousins” ... “colourfully wrapped (Wangusa 2015:128).

This fictional depiction of introduction ceremonies is done in the realistic mode, in the sense that what Wangusa describes (the verbal dexterity exhibited by the spokespersons of both sides, the elaborate handing over of gifts to the parents-in-law, the delicate performance of courteousness to the prospective parents-in-law, and so forth) mirrors what actually happens in real life. This picture of a solemn ceremony helps us to appreciate the extent to which the marriage ceremony depicted in the sketch comedy under discussion deviates from the norm. It is this deviation that makes the skit comical as I explain below.

In the comedy, the prospective bride, Muteweta and his party (Ganja-man, Muzamiru and an unnamed man), are shabbily dressed. Muteweta is dressed in a short *kanzu*, and a pair of shorts, obviously inappropriate for the occasion. The dressing of his colleagues is worse. The Ganja-man has a pair of multi-coloured shorts, a sleeveless shirt, a hat and iron chains around his neck; Muzamiru is in a *kanzu*, but without a jacket, and without shoes. The unnamed member of the group is in a *kanzu* and a jacket, but he is wearing gumboots, as if he is going to a farm. Because the visitors look shabby, the brother to the prospective bride asks his father,

on seeing the groom's party approach the house: "Did you invite hunters?"

This is a sarcastic question, which the father responds in the negative, thereby making his relatives conclude – with utmost relief – that the people they are seeing must be passers-by. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the visitors' spokesperson, Muzamiru, tells the hosts: "We are the people you are expecting." When the prospective bride's brother protests by saying that this cannot be the case, since the so-called in-laws look like saucepans (a metaphorical reference to their ordinariness), Muzamiru sarcastically asks: "Shall the prospective bride be married to two men?" This rhetorical question makes the bride's party relent. They sit down to listen to their visitors, who go about the business of their visit in the crudest way possible. The prospective groom Muteweta sits clumsily, prompting the Ganjamana to tell him to ensure that he does not show his 'limes' (euphemism for private parts) to his in-laws.

Perhaps the most pronounced deviation from the normal traditional marriage ceremony is in the gifts that the prospective groom brings for his prospective parents-in-laws. The prospective groom brings half a kilogram of salt, quarter a kilogram of rice, half a kilogram of groundnuts, a bun (half of which they devour in front of the hosts to prove – they claim – that it is not poisoned), and a small piece of washing soap. Unable to bear the insolence of the visitors anymore, the prospective father-in-

law drives his guests out of his home with a mattock.

To understand his fury, we need to closely look at the Ganda concept of *ekitiibwa* (honour/respect). In a Luganda-English dictionary compiled by John D. Murphy, the word *kitiibwa* is explained thus: "That which is feared, honour, glory, prestige, dignity, respect, reverence, pomp" (1972:210). Murphy adds a qualifying sentence: "None of the preceding equivalents expresses the full meaning of *kitiibwa* which is perhaps the greatest ideal and the most sought-after attribute of the Baganda" (Murphy 1972:210).

This concept guides an individual's behaviour and etiquette towards the self and others in myriad situations in Buganda. The behaviour and etiquette range from the most mundane, for instance the way one walks, speaks, or eats, to the most formal, for instance the way one holds himself or herself in front of visitors, elders or authorities; for instance, chiefs or the Buganda King called the Kabaka. Behind the concept '*ekitiibwa*' is the concern of the idea of 'good breeding', which is expected of everybody, and which is expressed through the ways in which one conducts the self at all times. The concept *ekitiibwa* is so central to Ganda culture that the Buganda Kingdom's anthem exhorts every Muganda to uphold it from one generation to another.⁵

The fact that the prospective groom and his party, in the clip under

⁵ For the lyrics of the anthem, see: <http://buganda.or.ug/anthem> (accessed on 7 September 2020).

discussion, do not prepare duly for the ceremony by following the social rules and etiquette governing such ceremonies shows that they are not prepared to enter into marriage – an institution with its own set of rules. By dressing indecently, it is implied that they are not afraid to show their ‘nakedness’ to the prospective mother-in-law, which is a serious taboo in Buganda society. Professor Abasi Kiyimba, another scholar I interviewed for this article, explains:

... the whole notion of *ekitiimba* – the respect and consideration for the in-laws – really rotates around the mother in-law and is characterized by efforts to guard against sexually related indecency. These restrictions are observed at all occasions when the two sides come in contact, but the real drama happens during formalized marriage proceedings such as *kwanjula* (introduction) ceremonies. When one goes to visit the in-laws, all Baganda know that the most important entity that one will visit is the mother in-law, and everything must be done to show her absolute respect (read: protect her from sexual indecency/innuendos).

In the comedy, what we see is the opposite of the above scenario: the prospective groom and his party do not show any respect to the family they have come to visit. This is the reason as to why the prospective father-in-law registers his disgust at their offensive manners by driving them out of his home with a mattock. His action raises a number of questions, though. The first one

is that the viewer of the comedy wonders if his aim is to punish the visitors, or to rehabilitate them so that they become more respectful of elders. Perhaps his aim is the latter, if we look at this from the perspective that visitors must think twice and plan appropriately before going for a marriage ceremony to seek anybody’s daughter for a wife.

The second question is whether or not the prospective father-in-law does not dishonour himself by raising a mattock against his prospective son-in-law and his party, since this is not the acceptable way of welcoming visitors in one’s home. The answer to this question is that the old man had been patient enough with them, but after some time, his patience was strained, thereby moving him to potential violence. Even with this answer, however, there is some indication that he is not accommodative of diversity, since instead of engaging in dialogue (for instance asking the visitors why they are dressed in a manner he considers dishonourable), he rushes for a weapon of destruction. The word ‘diversity’ might sound a misnomer here, but when we remember that to the prospective groom and his party their way of dressing and speaking is okay, then it makes sense.

We could therefore say that the prospective father-in-law is monological, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, in the sense that he knows only one code of conduct through which honour and respect can be accorded. Bakhtin’s (1981:271) view

that monological systems aim at “the supplanting of languages [world views or ideologies], their enslavement ... the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems ... directed away from language plurality to a single proto-language”. This shows how these systems can be dominating and suffocating of other systems that they consider wrong or inauthentic. In the context of this article, this domination and suffocation could apply to the prospective father-in-law’s expectation that his visitors speak and conduct themselves in a Kiganda way, which is the only one he knows, understands or appreciates. The *kiyaaye* way, which is what the prospective groom and his party practice, is not acceptable to him. Bakhtin’s view is relevant to this discussion for the characters in the skit speak a secret language that is not appreciated or welcomed by the elders, although it is knowable to them, since they respond to it by chasing them away.

One wonders why the prospective in-laws in the skit choose to use a secret language, well aware that it could cause them trouble. Perhaps it is to emphasise their identity as deviants, since their ‘crude’ language (at least from the perspective of the hosts) is in character with their culturally dishonourable dressing style. Besides, one cannot rule out the possibility that the visitors simply want to spite the hosts. This view is

supported by the fact that they know some social rules governing *kwanjula* ceremonies. For instance, they are aware of the requirement that the prospective groom must carry gifts for the prospective in-laws, and that the son-in-law is expected to sit decently, without showing his private parts to the in-laws. It is possible, therefore, that they are also aware that they are expected to conduct their conversation using a particular language.

This means that their decision not to do so might be read as a deliberate decision to offend or to perform their deviation from the norms governing speech in this community. In any case, they start their interaction in grammatical Lusoga (a language lexically and semantically close to Luganda) and then deliberately decide to change to their secret language mid-way, even when they are well aware that the hosts may not understand or welcome what they are saying. It is for this reason that they use the services of an interpreter.

One cannot rule out yet another motivation: that the use of a coded language is meant to scoff at the hosts’ expectation that the visitors speak grammatical Luganda (or Lusoga) by establishing a form of “expression directly or indirectly criticizing or opposing the mainstream” (Parasecoli 2014:323). Seen from this perspective, the coded language can be considered a form of resistance against the standard language ideology that overtly stigmatizes linguistic variation

(Gates and Ilbury 2019:109). Besides, it can be the beginning of a project aimed at making the outlawed language, dress style and code of conduct the norm. This brings to mind the observation made by Emmanuel Mubiru (the person who plays the role of the translator in the comedy) in the interview I held with him, that increasingly, *kiyaaye* (uncouth) culture is increasingly becoming alluring to many people so much that if nothing is done about this, it may sooner or later become the norm. In other words, the skit can be read as a warning that something needs to be done to ensure that *kiyaaye* culture does not become the norm.

At an artistic level, however, the script writer and the skit directors use this language for the sake of creating humour, by showing the chasm between the lexicon expected of the prospective in-laws and the one that they actually use. Abasi Kiyimba's observation that "oral literature is a fairly reliable indicator that when change takes place in a society, the literature changes to reflect it" (2008:169) is true for drama as well, for the realities that the comedy highlights are not far-fetched. Indeed, it is not uncommon these days to see adults dressed in a manner similar to the one we see in the comedy.

Finally, as a popular art form, the skit offers a critique of youth culture, not just in relation to language use (what in Uganda is called '*Lmyaaye*' or uncouth language), but also other aspects like dress code and cultural

upbringing. Since the characters in the skit have been produced by the Ugandan society, it is also possible that the skit is asking the critics of youth culture, such as the prospective father-in-law who raises a mattock against his visitors, to reflect on their contribution to what is happening. Perhaps the parents are "too wrapped up in their jobs" (Grobman 2001:10) to know what is happening to their children. The fact that the prospective father-in-law's daughter has brought home people who look like hunters and who speak a coded language as prospective in-laws lends credence to this point.

It is significant that in the skit, the prospective in-laws are imagined as foreigners/strangers in Buganda society because they come from the eastern Ugandan region of Busoga. This perhaps explains why they act the way they do, for it is possible that they do not know the Ganda etiquette surrounding visitation and introduction ceremonies. It is also possible that the skit directors are passing on a stereotypical message about the Basoga as an ethnic group that lacks common sense.

However, the requirement that in-laws show etiquette and honour is not just a Ganda thing, but one which cuts across all ethnic groups of Uganda, if not all sociocultural groups all over the world. This disparaging of the other (the Basoga in this case) weakens the skit's corrective potential, since the problem of dishonour and lack of etiquette that it explores

is not limited to one ethnic group. The argument made by the French-Hungarian philosopher Julia Kristeva (1991:1) that the foreigner we detest “lives within us [as] the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder” comes to mind here. It is evident that the Basoga people, whom the skit seems to disparage, represent all of us irrespective of our ethnic or national identity, because we are all capable of falling short of the honour, respect and etiquette expected of us in myriad settings. In other words, the subject of the skit’s critique only becomes a Musoga if I, the viewer, consider myself different from him or her. The moment I notice that the honour and etiquette-related mistakes the Musoga makes are similar to those that I, the non-Musoga, make or is capable of making, then the Musoga becomes me and me the Musoga.⁶

There are several elements that make this sketch comedy humorous. The obvious one is the way the prospective bride trivialises the ceremony by dressing and acting informally and clownishly. The Ganja-man’s translations, which are obviously off the mark, also contribute to the humour. For instance, when Muzamiru advises the prospective bride to be respectful to her prospective groom despite him

being small in stature, the Ganja-man translates this to mean that the groom is “doggyish and feverish”. When Muzamiru says that the groom deserves respect from the wife-to-be despite him being a poor man, the Ganja-man translates this to mean that the groom is “rotten-rotten.” This has the effect of making him seem worse off than just being a poor man.

When Muzamiru further advises that the two lovers should make God the centre of their marriage, the Ganja-man translates this to mean that they should employ God as their security guard. This is rather a preposterous proposition, since it depicts God as someone who takes instructions and acts according to the whims of the employer. Simon Lewis’s observation that “[t]he point of the Italian proverb *tradurre è tradire* is that exact translation is never possible and that any translation therefore implies some ‘betrayal’ of the original” (2001:435) comes to mind here. The Ganja-man’s translation is an obvious case of treachery to Muteweta, the prospective groom, for it makes him unacceptable as an in-law, even before the mattock is brandished against him and his party.

Another way through which both the humour and the meaning of the skit can be analysed is to approach it from the perspective of literary onomastics, which Alvarez-Altman (cited in Mhlambi 2012:75) describes as “a more specialized literary criticism in which scholars are concerned

⁶ Kristeva’s observation that “the foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities” (1991:1) is relevant here.

with the levels of significance of names in drama, poetry, fiction and folklore". Ruth Finnegan (2012:456) observes that names "... can be used as a succinct and oblique way of commenting on their owners or on others." D. S. Izevbaye (1981:166) notes that "naming in literature is of unconscious value to readers, acting as the lodestar in the appreciation of narrative [for] apart from acting as pointers to meaning in certain kinds of narrative (folktales, allegories, romances), names help to characterize the work for the reader" in particular contexts. Besides, names have the capacity to "convey powerful imagery" (Martin 1991: 83).

This is why names are so important that we carry them "even into death; etched in stone they stand above us for all eternity" so much that even when we change them in courts of law "the old name is not completely erased. Reduced to a footnote, it drags along at the bottom of your history" (McGlynn 2009:289). However, an artist might imbue a name with irony to the extent that what the name means in one context is the opposite of what it means in another.

The name 'Muteweta', for instance, refers to a person who does not bend or one who walks in one direction without turning left or right, that is to say, a person who lacks flexibility. By implication, the character bearing this name is a robot of sorts, inflexible in his manner of doing things. Yet, when Muteweta's friends ask him to sit well so that he does not scandalize

his in-laws, he actually complies, meaning that his name is not his fate as such. Rather, the script-writer and the script-directors use the name to create humour, as the audience is bound to laugh when such a name is mentioned since it is an unusual one.

The translator is called "Omuyaaye-Ganja" – a name that points to the fact that he is a street nonentity – one who is not a gentleman. The word *muyaaye* is a Luganda word that denotes "a delinquent, unreliable, or uncouth child" (Snyder 2000:187), a "street boy" (Beraho 2008:23), or a "vagabond" (Ntarangwi 2009:26). The additional adjective, Ganja-man, implies that he is on drugs (*njaaye*, the Luganda word derived from 'ganja', means marijuana) and therefore not in complete control of his senses.

This name, which is also the title of the skit, therefore underlines the senselessness of his speeches, dress code and deeds. The word 'muyaaye' also suggests that the characters in the skit are products of a certain urban modernity associated with street life and hip-hop as a cultural product (Olaniyan 2004:8-23). This is a modernity that espouses a certain rebellious attitude to traditional values, in this case ritual oracy, which Stuart Sillars considers a "means of defining the individual and reinforcing and extending the community" (2008:24). The failure at ritual oracy, in the skit, destroys the relationship between the two groups (the hosts and visitors).

I suggest that the sketch comedy also ridicules traditional marriage

ceremonies as practiced in Uganda today, where they have become so spectacularised that people pay large sums of money to have them broadcast on television. As a parody, the comedy “encourages the reader or listener to focus on the style itself and be aware of a conflict or dialogue between the old style and the parodic version”, in the words of Alision Ross (1998:48). This way, it has the capacity to serve as an antidote to the over-spectacularising of the marriage rite by showing us the opposite of what we see on TV: shabbiness in the place of glamorous dressing; laughable gifts in the place of truckloads of goods; jocular personae instead of the dead-serious grooms, and so forth.

In other words, the ridiculousness we see in the comedy in terms of miserliness and sartorial blundering serves to remind the audience of the preposterousness we see in spectacularised and mediated marriage ceremonies, which are characterized by excess of pompousness and spectacle.⁷ On the one hand, through parody, the artists behind the comedy (writers, directors, producers, the camera crew, etc.) seem to be telling their audiences that if what we see in the skit is laughable because of the way it robs the marriage ceremony of its respect and solemnity due to the uncouth way the groom’s party goes about

the traditional marriage, the same is true of the exaggerated performances on TV, which are equally laughable because they also rob the rite of its meaning by prioritizing glamour and spectacle over solemnity and meaning.

This lesson is possible with the resources of intertextuality which “occurs when one text is read in relationship to others and is affected by the spaces between the texts” (Fiske cited in Roome 2002:56). This implies that the audience watching the comedy is expected to have witnessed or watched the ‘normal’ marriage ceremony, which forms the basis for both the ridiculous version that the skit ridicules, and the spectacularised, usually televised ceremonies as well.

Conclusion

The article has highlighted the fact that sketch comedies entertain and educate. The paper has explained how the educative purpose of the comedies is made possible mostly with the help of satire, whose key device, humour, “often involves critique, accomplished through bringing unexpected elements together thereby – potentially – providing new insights and spurring change” (Bell 2017:366). The new insight in our case is that failure to observe the etiquette surrounding marriage ceremonies can cost one a partner. The comedy therefore teaches us to observe every rite with care, lest we come to dishonour.

In the first skit, we saw how Muzei Kalali is disgraced for being

⁷ Victoria Nampala speaks to this issue when she asks, in a June 2019 *New Vision* article, “Is Kwanjula a show these days?” See: <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1501467/kwanjula-days> (accessed on 7 September 2020).

gluttonous; in the second one, the prospective in-laws miss the bride, as they are sent away scampering when their host raises a mattock against them. As we watch these skits, we laugh at the characters for being gluttonous (Muzei Kalali) and rowdy, disorderly and scandalous (the prospective in-laws). However, we are aware that we are not perfect either.

There are moments when we too act in greedy or disorderly ways; such as when we want every opportunity to

come our way and not our neighbour's, and when we treat our relatives and friends disrespectfully. Therefore, as we laugh at the characters, we laugh at ourselves as well, since the stranger (read: the 'flaws') in them are also in us. In other words, the scripts achieve both purposes of entertaining and educating us, for not only do they amuse us, but they also challenge us to always watch how we behave at all times.

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