

Reconciliation and Peacebuilding of Standup Comedy South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on post-apartheid struggles and xenophobic attacks on non-South African Black nationals against the prior knowledge of racial discrimination between White and Black folks. Studies on post-apartheid struggles and xenophobic violence have widely been expressed via literature texts, neglecting the efficacy of stand-up comedy. Therefore, this study examines the efficacy of stand-up comedy in reconciliation and peace-building in post-apartheid struggles and xenophobic violence in South Africa. This study explores how comedians use empathetic narrative power of humour and performative techniques on-stage performance to foster unity, love, and peace among South African and non-South African nationals against killings, rape, violence, and deportation. Textual analysis of live recorded digital video of selected South African stand-up comedians and Schechner's Performance and Jauss's Reception Theory were used to analyze the performance of the stand-up comedians and the success behind their outstanding popularity with their audiences.

KEYWORDS

Humour; reconciliation; peace-building potential; Xenophobia post-apartheid; stand-up comedy

INTRODUCTION

Different scholars have investigated post-apartheid struggles and xenophobic violence in South Africa across the globe. Maendane (2006) avers the fact that it is a constant discussion on radio stations, that non-South African Black nationals should not be allowed to come in en masse to South Africa. Yakushko (2009) also affirms that xenophobia is a hateful act toward immigrants or assumed foreigners. Xenophobia is the fear of the overwhelming presence of foreigners by nationals (Handmaker, J., & Persley, J., 2002). They believe that black nationals from other African countries have come to their country to take or usurp privileges and rights that are meant for them to enjoy (Valji, 2003; Munro, 2006; Neocosmos, 2008; Yakushko, 2009; Gumbo, 2014). This is the reason Beyer (2012) says "South Africans are racist, but it is very easy when one feels empathy with those who suffered" (p.58). This disparity has attracted hatred and violence between the two groups in South African society (Valji, 2003; Neocosmos, 2008). Gould argues that crime and violence are on the rise in South Africa without any rule of law put in place to checkmate them. Post-apartheid era is branded with mass unemployment, uneven distribution of wealth, corruption, sexual assaults, criminal violence, and deadly diseases of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS (Horwitz, 2009). Beyer (2012) also establishes the fact that South Africans still suffer from unemployment, poverty, and HIV, and over a tenth of the population lives in townships. Boswell (2011) reveals in the analysis of Ndlovu's poetry that colonialism and apartheid are socio-economic and political factors that lead to the present traumatic

situations of the post-apartheid era. The socioeconomic hardships and domestic uprisings have largely turned to the nation's perils, or national traumas (Adekunle, 2017). Post-apartheid socio-economic menace and xenophobic attacks against non-South African Black nationals are recurrent issues that draw the attention of the global audience (Gumbo, 2014). The hostility has engendered hatred, inequality, violence, rape, disunity, brutality, and destruction of lives and property of the non-South Black nationals (Bayaga, 2011). In the above, scholars examined post-apartheid struggles and xenophobic violence through literary texts and other social media with little or no attention paid to the efficacious power of stand-up. Therefore, this study investigates the humorous efficacy of stand-up comedy in reconciliation and peace-building in xenophobic post-apartheid South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Schechner's Performance theory and Jauss' Reception theory were used to analyze the performance of the stand-up comedians' success behind their outstanding popularity with their audiences. Also, the theories help to sustain mutual interaction between the comedians and their audiences.

Schechner's Performance

Article text. Performance theory emphasizes human activities in different capacities in line with rules and regulations in a given society. It reveals ritual ceremonies, dramatic shows, cultural performances, cinematic orchestrations, and the hunting of animals as reflections and refractions of human activities in everyday realities. The theory evaluates how performances are redeveloped, communicated, established, and assessed in interdisciplinary, intercultural, and inter-generic studies (Schechner, 1995). Its theoretical framework is a holistic approach to theatre, performance, folklore, and popular culture. It is a cross-disciplinary mix theory that also examines other human activities, such as music, sports, games, scripts, and dances (Schechner 1994: xiv; Adekunle, 2020; Adekunle, 2021; Adekunle, 2022; Adekunle 2023). Its analytical contents include performance activities, such as rehearsals, preparations, workshops, pieces of training, spectators' satisfaction, and all activities that go on after a performance as systems of social and aesthetic life of every society (Schechner, 1994: xiv-xv). In the public domain, Schechner also examines public strategic presentations of businessmen and women, politicians, and religious leaders in meetings as a performance (Schechner, 2002: 146). The constructive behavior of listening and/or watching the speakers by the audience is also revealed as a performance. The use of professional skills in media, the internet, arts, courtrooms, classrooms, churches, offices, and public places is regarded as a performance (Schechner, 2002: 110). Besides, Schechner (2004: 70) exams drama has the main territory of the composers, authors, shamans, and scenarists, while the script is revealed as the subject area of the teacher, master, and guru. Theatre displays as the province of the performer, and performance is shown as the area of the audience. Schechner sees performance as inclusive (Schechner 1994). To Austin (1962), to say something is to do something. Austin examines theory as performative. Schechner affirms that "Life is primary, art secondary" (Schechner, 2002: 116). It imitates individual and societal life (Schechner, 2002: 143). Drama is revealed as a propelling force that moves the total work (Schechner 2004).

Reception Theory

Article text. Reception Theory is a product of readers' responses or interpretations of literary texts to make meanings from such texts (performance, movie, book, play, etc.). Reception Theory focuses on readers' responses to literary texts (Tyson, 1999; Adekunle, 2017).

Kinoshita (2004) examines Reception Theory as the power of the readers. Holub (1984: xii-xiii) views Reception Theory as a complete shift from the authors and their writings to the texts and the readers as a response to sociopolitical, scholarly, and growth in West Germany in the 1960s. Holub categorizes the new role of the reader into "implied reader" and "actual reader." Also, Holub sees the implied reader as a textual situation that gives meaning to the literary texts (Holub 1984). This means the term integrates restructurings of the text and the reader's realization of meaning through reading such a text (Iser 1974). Iser views the implied reader as the reader whom the text creates for itself and amounts structural contents of the texts that give meanings to the readers (Iser 1974). Jauss' essay, *The Change in the Paradigm of Literary Scholarship*, sees the theory as a new way of substituting outdated literary studies (Jauss, 1982: 15; Kinoshita, 2004:1). Iser (1974: 274-275) affirms that literary texts are an identical show of both the readers and the texts. Iser views Reception Theory as a synergetic approach. He believes that the text and the readers give meaning to the interpretation of the texts. Iser promotes the significance of hermeneutics in the interpretation of literary texts. He maintains that hermeneutics give a self-reflective and thematic interpretation in analyzing a literary text (Iser 2000: 41-42).

Besides, the paradigm shift of Reception Theory was established in visual arts in the works of Minimalists, such as Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, and Donald Judd. According to Andre as cited by Baker (1988: 45-52), the work of sculpture on a global scale is a collective experience of many individuals that garner from the trees, seas, stones, mountains, etc.

In a nutshell, Kinoshita views Reception Theory as a new revolutionary approach against outdated literary criticisms that do not take readers' responses in making meanings from literary texts. He examines that meanings occur when both the reader and the text interact. Kinoshita further claims that both influenced the way examines literature and art's history (Kinoshita 2004: 9).

In this research, the Reception theory analyses the audience's response to the stand-up performances. Reception Theory is usually called "audience reception in communication models (Fiske, 1987; Hall, 1993; Martin, 2007). It examines what the audience feels about the live performances.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data comprise four live recorded video discs of the purposively selected South African stand-up comedians: Trevor Noah, Barry Hilton, and David Kau. The selected live recordings are based on comedians' efficacious power of stand-up senses of humor to reconciliation and peace-building in xenophobic post-apartheid South Africa. Data are subjected to textual analysis.

Data Analysis

Violence and socio-economic threats across the globe are injustice and crimes against humanity. It is a social misdemeanor that can disintegrate international peace and unity among nations and, at the same time, dent images of such countries that indulge in it. In South Africa, post-apartheid struggles and xenophobic violence against non-Black South African nationals are heart-breaking issues among African nations, especially the affected nations like Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Post-apartheid and Xenophobic attacks have unwittingly generated conflicts, hatred, and controversies among African nations. The actions are seen as a high form of man's inhumanity to man and denial of fundamental human rights. In an attempt to rescue the situation, South African stand-up comedians use their stage shows as tools for open dialogue and mediation. The stand-up comedians humorously use empathetic narrative power of humor and performative techniques on their stage

performances to foster unity, love, and peace among South African and non-South African nationals.

Efficacy Potential of Stand-up Comedy Reconciliation and Peace-Building in Post-Apartheid Struggles in South Africa

Trevor Noah, one of the most outstanding and talented South African stand-ups, uses his performing art to extensively reveal the myriad problems of South African national life. The socioeconomic hardships and domestic uprisings have largely turned to the nation's perils or national traumas. He mockingly condemns these societal foibles that have turned the nation's unity apart and into a state of lawlessness and disorderliness. Racial discrimination, social crimes, maladministration, and social injustice are prevailing issues in the South African nation. Apart from all these societal flaws, he also decries the hostile nature of the South African nationals towards non-South African Black nationals. He reveals that South Africans used to be friendly to foreigners in the time past, but, now, they have become hostile to foreigners. Everyone is frustrated and depressed, due to the socioeconomic hardship that has completely sifted life out of them. This is one of the major reasons why the Black South Africans put their vexation on other non-South African Black nationals, likewise prompting them, to different social vices, in their home country. This obscenity has turned the nation into an angst-ridden society, which is vividly reflected in the people's behaviours, through their nefarious activities, as displayed below, by the stand-up. This is why Gould (2014) affirms that crime and violence are the major challenges of South African nations and these factors have resulted in to increase in poverty and inequality that the rule of law cannot able to curtail.

Trevor Noah:

We become angry and angrier almost focusing on negative aspects of the race. We seem to be the rainbow nation, now the colours are going separate ways. I will tell you a story that makes me sad at the end of the day. The University of Cape Town decided to cast a vote within the university, alright, and the vote was, "Who is the most beautiful race in South Africa?" That is what they are voting about. Who is the most beautiful race in South Africa? The voting result came out; white people won the vote in Cape Town. But the most interesting was the dynamic of the vote because what happened was, the white people voted for themselves, yea, the black people voted for themselves; coloured people voted for themselves, but half of them voted for the white people...and that is how white people won. Now, I have two problems with this competition. First of all, it is thin not naught. The most beautiful race, really, and it must be slippery slush, what next, the least needed race? You get to be careful. And the second problem I have with this is the conclusion itself. How can anyone make such a decision? There is no such thing as the most beautiful race. All humans of every race can be beautiful, there is no such thing as the most beautiful race. Because, facially, every human has different features, you can be beautiful no matter what race you are. All can have a beautiful face; we can have a beautiful face that is the thing. All humans of every race can be beautiful. [You can say] Trevor Noah, I have not seen a beautiful aboriginal. Is that what you said? You will say "yet", that is what you will say, you say "yet", because you haven't seen all of them. And that is not always about the look, yea, maybe aboriginal may do special things, he just jumps on top of your voice, like [a rhythmic song] "wahu, wahu, wahu", oh yea. You don't know. All humans of every race can be. There is just a difference among them that is why I feel sorry for people, who don't go out to explore. Do you know how many people around there; don't find other races

attractive...Why wouldn't he explore so many options there? So many different things you will get to know (Appendix SA3).

As narrated above by Noah, the colour rainbow stands for the nation's unity, strength, and love, but the colours are "now going separate ways". This metaphorically means that there is a disintegration of national unity and love. Things are falling apart, and the centre can no longer hold in South Africa. This is what led to racial discrimination among the nationals. The races focus on the negative aspects of one another while forgetting to harness their strength, by looking at the positive aspects of different races. Seeing these national plagues, Noah, tenaciously, warns his country's people to depart from such obscenity "We become angry and angrier almost focus on the negative aspect of the race. We seem to be the rainbow nation, now the colours are going separate ways." The people are annoyed with one another over colour prejudices and malicious acts. South Africa, a rainbow nation, with different races and cultures, needs to see its unity in diversity. The citizens should see themselves as one, not as enemies.

In addition, he urges everyone to embrace one another, through unity in diversity. This is the reason why he sarcastically condemns the voting exercise that takes place at the University of Cape Town, in South Africa. The voting exercise was "who is the most beautiful race in South Africa?" The voting exercise was conducted among "the Whites", "the Coloureds", and "the Blacks." The white folks won because half of the Coloureds voted for them. Noah satirically condemns, and, at the same time, interrogates this nation-breaking-voting exercise that can disintegrate the country's national unity. He sees the voting exercise as a propelling force that can lead to racial class and racial hatred. Noah sees this as an act of an inhumane decision and irrational thinking of those races involved "Now, I got two problems with this competition. First of all, it is thin not naught. The most beautiful race, really, and it must be slippery slush, what next, the least needed race? You get to be careful. And the second problem I have with this is the conclusion itself. How can anyone make such a decision?" He believes that such a decision should not be made among those who called themselves the intellectuals, or intelligentsia. He believes they should be refined in their decision-making, and able to pilot the nation on the wheel of progress and national unity. They should not be found in places where racial discrimination thrives, or involved in anything that can lead to the disintegration of national unity. They should be the brains behind national development and capacity building. This is why he publicly decries these irregularities found among the intellectuals by lamentably saying "I will tell you a story that makes me sad at the end of the day." Also, in the above excerpt, Trevor Noah mockingly used the first person narrative technique, by using a pronominal element "I" to show how painful, deep, and grievous the act of racial segregation is in South Africa.

Trevor Noah shows that all humans are beautiful no matter their race or cultural background. They are all meant to complement one another. He stresses further that beauty does not necessarily have to be in facial outlook, but resides in an innate ability that every race is endowed with: "All humans of every race can be beautiful, there is no such thing as the most beautiful race. Because, facially, every human has different features, you can be beautiful no matter what race you are.... And that is not always about the look, yea, maybe aboriginal may do special things, he just jumps on top of your voice, like [a rhythmic song] "wahu, wahu, wahu", oh yea". He beseeches his South African audience to go out of their home country to explore different cultural possibilities across the global society. He believes that this discovery or finding will enable them to learn from other cultural backgrounds better than theirs. They will see things better from a newer dimension than being armed chair observers in their home country: "is just difference among them that is why I feel sorry for people, they don't go out to explore. Do you know how many people around there; don't find

other races attractive... Why wouldn't he explore so many options there? So many different things you will get to know." In South Africa, every race finds their race better than the other, because of ignorance, and self-pride. He warns that every race is important, and no one should be seen as the least needed race: "it must be slippery slush, what next, the least needed race. You get to be careful." Noah proves that those races are meant to complement one another. The use of "it must slippery slush" to lampoon the racists here means that it is "an unintelligible talk or thinking" that should not be found among races.

Moreover, David Kau, a renowned stand-up comedian, sarcastically lampoons the act of racial discrimination and racial killing of Blacks in South Africa. As a frontier of socio-political liberation, his works reveal the societal struggles and socio-political decadence that permeate South African society. His comics often launch his audience into an atmosphere of therapeutic laughter, through which the target audience eases out their tensions. Apart from that, he sees his works as a form of social enlightenment, through which truths are said, or revealed, about his society. These realities are practically revealed in his Profile-e-Artist David Kau [480].

David Kau:

Last year, crazy town in our country since past two weeks from now, in our country a lot of people said 44 miners and police were killed, and white people said so many people died. These people decided to go into the most blessed province, in South Africa, in the swimming pool, I mean in the swimming pool. Some black people saw this happen, which means we are Blacks; that is a swimming pool. Now, they just have eyewitnesses... "Salu, where are you going to? "I am going to the swimming pool", "Where are you going?", "I am going to the swimming pool", "No, Salu, don't go there", No, leave me, I'm going to the swimming pool (Appendix SA2).

Stand-up comedy, as a form of social enlightenment, is used to practically state facts, and figures, about social realities, or upheavals in any given society (Adekunle, 2014). In the above performance, the comic show is used to give some pieces of information about the massacre that took place in South Africa. Although there is a contradiction between reality and falsehood on the fact, this comic performance categorically reveals the mass killing of people without mincing words against the backdrop of the spreading rumour. It was reported in the local news that 44 people and the police died, but the foreign news, like BBC, CNN, and AL-Jazeera, carried the actual information, that many more people lost their lives in a struggle: "Last year, a crazy town in our country since past two weeks from now, in our country a lot of people said 44 miners and police were killed, white people said so many people died." This shows how the local stations of the government keep adequate information from the general populace in South Africa, while the foreign or international stations give real information about happenings without mincing words. Although the actual number of dead people was not mentioned by foreign news, the truth about the incident was reported by foreign reporters. David Kau's stand-up re-emphasizes the actual number of dead people; in the same way, foreign news or foreign broadcasting stations carry pieces of information to people.

Moreover, "White people said so many people died" This statement is metaphorically used to represent foreign broadcasting stations, such as BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera, that often state the actual realities of social upheavals in South Africa, Africa, and the global community at large. In South Africa, and Africa in general, most of the local broadcasting stations always understate domestic uprisings, or social upheavals on air, to reduce or curb societal tensions that can lead to the insanity of fear, or escalate into social unrest.

In other words, Kau also reveals the class consciousness between the Blacks and the Whites. Handmaker and Parsley (2002), Valji (2003), Neocosmos (2008), and Bayaga (2011) affirm this fact that South Africa is of two nations, the uneducated Black folks who are perpetually poor and the minority rich White folks who control the economy of the nation. The Whites occupy the best places in South Africa, while the Blacks reside in ghetto areas "These people decided to go into the most blessed province, in South Africa, in the swimming pool, I mean they were in the swimming pool." Here, "the most blessed province" connotatively represents the best places where Whites reside in South Africa. Also, "the swimming pool" symbolically stands for the recreation centres meant for only White folks to enjoy. This consciousness has led to different fracas amidst races and the police, who serve as peacemakers. Salu, a native South African, is warned by David Kau, not to go to a swimming pool where the Whites swim, but he refuses flatly and makes his way there, he is eventually murdered. He refuses because he wants to live a good life just as the Whites do. It is for the same reason that the coal miners down the tools above. The "swimming pool" images the good life and going there represents Blacks' aspiration for better living standards. On this note, Egbokhare (2004, p.1) says: "We would like to warn you that we have taken the liberty of accumulated wisdom." Salu, here, serves as a representation of all South Africans that do not take heed to warning signals. Salu believes that he can defend himself without anyone's assistance. He takes liberty for granted.

Potential Power of Stand-up Comedy in Reconciliation and Peace-Building in Xenophobic Violence in South Africa.

Trevor Noah, a staunch stand-up comedian activist, passionately condemns the xenophobic attacks of Black South Africans on non-South African Black nationals. He examines the act as hostile behaviour towards their fellow Black people. He believes that everybody should coexist peacefully without fear or intimidation in South Africa as revealed in the excerpt below:

Trevor Noah:

Something I feel we have lost in South Africa is part of our culture, we used to be a friendly nation. We used to be people of a smiler, people of talkers, now, we have that thing, that anger that distrust when we look at one another. I know what happens; we just lost it, you know (Appendix SA3).

Noah calls for national unity, friendliness, and team spirit for national growth "Something I feel we have lost in South Africa is part of our culture, we used to be a friendly nation. We used to be people of smiler, people of talkers, now, we got that thing, that anger that distrust when we look at one another. I know what happens; we just lost it you know". Here, he satirically condemns the South Africans' unfriendly or hostile attitude towards non-South African Black nationals. They were formerly known to be a friendly nation and smiling people. They were also well-known to be "people of talkers" in the sense of "intelligible relationship" and "commonality." The use of "anger" here metaphorically signifies "aggressiveness", "hatred" and "cruel hostility" towards non-nationals. "Distrust" symbolically portrays "suspicious activity" and "mistrust" habits that preoccupy the minds of the South African nationals towards the Black non-nationals. This means that they have lost their sense of dignity, reason, and mutual understanding.

Barry Hilton also elicits the national social fabric of xenophobic attacks on non-South African Black nationals in South Africa. Besides, he also mocks the way South Africans are racially maltreated in the United States.

Barry Hilton:

It is funny; you have to think on your feet a times. Number one, one boy got arrested and some parents, you have to be chopped. You are going to be arrested not yet, you going to be arrested in America, for all of you stay is a visa. And you know as you are talking in the morning if your son calls you daddy, so the thing is amiss, wait and see: "Daddy, daddy, I have been arrested. I have told them; they aren't listening". The Father: "You will soon leave Dandy, what happened?". Son: "Daddy, I was arrested, I just keep busy, they just arrested me". The Father: "It is a small misnomer; they put you in the plane tomorrow and deport you". Son: "eh! Daddy, I don't have any uniform, I have the mandate, I am only here live". Father: "Okay, single advice, you not promulgate criminal" (Appendix SAI.d).

The realities of Barry Hilton's comedy shows give a thoughtful and deeper sense of rational sensibility as stated in the first line of the excerpt above "It is funny; you have to think on your feet a time": "It is funny" here is a derogatory statement used by Barry Hilton to show his displeasure. "It is funny" is used in the sense of molestation and dehumanization of non-citizens in South Africa and the United States. The word "funny" here connotes "danger" "apprehension" and "brutality." The use of "feet" also means standing on one's rights. It means that the rights of non-citizens must be protected.

Besides, Barry Hilton on a large note mockingly decries the xenophobic attacks on foreigners, especially economic migrants from developing countries, who seek greener pastures. He uses the United States of America as a case study to metaphorically portray what is going on in his home country, South Africa. In the above, the use of "visa" symbolically connotes the "right to socioeconomic privileges and rights." In the US, economic migrants are not permitted to stay or live there without a visa "You are going to be arrested not yet, you going to be arrested in America, for all of you stay is visa". The country believes that these economic migrants came to constitute a nuisance to the nation's development. The immigrants are seen as poor, criminal, violent, and uneducated (Muller and Espenshade, 1985; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Yakushko, 2009; Bayaga, 2011). Also, the US believes that individual immigrants are causing overpopulation, a declining economy, heightened violence, and worn-out social resources (Cowan, Martinez, & Mendiola, 1997; Munro, 2006).

One can purely see this reflected in the performance above on how the boy who seeks greener pastures in the United States is arrested. The boy called his father for safety on the point of his deportation, to his home country, South Africa: "Daddy, daddy, I have been arrested. I have told them; they aren't listening". "Son" here means a child looking unto his father for "help", while "daddy" is assumed to be "a shield", "a shelter", and "a saviour" to his son but here the father could not prevent his deportation. The boy's father's role here is seen as a sheer failure. Also, "they aren't listening" ironically shows how the US Immigrant Officers are adamant about their decision on deportation.

In the same vein, this is exactly what is going on in South Africa. South Africa's xenophobic attack is what I call "Afrophobia." It is the fear of other Black foreign nationals by the native Black South Africans. They believe that the other Black nationals have come to fight for space and the limited economic resources they have (Gumbo, 2014). They see these non-South African nationals as a threat to their national life and development. This "Afrophobia attack" has drastically made these Black foreign nationals suffer a great deal at the hands of Black South Africans. Many of them have lost their lives and property. Barry Hilton ridiculously condemns this act of unfriendliness and xenophobic attack that pervades the South African nation and the global society.

CONCLUSION

Through the theatrical performances above, South African stand-up comedians have wittingly and craftily used the stage shows as an open dialogue to reconcile and, at the same time, create peace to foster unity and love among the Blacks and Whites, Black South Africans and non-South African Black nations. Pressing issues and challenges are raised. Empathetic narrative devices are employed to appease the emotionally angry states of the South African people and, also, appeal to positive attitudes toward non-South African Black nations.

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