

Editorial

Lately I seem to meet all kinds of interesting people. Mostly young, self motivated people, who have created a space for themselves in an adverse economy by being innovative. I have met a guy who engraves glass with exquisite skill; another guy who designs clothes, bags and other products for factories. I have met people who never studied music, but who have created a style of Hip Hop that is completely Kenyan; writers who never studied literature who are writing at a level I did not know existed in this country. I have met a film director who managed to make a film in three weeks, with virtually no budget, who made another film in Sheng, using unknown actors. I have met an artist who is twenty one years old, and who must have Kenya's largest art exhibition - all around the streets and alleyways of Eastleigh and Mathare. His name is Joga. I have met a writer, who has the power of words to evoke place like no Kenyan I know. He works as a gardener in Nairobi. His name is Stanley Gazemba.

To me this says we are finally becoming a country. When art as expression starts to appear, without prompting, all over the suburbs and villages of this country, what we are saying is: we are confident enough to create our own living, our own entertainment, our own aesthetic. Such an aesthetic will not be donated to us from the corridors of a university; or from the ministry of culture, or by The French Cultural Centre. It will come from the individual creations of thousands of creative people.

It is only a matter of time before this country is known around the continent as a country of creative energy. It is about time.

Breaking new ground always provokes ridicule. When I interviewed Kalamashaka, they told me people would boo when they attempted to sing in Kiswahili. In the old Kenya, people with new ideas were ridiculed. They threatened the position of those who had stopped having new ideas.

So I shall call this new generation, the Redyculass Generation.

This is the Kenya that kwani? is about. We are a magazine of ideas. We seek to entertain, provoke, and create. We are open to all Kenyans, wherever they may be, who want to say something new.

Between these covers, you will visit some interesting worlds: the world of a pot-bellied Kenyan mayor who suspects that he is about to lose his power; the world of an expatriate European desperate to become a macho Kenya Cowboy; the world of a young girl pondering the implications of womanhood in a salon in the 1970s. You will meet a UN worker who falls in love with a smell; you will enter the minds of three great Kenyan icons. You will rise and fall with Richard Onyango.

Kwani? would not be in existence if it was not for the time, and work and monetary support of so many people who shared the dream. I would like to mention them here.

Wanjiru Kinyanjui, whose idea this was, Muthoni Wanyeki, Irene Wanjiru, AH Zaidi, Judy Kibinge, Andia Kisia, Jesse Munene, Alvas Onguru, Oscar Abuko, Rasnah Warah, Ann McCreath, Betty Muraguri, Rafael Maina, Yvonne Owuor, Tom Maliti, Parselelo Kantai, Muthoni Garland, Njeri Karago, Ebba Kalondo, Olivier Lechien, Rob Burnet, Lillian Adego, Joga, Mikhail lossel, Majorie Oludhe-Mcguoye, the late Wahome Mutahi, Jimmy Ogonga, Ciuri Ngugi, Mr. Mwongo, Malla Mumo, Sagwa Chabeda, Baroness Emma Nicholson, Nick Elam, Huma Humuyn, Mumbi Kaigwa, Telly Savalas Otieno, Eva Kiiru, Muhonjia Khaminwa, Mike Vasquez, Marion Kaplan, Uchumi Supermarkets, Ntone Edjabe and Chimurenga, Sheba Hirst, Rosenne Wanja, Muthoni Garland, Cess Mutungi, Lorna Irungu, Betty Muraguri, Perry Alando, CheckOne Entertainment, Jean Pierre Volia, Eve magazine, Mr. Mundia Muciri, Liz Ng'an'ga, Mwalimu Mati, Stanley Gazemba, Njeri Karago, Ralph Johnstone, Random Access and the Webtouch guys, Carol Mochama, and many, many other people. A special mention. I would like to thank Kairo Kiarie, for all the late hours he has put in. I sometimes wonder whether he thinks us artist types are crazy. Without his pragmatism, and hard work, none of this would have been possible. Thanks Kairo.

Binyavanga Wainaina

Editor