

Pan Africanism, Myth and History in African and Caribbean Drama

by

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Abstract

The endeavors of the Pan-Africanist movements not only united historical personages across continents and across centuries but also provided a meeting point for both historical and histrionic representations of Pan-Africanism. This paper observes that both the history and the histrionic representation of Pan-Africanism are unified by the theme of Africa and the goals of validating African history and culture. They are also united by the tropes of struggle – including solidarity, resistance and optimism. However, there are also substantial differences in histrionic representation across African entities globally. This paper compares the Pan-Africanist aesthetics of some of the acknowledged masters in African drama (for example Soyinka and Osofisan), and some of the acknowledged masters in Caribbean drama (for example Walcott, Hill and Braithwaite), in terms of how their dramas relate to historical Pan-Africanism. The paper shows that, where the latter tends more towards historical representativeness in the relevant drama, the former has tended more towards mythology in its representation of Pan-Africanism. The difference shows in an interesting way how the mode of representation of history in drama is itself subject to exigencies of history.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism, African and Caribbean Drama, History, Mythopoesis, Walcott/Soyinka/Braithwaite/Osofisan

Introduction

Although the origination and dating of the Pan-Africanist phenomenon itself is often not precise, there is considerable consensus around its definition and philosophical purport. Pan-Africanism is frequently defined as: “an intellectual movement conceived by people of African descent mainly in Africa in the Caribbean and in the USA” (Christopher, “Caribbean Studies International Traditions”), and one that: “consciously and deliberately attempts to create bonds of solidarity based upon a commonality of fate imposed by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath” (Cooper, citing St. Drake; “No matter where you come from ...”). It is also seen as: “a quest for unity amongst continental and Diaspora Africans, a revival of undeniable so-called African traits and traditions, and finally, political and economic independence” (Campbell, “Sculpting a Pan-African Culture” 28). The movement has Africa as its central motif and the validation and emancipation of Africa as a constant pre-occupation. It has been described further as “solidarity among people of African descent, belief in a distinct African personality, rehabilitation of African past [and expression of] pride in Africa” (Esedebe 4, cited in Secovnie 32). In all, Pan-Africanism was and remains crucial to the formation of a universal Black identity, derived from a consciousness that all Black people emerged historically from Africa.

Cultural Pan-Africanism, which may also be referred to as the literary arm of Pan-Africanism, has rendered the Pan-Africanist vision in varied aesthetic forms over time. Pan-African aesthetics generally mimics Pan-African history and politics in terms of thematic exposition and sundry representations of Pan-Africanist ideals. These “ideals” are not always monolithic or easy to define, as there are a number of recorded variations in the originating details of the Pan-Africanist vision. Examples of these include: whether the original concern was only about Black people in the Diaspora or with Black people in Africa as well (Mazrui’s “Africans of the blood” and “Africans of the soil” respectively (Mazrui 70); whether the attitude towards the continent was egalitarian/partnering or patronizing/paternalistic or both (Marcus Garvey’s “brotherly cooperation”/“assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa” or Du Bois’s “I used to think Africans were children,” cited in Secovnie 5), and whether it Pan-Africanism would only entail a spiritual/psychological affiliation on the part of elements of the Black Diaspora, or involve an actual return to Africa relocation programme, etc. However, the fact remains that the thoughts of the acknowledged American, Caribbean and African fathers of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah respectively, coalesced around a broad Africanist concern embracing all Black people.

The ideals of Pan-Africanism may therefore be phrased in summative terms as the emancipation of Black people in all locations, and, possibly, the political unification of African countries and the creation of a home in Africa for all African people. Cultural movements within Pan-Africanism, notably Negritude and Afrocentricity, seek both the political and cultural validation of Africa by encouraging and documenting the deployment of Black or African cultural values and Africa-derived aesthetic usages in art forms by people of African descent.

It follows from the definition above that both “Africanist” and “Pan-Africanist” aesthetics would intersect at many levels and may be regarded as being coterminous. The terms are sometime used interchangeably in this paper. African aesthetics itself has long been defined as aesthetic forms that evoke the image and emotions of Africa, providing a “complete ensemble” of its values (Mphahlele 49), evincing a “cultural and metaphysical immersion” in African ideas and world views (Jeyifo 42) and approaching “a high degree of regional authenticity” in “[language] usage, setting, treatment or realization” (Oloruntoba-Oju, “Irreducible Africanness”). (See also Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*; Osofisan, “Beyond Translation;” Jeyifo, “The Language Question in African Literature,” among others, for a discussion of African aesthetics).

The relationship between African aesthetics, defined as above, and Pan-Africanist aesthetics, is thus axiomatic. From the very beginning, the Pan-Africanist concern was always seen as an Africanist concern, and vice-versa. Even when the primary focus of solidarity was political and regional (for example Blacks in the Americas, in the Caribbean or in the early West African states uniting amongst themselves against colonial oppression, and attempting to forge regionally based alliances), race and ethnicity (in this case a universal Blackness) was always a primary descriptive paradigm and source of the solidarity. Basil Davidson (32, cited by Secovnie 34) had observed that the earliest form of Pan-Africanism basically concerned with Blacks in North America and the Caribbean, being united as they were “by their colour and their suffering.” He also noted, however, that these early Pan-Negro movements, “even in this early form, stood for the defence of Africans in Africa.”

However, even if distinctions between “African” and “Pan-African” could be made at the political level, such distinctions tend to fizzle out at the cultural level where aesthetic forms are primarily referenced. Pan-Africanism is basically defined by assumptions of racial and cultural unity amongst Blacks of all regions. In this regard, Secovnie (33) usefully cites Davidson (Donald Davidson xvi, xvii), noting that “Africans both on the continent and in the US have a continuity of culture, while possessing what he [Donald Davidson] calls “unity-indiversity,” which is ‘accounted for both by the common cultural heritage and by the similarities in treatment inflicted on African slaves’” (Secovnie 33).

It is also instructive that the “Pan-African Manifesto,” as elaborated at the Organization of African Unity First All African Cultural Festival, held in Algiers in July/August 1969, also conjoins African and Pan-African, and elaborates the latter largely in terms of Africanity. Significantly the manifesto notes that: African culture, art and science, whatever the diversity of their expression, are in no way essentially different from each other. They are but the specific expression of a single universality. ... Africanity is also a shared destiny ...” (OAU, “Pan-African Cultural Manifesto”).

From this assumed cultural affinity flows the unity between what is “African” and what is “Pan-African.” This paper regards both, Africanist and Pan-Africanist, as those aesthetic materials that *consciously reference* Black or African cultural values, depicting situations involving Black characters and Black history, as well as images, myths, metaphors and related aesthetic flavours that draw attention to the universalist dimension of Blackness or Africanness. Such materials tend to evoke a certain similitude in cultural appreciation, and hence provoke emotions of cultural affinity and ethnic solidarity, amongst persons of African descent.

Features of Pan-Africanism in African and Caribbean Dramas

It is apt to point out from the start that the combined Pan-African offering of African and Caribbean drama hardly approaches anywhere near the extensive reach and mass appeal of the Pan-Africanist contributions made in other aesthetic fields, particularly music. For example, the reggae musicians Bob Marley and Peter Tosh of the Caribbean, as well as Fela Anikulapo Kuti and Sonny Okosuns of Nigeria, and others of their ilk, may have achieved more for the spread of a Pan-African consciousness than, say, the combined effort of Caribbean dramatists such as Derek Walcott, Errol Hill and Kamau Braithwaite and African dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Femi Osofisan, etc. As the Caribbean (Guyanese) politician and Pan-Africanist, Eusi Kwayana, was quoted as saying, “the power of art that Bob Marley’s music represented had done more to popularise the real issues of African liberation than several decades of backbreaking work (sic) by Pan Africanists and international revolutionaries” (cited in Campbell, “Rastafari as Pan Africanism” 76). To this one may also add: decades of backbreaking work by Pan-Africanist playwrights.

The comparison is an unfair one, since music, in its unbridled appropriation of the air waves, has an obviously wider reach than drama, or any other genre of aesthetics for that matter. More crucially, however, the works of the musicians tend to contain more explicit references to Pan-Africanism than may be extracted from works of drama. The magical lyrics of the Pan-Africanist reggae singers (e.g. the Caribbean Marley’s: “How good and how pleasant it would be before God and man, yea-eah! /To see the unification of all Africans, yeah!” in his song, “Africa Unite,” or the Nigerian Okosun’s “Africans Unite/No matter where you may live/No matter the language you speak/ ...” also in his Africa Unite) resonates with direct references to Pan-Africanism beyond what would be found in any of the comparatively obscure lines of the Caribbean and African dramatists. Because of its relative short length and intensity, musical expressions maintain a focus on the subject matter without the distraction of space, time, suspense and narrative development, which are the hallmarks of drama. However, what the latter lacks in mass appeal it makes up for in textual density and intellectually challenging aesthetic complexity. Drama in particular allows a condensation of various aesthetic usages and materials from multiple sources to service the ideologies and thematic thrusts of the dramatist. The focus in this paper is on history and myth, among fodder materials frequently deployed for the rendition of Pan-African sensibilities in African and Caribbean theatres.

Pan-Africanist drama come in an astonishing variety, although it would also be difficult to find a single dramatic work that could be said to encapsulate all the ideas relating to Pan-Africanism. Some of the forms in which Pan-Africanism is realized in African and Caribbean theatres include:

- drama projecting the image and character of historical Pan-Africanist figures (for example, Femi Osofisan's *Nkrumah-ni Afrika-ni!*);
- drama expressing Africanist political concerns by projecting or satirizing key African figures (for example, Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* and *Opera Wonyosi*);
- drama Africanizing or Caribbeanizing classical and other dramatic works through adaptation and intertextuality (for example, Osofisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone*, Edward Kamau Brathwaite's Omeró's *Odale's Choice*, Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, Wole Soyinka's *The Bachae of Euripedes*);
- drama representing cross-cultural interaction and the attendant clash of African and Western cultures, possibly with a noticeable slant in favour of African cultures (for example, Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*; Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*), or simply
- drama employing African or Africanized references – names, settings, images, masks, myths, mores, metaphors and sundry manifests of African aesthetics (as already defined in the foregoing).

The possibilities are endless. In this regard, Secovnie (18) has also listed a large corpus of Pan-Africanist dramas in terms of their apparent orientation to “theorize about the relationships between West Africans with African Americans through their representations.”

Our focus here as noted earlier is specifically on the deployment of the paradigms of myth and history and sundry elements of the African aesthetic matrix (elements that constitute African aesthetics) in a manner that may be seen as projecting a Pan-Africanist consciousness in specific works of drama.

On Myth and History in African and Caribbean Drama

Myth and history are in perpetual flux in core African and Caribbean drama aesthetics, produced by the major playwrights of the two regions and critically acclaimed as reflecting the mores and cultural values of the regions. The relationship between myth and drama esthetics is axiomatic, the ritual fount of theatre being almost unarguable. Here, African mythology contains numerous incidents and personages that represent a mytho-historical fusion, often in the form of anthropomorphic beings whose sojourns crisscross earthly and ethereal boundaries (See, for example, Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*). Similarly, actual history, past or contemporary, has dramatic potential and is often employed in the theatre in parallel to the myth, legend or folktale to which it might be correlated. Thus, myth is frequently transfused with contemporary reality in core African drama, often as a metaphor for the reality.

Also, the mythical medium enables the dramatist to plumb the depth of experience in a manner that 'banal' actualities cannot. Yoruba tragic art, which Soyinka uses as an African sub-stratum to represent African metaphysics:

Belongs in the Mysteries of Ogun and the choric ecstasy of revelers ... Yoruba tragedy plunges straight into the 'chthonic realm', the seething cauldron of the dark world will and the psyche, the transitional, yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming. Into this universal womb was plunged Ogun, the first actor, disintegrating within the abyss....
(*Myth, Literature and the African World* 140).

In his *Performance Theory*, Richard Schechner (cited in Balme 184) notes that the use of masks "transcends the purely theatrical and attempts to look into something closer to masking in primal cultures where the wearing of the mask involves the transformation of the performers". The mask then complements other elements of ritual performance which include "drumming, dancing and spirit possession" (Balme 184).

Core Caribbean theatre, i.e. drama produced by the major playwrights, evinces a similar mythopoesis. In postulating a national theatrical aesthetics for the West Indian theatre, Errol Hill one of the major playwrights of the Caribbean, acknowledges history, myth and culture as the foundation of Caribbean theatre aesthetics. Emphasizing the cultural fount of the theatre, Hill (34) enjoined theatre artists in the Caribbean to, as appropriate: "seek inspiration from the indigenous theatre of the Folk, not as curiosities but as the fiber from where a national drama is fashioned, the carnival and Calypso ... shango and polonium... native music and Rhythms ...". Hill's invocation of Sango ("Shango") in Caribbean theatre formation canon is instructive. Sango is one of the primordial African deities whose archetypal existence offers a model for dramaturgical exploits and who "travel well" in the Black Diasporas, including the Caribbean: "The African world of the American testifies to this both in its socio-religious reality and in the secular arts and literature. Symbols of Yemaja (Yemoja), Oxosi (Ososi), Exu (Esu) and Xango (Sango) not only lead a promiscuous existence with Roman Catholic saints but are fused with the twentieth-century technological and revolutionary expressionism of the moral arts in Cuba, Brazil and much of the Caribbean" (Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* 1). Inevitably, the mask/myth paradigm enters into the evolution of theatrical aesthetics in the Caribbean in a manner that closely approximates the situation in African theatre.

Derek Walcott, who has been the most prominent Caribbean dramatist to date, is also one of the theorists who have deployed mask dramaturgy in their theatrical output. He acknowledges that, everywhere, and especially within the context of the Caribbean, mask dramaturgy is the manifestation of an inner yearning to reconcile with the aesthetics of the roots. According to Walcott, a mask is not necessarily a “device” as it is in “metropolitan theatre”. It is rather “a totem,” and “modern playwrights who use masks ... are not avant-garde, but are returning to the primal formalities of ... African theatre” (Ciccarelli 297).

It can be stated without equivocation or fear of contradiction, then, that the most profound histrionic offerings of both Africa and the Caribbean are those in which the myths and histories of or relating to Africa and the African Diaspora constitute a central theme or motif. The “Africa as Canvas” motif is evident in the important dramas of the prominent playwrights of the two regions either through their espousal of African themes or by deploying landmarks of an African presence in their drama. The rest of this paper is devoted to some of the complexities of the deployment of these trajectories of myth and history by African and Caribbean dramatists in conscious or unconscious service to a Pan-Africanist consciousness.

History, Myth and the Pan-Africanist Theatre of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan

Osofisan’s main contribution to Pan-Africanist literature is arguably to be found in his play conspicuously titled *Nkrumah-ni Africa-ni!* (“It’s Nkrumah It’s Africa!”). Two other Osofisan’s plays, his adaptation of *Antigone (Tegonni: An African Antigone)* and *Ajayi Crowther: The Triumphs and Travails of a Legend* could also be bracketed under the Pan-Africanist umbrella as a contribution to its themes and consciousness of its origins. The plays include copious references to the African predicament, especially as deriving from enslavement, colonialism and neo-colonialism. They are also laced with African proverbs and metaphors, in addition to Osofisan’s trademark Yoruba songs and mythical allusions. However, it is to his *Nkrumah-ni ... Africa-ni* that this paper must turn for his most representative fusion of actual history and myth towards a Pan-Africanism exposé in his entire corpus.

Nkrumah-ni! ... Africa-ni! not only dramatizes the life of one of the foremost African Pan-Africanist leaders, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, but it also has Pan-Africanism as its theme and as the organizing principle of the play’s dramaturgy. The key dramatic settings take place in Ghana, where three historical Pan-Africanist leaders, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Amilcar Cabral, meet and try to fashion a way of realizing their dreams for Africa and a solution to the travails of Africa. The meeting is neither voluntary nor cozy. Nkrumah had been sent on exile from his country Ghana by rebels backed by imperialist forces. He takes refuge in Conakry, the capital of Guinea, with Sekou Toure as the President.

The play most certainly received a lot of help from actual history. Indeed Osofisan's emendations of history in the play are more dramaturgical than substantial. The choice of Guinea as place of exile was based on actual historical records. Nkrumah had, on helping his country Gold Coast to achieve independence, become a bastion for other African countries seeking independence, and he had offered a helping hand to both Sekou Toure and Amilcar Cabral in their own wars of independence in French controlled Guinea and Portuguese occupied Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Guinea respectively. Sekou Toure went on to become the President of independent Guinea; it was therefore logical for Guinea to become a place of refuge for Nkrumah when he became embattled. For his part, Cabral was assassinated just before his Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde attained independence following the war that he led.

Nkrumah ni! Africa ni! establishes the themes of African unity, the divisive role of imperialists and the betrayal of the African dream by fellow Africans. This is not only through story and plot but also through moving dialogue, songs and symbols. The linguistic blend noticeable from the title is meant to tell a Pan-African story: Nkrumah is Ghanaian, exiled in Guinea, while the base language of the play's title and many phrases as well as some of the songs in the play is Yoruba via Nigeria.

However, although *Nkrumah-ni ... Afrika-ni!* follows the path of actual history for the most part, there are emendations in the play that have the effect of mythologizing the drama of Nkrumah's life. In the play, as in history, Nkrumah dies in exile; however, whereas in real life Nkrumah was flown to Bucharest, Romania in ill-health and in the throes of death, succumbing at last to a troubling cancer of the skin, in the play, Nkrumah's death comes from a dramatic heart attack on hearing of the news of another coup in his country, Ghana. Being a coup by opposition elements, it put an end to the possibility of Nkrumah ever returning to his beloved country.

This mytho-historical fusion is significant for the drama. It seems important to the playwright that Nkrumah should die in Africa, and over Africanist concerns. By mythologizing the death of the historical Nkrumah, Osofisan helps to further entrench Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist image even at the point of his death.

It is also through a mythologizing strategy that Osofisan achieves his signature alienation technique in the drama. In the opening scene, Nkrumah rises from his coffin to step into his role in the play thus moving the play out of the mode of reality and simultaneously challenging audience attention and intellect. The scenario at once echoes the song of Sonny Okosuns, the late Nigerian Pan-Africanist musician and his undying lyrics: *Kwame Nkrumah will rise again/.../Overamwen will rise again/These people died for freedom/Oh yes they died for freedom/Yet they told us that freedom is the answer/We will never forget/Though we are feeling the pain/Africa will never never never never surrender.*

However, more important for our discursive context here is the fact that this scene also represents the play's indebtedness to African mask dramaturgy, which basically derives from the concept of ancestral spirits coming to rejoin the land of the living, to celebrate with the latter and to offer help and guidance. The dramaturgic maneuver is also didactically functional. The scenario of Nkrumah emerging from the dead is meant to convey a message to Africa. It is undoubtedly a cue for the continent to remember its Pan-Africanist leaders and follow their footprints; the event is meant to give hope and courage to Africa, and to recall some of the great moments of history. The actual history is neither obliterated nor significantly blurred; it is only embellished in this play through the use of mythology. A similar trajectory of mytho-historical fusion and a deeper level of mythologization would be found in the works of Wole Soyinka.

Retrospectively, Soyinka's own Pan-Africanist career spans three levels of socio-political activism, scholarly criticism and creativity. As a student in Britain, Soyinka was overly concerned about the liberation of apartheid South Africa. He was to describe the "politics of my mind" in this period in terms of "its obsession with South Africa" (Soyinka, "Who is Afraid of Elesin Oba?" 112). As well known, Soyinka's career as a militant socio-political activist reached its zenith during the Nigerian civil war when he crisscrossed both fronts in a bid to forge a rapport to end the war. He was later incarcerated for two years for his activism during the war. And earlier in the turbulent electoral period leading up to the war, he had 'held up a radio station' with a toy gun and substituted the rigged election broadcast with his own statement. He would also advocate the adoption of Ki-Swahili as a Pan-African language, simultaneous with "the conservation and enrichment of all ... existing African languages" (Soyinka "Language as Boundary" 137).

However, some of Soyinka's main contribution to Pan-Africanism would be found in his theoretical exposé on Africa, as well as his creative exploits. In his 1976 treatise, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, he lays bare his critique of Western epistemologies, which he juxtaposes with the African world-view, while upholding the latter with as much emphasis as he could muster. For Soyinka, the African world-view is epitomized in the Yoruba metaphysical perception of the universe as a cyclical continuum. Here the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn are in a constant flux and are in constant interaction with the spiritual forces of the universe. Within this configuration, maintenance of harmony is the African grundnorm, manifesting in a deep sense of communality, solidarity and camaraderie (as against the Western ethos of individualism, for example). Western colonial narratives had derided African culture as either non-existent or as primitive; Wole Soyinka's position has been to defend African epistemological traditions, including its legacy of myths and archetypes. He also defended the reality of an African world marked out in relation to the West, notwithstanding the internal heterogeneity of Africa.

On the creative front, some of Soyinka's arguably Pan-Africanist works include his *Mandela's Earth and other Poems*, which pays tribute to perhaps the most visible modern icon of the African spirit, Nelson Mandela; his *A Play of Giants* and his *Opera Wonyosi*, both of which satirize African leaders mired in dictatorship and brutality, leading Africa deeper into an economic and political jungle. His historical and mythopoetic play, *Death and the King's Horseman* is also a significant contribution.

Indeed, Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is perhaps the play in which he most profoundly elaborated aspects of the African world-view and a Pan-Africanist perspective through the form of drama. The play deliberately and elaborately sets up arguments between Western and African value orientations. The former is represented in the action of the Pilkingses (the colonial officer and his wife) and the latter in the rituals of the African community represented by the Oyo Yoruba community in Nigeria.

The play depicts a tragic confrontation with death, and the staunch but thwarted determination of the human vehicle, Elesin Oba (the King's horseman) to follow through the transitional rites demanded of his office. The play effectively translates the metaphysical world view of the Oyo African community on to the stage and emphasizes the disruptive influence of colonial intrusion. In the community's cyclical conception of being, existence does not end with death; rather the dead are transported into the ancestor world which acts as guardian angel of the living. The communal rites of passage revolve around this conception and the need to ensure harmony in the universe by constantly oiling the machinery of the movement of transition.

The drama is closely based on actual history. In the dramatic representation, the Alafin, king of Oyo has just died, necessitating a ritual death by suicide of Elesin Oba, the king's horseman, to "accompany" the king. For the community it is a simple matter. The suicide propitiates the elements, smooth the metaphysical passage, and ensures that the king enjoys a pride of place in the ancestor world comparable to his status in the land of the living. The suicide is the entire *raison d'être* of Elesin Oba's life. Perhaps by way of palliation, the king's horseman also lives like a king ("Whatever I wanted, the thing was mine," Elesin testifies), and enjoys a close friendship with the king. In the perception of the community the reciprocal benefits to the living are enormous. For Soyinka, there is no conceptual difference between this idea and the colonial or Christian idea of sacrifice. However, the colonial district officer interrupts the ritual, denouncing it as 'barbaric,' and placing the king's horseman in protective custody. His action thus sets off a dramatized debate over the meaning of suicide, the concept of honour and the relative colonial and African sense of value. The horseman's son, Olunde, a medically trained medic in England, arrives in the nick of time and commits suicide in place of his father.

Soyinka himself explains how his conscious defense of an Africanist perspective has informed aspects of story and plot in this play:

My circumscription of the possible areas of ‘argument’, my rejection, for instance, of the option to make Olunde reject suicide because of ‘overseas’ enlightenment is a creative prerogative, logically exercised, since I have no wish to demonstrate that the colonial factor is ethically superior to the indigenous. .. the concept of ‘honour’ in that Oyo [African] society is, for this dramatist, precisely on the same level of honour, mission duty, as revealed in the imperialist ethic that brought Europe to Africa in the first place (Soyinka, “Who is Afraid of Elesin Oba,” 128).

Some of the playwright’s emendations to the historical incident that gave rise to the play also serve as a Pan-Africanist projection of African value systems. For example, in actual history the horseman’s son was a trader in Ghana (then Gold Coast), not a trained medic as in the play. On the other hand, the action of the play is set in war time England, which was not the case in actual history. This latter emendation enabled the playwright to articulate a conceptual parallel between the ritual suicide by Elesin Oba and the suicide of an English naval Captain who, according to the news relayed by Mrs Pilkings, blew himself up with his ship, “to save lives.” Both suicides occur on a similar ethical plane as a selfless service on behalf of the community, often the supreme price within turf of the tragic hero.

Although Soyinka’s drama has often been criticized for such apparent romanticism of African metaphysics and the African world-view, and sometimes for not investing his dramaturgy with ideological content (in the Marxian context of the word), he has often risen to a stout defense of his ideology (See his *Art Ideology and Outrage*, especially the articles “Aesthetic Illusions” and “Who is afraid of Elesin Oba?”). It is ironical that Soyinka has also been charged with an unfeeling Eurocentrism; this is largely because many of the critics have been more concerned about surface elements of language (his sophisticated use of the English language) and form (the employment of classical Western elements such as the five act structure and the classical unities) for his tragedies. Contrary to the vitriolic criticism of the likes of Chinweizu et al in *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*, not many African writers have consistently related to the African world-view and metaphorical landscape than Soyinka does in his works. The expression of Africanist concerns established in many of his plays is ipso facto an expression of Pan-Africanist concerns.

Common to the representative Pan-African plays from Africa briefly discussed above is the deployment of actual and specific histories and historical personages, in addition to weaving the plays with mythology as an element of African mask dramaturgy. Notwithstanding the co-presence of myth, the outlines of the actual remain clear in the drama. The history is neither obliterated nor significantly blurred. By contrast, Caribbean drama almost exclusively deploys myth rather than actual history or actual historical personages in its representation of Pan-Africanism.

Myth and Symbolism as Pan-Africanist Representation in Caribbean Plays

In canonical Caribbean plays, the reference to Africa is almost exclusively achieved through the mythical mode of expression, in contrast to the direct representation of actual history and actual historical personages evident in the African plays cited above. It is important to note that, for the leading playwrights of the Caribbean canon, Derek Walcott, Errol Hill, and to a lesser extent, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Africa provokes an ambivalent image through a nostalgic pull towards Africa as root, and on the other hand a feeling of frustration, regret and competition with the new home in the Caribbean.

This was not always the case with Caribbean drama. The evolution of Caribbean drama boasted an “African phase,” properly so called, when the forced African populations of the islands had only remembrances of an African home as their main source of cultural expression. As noted by Buff (“Immigration” 80), the struggles of later Caribbean populations for decolonization also “brought about a renewed awareness of the African roots of Caribbean cultures,” with “anticolonial politicians and intellectuals [drawing] on the force and invention of Afro-Atlantic cultures to argue for national traditions linked to a broader, pan-African history, overturning the cultural Eurocentrism and political dominance of colonial rule.” The Caribbean Carnival culture “also helped to consolidate a national identity based in an African heritage” (32) as well as “a means of ethnic expression, a link to home, and a source of racial or pan-African solidarity and pride” (Manning, cited in Buff 33).

However, as noted earlier, the eventual relationship of major Caribbean dramatists to Africa and the African aesthetic matrix was to become one of ambivalence and mired in controversy. For example, Derek Walcott’s career as the most prominent Caribbean dramatist has gone through stages that mimic the larger Caribbean search for a ‘final’ identity. It has moved from a “sense of inheritance” (of Western forms), a vocation to “prolong the mighty line of Marlowe, Milton” and “yearning to be adopted” by the master race to a stage in which the English heritage was considered merely “filial and tributary.” This was in turn followed by a brief flirtation with an “African longing” and finally a shedding of the African longing for a Caribbean mulatto identity and aesthetics (Walcott, “The Muse of History”). Whether Walcott has been able to maintain a balance in terms the relative amounts of cultural insight he has taken from the tributaries that feed his aesthetics has also been controversial. He has suffered scathing criticism to the effect that Western aesthetic elements are by far more pronounced in his aesthetic fusion, thus “privileging the European over the genuinely African” (Wetmore, *Black Dionysus* 221). This predilection for Western ideas had also been theorized as being informed by a conscious ideology on the part of Walcott (Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest*).

Allied with this stance is Walcott’s repudiation of history as aesthetic paradigm, rather embracing mythopoesis as his main aesthetic medium. For him, history is too literal, and banal, thus Walcott approaches the depth of the Caribbean experience of life and art, not by means of banal realism, but by means of a profound, and often surreal dramatic form.

Hence, his aesthetic orientation is to examine life through what he has called, in another context, the “interior life of poetry” rather than the “outward life of action”, in short, through mythopoesis. Man himself is a myth, according to Walcott. Similarly, Walcott denounces race and colour as insignificant, as embedded in his 1980, play *Remembrance*:

Voices Off:

Gray is ofay, black is beautiful

Gray is shit,

Jordan is a honky donkey white nigger man!

JORDAN:

Put out your hand, boy!

...

What color is the palm, eh? Pink.

What color is the back, eh? Black!

Well, you go learn, little nigger,

...

Color don't matter! Color don't matter! (*Remembrance* 5)

Walcott's attitude in saying no to race, to colour, or to history as parameters for either epistemology or aesthetics may well be part of an artistic prerogative; however, it is also true that history generally constitutes a specific burden on Caribbean consciousness. The manner of the Caribbean coming into being has foisted on the inhabitants a sense of rootlessness and a suspicion of history. Alienated from their specific homelands and finding themselves in the middle of nowhere, Caribbean folks of African extraction could not but view history as ephemeral and insubstantial, while constructing a hybrid culture from their different remembrances. Errol Hill, Walcott's compatriot and another major Caribbean playwright has also noted this peculiar Caribbean indifference or antipathy towards history, and towards geographical space. As analyzed by Buff (24), citing Hill, the Caribbean is “rooted in the concept of culture, rather than any specific place,” hence “slaves and their descendants forged a uniquely “indigenous culture.”

Where does all this leave a search for features of Pan-Africanism in Walcott's drama? It is interesting that Wetmore (*Black Dionysus* 221) has gone as far as to suggest that “nowhere in any of his writings, either creative or critical, does Walcott espouse anything resembling Afrocentric classicism.” Such a statement, if totally correct, may well put paid to a search for matrices of Africanist (let alone Pan-Africanist) aesthetics in Walcott's works. However, as already noted in the literature, such criticisms of Walcott's aesthetic orientation should not lead us to completely discount the fact that Walcott does employ African mythopoesis and African derived aesthetic elements as an “important constitutive gene of the mulatto and the associated aesthetics in the Caribbean” (Oloruntoba-Oju, “The Redness of Blackness” 24).

Confronted with an aesthetic amalgam, the orientation should not be to throw one's arm up in despair, but rather to "uncouple the hybrid" and characterize it in terms of the "nature and quantum of specific inputs" as had been advised before now (Olorunfoba-Oju "Irreducible Africanness"). Within our present context, this would enable us to give unto Africa that which belongs to Africa in Walcott's works. This may mean making do with 'moments' of Pan-Africanist expressions in the works, even if the moments happen to be sometimes fleeting. Thus, Pan-Africanist moments in the works of Walcott occur mostly in the form of 'return to Africa' narratives in his plays and poems. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, MAKAK, a charcoal burner in the Caribbean returns to Africa in his dream. His description in the play symbolically captures the totality of the Caribbean anguish:

A being without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of his own (*Dream on Monkey Mountain* 22).

But the brief illusion through the medium of dream in the play transports him from a state of homelessness to a place that he could call "home" and enjoy untold privileges. He is crowned king! This return to Africa aspect of the drama enables Walcott to input various elements of African aesthetics in the play, including aspects of drumming and dancing.

The themes of namelessness and homelessness are also pursued in *Omeros*, Walcott's epic poem. In the section titled "Achille in Africa," Walcott similarly realizes Africa as original home, ostensibly home to the Caribbean. The home return is divinely sanctioned in the work:

And God said to Achille, 'Look, I giving you permission
to come home. Is I send the sea-swift as a pilot,
the swift whose wings is the sign of my crucifixion.
And thou shalt have no gods should in case you forgot
my commandments.' And Achille felt the homesick shame
and pain of his Africa (*Omeros* 135)

Though *Omeros* is a poem, it is a dramatic poem and indeed contains large chunks of dramatic, dialogical sequences complete with stage directions. In one of the dramatic sequences in "Achille in Africa," Achille is queried about his name, or namelessness, and is lectured on the significance of naming in African cultures.

The father figure first calls out his own name, Afolabe (possibly a corruption of Yoruba Afolabi – born in grandeur):

Then the fishermen sat under a large tree under whose dome
stones sat in a circle. His father said:

‘Afo-la-be.’

touching his own heart.

‘In the place you have come from,
what do they call you?’

Time translates.

Tapping his chest,

the son answers:

‘Achille.’ The tribe rustles, ‘Achille.’

and it runs like a wind in the leaves on the green crest
of a hilltop at sunrise, then all the mutterings settle.

AFOLABE

Achille. What does the name mean? I have forgotten the one
that I gave you. But it was, it seems, many years ago.

What does it mean?

ACHILLE

Well, I too have forgotten.

Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know.

AFOLABE

A name means something. The qualities desired in a son,
and even a girl-child; so even the shadows who called
you expected one virtue, since every name is a blessing,
since I am remembering the hope I had for you as a child.
Unless the sound means nothing. Then you would be nothing.
Did they think you were nothing in that other kingdom?

ACHILLE

I do not know what the name means. It means something,
maybe. What’s the difference? In the world I come from
we accept the sounds we were given. Men, trees, water.

...

AFOLABE

No man loses his shadow except it is in the night,

... (*Omeros* 138)

In the ensuing argument, Archille is characterized as a ghost, having been long cut off from the African home where names have meanings and having accordingly lost his original name. Interestingly, Walcott also provides a clue in the last few lines above that the exchange has a real-life parallel in the Caribbean, where there are many questions (on history, race and culture), for which there are difficult or no answers.

And you, nameless son, are only the ghost of a name. Why did I never miss you until you returned?

...

There was no answer to this as in life. (*Omeros* 139)

Numerous other African elements recur within Walcott's dramaturgy which must count ultimately as contributions to the awareness of Africa, and potentially as expressions of a Pan-Africanist consciousness. Some of the other elements include references to the African pantheon (with names such as Shango, Ogun), place names and geographical cues (Congo, mangrove, jungle, forest), etc. As noted earlier, an enormous amount of syncretism is embedded in Walcott's aesthetic output, just as there are numerous indices of negation of the African quest in his works. Actual history is also obliterated or blurred in the dramaturgy. The mythical returns of characters like Archille and Makak in the texts examined above are the closest substitutes for history in the works. It should be noted however that, at depth, this blurring of actual history does not detract from the significance of the Africanist features in Walcott's works as a conscious or unconscious celebration of Africa. With Edward Kamau Braithwaite, however, the Pan-Africanism trajectory is on firmer ground.

At a general level, Braithwaite's contribution to Caribbean aesthetics is often juxtaposed with that of Derek Walcott, and the two main contrasted features are the stylistic and ideological orientations of their works. Where Walcott's style is seen as bourgeois and elitist, that of Braithwaite is regarded as orienting towards the masses; where Walcott's ideology is that of detachment from history and from Africa, Braithwaite's is seen as being rooted in African consciousness and being therefore Pan-Africanist. Ismond (54) regards Braithwaite as the "poet of the people dealing with historical and social themes that define the West Indian dilemma." Walcott, on the other hand, is seen as "a type of a poet's poet, the kind of luxury we can ill afford, and which remains Eurocentric." Bruce King (139) also compares what he calls "Walcott's transformations of foreign models" with "Braithwaite's claim to speak for the folk," observing that the true model of Caribbean aesthetics is a combination of these ideological/aesthetic orientations.

Born in the same year as Walcott (1930), Braithwaite's intellectual development focused on studies of Black people in Africa and in the Diaspora. He was to spend nearly a decade working in Ghana prior to and after that country's independence, a sojourn which he saw as a "mission to find in Africa an 'authentic' ancestral homeland for West Indians of African origin..." (Gilbert and Tomkins, cited in Wetmore, *Black Dionysus* 217).

In his "Timehri" (cited in Oloruntoba-Oju "Irreducible Africanness"), Braithwaite also talked of a "sense of identification" and linking of "Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland." There is no impugning his Pan-Africanist sentiment, consciousness and advocacy. On returning home to the Caribbean, he discovered: "That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean" (Timehri 347)

Like Walcott, Braithwaite's aesthetic realization of his Pan-Africanist orientation comes through the mythical medium rather than through any direct representation of history. The realization is largely through his adaptation of Sophocles's *Antigone*, which he titled *Odale's Choice* written and performed in June of 1962 in Ghana. The adaptation follows the original fairly closely, though with some alterations. The same themes of filial love, courage and commitment, and the perennial conflict between laws of man and the laws of the gods are evident in the play.

In *Odale's Choice* Creon's tyrannical rule in the unnamed city (Thebes in Sophocles's play) led to an insurgency that involves Taiwa, his nephew and brother to Odale (Antigone). Taiwa is captured and brought before Creon who kills him and then, the ultimate disgrace, leaves his corpse in the open to rot and smell. Hearing her brother had been killed, Odale inclines to give him a 'burial,' both out of filial love and out of obedience to the injunction of the gods: to leave him unburied is to call curses on his household. The 'burial' is cosmetic/symbolic (she merely covers Taiwa's body up); however, Creon is infuriated and first orders Odale killed but reduces the sentence to banishment following the intercession of the chorus (people of the town). Odale then requests to properly burial for her brother, and when Creon refuses, she rejects his scornful amnesty and chooses death. This is in stark contrast to the choice of Leicho, her twin sister who opts to accept Creon's tyranny out of fear.

Wetmore (*Black Dionysus*) has argued that "the non-specific ethnicity of the characters in *Odale's Choice* reflect a Caribbean more than an African sensibility" (217). However, names like Odale, Akwele Akwukor, Musa, etc in the play are definitely African or Africanized names, and they specifically have a West African ring to them. The play's dramaturgic advocacy of resistance to tyranny also keys into the then "mood of the moment," at a time when many African states were struggling with issues of independence from colonialism. The anguished question by Odale ("is it a crime to fight for one's ideals?") resonates well with the stance of prominent Pan-Africanists like Nkrumah to struggle for liberation and even encourage armed struggle in the then volatile areas such as Guinea, Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), Namibia and South Africa. The elaborate burial rites and the role of women in caring for and mourning the dead in the play also key into similar practices in African cultures. And although the play sidetracks actual historical incidents it does index them indirectly through a mythologised representation of history.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine differences in the realization of Pan-Africanist concerns by some African and Caribbean dramatists, and the intersection of these realizations with myth and history. For African drama, we examined plays that have actual history and actual historical personages as their fount and that espouse Pan-Africanist themes in an explicit fashion. However, the Caribbean drama corpus calls for a reverse strategy. Thus, due to the absence of drama following the course of actual history by the region's key dramatists, Pan-Africanist features are extracted from mythological and pseudo historical representations. This contrast shows how the different histories of the regions have shaped the attitude of the playwrights towards history and historical materials. However, notwithstanding these differences, the Pan-Africanist spirit could be observed hovering around the dramatic pieces in this survey with each play helping in different ways to propagate the idea of Africa.

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