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PERFORMING GENDER IN ARABIC/AFRICAN THEATRE

Amsterdam, April 2009

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Proceedings: Freddy Decreus& Mieke Kolk, eds.
Gent, Belgium / 2004

Khalid Amine & Mieke Kolk
The Performance of the Comic in Arabic Theatre; Cultural Heritage, Western models and Postcolonial Hybridity.
Proceedings: Mieke Kolk, ed.
Tetouan, Morocco 2005/ Gent 2005

Shams El Din Younis & Mieke Kolk
Rituals and Ceremonies in Sudan; From Cultural Heritage to Theatre
Proceedings: Mieke Kolk, ed.
Khartoum, Sudan 2005/ Amsterdam 2006

Shams El Din Younis, Saad Obeid Younis, Adel Harbi & Mieke Kolk
Performing Gender in Arabic/African Theatre
Proceedings: Mieke Kolk ed.
Khartoum, Sudan 2007/ Amsterdam 2009

INTERCULTURAL THEATRE: ‘EAST’ MEETS ‘WEST
Number 4

PERFORMING GENDER IN ARABIC/AFRICAN THEATRE

Mieke KOLK (editor)

Martin ADRICHEM (copy-editor)

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NEGOTIATING THE SPACE OF THE IN-BETWEEN
Between Cultures, Between Gender

Mieke KOLK

In December 2007 the fourth INTERCULTURAL THEATRE CONFERENCE 'EAST MEETS WEST' took place in Khartoum, Sudan. Some 30 scholars from Africa, Europe and the USA sat together to discuss the gender-issue as one of the most important social and cultural themes in the world in general and with growing attention also in the Arabic and African countries.

Under the title: **Performing Gender in Arabic/African Theatre** a series of lectures were presented. The focus was of course on the representation of male and female roles on stage, reflecting or criticizing these gender-roles in culture and society. But also the position of female artists in the mostly male-dominated domain of theatre-practice was discussed. The voices of women and their vision about daily life and future changes should be heard, breaking the silence.

Struggling against social power-constructions both male and female artists are searching for a new freedom of body and mind, where image and self-image can come together and identity is no longer a fixed phenomenon but a pluralistic concept, fluid and continually shifting in a changing cultural lsandscape.

Crucial in this new idea of identity construction is the concept of performativity, the idea that identity is created not only by facts of nature, social context or inner psychological truth, but time and again by our actions. It are these actions, these forms of agency, that are searched for and reflected in drama and theatre: in subversive forms of femininity and masculinity and in the crossing of boundaries of what can be made visible in a cultural community.

Theatre is a public institution, a theatre-performance a public event. On stage the theatre-makers offer their vision on the cultural and social conditions of a society and negotiate, so to say, with their audience (changing) norms and values of this society.

Therefore a theatre-performance is both an aesthetic, artistic phenomenon and a social and political event.

The articles presented in this publication on Arabic/African the theatre nearly all present the struggle about male/female positions in the *private* and *public space*.

Women are for whatever reason banned to the private space of the home and to motherhood as their proper place. Women are also often banned from the stage as a public forum, either directly as an actress, a writer or a director, or indirectly in roles where they cannot escape their traditional representations. But nearly every author discusses and questions the male power-relations and explores strategies to develop an effective model of female agency, both in reality and in fiction.

Performativity and performance are thus both social and artistic concepts that function in dance, theatre and drama. They will be central in the arrangement of themes and articles in the book.

1. Starting with female performance, we concentrate first on ***'performing traditions'*** where women are taking the stage in ancient and modern rites: *ancient* like priestesses in the Nuba Mountains in Southern Sudan and *modern* as Wedding Singers in a long marriage tradition in the Sudanese capital Khartoum.

There are two exciting studies about powerful women and women-roles visible in still existing daily practices. Osman Badawi describes the roles of female performers in the archaic ritual practices of the Nuba-people in South Kordofan as priestesses in different rituals, and the important position of women in the Nuban myths of origin from ancient times.

Despite the fact, he writes, that the indigenous Nuba people have for decades mingled and co-existed with cultures from North and South and are themselves mostly either Muslims or Christians, the Nuba managed to preserve their indigenous ritualistic practices unswerving. And that means that a woman can, for instance, be the oracle-priest, the *Kujuriya*, in which position as a spirit-medium she performs and " identifies with the ancestral spirit, adopts its character, speaks in its tongue and becomes an actor in a very serious play".

During her stay in Khartoum, Dutch anthropologist Natasja van 't Westende at the end of the 1990s, did an extensive study of the female wedding-singers as performers. Singing at weddings, these women, fulfilling an important role in society, also have to deal with a so-called 'loose' reputation, being accused of singing a repertoire of 'sensual and shameful' songs in public. Wanting to combine their position as artists, working women (that is that shameful act of earning money), motherhood and a home, they defend themselves by proving to be ‘generous’ and ‘serving the family’.

As these women are mostly married, their husbands tend to support the job they perform, also out of economic necessity. Although the Islamic discourse in the Nile Valley since the early nineties does not approve of this public performance of music and songs, the political elite is inclined to accept it because of the more private female character of this part of the marriage ceremonies. “The ideas maybe changed but not the behaviour”, comments the author, “a wedding without the songs and dances is no wedding at all.”

The accusation of causing “fitna”, in this context ‘sexual chaos’, is a threat for all performing women in the Sub-Sahara region. Where actresses are considered as prostitutes, like in Europe up till the 20th century, their behaviour must stress the image of the ideal woman.

2. Moving between reality and fiction, we should also consider the forms of ***applied theatre, community theatre, theatre for peace*** etc. where *theatre-techniques* and *performance strategies* are put into use in sessions of groups of people, who are subjected to political change, modernization processes, migration… In these spaces of transition, traditional male and female roles are put to task, creating a deep crisis in especially the male identities when women have to take over their responsibilities. Often both shocked and traumatized, the women - always considered inferior to the male - now have to take over his role as provider.

How deep these patterns are invested becomes clear when migration, war and dislocation are met. Jessica Kaahwa writes about a workshop she organized in the *Kyangkwali Refugee Settlement* in Uganda:

“In everyday life, relationships between male and female are gendered, creating distinguishing body-language and physical movements. In a performance with refugees all these gestures tend to celebrate or express critique, revealing the very essence of an individual especially those grieving of loss of family, friends, homes, possessions and livelihoods, personal identity, self-esteem, cultural and ancestral roots. This loss and grief confronted by the new oppressive reality of the refugee leads to the emotional experiences of a cultural shock and, especially for the men, an awareness of disempowerment feeling “castrated” and helpless.”

They feel that they are not adequately supporting their families or that their wives are playing more active roles in running the family then they do. The wives, on the other hand have to switch their social roles and also perform the roles of their husband.

Both Jessica Kaahwa and Nora Amin, the latter organizing a workshop in the SIHA network in the Blue Nile-region in the South of Sudan, are very much aware of working with traumatized people/women still under the effect of war and the consequences. “Usually”, Amin writes, “the participant cannot detach herself from her own experience in order to represent it. She remains at the phase where the experience needs to find its way out of its internal life into the memory of the external life of performance, communication and sharing”.

In fiction this crisis around gender-identity is surprisingly reflected in the Cameroon plays of Bole Butake, who in search of an audience turned to forms of community theatre. Butake gives a lively portrayal of what can be called the ‘mutual zombification of dominant and dominated males, robbing each other of their power’, leaving it to the women to solve the crisis in the community by their own means. Christopher Odhiambo describes meticulous this loss of male identity in four successive drama’s of the West-African writer.

Although, he remarks, the central conflict in Butake’s drama is usually not gendered, the women are drawn into the conflicts as a reaction to reinstate a sense of cosmic balance that has been destabilized as a result of male power plays.

3. The *silence of the female artists* has nearly everywhere comparable roots: lack of education, religious rules and early marriage: the ideal woman is still a mother taking care of her home, her husband and her children.

The women who can get an education, also as an artist, are often forced or obliged to keep their talents in the private sphere. Not permitted to perform, not permitted to enter the public space. One is surprised by the lists of women writers that are presented in the articles about Egyptian (Nehad Selaiha), Cameroon (Naomi Nkealah) and Nigerian female drama-authors (Babatunde Allen), how few of them kept to writing or are known in- and outside their home-lands.

For Egypt, the reason for a relatively small production of plays, is explained like this: “the freedom of the body is deeply linked with the freedom of the mind. The historical confinement of the female body to the home has been the main cause of women’s intellectual backwardness: denied education, social mobility and access to public life, how can women hope to develop their minds or become artists and scientists. Theater is also a communal art and a public forum. Few women are trained to take such a place, few women, in Arabic-Islamic countries, are allowed to visit the theatre.” Another reason for their silence is the social position of the power of the male author in the theatrical discourse, very much inclined to reject the work of female authors.

In a later publication Selaiha writes about a new movement in the Egyptian theatre: *The Independents*, that not only makes space for new forms of more experimental theatre but also creates opportunities for female theatre-makers to raise their voices and tell their personal stories, independent from male directors and managers. Outside the more traditional forms of theatre based on a text, clearly there are many other ways to communicate on stage.

Kristin Johnsen-Neshati explores for both the USA and Egypt the problematic position of the female dramaturg. As a phenomenon created in continental Europe, the position is challenged in theatre-practice, also in Egypt. Regardless of gender, the production –dramaturg operates from a “feminized” position, accepted as glorified stage assistants, but not in full partnership with the directors and the playwrights. A way out seems to be, again, to take the initiative for a new production, either solo as creator of the idea, or in a collective authorship, as a group of Arab and Arab-American women artists did in their performance of *The Panel* in 2006 in New York.

4. Negotiating identity, image and representation.

The need for the voices of women in the theatrical discourse is the need to break with traditional female stereotypes, in reality and in fiction.

Recent African literature has witnessed the emergence of women writers like Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), Mariama Ba (Senegal), Rebeka Njau (Kenya), Nawal el-Sadaawi (Egypt) Sindiwe Magona (S-Africa) and many others who have made the unveiling of women’s realities the central focus of their writing. Deconstructing male stereotypes of the female gender is part of this effort, writes Naomi Nkealah.

Her Nigerian colleague Babatunde Allen puts it bluntly: “Across distance and boundaries in history and society, women have been placed on pedestals as goddesses, but imprisoned with domestic injustice (custom has been nothing but a tyrant hidden in every home). They have been romanticized in literature and lyrics, but commercialized in life (…) they have been owned, used and worked as horses, even today….”.

Although stereotypes are often practiced in drama and enable the audience an easy access to the characters, the ideal type of a passive, pitiable and hopeless woman as a victim of the male world does not inspire identification and energy for change.

“I would recommend”, writes the Nehemia Chivandika from Zimbabwe, “the construction of compelling, challenging and fascinating male and female characters, who are constantly struggling against complex social forces of death, deprivation, disease and indeed all manifestations of gender domination.” But this is not what most male writers do. Despite the change imparted on her by modernization, the woman is still largely marginalized.

In her article Naomi Nkealah quotes Nalova Lyonga, who argues that female characters in African literature were often portrayed for male ends: as a symbol the to male on the brink of cultural alienation and emasculation (Senghor); as a “paragon” of African traditions (Achebe, P’Bitek, Amadi) as an appendage to a male visionary whose role is, however, blotted out once she has served her function of producing “ the strong breed” (Soyinka) and not least significant, as a flat whore (Ekwensi). Comparing the Anglophone Cameroon drama of Bole Butake and that of Bate Besong, Nkealah points to their challenging of an established pattern of female representation by creating exceptionally strong female characters. Besong even calls his major female character “Woman” and shows her as an educator of the downtrodden masses, a revolutionary leader, and a combatant of foreign exploitation. Both writers reveal a new vision in which women become the initiators of change: both describe different strategies for the women to negotiate power in the gender-biased societies. In Butake’s plays the women use their bodies as a site of resistance against male complacency, Besong’s Woman uses her knowledge of the evils of the ruling government to form a political movement against it.

Surprisingly, female author and director Anna Ndebele from Zimbabwe adopts the common male negative images and metaphors of female sexuality in her play about Aids, a strategy that Chivandikwa signals as a weakness in Zimbabwean theatre: the abuse or negative use of serotypes. In her play *Zvatapera Todini*, the young girl Sharon is constructed as a sex object, a prostitute that, stereotyped, brings aids: she wears a very short skirt, which exposes her thighs, her breasts are barely covered …Next to her a group of stock, pitiable passive and hopeless women characters do severely limit the transgressive impact of performance and narrative that are meant to question gender domination and exploitation.

Chivandikwa also researches a play *Africano-Americano* that deals with a mixed marriage: an African girl and an American husband. While living there, the woman is abused, oppressed and shunned by her husband and decides to go back. Before he kills her, she stands up as a great fighter, physically and ideologically. In a fascinating way the author then researches and interprets the reaction of three different audiences on the play: for a mostly young female audience, a more adult male audience in Zimbabwe, and the European reactions during a tour.

Mixed marriage relations are in a way also an important theme in the work of South African drama-writer Antony Akerman who lived for 17 years in migration in Europe, although his couples are white. They become separated just by being from Africa- or not being from Africa. Mieke Kolk compares two of his plays about exile: *A Man out of the Country* and *Dark Outsider* with the famous Sudanese novel of Tayeb Salih: *Season of Migration to the North*. Having left Africa the main male characters in their work, develop highly problematic relations with the women. Both African writers, write about the process of the loss of male identity and the fundamental insecurity to live, while African soil does not support their ‘maleness’ anymore. The female characters are in essence a foreign country, just by being not from Africa, born-betrayers so to say.

5. The boundaries of the visible

In Islamic culture the body, especially of the female, is considered a vessel holding an untamed sexuality that invites sin and corruption. Women are said to possess a supernatural, sexual energy capable of corrupting the morals of religious men and, as an implicit conclusion, the society as a whole. Social interaction between men and women is governed by strict rules of modesty.

Hubertus Mayr researching the function of the veil in Iranian dance, puts the veil as an instrument that serves gender-segregation, it is part of an ideology that subordinates women to men. But he also mentions Leila Ahmed who stresses the function of the veil as an *icon* for the legitimacy of all Islamic customs, in a narrative of resistance to Western domination and part of a protest to postcolonial attacks to that customs.

In Iran, the history of the veil is a story about a myriad of different personal and political interpretations: “an emblem now of progress, then of backwardness, a badge now of nationalism, then of domination, a symbol of purity, then of corruption”. Its ambiguous function works here two ways: the enforcement of hijab served as a catalyst to increasingly visibility and participation of women in public life and politics by making public space morally correct in the eyes of the traditionalists. In the same way the restrictions on the performance arts and bodily representation seem to challenge a new creativity and to form “an ideal breeding ground for unique performance practices that attempt to cross the discursive limits of culturally defined boundaries between East and West”.

How ambiguous the function of the veil as a sign has become, I experienced during the different theatre festivals I visited last year in Cairo, Tehran and Khartoum. The Egyptian festival showed veiled and unveiled women, moving and dancing according to the homeland cultures. The Egyptian street showed more and more veiled women, also the younger ones. In Tehran on the Fadjr festival every actress was carefully veiled on stage. However the female public and the street showed another image, especially the younger girls with colourful scarves dancing on and from their heads. In Sudan I was taken by surprise: the young actresses on stage without the veil, only the elderly women seemed to stick to it. On the street nearly every women wore the elegant toob somewhere ending on their head.

Migrating

Paula van Zijl, curator of an art-exhibition of Moroccan artists in migration living in the Netherlands, mentions in her story a couple of interesting positions the female artists migrating to Europe defends:

> *“My work is not about the gender-question. I am not an Moroccan artist, I left when I was 8, since then I stayed in France, Denmark and Holland.*
>
> *In my work the issue was about displaced people in general, (…) how to deal with identification when one cannot refer to one exclusive home country any more? It is not about* ***identity*** *– this remains a personal issue for any individual- but about* ***identification****: where do I come from, what is my nationality*?

Maartje Nevejan, director of *Couscous and Cola*, a television series about growing up teenagers of an Eastern/African background in Holland that went all over the world, develops an intriguing theory about the overwhelming hate of these teenagers of the West. She signalizes the simultaneity of the process for the young children of leaving Africa, their motherland and often their mother, to enter the Western world that is also the world of the then unknown father and his disciplining strategies, that puts them again into the position of little children. Nevejan also mentions the violent gesture of the West in negating the magic and spiritual world of these young teenagers, educated in religious traditions and norms and values of their community.

In the same way as the artists in the Moroccan project mentioned above, they ask themselves where they belong, entering the space of the in-between of two worlds.

Nevejan pleads also for a world that does not accept perspectives like the *West and the Rest, the Men and Woman*.

I suppose we all know that such positions are not acceptable any more.

Lectures spoken at the conference in Arabic will be, hopefully, published online (www.ArtsAfrica.org) in the coming months, in Arabic.

I would like to thank my Sudanese colleagues of the College of Music and Drama in Khartoum and Ahfad University, Omdurman, for the perfect organization of the Conference and Mr Ali Mahdi and the Royal Dutch Embassy in Khartoum for their financial support.

I thank, again, Antje von Graevenitz and Martin Adrichem for their priceless support of both the conference, the Exchange-program Sudan-The Netherlands, and the publication of this book.

BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THEATRE
The Role of Women Performers in the Ritualistic Practices of The Nuba

Osman EL-BADAWI

It is now common belief that in some Arabic, Islamic and African societies that are thought to be male-dominated, there has always been gender-prejudice against women in favor of men, which is particularly observed in gender-representation within the domain of artistic performance. Accordingly, women in such societies are said to be noticeably deprived of their right to participate in public activities, a situation regarded by some as being an act of fairless-ness against the fair sex. This does not mean, however, that women do not take part in the social life of their societies.

This paper intends to focus attention on the role, within the sphere of ritualistic practices, played by women-performers. We know for example about the Nuba people that women are tribal priestesses and in this function are believed to be possessed by ancestral spirits. Female performers in this part of the Sudan occupy a prominent place within the scope of indigenous cultural practices, that can by no means be excluded from being performances in a social and an aesthetic sense.

The concept of *performance*, developed in the last thirty years in the academic disciplines of Theatre Studies and Anthropology as a crossword between the domains of the social, the religious, and the artistic, offers us a new grasp on the narrow relations between ritual (religion) and play (theater). Both *ritual*, described as collective memories encoded into actions "helping people to deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships (…) that exceed the norms of daily life", and *play*, giving people a chance to temporarily experience the excessive and the risky, lead people into a 'second reality', separate from ordinary life. Both ritual and play share their part in a possible definition of performance as: "ritualized behavior conditioned and/or permeated by play."[1]

When anthropologist Victor Turner stated, as early as the year 1980, in a planning meeting for the *World Conference on Ritual and Performance*, that cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances[2], he re-opened a field of research that has been most influential in both disciplines. Our question will be what dimension or definition of performance we can use as a reference point from which we can look into the role of women in the cultural practices of the Nuba people. The reason why we have chosen the Nuba is that this particular area of Northern Sudan has been exposed to a widespread influence of Islamic and Christian cultures. It seems, nevertheless, that the African traditional practices of the indigenous Nuba cultures, inherited from their ancestors, remained as strong as ever before.

This paper will therefore discuss:

1. The strong connection between Anthropology and Theater Studies, centering on the concept of performance as a methodological tool to approach and describe the comparative phenomena between ritual and theatre/drama.

   This part will also describe some important historical approaches of scholars from different disciplines remarking on these connections, before the period of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner as the main theoreticians in the field.

2. We will then present the reader with a general overview of the land, the people and the cultural identity of the Nuba.

   Describing the position of women in the ancient rituals, we think it important to explore the position of women in the Nuba myths of origin explaining the beginning of the world.

From these ancient stories we can learn how important women were considered in the creation of the people and the land of the Nuba. And it certainly will reflect on the importance of the female priests still functioning in the modern world of the Nuba.

We start with:

a. a description of the position of women in the Nuba mythology;

b. a description of their function as priestesses, as mediators between the ancestral spirits and human beings. Added is a list of terms that are necessary to an understanding of the rituals.

3. The paper will close with a short scenario by the author based on the anthropological research of Rev. P.D.Kauczor: *The Turks Are Coming.*

The paper is mainly based upon extensive fieldwork carried out by the researcher in the Nuba mountains. Next to his direct observations, the paper will draw extensively on and borrow from other material, made available by a number of other anthropologists.

Focus of the study will be the difference in position between male and female positions in these ritual performances. We will also look for actual disruptions in these activities under the influence of Islamic or Christian religion. The paper can by no means be a comprehensive treatment of the whole concept of ritual performances of the Nuba women. That is far beyond its limits and, therefore, it is going to examine only a few examples of anthropological observations collected in different periods of time.

1. Between Anthropology and Theatre Studies: the Concept of Performance

The narrow ties between ritual and theatre are mentioned in every history of theatre, whereby mostly rituals are considered more ancient than forms of theatre. Traditionally it could be said that while efforts of the anthropologist would be focused upon such aspects of the phenomena as "social position of the performer, the reactions of the participating audience, the structural type of personification adopted by the medium, and the general place of the spirit cult in the social and religious system of the people", the theatre researcher would be, on the other hand, more inclined to approach the subject from an artistic and aesthetical point of view.

However, in a study of the 1960s, there are four points made by Peter Hammond about the relationship between anthropology and drama (theatre) that we can build on. It is worth quoting him here at length, as he says:

1- The anthropological study of drama, more than any other art form, illustrates both the potential inter-relatedness of all forms of aesthetic expression and the fusion of art with most other aspects of a people's way of life.

2- The relationship between drama and religious ideas and practices is particularly close, as it is still by ritual means that the majority of people try to control the circumstances of their life.

3- Drama as an aspect of ritual also provides a means of reducing anxiety and tension through such relief-giving patterns as prayer, sacrifice, possession, and other behaviors culturally designated as appropriate for coping with anxiety and the pressure of other strong emotion.

4- Drama is among the art forms most seriously neglected by anthropologists, perhaps because in so many societies it is not easily separated from its usual context of ritual observances and perhaps also because its analysis is complicated by the manner in which it typically incorporates nearly all other aesthetic forms.[3]

With such sharp observations already done, the coming together of two key figures in recent Theatre Studies seemed to be only a matter of time. As we stated already it was at the end of the 1970s that anthropologist Victor Turner built the first bridge with his remark that cultures were most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances. Turner here associated culture and ritual with theatre and performance, but did not provide a definition of what performance could be. Theatre scholar Richard Schechner took up this matter in time to come.Writing a general introduction to the *Performance Studies Series* he and Brooks McNamara contemplated the question 'What is a Performance'. In their quest for an answer, they distinguished eight different events, which led them into another question, which was 'do these events have anything to do with ritual?' After all the effort they made to arrive at an acceptable answer they concluded that performance is no longer easy to define or locate, because the concept and structure has spread all over the place, but what all performances share is 'restored behaviour' which creates the shortest valid description of performance (and ritual) as 'twice-behaved or repeated behaviour' used in *Performance Studies*. In a strong linkage with what had already been included in the concept of performance, developed by Erving Goffman in 1959, the term won its second important dimension. In his famous study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman defined *performance* as: "All the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to *influence in any way any of the other participants*."[4] (italics added). The next question we have to ask ourselves is to what various fields of activity and the drive to influence can the verb *to perform* be applied, and with what different meanings?

According to Richard Schechner, we can, at least, apply it to three different areas of activity, namely business, the arts and everyday life. *To perform*, says Schechner is *an action*

1. In business, sports etc: to do something up to a standard.
2. In the arts: to put on a show, a play, a dance, a concert.
3. In everyday life: to show off, to go to extremes, to underline an action for those who are watching.

Our questioning does not stop here, and neither does Schechner's explanation. We would want to know whether our female-participants will be living, doing, showing or explaining the instance they assume, so that we can see that they seem to 'perform'. Schechner, in this context, assures us that:

To perform can also be understood in relation to:

a. Being.
b. Doing.
c. Showing.

And goes on to clarify that:

1. *Being* is existence itself.
2. *Doing* is activity of all that exists.
3. *Showing doing* is "performing, pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing".

Performance can at least encompass all these three categories, namely existence, activity and doing, performance defined as an intentional activity directed to others. All three modes can be discussed within the framework of ritual activities, which our women-performers are eligible to *perform* as the natural result of being *possessed*.

The term *performative* is then the adjective or adverb in connection with or to perform, stressing the activity meant to reach out to the other.

What we will try to arrive at by means of examining the following examples is to answer the question of whether women in the Nuba Mountains are distinguished by, or, otherwise, deprived from being, among other women-performers, the ones who play a leading, or at least an adequate, role in the performative practices of their own culture.

2. Nuba Mountains

The Land and The People

Nuba Mountains is described as a plain of nearly thirty thousand square miles, dotted with isolated hills in the state of South Kordofan in the Republic of the Sudan. Because Nuba are essentially hill-dwellers they actually inhabit only a small part of the whole area, namely hillsides, leaving the rest of the plain being occupied by a number of Muslim Arab tribes broadly known as ‘the Baggara Arabs’. Very little information is available concerning Nuba beliefs of their own origin and religion but, nevertheless, the authority of tribal priests and priestesses is of great importance, both in religious and temporal matters. All the community’s problems are believed to be solved, by means of consulting ancestral spirits through priests and priestesses (Kujurs and Kujuriyas) who perform their communicative role in a trance-like condition.

The Nuba were, until the year 1912 in complete cultural isolation. They remained pagan until both the twin forces of Christianity and Islam began their contest for the conversion of the Nuba people. Many were converted to either Christianity or Islam but, nevertheless, the traditional practices of the indigenous Nuba cultures, in their performative modes inherited from the ancestors, remained as strong as ever before. The reason why they are so strongly preserved is because much of what is practiced in the form of a ritual performance is, in fact, deeply rooted in people’s religious belief, which is at the same time a portrait of social life. Ritual and social life of the Nuba are, therefore, inseparable from each other. This was also observed by Clifford Geertz elsewhere: “Daily interaction is so ritualistic and religious activity so civic that it is difficult to tell where the one leaves off and the other begins.”[5]

Women of the Nuba people often take the leading role in such important performances as spirit-possession. They assume the character of the ancestral spirit by whom they are possessed, thus communicating to the community, in a state of spirit-medium-ship, the message of the ancestor whom the community venerates.

It is true that this cultural practice of spirit-medium-ship is widespread in many traditional cultures all over the world, but what is unique about the Nuba model is that despite being approached by both Christianity and Islam, it defied change and preserved the leading role played by women who preside at many an important performance. It is on this specific aspect of women’s role in such performances that we now will concentrate, so that it might contribute to an understanding of the place of women within the cultural framework of the Nuba, which for many decades has been subjected to the influences of other cultures.

Cultural Identity and Alien Cultures

The term ‘Nuba’ may, falsely, imply the existence of a single cultural entity using one native language throughout the whole area. In fact it might be rather surprising to know that with a total population of less than half a million inhabitants the Nuba are found to be divided into thirteen language groups, and subdivided into more than fifty tribal sections each of which preserves some cultural peculiarities of its own. But this does not refute the fact that all these tribal sections, hill-communities and villages share the same basic principle of their religious system, namely the conception of spirit possession. Despite the fact that the indigenous Nuba people have, for decades, mingled and coexisted with the cultures from the North and are surrounded by a number of pagan groups of the Southern Sudan, and although the Nuba themselves, in some villages, are today in great measure either Muslims or Christians - and some of those who are still pagans are, to some extent, influenced by either Islamic or Christian teachings or both - the Nuba managed to preserve their indigenous ritualistic practices unswerving. The impact of all those foreign influences has not caused the disappearance of the Nuba traditional beliefs and practices connected with spirit possession and spirit-mediumship. They even adhered to their tradition in areas of displacement scattered all over the country during the time of war provided that there be a KUJUR to conduct the ritual. Having mentioned the word KUJUR, it may be appropriate to pause here for a while so as to introduce and explain the meaning of some terms connected with the study, and particularly with the field of ritual performances.

Terminology

Kujur: Oracle-priest. Kujur (male) or kujuriya (female) is very important in the life of the Nuba because he or she is the person who directs the religious ceremonies known as SIBIR. The Kujur of a community or master in a specific field of knowledge, plays the leading role in all the communal activities related to his domain of magical craft. The oracle-priest or priestess is given different names other than KUJUR, such as BAYEL in the Koalib tribe, and KUNI in the Njimang. But the name KUJUR is the most popular one so that even Koalib, Njimang and Dilling people, among many others, now adopt it, it may, therefore, be appropriate to use it, instead of oracle – priest, for the rest of the present paper.

Sibir: Religious ceremony headed by a Kujur or Kujuriya in trance-like state of spirit-possession.

Spirit Possession and Spirit Medium-ship: Spiritual practices often enveloped in theatrical form, a quality which the Scottish-born anthropologist Victor Turner would refer to as ‘the human seriousness of play’. To remove some possible ambiguity of the terms ‘spirit-possession and spirit-medium-ship’, we quote Professor Raymond Firth as he explains:

“Spirit-possession is a form of trance in which behavioral actions of a person are interpreted as evidence of a control of his behavior by a spirit normally external to him. Spirit-medium-ship is normally a form of possession in which the person is conceived as serving as intermediary between spirits and men. The account here is on communication; the actions and words of the medium must be translatable, which differentiates them from mere spirit-possession or madness".[6]

Doaka: concave clay-slab used for making KISRA.

Kisra: kind of thin bread known in many parts of the Sudan among which is the Nuba Mountains.

Angareb: Bed

Merissa: Local beer made of fermented sorghum

Kwotekakero: Second month of the lunar calendar, which corresponds to Alwaheed in Arabic Sudan.

A. The Place of Women in the Myths of Origin

As has been said before, the Nuba people know very little about the origin of their own race. Although this paper is not very much concerned with myths, stories or tales of origin, nevertheless, there are some mythical conceptions which might be very interesting to relate, for they involve the feminine gender in some dramatic conflicts of how the Nuba race first came to exist. Some of these tales are worth mentioning.

In Alliri Hills, for example, people attribute their existence to the genius of a supreme deity called 'Kalo', who created the whole universe and abode in heaven where he also kept the sun and the moon. He made people drop from the sky and spring from the earth. People of Kawarma Hill insist that their ancestors were among those who sprang from a spot within their very land. To prove this point, they would take you to a rock they call Eldu, where, they believe, their first ancestor, called Arenjuk, and his wife, their first ancestress called Kamara (which is the Arabic word for 'moon') had emerged together with their pigs. Slightly different is the story told at Dilling town, which makes the ancestress the one who was rooted in their land of origin while the male-ancestor, whose name was Tinga, came from the west to meet a woman, probably called Alinga, who had just sprung from a rock on the Dilling Hill. Tinga took the woman as his wife and together they founded the Dilling folk.

More interesting, or even more dramatic, is the myth of how the black race was created as the result of a purposive visit paid by the supreme deity to the abode of Mother Hawa (Eve).

The story was related by the anthropologist J.W.Sagar, working in Sudan in the Colonial period, as follows.

Some Nuba people trace their descent back to Adam and Hawa. They relate the following story:

> Once upon a time the lord God went to see our mother Hawa and asked her to show Him her children. She consented readily, but as some of her children were beautiful and the others ugly, she feared that God might take the beautiful ones, so she went into the house and hid the beautiful ones under the doka (which is the concave clay-slab used for making the thin bread called kisra). Then Hawa brought out the ugly ones for God to look at. The Lord noticed that there were so few of them and asked her if those were all her children. She replied yes. But God said no, these are not all, you have hidden some of them under the doka, and for this reason I will turn black the children whom you have hidden. Then he went on his way, and when Hawa brought the children out of their hiding place she found that they had turned black. Having been turned black, the beautiful children were enslaved to the ugly ones until Tinga, one of the beautiful children who were turned black, laughed at God who made the black children slaves. He took his brothers and one sister and made their escape, however, and flying to other lands founded the black races.[7]

What can be elicited from the story cited above is that the Nuba, who believe that 'black is beautiful' as the story tells, would attribute the merit of being a beautiful race to the clever performance of their ingenious remote woman-ancestor, Hawa, who was, in that instance, interacting with Lord God the Creator, the supreme deity himself.

Moreover, one could also detect a distant relationship, a degree of resemblance or, at least, a degree of analogy between this Nuba myth of Hawa, mother of the human-race and wife of Adam, and the Greek myth of Hera, sister and wife of Zeus and queen of the gods (notice here the similarity between the two names: Hawa and Hera). The Greek myth tells that Kronos, god of time, swallowed each of his children at birth because of a prophecy that he would be deposed by one of them.When Rhea sister-wife of Zeus and mother of Hera and other gods, bore to Kronos their youngest son, Zeus, she was frightened that his father would swallow him. Her daughter Hera, eagerly, asked her mother Rhea to leave the child in her charge. When Kronos came and asked Rhea to show him what she had born, Hera wrapped up a stone and passed it to her mother Rhea, who handed it to Kronos.

Thinking that it was the newborn baby, he devoured it, but at once he came to know that a trick had been played on him. He began searching for Zeus all over the earth. Meanwhile, Hera took Zeus, her future husband, and made their escape to Crete.[8]

Conflict, which is the core of the stuff of drama, seems to be inherent in most stories about the Nuba origin and where they came from. Some Nuba claim to have been members of the Nubian family of the Northern Sudan. As a result of a family dispute they had to leave home and move away to a different area. They say that they were the descendants of a Nubian chief who had two wives, each of whom gave birth to a number of children. The father was a wealthy man who cultivated the land as well as he bred cattle. This wealth divided the family so that the boys, each group supported by their mother, were in continual dispute about their father's fortune and who was to inherit it. To end off the conflict, the father decided to divide his wealth among them. He gave the farms to one group of his children and made them and their mother stay with him around the River Nile, and gave the cattle to the other group and told them, with their mother, to seek another place where they could take up residence. They went wandering about until they reached a place where they thought that they should settle. The place where they took refuge was the land now known as South Kordofan in the central Sudan, and the name they gave to themselves was 'the Nuba' instead of Nubians.

B. Spirit-Mediumship: The Human Seriousness of Play

Victor Turner, as mentioned before, defines spirit-mediumship as 'The Human Seriousness of play'. In any Nuba community all the locality is but a stage and whenever consultation with the ancestral spirit is needed, the Kujurs involved, whether males or females, must identify with the ancestral spirit, adopt its character, speak in its tongue and become actors in a serious play, with the whole community watching. But to keep the thread of our argument connected, let us follow it home by means of explaining briefly the hierarchy of the deity system of the Nuba, and according to which they perform their prescribed roles within this framework of the human seriousness of play.

Nuba people believe that there is a supreme deity, who is given different names in different parts of the Nuba land and who is regarded with great reverence. After having fashioned the universe this supreme deity is believed to have little to do with activities and practices of everyday life, for that is a role which is entrusted to the care of the supreme tribal-spirit who, in its turn, gives the charge of various roles of guiding the lives and affairs of mortals to a number of spirits. These spirits perform their responsibilities through their human agent in a state of spirit-mediumship. Either of the two genders is eligible to be nominated by one of the ancestral spirits as its medium, provided that the agent succeeds in performing a prescribed course of endurance test before one can be consecrated as tribal priest or tribal priestess. While the tribal spirits control the affairs of their peoples from their abodes in the next world, their agents perform their duties from within the community where a house is built for each spirit. The duties of the spirits and their agents include looking after the welfare of their people in the present life in such areas as bringing prosperity or sending curses and punishments to evildoers.

The Rev. P.D Kauczor, who was a missionary at Dilling for some years, writes:

> The worship of the ancestor prevails so exclusively that it seems to overshadow completely the concept of a deity, and in no Nuba tribe is there any form of worship addressed directly to God, except in so far as Muslim influence is felt. Since there is only a vague idea about God the Creator, whose abode is in heaven, all communications are addressed, not to God, but to the ancestral spirit.[9]

A person who has become a Kujur (male) or Kujuriya (female) by means of being possessed by the ancestral spirit is the one through whom the message of the spirit is passed to the community. A perfect identification with the spirit and a convincing performance by the medium is the only guarantee of keeping alive the interaction between the deity and the audience. Keeping the interaction means to be possessed, and to be possessed, in my opinion, means to be *in performance*.

Using this term, of course, means not only a 'twice behaved behaviour', but also a consciousness about this behaviour, a question still to be resolved.

In another noteworthy academic treatment of the question of spirit-mediumship that is, somehow, related to our present study is the paper entitled *Spirit Medium-ship as Theatre*, written by John Beattie[10], in which he addresses the question of the possible *theatricality* of spirit-mediumship.

Beattie tackled the question whether mediumship was just a fraud, or whether it was genuine, involving a real state of trance or dissociation on the medium's part, so that he, or more likely she, was telling the truth when she claimed that she did not remember a thing about her possession when she "came to" after it.[11] Long before my attention was drawn to Beattie's paper[12] I was, and still am agitated by the question. Despite the fact that his paper was an address delivered at the *Royal Anthropological Institute* Conference on Spirit Possession and Ecstatic Religion and therefore it was short, it was, nevertheless, able to provide a groundwork for the investigation of mediumship as a theatricalized performance, as he seems to suggest.

But to be more precise, I should mention that I am going to concentrate on some selected roles representing women's participation in performative activities within the domain of the Nuba cultural beliefs and practices. Through such examples we can then decide whether there is gender-prejudice against women in the area of (social and artistic / that is public) performance. After all, it must be accepted that ritualistic performances of spirit-mediumship are symbolic, and therefore a dramatic embodiment, in the sense that the possessed represent the spirit and do not present themselves and in that sense are actors.

However, I must admit that every time I wanted to treat ritual activities as theater I had a guilty conscience about trying to reduce the performance of a whole culture to the narrow limits of stage performance. But Beattie's approach enabled me, however, to reconcile the two ideas. In agreement with Radcliffe-Brown, Beattie states that "whatever has meaning is a symbol and the meaning is whatever is expressed by the symbol".[13] The analogy between the symbolism of both ritual performance and theatrical performance is affirmed by T.Parsons who says: "The essence of a symbol is first that its importance, value or meaning is not inherent in the intrinsic properties of the symbol itself, but in the thing symbolized, which is by definition something else."

b. Spirit-Possessed Women in Performance

The real dominance of female performers in the Nuba Mountain can be seen in a solitary hill not for away from Dilling town, where the nearby village which was known to be called Kunit is now renamed Kujuriya due to the power and influence of the great number of priestesses who presided in that area.Two of the great women - Kujurs of that area whom people still remember - were Great Kujuriya Hamra bint Jamal, who died in the year 1926 and her successor the Great Kujuriya Zereiga, who ascended in the year 1930. It is believed that the ancestral spirit of that hill would only enter into a married woman who has given birth. When the spirit of the supreme ancestor possesses a woman she becomes the Great Kujuriya. Consequently, her husband has to run away from her for it is believed that anyone who has sexual intercourse with the Great Kujuriya is sure to die. Kujuriya Hamra bint Jamal was said to be so powerful that when the official authorities of the British government failed, as colonizers of the Sudan, to implement a resolution that prohibited Nuba people from dwelling on hilltops, some British officials sought the Kujuriya's help to convince people to obey the government. She also declared forcefully that no Nuba youth was allowed to leave the district except for joining the armed forces. Those who would not obey were punished severely by curses befalling them. No arms were allowed to be brought into the area. Rifles and other weapons which were already there were kept under her control. Contrary to Hamra's attitudes were those of her successor Zereiga who believed that people who were not good at cultivating the land should travel and seek their fortunes elsewhere. She was so much admired by the British authorities that she received numerous gifts and presents in the form of clothes and dresses of fine sorts, which the researcher himself saw, heaps of them, when he visited her house some years ago. In a report found in the Dilling archives she was described by a British official as being the best *actress* he ever saw in his life, as she underwent trances and fits of spirit-possession. Any person traveling away or returning from travel had to visit her so as to receive the blessing of the spirit.

The spirit can be of either sex and, therefore, either sex can be possessed by an ancestral spirit. As this paper is concerned only with the feminine sex the concentration will be on examples of priestesses undergoing states of spirit-possession, hence undertaking roles of spirit-mediumship.

Like the men-Kujurs, the female-Kujuriyas fall into ecstasy and show all the symptoms of possession, but their trances are said to come from God directly or from a female-spirit. When possessed the Kujuriya would talk in tongues because she speaks with the voice of the spirit. During the trance the possessed is believed to be able to prophesy the future, to cure diseases and to divine events hidden from human knowledge like, for example, crimes committed secretly or by unknown offenders.

Another area where the female is dominant is that of the *rituals associated with cultivation*. Cultivating the land is connected with three seasonal festivals, which are considered to be the most important all over the Nuba-land. Interesting enough to know is the fact that the sowing and the reaping ceremonies are, in many Nuba localities, conducted by the priestesses, not priests, in the presence of women only. All men are excluded from attending. The only exception is made for old men who are allowed to attend the ceremony of tasting the first crops, provided that they remain, during the ritual, seated with their heads bent and their eyes downcast, and that they turn away immediately after the ceremony of tasting is completed.

Also in connection with *cultivation* is a spirit in the Dilling area, who materializes only as a female incarnation, and that is the spirit-mother called Urne. This is an ancestral spirit who is not associated with a separate clan. The faculty of this female-spirit is to protect the crops by means of *warding off locusts*, which threaten the whole process of farming. Urne is also the spirit who is appealed to if the *rains* fail or if the rain is scarce.

What is so interesting and extremely dramatic about the conceptualization of this ritual is the fact that the wisdom of the Nuba-myth made the spirit-husband of Mother-Urne a great traveler, called Urmbaga, who likes to travel only in dry weather. Whenever Urmbaga feels like making a trip or going out for a journey, he would stop the rain. That is why he is also known to be the spirit responsible for causing drought. So, for the dramatic circle to have a beginning, a middle and an end, and for the performance of the ritual drama to take place, whenever rain is needed people would, suppliantly, entreat Urne by means of making offerings to her so that she keeps her husband at home. It is believed that rain was always to come after the performance is executed by the Kujuriya in a genuine trance with the help of her interpreter and assistants. The interpreter is the only male Kujur who is allowed to participate in the rain-making ceremony. He is believed not to be possessed by the spirit on such an occasion, because his function is to interpret to the spectators, that is the whole community, the messages of the ancestral spirit uttered by the Kujuriya in her ecstatic state.

Although an informant is describing, below, a ceremony presided by a male-Kujur and not a female, the ceremony, being a typical example of the ritual performed by a female Kujuriya in a rain-making ritual, and because women other than the Kujuriya play an exiting dramatic role, let us quote him at length:

> The women, festively clad, are summoned by the sounding of the drum, and go in procession to the Kujurs, visiting the Chief first. Along the way, they emit piercing shrieks, similar to that of the Kujurs, and they violently strike their throats. On arriving at the Kujur's dwelling, the hut to be used for the religious ceremony is immediately closed. The women continue to shout and beat on the outside, and then they prepare to dance. They dance in the following way: One of the women hops a little distance away with her feet together, and clenching her hands she clasps her body with her arms; then, slightly bending the knees and raising the hands above her head, she makes quite a high jump, which she repeats three or four times; this is then taken up by another. Once the dance is over the shouting ceases. Then one of the women, accompanied by the clapping of hands, begins to sing the praises

> of the spirit of the Kujur. This song is taken over by all the women. The Kujur is then begged to consult the spirit. Whilst the Kujur lies shouting on his platform, the women continue to yell and sing until the hoarse voice of the priest tells them that he is ready to speak. He reminds the people that in their misery, they must think of God, of the spirits, and of the Kujur; but as they had not done so they had incurred the wrath of heaven in drought, hunger, and all sorts of evil. Drawing a comparison between the richness and wealth of the past and the present poverty, he says that the tribe is suffering this because it has not faithfully observed the religion of the forefathers or followed the precepts and customs of the Moslems. He concludes the ceremony by promising rain for the following day. If all the Kujurs, or the greater part of them, hold forth the same hope, then the dancing, shouting and singing go on until nightfall and start again the following day.[14]

Suppliant women are required, during the rain-making ceremony, to make their offerings in the form of gourds full of grain presented to the Kujuriya so that the ancestral spirit may be appeased.

The Role of Women in Kujur-Making

Not in the main role but still very important are women also in the process of the *endurance test* that a Kujur-to-be has to undergo after he has been chosen by the ancestral spirit. After his first fit, a Kujur-to-be may wander about the hills for a whole day and night. As he returns to his house a stereotype pattern of behavior is followed. Now his attack subsides a little, he digs a hole in the ground near his house and like a dog would do, he climbs into it and stays there. For a period of about three to five days he takes no food. A small hut would be built for him within the compound of his next of kin. After that he leaves the hole to stay in the hut for about two weeks, during which period he would be attended on and served by an old female relative of his. She looks after him day and night and does not allow him to leave his hut, except by night to relieve himself. The old woman would serve him food and water three times a day and wait on him as he eats. She allows him to take three morsels only before she rebukes him for his greediness. She says: “How dare you be willing to eat more! Remember that if you tend to surfeit your stomach with food, your people will be sure to starve.” He stops eating immediately and she kneels, holds the dish, and prays: “May God envelop your heart in fat so that you do not need to be greedy.” Then she takes the food away from him. She also allows him three sips of water. For a fortnight the old woman continues to perform a main role in the process of making the Great Kujur.

Rituals of consecration vary considerably from one tribal-section to another. We shall continue with the Dilling example. In Dilling the ceremony of consecration begins on the fourteenth day of the period of seclusion. All relatives of the new Kujur and all the people of his village take part. Another fully initiated Kujur is invited to direct and guide the ceremonial. In the morning of the fourteenth day the Kujur-to-be steps out of his hut for the first time in a fortnight. The first people to see would be *77 women* of his relations lining up and parading the entrance of the enclosure. When the Great Kujur of Dilling told me this I thought it might be another test of self-control over his desires. He told me that he felt contentment rather than desire. Suzette Heald reminded me later that women in a society like the Nuba are seen as potential wealth because their bride-price is usually paid in tens of heads of cattle. The Kujur remains standing in front of his hut gazing at the women for a short time without uttering a single word, for he is not allowed to. The women would shout and greet him from a distance but he would only wave his walking stick in response. Then he re-enters the hut. This act is immediately followed by a sudden break of piercing cries and yelling. A woman begins the singing of a praise song, and other women follow her as the chorus. Then all other women of the community are summoned by the sounding of the drum. Beautifully clothed they go in procession to the house of the Kujur. Along the way they dance violently and omit piercing yells and cries. As they arrive at the house of the Kujur the hut used for the religious ceremony is immediately closed. The women continue to shout and beat outside, entreating and begging humbly, invoking the Kujur to come out and give them his blessing. One woman from the crowd suddenly breaks out to execute a frantic wild dance, which is taken up by the rest of them, one after another. Once the dancing is over the shouting stops, and, for a while, everybody comes to standstill before one of the old women begins to sing the praise song of the spirit of the Great Kujur, with the rest of the women providing accompaniment by means of rhythmic clapping of their hands. The song is then taken up by a chorus of all the women. The Great Kujur comes out to greet the crowd for the first time and give them his blessing by means of waving his hands and his walking stick without uttering a single word.

Drummer's society

Now here comes another important body in the Nuba life: the drummer's society. A woman-member of the drummer's society begins the singing of a newly composed praise song of the new Kujur, sung for the first time in public. Other women would follow as the chorus. Songs of the drummers' society are in great measure a record of people's big deeds. They, in fact, follow a person throughout his life and finally they form the central-dance song at his funeral. For ordinary people of the community the rest of the first day, after the described rituals, is spent eating, singing, dancing, and drinking merissa. The drummer's society would continue drumming and singing, with women and young girls dancing round the Kujur's hut till, at dusk, the gathering breaks up.

All during this time, since his first trance, the new Kujur would not have slept with his wife nor with any woman. After the ceremony is over some assistants would go out and procure a woman for him. At the break of dawn or shortly before that, the Kujur's wife brings the woman water to wash, gives her money, and sends her away. When I visited the Great Kujur of Dilling, whose name was Mohammed Aghbash, he told me that such an ill-starred woman is sure to die or, at least, lose her reason, for it is believed that she would have relieved the Kujur of all his evils and sins. In addition she would be the only person to have slept in the room of the spirit, and that unlawfully.

The theatricality and the role-playing in the Nuba ritual practices can be repeatedly emphasized but it is also important to say that all the Nuba life seems to be in a state of continuous ritualized reality in which a number of so called artistic practices are considered to be essential elements in the embodiment of religious beliefs. Throughout the year there are always occasions for music and dance gatherings in the Nuba Mountains these occasions and their traditions and qualities vary from one place to another.

The Nuba have no festivals of a purely religious character. Being cultivators, their festivals are connected with sowing and with the harvest, though at the same time they are clothed with religious significance. Kujurs and priestesses take the chief parts in the celebration of the popular festivals, on which occasion they display their priestly functions in a most distinctive way. In many areas women-kujurs only officiate at such festivals.

The priestess' sphere of authority includes all matters pertaining to fertility and the means of sustenance: it is one of their duties to appoint the times for sowing and reaping. They themselves begin these operations, and by means of the celebrations they conduct they confer a blessing on them.

Appendix

A drama: The Turks Are Coming

The scene is laid in the past, during the *First Turkish Rule* by which term the period before the Mahdist rising is meant. This was a time of continued unrest, during which the land and the people were threatened by many dangers. Here we take an example of four Kujuriyas being consulted in a grievous affair. A raid by an enemy (the Turks) is expected. The scene was (anthropologically) observed and recorded by P.D.Kauczor, decades later it was dramaturgically interpreted by Osman el-Badawi.

Main Characters

The description begins abruptly with an order addressed by the **King** to his son, instructing him to arrange for the consultation of the spirit as rumours of the approach of enemies were troubling him and the people. First, he is to assemble the **four priestesses**, the fair woman, the Chief Priestess **Katebil** of Fala village, **Fari** of Kundukr, **Jalta** of Tumba, **Dahabi** of Kutigeli, and finally the **Kujur-interpreter of Kotere**, who is not referred to by name but only by his official title. Whereas in the case quoted here the initiative for the solemn consultation of the ancestor was taken by the King, the festival of warding off evils is entirely the business of the chief priestess Katebil, with the help of some subordinate priestesses.

Subordinate Character

The **Herald**, a woman in the service of Katebil. Katebil, being the main character, needs the services of a woman to act as her herald for the purpose of summoning the women from all villages by means of a peculiar call. During the celebration itself the same woman who plays the role of the herald acts as the priestess's chief **assistant**.

Action

In the first instance the chief priestess sends one of her ladies to the king, who communicates with the priestess Fari by means of a messenger; The latter then informs the herald again through a messenger instructing her to report to Katebil in order to receive her commands. As they have all assembled the performance begins.

King: When the moon of kwotekakero appeared, I made my messenger to go to Fala and asked him to bring the Fair woman Katebil and come. I sent him to

Kundukr to bring Fari, to Tumba to bring Jalta, and I made him go to Kutigela and bring Dahabi. I asked him to bring them all so that we may arise and visit our Father God, that he may tell us his answer so that we may hear and come.

Narrator: When the moon of Kwotekakero appeared the woman came with the priestesses, also the Great Kujur of Kotere came, and they went to Dimber.

(Enter the women)

Fari: What song are we to sing? Let Katebil lead the song in order that our Father God may come forth (from his cave).

Katebil: Begin the song of Dimber.

Jalta: What are we to sing women?

Katebil: Say thus
He who puts his hand into the fire.[15](19)
He demands a sheep.
On its forehead a white stripe.
A firstling lamb,
On its forehead a white stripe.

Narrator: The women singing thus went to that place and performed their song before God the Father. Father God heard their song and came out of his dwelling.

The Kujur of Kotere: Our Father God, on account of thee we have come, to-day say unto me everything that I may inform thy children.

Father God: My son, who art thou?

Kujur: I am the Kujur of Kotere.

Father God: Art thou the Kujur of Kotere?

Kujur: Yea, father. I am the Kujur of Kotere.

Father God: As for me, anger has seized me. You have deserted me. No longer do you come hither to me … You have many cattle, you have many sheep. If the Afitti all combine together to buy a bull and slaughter it by the road, shall not then the (poor) people come and eat?!

Katebil: But you sit by your drum and at your beer drinking.

Father God:You think of nothing. At night when I weep and call somebody, he does not reply. If you continue, Father God will bring upon you the fate of Komurnga. Father God Aba Boil will turn you all into stones like those of the ruined Komurnga village whom I turned into stones resembling human beings.

Kujur: Oh Father God, do not use such speech. We have brought to thee all thy things, a bull, a sheep, a hoe, an axe and grain. Also we have brought all women - in order that they may dance and sing before the ancestor.

Father God: Thou Kujur of Kotere, approach and listen.

Kujur: Oh Father God, say unto me to-day good news and bad news. Do not omit the bad, tell me all.

Dahabi: Our little children, our old men, whose eyes do not see the world are at home, the old women lie on the ANGAREB and do not go out, the pregnant women are at home. Now if the earth bodes evil …

Kujur (interrupts): If enemies approach, are we to fight or to remain with the women? Give me an answer that I may go and tell the Afitti, so that they may desist from their present careless manner and stand forth well prepared.

Father God: Kujur, cease from much talk. Come listen to my speech.

Kujur: Yea, Father God, I have come.

Father God: My son, I have wandered all over the earth and have seen, the time of rest is past, but little is left of it, there will soon be war. Your women, your cattle,your grain, nothing of these leave below. Ascend the hill with it, take it up the hill and put it in the midst of the hill. You men alone come down and stay there. Let the women bring you down food from the hill. and look upon the world and see what comes of it. Observe all events carefully.

Katebil: It is well, Father God. Are the Turks coming?

Father God: The Turks will come.

Kujur: Will the Turks kill us, or shall we kill the Turks?

Father God: If you camp at both approaches no harm will come to you, but if you camp at one approach only, the Turks will come. They will seize the other approach, they will ascend the hill, they will find the women, the children and the cattle in the midst of the hill they will take everything and carry it down with them. But if you camp at both approaches they will do you no harm.

Fari: It is well, Father God. What demandest thou?

Father God: I demand a firstling lamb.

Jalta: Of what kind is the lamb which thou demandest?

Father God: I demand a sheep with a white stripe.

Dahabi: Who is to bring it, the lamb? Shall Fari the fair woman – the priestess - bring it?

Father God: What garments and ornaments has Fari?

Katebil: Fari has a silver upper garment above, a silver apron beneath, on the head she has a silver hood.

Father God: It is well, let her bring the lamb, let her lead it hither and put it under the tamarind tree in front of the cave, let her tie it up and leave it there.

Julta: Come forth Fari, and bring the lamb.

(Fari brings it, ties it and comes out)

Father God: Let Katebil take the hoe and bring it, let her carry it into the dwelling of the spirit, throw it down and go.

(Katebil does so)

Father God: Let Julta come, let her take the axe, carry it to the opening of the dwelling, put it down and go.

(Julta takes the axe, carries it to the opening of the dwelling, puts it down and goes)

Father God: But those two women (points at Dahabi and her old woman) they shall not come.

Kujur: Why Father God, shall these women not come?

Father God: No, they shall not come, there is blood. The priestess is unclean.

(End)

Concl usions

1. Nuba life is religion-oriented but no form of prayers is known to exist and, therefore, the only form of the embodiment or materialization of religious belief is that of the (artistic) performance in which the possessed, being the agent, adopts the character, which is the ancestral spirit, voices its words, reflects its feeling, expresses its opinions and passes its judgement.
2. Despite the significant cultural changes in some aspects of Nuba life, which took place as a result of the spread of both Islam and Christianity, and despite the fact that Islam is taking precedence over Christianity, the indigenous performances remained unchanged.
3. Women performers in some Nuba communities seem to dominate over their male-counterparts, particularly in places of the Kujuriya where it is believed that the ancestral spirit would only possess a married woman.

   Having found what takes place in the Nuba Mountains within the framework of socio-religious cultural performances in a rather complete identification with what Clifford Geertz had observed in the Asian culture of Bali, I would, therefore, grant myself a free hand to borrow form some of the conclusions he arrived at:
4. Daily life in Nuba communities is noticeably ceremonious so that diviners, practicing their daily business while in state of trance, would in fact be adopting characters and performing roles. And since many of these diviners are female we can conclude that women are playing a major role in the performative activities of the Nuba.
5. The ceremoniousness of life takes the form of serious activity and from that we elicit that it must have some impact on the community-life, which confirms a women-performer’s presence and influence on people’s life.

Notes

[1] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies, an Introduction*, second edition Routledge, 2006, p. 52.
[2] Schechner, p. 19.
[3] John Beattie, *Other Cultures*, London, 1964, p. 69.
[4] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959, Reprint 1982, p. 26.
[5] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London, 1975, p. 400.
[6] Quoted from Schechner, p. 19.
[7] Quoted from a paper " Notes on the History, Religion, and Customs of the Nuba" written by J.W.Sagar (of the Sudan Civil Service) ten years before it was published in: *Sudan Notes and Records* (p. 137-156), Volume 5, Reprint 1975, p. 143.
[8] Max S. Shapiro and Rhoda A. Hendricks, *A Dictionary of Mythologies*, London, 1979, p. 47,80 and 168.
[9] P.D Kauczor, "The Afitti Nuba of Gebal Dair and their Relation to the Nuba Proper", in: *Sudan Notes and Records*, Volume 6, No 1, pp. 1-34, p. 2.
[10] Published in *The Royal Anthropological Institute News*, June 1977, Number 20.
[11] Beattie, p. 2.
[12] thanks to Dr. Suzette Heald, my co-supervisor when I was investigating a now abandoned Ph.D. thesis.
13 Radcliffe–Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, London, 1952, p. 143.
14 John Beattie, *Other Cultures*, London, 1964, p. 69.
15 Meaning the ancestor called Dimber who, when still living on the earth used to put his hand into the fire to prove his courage.

‘GOD GAVE ME A GOOD VOICE TO SING’: FEMALE WEDDING SINGERS IN GREAT-KHARTOUM, SUDAN

Natasja van 't WESTENDE

This article is a result of a research into ‘female wedding singers’ that I conducted in Great-Khartoum in Sudan in 1998 as part of a M.A. study in Cultural Anthropology at Leiden University, the Netherlands. The research dealt with the position and profession of female wedding singers in Great-Khartoum at the time of the NIF regime. This regime, an alliance of the military and the National Islamic Front, had come to power in 1989. NIF leader Hassan al-Turabi became the main ideologue of this new regime, which was in fact the first major experiment of political Islam in the Sunni world.[1] In 1991, *shari'a*, Islamic law, was reinforced in the northern states, after it had first been introduced in 1983 by President Nimieri, whose regime had been overthrown by a civilian uprising in 1985. The NIF regime introduced a political project, whose main goal was “not only to change state politics, but also the Sudanese society at large into a righteous Islamic community, *al-umma islamiya*”.[2] Their aim to Islamize society touched all aspects of life.[3] The focus of their Islamist discourse however, was foremost on women: they advocated a moral doctrine that strongly focused on the ‘ideal role’ women had to play in Islamic society. [4] Still, the ideas of this Islamist[5] government regarding gender identity and ‘proper’ gender roles were not exactly new in Sudanese society.

The female wedding singers that this research is about seemed to fulfil an important and at the same time ambiguous role in society. I perceived their roles as important, because they performed at weddings, probably the most important ritual in society, and ambiguous, because the singers had a ‘loose’ reputation and were commonly accused of singing a repertoire of ‘sensual’ and ‘shameful’ songs.[6] The singers were popular and could, when they were in demand, earn a lot of money, but were also commonly perceived as ‘bad women’. Therefore the singers seemed to contract the ideal image of ‘the good Muslim woman’ that was advocated in the moral discourse(s) of the NIF regime and that was largely shared in northern Sudanese society. The main question I therefore ask is ‘how do female wedding singers negotiate the dominant moral discourse(s) to legitimize their position as a performer in contemporary Great-Khartoum?’ In order to answer this question, I examined the position of the wedding singers as performers; the influence of the dominant moral discourse(s) on their profession; and finally, how some individual female wedding singers positioned themselves in relation to the dominant moral discourse(s) and how they negotiated the subject positions that were laid out by these discourses.[7]

1. The Position of Female Wedding Singers as Performers

Confusion about Sudan's cultural identity (is Sudan Arabic or African?) might have been the reason for the little attention that Sudanese arts, despite its rich cultural legacy, has received in both Arab and African art-historical writings so far. [8] The history of female music and performers in particular had not yet been the object of thorough study at all. Consequently, I first had to examine the singers' position as performers and the development of this position, over the last fifty years in particular. Therefore, I discuss two contexts, namely the socio-historical context and the performing context.

The Socio-Historical Context: the Appearance and Development of a Profession

The most important musical roles in the central Nile valley, also called the riverain region, of Sudan were reserved for women traditionally. Girls and women sang mainly in groups in a tribal setting, and their songs, which were often encouragement or praise songs hailing the bravery of men, go back a long way.[9] The female songs, especially those sung at weddings, are most likely to be the oldest songs in the region as well as the best known. They were usually accompanied by a *daluka*, a clay drum and the instrument that was particularly associated with female songs. The songs were therefore also labelled as *daluka* songs.[10]

During the so called Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1955) some female singers appeared on stage, who also participated in political issues. They sang on the frontline during World War Two to encourage the Sudanese soldiers, they participated in demonstrations against colonial rule and sang songs about achieving independence. Aisha al-Fellatia was the best known singer at that time and was often called the 'Mother of Arts'. She was also the first female singer, who was broadcast on Omdurman Radio, the radio service that was introduced in 1941 by the British, the main colonial ruler. There were a few more singers like her, such as Fatma Khamis, Mahala al-Abbadia, Rabha al-Tomtom and Howa al-Taktaga. These singers were part of a new cultural climate that became prominent in Omdurman and in the other two towns of Great-Khartoum in the early decades of the twentieth century, but they had to pay a high social price. They were commonly equated to prostitutes and treated as outcasts. They usually had to break ties with their families in order to become a singer. Like Howa al-Taktaga, one of those pioneer singers, who recalled: *"at the time, the Sudanese woman, when she adopted singing, was a* mambuz, *outcast. My relatives radically objected to me becoming a singer. I was displaced, when I insisted in continuing"*. During this time, new music types emerged alongside the formation of a new intellectual and cultural elite. However, at the same time, the gender segregation in the towns was stringent and views on music and singers were harsh, particular from a religious and conservative side.[11] These views on music and singers had a longer history. For example, during the foregoing political period, the Mahdiyya (1885-1899), when also a strict Islamic discourse was promoted, singing and music had been banned altogether.[12] Even before that, during the Turkiyya (1821-1885), singing was said to be prohibited for girls and women from 'good' families or from the North in general, and became associated with slavery and prostitution.[13]

The female singers during the Condominium composed and sang *tom-tom* songs, which were a further development of the older *daluka* songs, but with a much more sensual character than had been common before that time. The songs dealt with topics such as man-woman relations in a very frank and direct way, although they also included political topics, such as the demand for independence. The *tom-tom* songs were accused for their immoral character from different sides, while later in retrospect the more political aspects of the songs was appreciated. Men also started to sing the *tom-tom* songs, although this musical style particularly evolved throughout the years into what now is most often referred to as *aghani al-banat*, girls' songs.[14] During the same period, in the 1920s and 1930s, the famous *haqiba* songs were developed by male singers and poets. These two musical styles laid the foundation for a new urban Sudanese music, sometimes called 'Omdurman song'.[15] The male *haqiba* singers and poets were also the founders of a new phenomenon, i.e., the emergence and dominance of male singers, poets and musicians in the public music scene. Men started to take over what had been a women's domain from early on, while at the same time the scene began to professionalize, in particular after World War Two.[16] This continued after independence in 1956.

Female singers during the Condominium were often wedding singers, who sang with a *daluka,* but they also participated in political issues and started to experiment with other instruments. This made their songs and performances at the same time part of a 'tradition' to sing at weddings and part of a new popular, modern and urban development. Especially after independence most of these pioneer singers, as they were called, became wedding singers. At that time, during the

1950s, the bride in Omdurman and the other two towns of Great-Khartoum, i.e., Khartoum and Khartoum-North, started to receive lessons for bride dancing. The phenomenon of the dancing bride existed before, but it was related to an intimate ritual and one of the major functions was to show the bride's body to the female relatives of the groom. Now girls started to gather around the bride to give dance lessons and to sing and compose *aghani al-banat*, girls' songs, the new name that was given to the accompanying songs.[17] However, specialized female singers, such as Howa al-Taktaga, already existed at the time, even though they were not professional in the sense that they asked money for their services. Since that time the profession of female wedding singer as well as its evaluation developed in close relation to socio-economic factors and to other music developments.

Firstly, there was a strong relation with the economy. The profession of female wedding singer from its current outlook began to take shape in the 1960s and 1970s, when female singers started to get paid for their performances and it became a 'real' occupation. During this time also the name *aghani al-banat* became widely used for the repertoire of (wedding) songs associated with these singers.[18] During the 1970s in particular, when there were series of economic crises and many Sudanese men left the country as expatriates, a large group of 'professional' wedding singers appeared. A second major increase in the group of female wedding singers came about during the 1990s, when again economic hardships forced many women to work outside the home, especially when they were from lower to middle class backgrounds.[19] The occupation of wedding singer did not require an educational degree and this made it an easy profession to enter. At both times there also had to be an increasing demand from the side of the customers in order to explain the growth. In the 1970s the expatriates and some other groups in society were earning quite a lot of money, in contrast to the general trend, which they also spent on weddings.[20] In the 1990s the demand came mainly from an increasing number of girls who wanted to dance at their weddings, probably related to the fact that the NIF regime had shut down almost all other options for girls and women to entertain themselves.

Secondly, there was the relationship with other music developments that in particular influenced the perception on the position of female wedding singers as performers. While men had taken over the music scene from the 1940s, so called educated female singers appeared on stage in the 1970s and early 1980s. Most importantly and appealingly was the rise of the famous female group Al Balabil (The Nightingales), but other female singers started to graduate from the new found Institute of Music and Drama (Khartoum) as well. It was, however, still very difficult for most girls to become a singer due to the opposition they would face from their relatives and the bad reputation singers had, especially where it concerned girls or women, in society. Yet, the appearance of this new group of singers gave rise to a dichotomy that was commonly made in society, i.e., the distinction between educated female singers and wedding singers. In the process, the wedding singers became in public opinion more connected with 'tradition' and with the wedding, particularly with bride dancing, than they had been before. The pioneer singers had instead combined both functions, i.e. singing 'high-art' songs and performing at weddings singing 'traditional' songs during the different ceremonies.

The current wedding singers were mainly associated with *aghani al-banat*, girls' songs, which were distinguished from the 'modern' songs that were registered, had recognised poets, were accompanied by 'modern' instruments, and were sung by male singers and educated female singers. The girls' songs, on the other hand, were associated with the *daluka,* with the wedding and with the custom of bride dancing in particular. They were sometimes called legacy songs and indeed there was a general repertoire that was sung by all the female wedding singers, but that was nonetheless very alive. These songs were not broadcast on radio and television and were commonly regarded to be of 'low standard' or even as 'shameful', mainly due to the topics that these songs dealt with such as sexuality and male-female relationships.[21] The songs were, however, vital to different wedding ceremonies, although they were also sung outside a strict ceremonial context. Moreover, different types of female songs as well as different types of wedding songs were usually grouped together under the name *aghani al-banat*, which had become an umbrella term in the second half of the twentieth century. Song types also overlapped and genres were blurred as female singers for example incorporated (parts of) 'modern' male and other songs, like *zar* songs, in the *aghani al-banat* repertoire as well as using other instruments besides the *daluka*.

The Performing Context: the Wedding Celebrations

In order to understand the position of the singers as performers, it was also necessary to examine their main performing context, i.e. the wedding celebrations. The wedding consisted of a complex whole of different ceremonies, rituals and parties. The different occasions gave different contexts for the singers to perform at. Moreover, both the profession of wedding singer and the wedding celebrations had a 'traditional' and a modern, urban outlook at the same time. Cultural practices are, quite obviously, always part of a process and never fixed or scripted cultural events,[22] but the wedding in Great-Khartoum seemed to be a platform especially for different cultural expressions at the same time. The wedding was the performing context for most singers, male and female, and therefore it also served as an entertainment platform for different types of music, including popular music, alongside its function of celebrating the marriage rituals. At the same time, the wedding celebrations as well as the songs of the female wedding singers were highly gendered: they were strongly associated with women and with women's culture.[23] Furthermore, the practices and songs were (increasingly) regarded as 'traditional', which could have both a negative or a positive connotation. Some people regarded certain customs or traditions, in particular the bride dance, as out of date or more imbedded in local custom and not in line with 'true' Islam; other people stressed the 'traditional' value of these wedding practices.[24]

Although many of the rituals and ceremonies continued and developed in a general 'traditional' form that had seen a certain consistency and 'Sudanese' character for a long time, the wedding celebrations in Great-Khartoum were anything but static.[25] People actively favoured, discarded or changed wedding ceremonies in order to make them fit their own ideas as well as deploying 'traditions' and customs to deliver social or political messages to society at large. Some families chose to make a social statement, for instance, to deliver the message that one was a family of prestige. Other families or couples intentionally crossed the line advocated in the NIF Islamist discourse, in which, for example, the bride dance was considered shameful. In this way, people debated about meaning, while they performed and created 'culture' at the same time.[26]

The female wedding singers were mostly associated with the dancing of the bride, the custom most affected by the religious discourse. It had evolved from a performance in a very intimate setting towards a mixed event that was held out in the open in the 1960s and 1970s, even though the bride at that time wore a dress above the 'traditional' *rahat*, a leather skirt.[27] Previously, the bride had worn nothing besides this skirt and some golden jewellery, a 'tradition' that many people now regarded uncivilized. After the first introduction of the *shari'a*, Islamic law, in 1983, the dancing became again restricted to a female environment.[28] However, within this female context, it evolved in the 1990s into a huge and very popular event. The dancing of the bride had become a real stage act, during which many short dances were performed by the bride under the guidance of the female wedding singer.

The role of the wedding singers had also become more important in this aspect. She accompanied the dances by singing the songs and playing the *daluka,* but she also choreographed the dance performance. During the performances, the bride changed her dress several times, which also gave an opportunity to show off. It was, furthermore, an increasing phenomenon as many girls, both lower and higher educated, wanted to dance at their weddings, despite the fact Islamists attacked this custom as being not in line with 'true' Islam and also some elite people and educated women, in particular the so called women pioneers, saw it as a custom that denigrated women. These women pioneers, educated women who had been at the forefront for improving women's rights in the Sudan, had not danced at their weddings as they had wanted to be appreciated as modern and civilized women and distanced themselves from 'backward traditions'.[29] The opponents of bride dancing especially condoned the sexuality that was expressed in both the songs and the dances.

Even though the female wedding singers were often related to 'tradition' as a professional group they fulfilled different functions that overlapped and which ranged from bringing popular music and entertainment to singing at rituals and ceremonies. What female wedding singers had in common was that their main performing context was the wedding and that they were distinguished from the educated singers. Their group was, however, not homogenous. The older pioneer singers, who usually had more status, also belonged to the group of wedding singers. There were also great differences among the younger generations. Some singers were, for instance, famous and much in demand, while there was also a large group of anonymous singers, who mainly performed for relatives and neighbours. Some singers were specialized as bride trainers; others also or mainly performed at other mixed (wedding) occasions, either with a *daluka* that they played themselves or with male musicians. Some of the wedding singers also sang songs composed and written by song writers, just like the educated singers. They also made tapes and appeared on radio and television, the performing contexts for educated female singers. In this way, the demarcation line with the educated singers was sometimes vague.

2. Influences of the Dominant Moral Discourse(s)

The debate on art and music in Sudan changed after the installation of the NIF regime. Within their Islamist discourse, most music and dancing was related to immorality, temptations as sex and drinking, and to a diversion of religious duty.[30] The NIF government, furthermore, attempted to transform art and music into religious practices as part of their overall aim to transform Sudan into an Islamic state.[31] The regime's moral and religious discourse also focussed above all on women. Even though their ideas on gender were not new in society, the NIF regime in particular imposed a hegemonic discourse on gender identity as well as issuing actual decrees concerning both women and music. Did this then mean that the wedding singers had to take more notice of the religious discourse?

Reputations, Gender, and Islam

There had been long standing views in society about the disregard and immorality of singers and performers. A hierarchy in the status of performers could, however, be observed. Male (educated) performers of urban Sudanese music had the highest status, even though they also faced judgement. In fact, male singers, who started in the early decades of the twentieth century, were often accused of female behaviour as singing used to be the domain of women, but these notions gradually changed after independence.[32] The mentioned urban Sudanese music of these male performers, also called 'Omdurman song', had been privileged and embraced by the Nile valley elite. It had become associated with elitism, high social status and artistic superiority.[33]

The dominant gender discourse(s) had great impact on the evaluation of performers: the disrespect for female performers was much more articulated. Most of the female wedding singers faced, therefore, opposition from their families when they started out as singers. Within the group of female performers, the wedding singers were furthermore distinguished from the educated singers, who had a higher status position as a performer. The low(er) status of the wedding singers was primarily related to the content of their songs, their handling of money, and their assumed 'immoral' conduct. The educated singers, on the other hand, sang songs of higher standing and had the status of 'learned amateurs', who did not sing for money, which was an appreciated quality. Yet, also the educated singers faced opposition from their families and from society in general, when they started their career as singers.

The disregard for female performers related to the fact that they were firstly evaluated as women, in terms of shame and respect, and only secondly as performers.[34] The status and position of women was in the dominant discourse on gender strongly related to their behaviour and social conduct, which was connected to the construction of the female body as sexual. In the NIF Islamist discourse the body of a woman was considered to be the 'source' of sexual temptation, which in turn could lead to *fitna*, sexually induced chaos, that would disturb the social order and the ideal Islamic society. Moreover, women were hold solely responsible for the disorder and situations where a woman could be in a position to cause *fitna* had to be avoided.[35] The NIF regime therefore took measures to control women's sexuality. The social and economic mobility of women became restricted in several ways as laws were issued regulating women's social conduct, travels, dress and behaviour.[36]

The ideological construction of the female body as sexual 'by nature' was also the main reason for the controversial status of female performers and the difference in evaluation between male and female performers.[37] The controversy of a female performance depended, firstly, on the extent to which it would arouse a male audience. For this reason, dancing on stage for a mixed audience, an act for which the singer Hanan Bulu Bulu had become notorious in the late 1980s, had been banned when the NIF regime took power. Female performers were particularly regarded as immoral, because they presented themselves in public, while they instead should 'cover' themselves up in order to avoid causing *fitna*. Moreover, the female wedding singers were also associated with other behaviour that was regarded as a danger to the social order, such as 'prostitution', drinking, smoking, and travelling at night. They were, furthermore, accused of singing 'immoral' or 'shameful' songs; an act for which they even asked money.

State Policy

State policy that influenced the female wedding singers' performances consisted mainly of regulations that concerned the wedding. This contained permission papers for the parties, an eleven p.m. cut off time and the prohibition of mixed dancing, of which the last two were not followed closely. Like Abusabib noted "much of the population of the countryside view such changes as completely out of place and greeted them with ridicule".[38] Moreover, women guests who danced during the wedding were usually not accused of immoral or indecent behaviour unlike the singers. Consequently, the decree that prohibited female singers to dance on stage in front of a mixed audience was strictly followed. Dancing in public and in exchange for money was regarded almost identical to prostitution.[39]

State policy was however, much more stringent where it concerned the 'public music scene' in general. Educated female singers, who wanted to appear on radio or television faced harsh examination as all the songs had to be approved by Islamic jurists.[40] They also had to dress in the Islamic way, in the *hijab,* a way of veiling with hands and face bare, and were not allowed to wear make-up. The regime tried, furthermore, to bring the entire artistic field under the control of the state. Loyalists were given leading positions in art institutions and mass media and almost all artistic associations were banned.[41] Al-Turabi argued, for instance, that art had to be deployed to serve the Islamist cause and help to establish the Islamic society.[42] Furthermore, a debate was promoted about songs that ought to be prohibited and the regime tried to censor new productions. They also aimed to erase ‘indecent’ songs or songs not in line with the course of the NIF from the national television and radio archives. The director of the cultural section of Sudan Television stated, for example, that “the banning of some songs is in accordance with the general policy of the state to establish genuine works of art and culture and purge them from all blemish”.[43] The ideological impact of the Islamist program caused many leading male singers and musicians, such as Mohammed Wardi, Mohamed al-Amin and the late Mustafa Sid Ahmed, to flee the country after the 1989 coup, while others, like the popular male band ‘Igd al-Jalad, were under continual threat of persecution. Even though many artists, singers, and poets had got into trouble with successive regimes as well, the policies of the NIF regime affected the artistic field in a way that was unprecedented.[44]

Despite the numerous measures of the NIF regime and the impact of their Islamist discourse, the 1990s showed, however, a remarkable increase in female wedding singers: their profession flourished. And despite the fact that girls’ songs were often attacked as being immoral and were banned from mass media due to their ‘low standard’, they were not declared illegal as one should expect with a regime that formulated such strong opinions regarding morality. Moreover, the female wedding singers, did not mention strong interference from the authorities and were in general not obstructed in practicing their profession. It seemed that, when the profession remained more or less in the private and female domain, the state did not view them as a direct threat to the social order, even though the singers were still accused of shameful behaviour. The authorities focussed much more on the public domain of singing and music. Still, also in the public field, it was in the long run impossible for them to impose an Islamic identity given the country’s ethno-cultural and religious diversity and the considerable resistance among artists and intellectuals towards their Islamist programme.[45]

Also the wedding celebration was in this aspect so much part of the culture and the daily lives of so many Sudanese that it remained intact. Even the contested bride dance and the associated girls’ songs were, despite a general disdain, still perceived as an intrinsic part of this wedding culture. Most people did not perceive a wedding without the girls’ songs a real wedding. Moreover, the girls’ songs, despite that they explicitly referred to ‘sexuality’, in fact represented and reinforced in their portrayed images the stereotypes as defined in the dominant gender discourse(s). The songs usually reflected the sexually attractive and obedient virgin as the image of the ‘ideal woman’ and the rich, strong and intelligent man as the image of the ‘ideal man’. Even though the songs also expressed forms of resistance, for example against forced marriages or polygamy and they sometimes ridiculed men, there was no open critique. The institution of marriage itself was, for instance, never attacked. Furthermore, the songs were often perceived, especially by men, as not serious and therefore as socially harmless and ineffective.[46]

So with regard to state policy that concerned the public domain of singing and art, the NIF regime followed a new path. Also the Khatmiyya and the Ansar and their corresponding parties,[47] the former ruling elite in Sudan, had never incorporated opinions about art and music in their political agenda nor did they issue such stringent decrees.[48] Furthermore, the NIF regime, even though the wedding practices were not really under attack, did stimulate a climate in which some practices were regarded as not in line with 'true' Islam. In the process, the connection of women with local custom and 'tradition' that distanced them from 'true' Islam, became probably more stringent during these years.

Ethnicity and Class

Besides the constructs of gender and religion, also ethnicity and class played a role in the evaluation and stigmatization of the singers from the perspectives of the dominant discourse(s). The Nile valley elite[49] still associated (female) singing with slavery, which referred to previous practices they did not want to associate themselves with. Girls from the North, especially educated elite girls from the riverain groups, weren't expected to become singers and certainly not wedding singers.

The female wedding singers indeed had other backgrounds, often with origins that could be traced back to western Sudan, even though they were not as ethnically or culturally distinct as was often perceived. Most of the singers I interviewed came from Arabic speaking ethnic groups, who were generally regarded as 'Arab' or Nubian, but they did not all belong from both sides to the riverain groups. Their ethnic backgrounds could have been the reason that they could practice the profession, even though most of them had to overcome strong objections from their relatives in the beginning as well. The singers underscored the Nile valley core culture and most of their families shared the dominant gender norms, but they were probably less strict with regard to religious notions on female conduct than the riverain (elite) people. Also important were their lower/middle class backgrounds. They belonged to the groups that were most hard hit by economic crises in the 1990s and they did not have much education. The profession of singer was then an easy profession to enter. Also the distinction between the educated and the wedding singers was often connected with other subjectivities such as class and probably ethnicity. The educated singers primarily came from higher classes, were generally more educated and often belonged to the riverain groups. Some people argued, however, that there were therefore other reasons that enabled these women to become singers.[50]

The evaluation of music types was related to ethnicity and class too. As noted the Nile valley elite had always favoured 'Omdurman song', the urban Sudanese music of the riverain groups. Sometimes this music was called 'Sudanese song', whereby the educated elite used it as a means in their construction of a 'Sudanese' culture that was solely based on their own culture and practices, and in which an element of ethnocentrism or even racism was included.[51] This type of music was, however, not popular throughout the country and therefore its national status was arguable. Still, its high status had its effect on the evaluation of music from other regions. Also the girls' songs could from the perspectives of both the educated elite and the artistic society not meet these artistic and social standards, even though these songs were most likely the only songs loved and popular throughout the country.[52]

The disdain of the songs, music, and female wedding singers came in this regard predominantly from the Nile valley elite. Also the singers emphasized the disrespect and disdain from the elite much more than that they mentioned criticism or rejection from the side of the government or from Islamists in general. The Nile valley elite had dominated the country in all aspects, including culture, since independence and they had pursued Arabic-Islamic oriented political and cultural policies towards other ethnic groups.[53] The NIF regime presented itself, on the other hand, as ethnically neutral, and therefore different from this former ruling elite and their paradigms. Still, also in the NIF Islamist discourse(s) and policies, the influence of 'Arab' culture and the aspect of ethnocentricity was still prevalent.[54]

3. Negotiating the Dominant Moral Discourse(s)

After discussing the position of the female wedding singers as performers and the influence of the dominant moral discourse(s) on their profession, it is possible to answer how some individual female wedding singers positioned themselves in relation to the dominant moral discourse(s). The main subject position, laid out by these discourses, was that of the 'good' Muslim woman, from which a woman was expected to take her identity in order to earn public respect, and which was strongly related to 'proper' femininity and conduct. The singers had, however, a 'loose' reputation, were commonly accused of singing a repertoire of 'shameful' songs and were perceived as singing 'just for the money'. The position and identity of the female wedding singers seemed therefore in contradiction with the identity of the 'good Muslim woman'. The main question I therefore ask is how six individual female wedding singers negotiated the dominant moral discourse(s) to combine these two seemingly opposing identities.

The six singers were of three generations. Howa al-Taktaga was a very famous singer aged 73, from a generation of singers who were often referred to as 'pioneer singers'. Al-Taktaga was her stage name. In the past she had sung with bands and orchestras. She was still performing, but now only sang with a *daluka*. In the next generation down there were three singers. Zachriman was 40 years old and famous. She only performed with a band. Auwadiya Iz el-Din was 35 years old and also quite well-known. She performed with both a *daluka* and with an orchestra. Faiza 'Issa was 30 years old, had a great clientele as well, but she only performed with a *daluka*. The third and youngest generation consisted of two singers, neither of whom was well-known. Monahel Osman Ibrahim was 27 and performed with a *daluka*. Fatma Yahya al-Sheikh was 22 and she performed with a *daluka* as well as with other instruments.

Dominant Gender Discourse: the Working Woman, Motherhood, and the Home

The NIF Islamist discourse was to a great extent a discourse on gender and they particularly elaborated on 'proper' gender roles for women. The identities that a 'good Muslim woman' could adopt, were first and foremost those of mother and wife. Men were, although this was suggested more implicitly, expected to provide for the family. The role of motherhood was especially glorified. Moreover, the 'ideal' Sudanese woman should take care of her children in the confines of her home.[55] Besides this, the identity and subject position of the 'working woman' was not articulated in the dominant discourse.[56] The NIF regime made, however, alterations to their ideal paradigm. They made exceptions for certain jobs and groups of women, although it was in particular legitimized for practical reasons and due to the economic crisis.[57] Even though there was a large group of working women, all these women had to negotiate the dominant discourse at this point. How did the wedding singers legitimize their alternative positioning as a working woman?

Firstly, all the singers worked out of economic necessity, but they argued that they lowered their rates for relatives and friends and in particular for poor people. In doing so, the singers emphasized how social they were. In this way, they attained their working with another aspect, namely generosity, which was acknowledged as virtuous in the dominant discourse. Moreover, the singers related their working position to yet another virtuous aspect, i.e., ‘serving’. ‘Serving’ was regarded as a feminine quality that referred to ‘mothering’ and therefore to motherhood, the most clearly defined and appreciated quality in the dominant discourse. Their ‘serving’ could relate to the fact that they took care of their children or their relatives, that they (had) ‘served’ the country as a pioneer singer, or that they ‘served’ the audience by providing them with happiness. It was Howa, Faiza, and Fatma, who stressed that they worked in order to serve their family, by which they made their work an extension of motherhood. Even singers, who were not real mothers related to this concept as also taking care of relatives was perceived as a form of motherhood. Moreover, they argued that their occupation in this regard was not different from other jobs either.

Zachriman, Auwadiya and Monahel did not articulate their ‘serving’ of their relatives, even though they also took care of their children and/or other family members. Zachriman did not use it as an argument to legitimize her role as a working woman as she instead preferred to emphasize her status as a good performer and artist in order to claim public respect. Therefore she did relate to ‘serving’ in the sense that she argued that she ‘brought’ happiness to her public. Monahel and Auwadiya did not emphasize their ‘taking care’ as they did not have to negotiate the dominant discourse at this point. They and their families shared another set of gender norms, in which the connection between motherhood and work was perceived as self-evident.[58] Moreover, their families had also not objected to them becoming singers.[59] Auwadiya and Monahel, however, did stress how social they were, which indicated that they, outside their family surrounding, took note of the dominant discourse nonetheless. In this regard, all the singers tried to, by attaining their position as working women with elements that were legitimized in the dominant discourse, create space for practicing their profession, which they also used as a means, as active agents, to achieve a certain economic independence. This in turn made them more in charge of their own lives, and changed their status and position within their families. Faiza, for instance, commented: *“my father totally objected to my singing in the beginning, but matters changed and life became difficult* (her father lost his job). *The one who was young became mature and responsible. I am the youngest and despite that, I became the eldest in taking care of my family”.*

The singers were not marginal women as they were engaged or married and their men approved of their profession. The singers also stayed either at their parents’ or their husband’s house. Only Howa stayed on her own, but she was already an old woman, who would no longer cause *fitna*. The singers occasionally travelled to regions in the Sudan and sometimes they even went abroad. Some even travelled alone, which was not a real issue as long as their 'male guardian', agreed to it. Women were not to travel, at least, outside the country, without a *muhram,* 'male guardian', or without presenting an official document to confirm his consent. This law was introduced by Nimieri in 1983 and was continued by the successive regimes, including the NIF regime.[60] Furthermore, all the singers had, following the initial opposition and harsh punishment that some of them at first faced, good relations with their families. They performed their roles as (house)wife, mother, or daughter. Again Zachriman took a somewhat different stand as she put her identity as a performer almost before her identity as a (house) wife, even though she did not contest the identities of mother and wife. She stated: *"I have a mission and I am lucky that both my family and my husband understand this…"*. Also Auwadiya and Monahel had again a different position, now with regard to the ideal formulated in the dominant discourse of raising children in the confines of the home. Neither of them saw any problem in sharing the tasks of raising their children with their female family members or even to leave them in their care. As noted, they and their families had different norms about 'proper' gender roles concerning the relationship between motherhood, work and being a 'good' Muslim than were advocated in the dominant discourse(s), which came to the fore on several fronts. The different position of Zachriman was, however primarily related to her choice of self-presentation.

Professional versus Amateur Status

In different dominant discourses 'professionalism' is a factor that downgrades the position of performers. Zuhur (1998) and Young (1998), for instance, both argued that paid performances in the Middle East affect the evaluation and position of female performers in a negative way. While disciplined musical professionalism usually has the highest status in the West, it is low in the Middle East as compared with amateurism due to the low esteem of musicians and music.[61] Jansen described female (wedding) singers in Algeria, who were, among other reasons, stigmatized for their handling of money.[62]Also in Sudan the issue of 'professionalism' played a major role in the downgraded status of wedding singers both as women and as performers. It set them apart form educated singers, but also from singers in the regions, who were not professional in the sense of making a living out of their performances.

Playing a *daluka* and singing girls' songs was by most people, in particular by the (educated) elite and the artistic society, not regarded as a form of 'real' art that required high skill. Moreover, the wedding singers were as a professional group almost ignored, just as their songs were trivialized. People tended to refer to them as ‘common’ girls, who would sing at weddings. The ‘professional’ wedding singers were only perceived as being different from these girls as they made a living out of singing, but asking for money for such easily acquired and common skills was perceived as shameful.[63] Within the dominant discourse the opinion often advocated was that the singers were ‘just professional’ due to the money they earned and that it had nothing to do with the artistic level of their songs and their performances. Indeed the wedding singers had no musical education and they usually started by singing for relatives and for free. There was also a large group of ‘professional’ wedding singers, who remained relatively anonymous and hardly got beyond the stage of ‘hobby’ singer.

The wedding singers I interviewed however, all strongly negotiated their positioning as a ‘low’ performer. Firstly, they all stressed their talent and their dedication to the art. The latter was also related to their aim to contest the notion that they were ‘just’ money driven. The established and famous singers also presented themselves as prominent singers who were much in demand. The difference in status and demand between the established and the younger and non-famous singers was obvious at this point. The ‘new’ singers stressed on their part how difficult it was to become recognised as a singer as there were so many singers around, who all sang the same songs and all delivered more or less the same services.

Secondly, the established singers made an effort to explain that they were a ‘pioneer singer’ in one way or another in order to claim a position as a ‘good’ performer/artist. To be innovative was a quality that was highly praised in society: women who achieved something in a certain branch were often given the label ‘pioneer’. Their self proclaimed pioneer status could be a result of them composing their own songs or achieving their own sound or style. In both ways they contested the notion that they were ‘low’ performers without skill. At the same time, the singers contested the dichotomy between the two types of female singers that was set out in the dominant discourse(s), namely that between wedding and educated singers, or even the distinction between male and female performers. In other words, they related their own performances and profession to those who had higher status as a performer, whilst distancing themselves from those without much recognition. Only Faiza took a partly different stance as she identified herself with the wedding singer, which was related to her self presentation as a modest and common girl. Still, Faiza also distanced herself from other wedding singers without ‘good’ conduct and who were ‘only money driven’. The younger singers could not claim to be a pioneer singer, but they tried to distance themselves from other wedding singers nonetheless.

Haram and Shame

Since the arrival of Islam there is debate among Muslims whether or to what extent music and performance is harmful, forbidden and/or against Islam. The legitimacy of the performer *and* the audience within Islam is commonly discussed and usually both advocates and opponents trace their arguments back to the *Qur'an* or the sayings of the Prophet.[64] Even though there is not one Islamist and certainly not one Islamic voice, the debate on art as well as on morality is usually highly gendered. In the religious discourse(s) female performers are commonly viewed as immoral and disreputable.[65] I refer here to two concepts, namely *haram* and shame. The religious debate on performers is articulated in terms of legitimacy: whether practices are permissible or *haram*, forbidden in Islam. Shame, on the other hand, has its place in the social discourse.[66] Did the female singers internalize the religious discourse and did they perceive their performance as controversial? And, in the social context, did they regard their profession or their behaviour as shameful?

All the wedding singers were Muslim, carried out their daily religious obligations, and none of them attacked religion itself. Moreover, all the singers gave different aspects of their profession a religious quality and stressed that it was God, who had given them their good voice. Like Zachriman remarked: *"we are Muslims and God gave us pleasure and a good voice to sing. Life is very difficult without singing and there is no contradiction between worship and singing"*. The existence a religious debate about the legitimacy of (female) singers and their almost inherent controversial status was only acknowledged by Faiza and Auwadiya. Still, these two women argued that it was a concern in religious discourse where it was of no importance in daily life. They articulated in fact a difference between dogma and practice. Moreover, they perceived religion as an individual matter and not as something that other people or the government could impose. Auwadiya, for example, said: *"It should not be a matter of persuasion. Every person, when God gives him the right way (...) will be a religious one"*. In other words, they acknowledged their possible sin to God, but they defended themselves against accusations by other people. Moreover, shame was, in this context, also related to deeds and to behaviour that could be reversed. Faiza, for instance, argued that she would like to go to Mecca in order to erase her sins in relation to God. More people affirmed that a pilgrimage to Mecca 'would wash away the bad deeds' of the female performers.

The other singers did not perceive any inherent contradiction between being a singer and a 'good' Muslim insofar as certain 'rules of decency' were followed. Therefore, they did not perceive their profession as *haram*. Howa, for instance, claimed that both singing and Islam had long been part of Sudanese history, by which she in fact criticized the ‘new’ policy of the NIF regime in which several customs were condoned for being not in line with ‘true’ Islam. The singers furthermore claimed credibility for their profession by stating that the people who attended their performances were all Muslims. The singers were, however, not only in the religious discourse accused of controversial behaviour, but also in daily life. How did the singers relate to such matters as conduct and respectability?

All the singers acknowledged their bad reputation in society, but they contested the notion that their profession, their songs or their own conduct was shameful. In the dominant gender discourse the importance of ‘good’ conduct and of ‘decent’ songs was advocated, aspects the female wedding singers from the perspective of the dominant discourse lacked. The singers referred, however, to exactly the same elements with regard to claiming credit and respect for their profession and their own position as a performer. Firstly, the singers mentioned the importance of ‘good’ conduct, which was formulated as being patient, being social and dealing with the people of the occasion in a good manner. These arguments related to the fact that the singers were not always treated well and they, therefore, stressed their own composure and social conduct. Most of them did not express such behaviour, contrary to the general assumption, as drinking or smoking and were certainly not involved in practices like prostitution. Secondly, the singers claimed that they sang ‘good’ songs, which did not contradict Islam. Indeed some singers also performed songs written by poets. These singers, however, also sang the common repertoire of girls’ songs, which were in the dominant discourse accused of a lack of standard. Yet, the singers’ statements also referred to the fact that the songs were legacy songs, commonly performed at weddings, and also not declared illegal by the state.

Faiza and Zachriman represented the two main narratives, which related to their different choices in practicing the profession as well as to their different self presentations. Zachriman was pretty silent about matters of conduct as she and/or her male musicians drank and smoked. Her silence about her deviant conduct indicated, nonetheless, that she also had to take notice of the dominant discourse. She, on the other hand, stressed that she sang songs with meaning, the other aspect that was acknowledged in the dominant discourse. Zachriman also related her performances to the more modern and popular side of the profession. It fitted in with her self presentation as a (non-gendered) artist and a good performer. She aimed not only to overcome the difference between wedding and female educated singers, but also those between female and male performers. Zachriman contested the notion that female performers were firstly evaluated as women and only secondly as performers.

Moreover, with her deviant conduct, she contested the construction of the female body as inherently sexual: she instead presented herself as 'one of the boys'.[67]

Faiza, on the other hand, was silent about the issue of 'good' songs as she only sang the repertoire of girls' songs. She, in particular, stressed the importance of 'good' conduct, whether related to social or performing behaviour. She claimed her position as a 'good' Sudanese woman by underlining that she predominantly sang for women, did not work with male musicians and did not make tapes that men could hear and play. Moreover, she did not use beautifiers (perfume, make-up) that could evoke temptation and therefore cause *fitna*. She underscored the gender norms as well as the private-public dichotomy that was advocated within the dominant discourse. Her main argument to claim respect was that singing, when it was innocent, i.e. performed in a female environment, was not against Islam or morality. In this sense, Faiza also placed her profession in the more 'traditional' context, whereby she could refer to its ceremonial value.

As noted, the other singers used both the arguments of 'good' conduct and 'good' songs, but they were less articulate in both their statements and in their choices of performance and conduct. They, for instance, also performed with male musicians and/or for mixed audiences and they did not make claims as Faiza did, about 'proper' female behaviour, while unlike Zachriman they did not dress up, nor was their other social and performing behaviour so focussed on being an 'artist' as was Zachriman's presentation. Above all, the singers' statements about decency and 'good' conduct show how much they argued in line with the dominant discourse, whether or not they could live up to their claim or exactly underscored the ideas and norms formulated in that dominant discourse(s).

Audiences and Acceptability

Without an audience, songs and performances would have no cultural significance.[68] And, despite the general disdain and the fact that the religious debate centred on the legitimacy of the performer *and* the audience, the profession of wedding singer flourished. Although the religious discourse(s) affected people's ideas about the profession and the performers, it did not mean that it affected their behaviour and prevented them from inviting the singers to their wedding occasions.[69] Consequently, all the singers referred to the attendance of the audience as a means of claiming credibility. As without people to hire them, they would not have a profession to practice. Moreover, people sometimes used the singers a status symbol or as an object of prestige (and the famous singers could earn a lot of money). The singers emphasized, in this regard, the difference in performing for the elite and for people from the lower/middle classes, where they came from themselves. Even though elite people paid well, they did not give the singers much recognition as performers. A comment of Faiza: *" if the bride is dressed in a fashionable way, they are pleased. They encourage me by raising their voice, but it is for the* 'arus, *the bride, and not for me, the singer".* Still, the established singers stressed that they performed for important people, for instance, for government people, for the educated and the elite, but also for Islamists and even for more 'radical' Islamists.

The singers gave the audience also a responsibility, not only by referring to their attendance to their performances, by which people in fact lost their ground to judge them, but also by stating that 'indecent' songs or 'improper' behaviour were, in fact, demanded by the audience. It was the audience that asked for 'sensual' songs or that loved to see singers dance on stage in the previous political period. Auwadiya and, in particular, Faiza were, furthermore, very clear in their statements about men, who did not behave decently. In this way, these singers tried to alter the dominant discourse in which the focus was on the conduct of women and their ability to cause *fitna*. Faiza argued that it was not the behaviour of the singers that should be questioned, but the behaviour of men, who think that a female singer can be equated to a prostitute. She, for instance, commented: *"I do not feel shy to perform, but when there is a party with men around, I feel shy. You know why? Because men are not polite. They misunderstand female singers. When you are a female singer, men think that you are going to drink or smoke with them… When there are men, I perform cautiously".* Moreover, as noted, the Islamist government did not declare their songs or their profession as illegal, while it took stringent measures concerning both women and the 'public music scene', which was also an argument the singers used to claim credibility and to contest the notion that their profession or they themselves were shameful.

Concluding

Each singer's position as a performer contradicted the subject position of the 'good Muslim woman' in several ways. The identities that a 'good Muslim woman' could take on were mainly that of mother and wife. These identities represented the image of the 'ideal' Sudanese woman. The singers did not fit in with this ideal identity and negotiated the dominant discourse on three aspects in particular. Firstly, the singers tried to create space for their alternative position as a working woman. Secondly, they were regarded as 'low' performers, who had no skill, did not practice a 'real' art and only sang for money. The profession of the female wedding singer in particular was, however, perceived as a shameful profession due to their public presentation, sometimes in a mixed context, and associated 'shameful' songs. Moreover, their conduct was also regarded and assumed to be immoral. The wedding singers, therefore, thirdly, also had to face the notion that they were disrespectful women.

The singers then tried to earn the respect and approval from the public, by attaining their alternative positions with aspects that were acknowledged and legitimized in the dominant discourse. They related their working position to generosity and 'serving'. By means of the latter, they also made their work an extension of motherhood, the most glorified aspect in the dominant discourse. In doing so, they tried to create space for being a working woman and for being economically independent. Furthermore, they all contested the notion that they were 'low' performers and just in the profession for the money, by stressing their talent and demand. The established singers also claimed a pioneer status, by having their own style or songs, by which they presented themselves instead as original musicians/ performers. The singers, furthermore, referred to their popularity and the fact that almost any Sudanese attended their performances. They also gave several aspects of their profession a religious quality, by which they made singing part of the religious discourse. All the singers, besides contesting the notion that their profession would be shameful, also resisted the implication that their behaviour would be immoral, again by referring to factors that were legitimized within the dominant discourse, namely that they had 'good' (social) conduct and that they sang 'good' songs.

There were differences between the singers in ethnical or social background, which influenced the extent to which the dominant discourse was internalized. Monahel and Auwadiya in particular had differing positions. Still, all the singers had to take notice of the dominant discourse and therefore negotiated their position in terms of the discourse. They did not attack, for instance, the relevance of religion or the gender norms that were advocated in the dominant discourse. It was only Zachriman who contested the notion that female performers were firstly evaluated as women and only secondly as performers. Furthermore, there were differences among the singers in age and status, particularly between the established and the younger generations, which affected their negotiations. The established singers could make claims with regard to being prominent or being a 'pioneer' singer that the younger generation could not. The latter were also the least articulate in their negotiations with the dominant discourse and first and foremost wanted to practice their profession undisturbed. Howa, on the other hand, could refer to her higher status as a real pioneer singer, who had served her country and who was appreciated for her political role during the struggle for independence, by which she could also pose the claim of being a 'good Sudanese woman'. Moreover, her old age also gave her more freedom and credit. There were also differences in self presentation. Faiza, for instance, took on the identity of the 'good' and common Sudanese girl and played down her role as a performer in order to claim respect. Zachriman, on the other hand, took on the identity of an 'artist' and tried to earn respect by striving for higher status as a performer.

It became obvious that all performers, including male and educated female performers, had to negotiate the dominant discourse(s) as actual identities of people never conflate with the ideal images articulated by dominant discourse(s). The female wedding singers tried, however, to create space for their position as a performer not by attacking the discourse itself, but by resisting the implied notions that, because their position as a performer did not fit the ideal image of the 'good Muslim woman', they were inherently bad Muslims or even disrespectful women.[70] They strongly contested the notion that their profession or their behaviour was shameful and in this way, the singers also tried to redefine the terms of the dominant discourse. The singers pointed instead to the positive aspects of their profession and, for instance, the happiness they brought into people's lives.

Noten

[1] A. Gallab, 'The insecure rendezvous between Islam and totalitarianism: the failure of the Islamist state in the Sudan', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 23 (2), spring 2001: p. 87-108; S. Hale, 'The Islamic state and gendered citizenship in Sudan' in S. Joseph (ed.), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, New York: Syracuse, 2000: p. 89.

[2] K. Willemse, *'One Foot in Heaven': Narratives on Gender and Islam in Darfur, West-Sudan*, Leiden: University of Leiden, 2001: p. 14.

[3] M. Abusabib, *Art, Politics, and Cultural Identification in Sudan*, Upsala: Upsala University, 2004.

[4] K. Willemse, N. Osman and C. Bijleveld, 'One from the heart: between family and friends in Al-Halla, West-Sudan' in C. Riseeuw and K. Ganesh (eds.), *Negotiation and Social Space: A Gendered Analysis of Changing Kin and Security Networks in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa*, New Delhi: Sage, 1998: p. 301; H. al-Ahmadi, *Globalisations, Islamism and Gender: Women's Political Organisations in the Sudan*, Nijmegen, 2003: p. 50-5.

[5] The term Islamist refers to organizations that call for an institutionalisation of an Islamic state and is in this way clearly distinguished from Islamic - H. al-Ahmadi, 2003: p. 28.

[6] I have named the group of female singers that this research is about 'wedding singers' for want of a better name. Most people just used general names, like *fannana(t)*, female artist, or *ghanaya(t)*, female singer, to refer to the singers. They performed at different life cycle rituals such as circumcisions and weddings, but sometimes at other occasions too. I chose to name them wedding singers, because the wedding was by far their most important performing context and I also restricted the research to the wedding.

[7] I use the concept of discourse with the notion that there are many and contradictive

discourses on a range of subject matters that exist in society at any time. In dealing with discourses, people are part of a process of subjectification, but as a result of the interaction of the different discourses that construct one's identity, there is usually a 'multiplicity of demands'. Moreover, individual subjects should not be regarded as simply adopting roles that are mapped out for them by discourses. Instead, they actively work out their subject positions and roles, as active agents, in the process of negotiating and shaping discourses - see S. Mills, *Discourse*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005 and R. Alsop, A. Fitzsimons and K. Lennon, *Theorizing Gender*, Cambridge: Polity, 2002.

[8] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 16.

[9] A. al-Kabli, interview 1998; Al-Fatih al-Tahir, interview 1998; *Ana Ondurman: Tarikh al-Musiqa fi al-Sudan*, Khartoum: al-Nashir al-Maktabi, 1993; M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 139.

[10] Al-Fatih al-Tahir, 'Women's songs in the Sudan' in *Separata del Anuario Musical* (vol.39-40), 1986: p. 137-9.

[11] Al-Fatih al-Tahir, interview 1998; M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 161.

[12] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 161-2; A. al-Kabli, interview 1998.

[13] Al-Fatih al-Tahir, 1993; I. Buzei, interview 1998.

[14] Al-Fatih al-Tahir, interview 1998; 1993; 1986: p. 139-40; A. Salih, interview 1998.

[15] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 164-5.

[16] A. al-Kabli, interview 1998; A. Diab, interview 1998

[17] D. Mohammed, interview 1998; A. al-Kabli, interview 1998; N. el-Bashir, 'Girls songs: an exploration in politics of gender and culture in Sudan', M.A. paper, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1997: p. 25.

[18] T. Taiyib, interview 1998.

[19] A. el-Battahani, 'Economic liberalisation and civil society in Sudan 1989-1995' in K. Prah and A. Ahmed (eds.), *Africa in Transformation: Political and Economic Transformations and Socio-Economic Development Responses in Africa*, Addis Ababa: OSSREA, 2000: p. 155.

[20] J. Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*, Madison: The University of Winconsin Press, 1989: p. 319-20; N. el-Bahir, 1997: p. 32,39.

[21] I. Buzei, interview 1998; T. Taiyeb, interview 1998.

[22] J. Fabian, *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theatre in Shaba, Zaire.* Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1990: p. 12-4.

[23] *cf.* S. Kenyon, *Five Women of Sennar: Culture and Change in Central Sudan*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1991: p. 232-3; J. Boddy, 1989: p. 323.

[24] *cf.* S. Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State*, Colorado: Westview, 1997: p. 206; V. Bernal, 'Gender, culture and capitalism in the Islamic revival (Sudan)', Boston: African Studies Center, 1992: p. 12.

[25] *cf.* M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 196; V. Bernal, 'Islam, transnational culture, and modernity in rural Sudan' in M. Grosz-Ngaté and O. Kokole (eds.), *Gendered Encounters: Challenging Cultural Boundaries and Social Hierarchies in Africa*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997: p. 139.

[26] *cf.* J. Fabian, 1990; L. Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*, Berkeley: University of California, 1993.

[27] H. Barclay, *Buuri al Lamaab, A Suburban Village in the Sudan,* Ithaca: Cornell University, 1964: p. 254; M. Hall and B. Ismail, *Sisters under the Sun: The Story of Sudanese Women*, Harlow: Longman Group, 1981: p. 166.

[28] S. el-Tayeb, interview 1998; T. Taiyeb, interview 1998.

[29] H. al-Ahmadi, 2003: p. 77-83; T. Niblock, *Class and Power in Sudan: The Dynamics of Sudanese Politics, 1898-1985*, Hampshire: MacMillan, 1987: p. 136-7; N. Melik, interview, 1998; N. al-Amin, interview 1998.

[30] P. Verney, 'Music in Sudan', http://www.sudanupdate.org/reports/music; A. Batran, *The Turbaned Junta of Sudan: Manipulation of Songs and Music*, Cairo: Center of Sudanese Studies, 1997.

[31] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 172-82; A. el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution: Islam and Power in Sudan*, London: Grey Seal, 1991: p. 175; A. Batran, 1997.

[32] A. al-Kabli, interview 1998; Diab, interview 1998.

[33] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 165.

[34] *cf.* K. van Nieuwkerk, *'A Trade Like Any Other': Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt*, Austin: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

[35] H. al-Ahmadi, 2003: p. 55-7.

[36] H. al-Ahmadi, 2003: p. 11,55; K. Willemse, 2001: p. 21-3; D. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, Oxford: James Currey, 2003: p. 129; S. Hale, 1997: p. 90.

[37] *cf.* K. van Nieuwkerk, 'Changing images and shifting identities: female performers in Egypt' in S. Zuhur (ed.), *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts in the Middle-East*, Cairo: the American University in Cairo Press, 1998b: p. 21-35.

[38] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 196.

[39] *cf.* K. van Nieuwkerk, '"An hour for God and an hour for the heart": Islam, gender, and female entertainment in Egypt', *Music and Anthropology*, 3, 1998a, http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/MA/

[40] P. Verney, 2005

[41] M. Abusaib, 2004: p. 184-5; A. Salih, interview 1998

[42] A. el-Affendi, 1991: p. 175; A. Batran, 1997.

[43] Cited in M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 187-8; *cf.* P. Verney, 2005; A. Batran, 1997

[44] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 168-9,184-5; S. Hale, 'Imagery and invention: Sudanese at home and in the world. Conversations with Mohamed Omer Bushara and Musa Khalifa' in S. Zuhur (ed.) *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts in the Middle-East*, Cairo: the American University of Cairo Press, 1998: p. 181; A. Batran, 1997; P. Verney 'Sudan: yearning to dance' in S. Broughton, M. Ellingham and R. Trillo (eds.). *World Music: The Rough Guide* (vol.1), London: Rough Guides, 1999: p. 675.

[45] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 188-91.

[46] N. el-Bashir, 1997: p. 42-5.

[47] These are the two main Sufi orders in the Sudan. The DUP (Democratic Union Party) is based on the Khatmiyya order and the Umma Party is linked with the Ansar. The NIF itself founds its origin in the Muslim Brotherhood.

[48] M. Abusabib, 2004: 185-6.

[49] This elite usually come from Arabic-speaking and Nubian-speaking Muslim groups inhabiting the 'central riverain region' and are mainly seated in Great-Khartoum.

[50] Two main educated singers, Hanan al-Nil and Amal al-Nur, were blind, while, for example, Abda al-Sheikh came from an artistic family.

[51] *cf.* K. Willemse, 2001: p. 345.

[52] Al-Fatih al-Tahir, interview 1998, 1986: p. 141; M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 139,164-5.

[53] M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 42-4.

[54] *cf.* K. Wilemse, 2001: p. 336-7,345.

[55] K. Willemse, N. Osman and C. Bijleveld, 'One from the heart: between family and friends in Al-Halla, West-Sudan' in C. Riseeuw and K. Ganesh (eds.), *Negotiation and Social Space: A Gendered Analysis of Changing Kin and Security Networks in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa*, New Delhi: Sage, 1998: p. 301; H. al-Ahmadi, 2003: p. 50-5.

[56] K. Willemse, 2001: p. 334.

[57] H. al-Ahmadi, 2003: p. 46,223; S. Hale, 1997: p. 194, 'The rise of Islam and women of the nationalistic front in Sudan', *Review of African Political Economy*, 54, 1992: p. 33.

[58] *Cf.* K. Willemse, 2001: p. 258-9.

[59] The different position of Monahel and her family probably related to her more distinct ethic background as a Dinka, even though they were Muslims and had taken over many practices of the Nile Valley core culture. Auwadiya had a Nubian background, but her father was a (non-professional) musician himself, which probably lowered the objections of her family to the trade. She also performed in contexts, like picnics, that were condoned by the other singers.

[60] The NIF regime made, however, compromises with regard to the *Salafi* discourse of more radical Islamists, who wanted to restrict women's mobility almost completely - H. al-Ahmadi, 2003: p. 59-60.

[61] B. Nettl, 'Introduction: an art neglected in scholarship' in B. Nettle and M. Russell (eds.), In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998: p. 8.

[62] W. Jansen, *Women without Men: Gender and Marginality in an Algerian Town*, Leiden: Brill, 1987: p. 190-5.

[63] *cf.* W. Young, 'Women's performance in ritual context: weddings among the Rashayda of Sudan' in S. Zuhur (ed.), *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts in the Middle-East*, Cairo: the American University of Cairo Press, 1998: p. 37.

[64] K. van Nieuwkerk, 1998a; M. Abusabib, 2004: p. 173; *cf.* H. al-Ahmadi, 2003.

[65] L. Abu-Lughod, 'Movie stars and Islamic moralism in Egypt' in R. Lancaster and M. di Leonardo (eds.), *The Gender Sexuality Reader*, New York: Routledge, 1997: p. 505; K. van Nieuwkerk, 'On religion, gender, and performing: female performers and repentance in Egypt', in T. Magrini (ed.), *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean*, Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2003: p. 269-74, 1998a.

[66] K. van Nieuwkerk, 1998a.

[67] *cf.* K. van Nieuwkerk, 1995.

[68] W. Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in Changing World*, Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 2004: p. 16; J. Blacking, *'A Common Sense View of All Music': Reflections of Percy Grainger's Contribution to Ethnomusicology and Music Education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987: p. 34-5.

[69] *cf.* K. van Nieuwkerk, 1998a.

[70] *cf.* K. Willemse, 200: p. 339.

Howa Al-Taktaga was one of the pioneer singers, who had participated in the struggle for independence. At the time she made, for example, the following song:

ahtif wa-aqol ‘alani	I shout and say loudly:
‘ash al-kifah al-wattani	Long live the national struggle
nihna ya habaibna wa ya qaraibna	We shout, my friends and relatives,
brittania ya zalmah wa dareen matalibna	Britain, you are unfair and you have to fulfil our claim

A very famous and old song was *al-mihaira*, which was always included in a bride dancing parties, and goes as follows:

al-miheria iqeid al-jalad	The scent of perfumes forms a necklace
an-nar ya arusna	You are a fire, oh bride
arisik ghalabo ath-thaba	Your restless groom has to care

A song that was probably from the 1960s or 1970s:

wa’adni al-sa’a khamsa	He fixed an appointment at five o’clock
jitu fi nafs al-hita sita ila sita	I came to the exact place at six to six
al-dukhan wa al-dilka khalat qalbi lika	*Dukhan* and *dilka*[1] made my heart confused
jara at-tob igata wa bain idaihu bita	He took off my tob and I slept in his arms

An example of a song in which an ‘ideal man’ is portrayed:

ya al-mashi lai paris	You who is going to Paris
jeeb lai ma’ak aris	bring a bridegroom to me
shartan yakoon libees	he must be elegant
min hay’at at-tadrees	and work at a teaching staff

“Sudanese traditions do not accept a woman away late at night. People ask: ‘why does a girl act like this?’ Finally, you are just a girl, you cannot even talk. Families do not support their girls going into this occupation as you find that men deal with singers in a bad way (….). Being a singer in the eyes of others means that you are judged and evaluates as bad. Female singers are supposed to have no standard at all”- Faiza.

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[1] *Dukan*, smoke bath, and *dilka*, body paste, were beautifiers used by women and regarded to have an aphrodisiac effect and therefore has sexual connotations.

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN A REFUGEE CAMP
Prospects and Challenges

Jessica KAAHWA

This paper is based on an investigative field-trip I undertook from August 6th –10th 2003 to the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda.

Establishing the Link

My visit was the result of a promise I had made to a Sudanese youth I met on a Metro Bus in Maryland State in the USA in 2001. The young man had shared with me his experiences while staying at the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in an irresistible and revealing narrative. Reflecting on it, I had made a promise to visit the Settlement upon my return to Uganda. Fortunately, the Settlement in question was located in the District of my birth. Unknown to me then were the bureaucratic hurdles I had to overcome during the process of securing permission to visit the Settlement. So, upon my arrival in Hoima in June 2003 I made inquiries on how to get to the Settlement. However, obtaining the necessary permission proved to be problematical, so I decided to take chance and visit the Settlement hoping to get the permission when I got there.

On arrival, I was informed by the office of the settlement commander that I was an illegal visitor and therefore had no permission to enter or have contact with or hold discussion with the camp inhabitants. I did a bit of consultations and established what I needed to do. I was advised to take the next available means out of the camp. However, there were several restrictions but mainly on movement[1] in and out of the settlement, which worked in my favour. At the time the Settlement had one passenger taxi van which made a single trip out of and into the Settlement daily. This was the only vehicle permitted in. It had the official capacity of fourteen passengers,[2] which would cater efficiently for the numbers that are given exit passes plus the odd the regular resident. The car would leave the camp at 6:00 AM and return at 6:00 PM from Hoima town. The fact that transportation was scarce given the numbers that were served by this single vehicle made it difficult for a novice like me to fight my way in through a narrow window of the first and only vehicle that left the settlement the morning upon my arrival.

With the help of the Chairperson Chuma Chiza, a Congolese national, we informally began to mobilize persons interested in acquiring skills of drama making. After two evenings of discussion and planning of how to get the camp administration to buy our idea we were all convinced that drama might provide another type of excitement. The succeeding evenings we would camp in the main courtyard of the Engineer's compound and we would try out sketches about current events, to which many responded warmly and the once gloomy faces that had greeted me on my arrival had loosened by the time we began to attempt the complex tasks of working personal experiences into dramatic skits.

KYANGWALI REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

History

Kyangwali Refugee Settlement is located in the Hoima District in Western Uganda, approximately 80 kilometers from the town of Hoima. Previously, the land was home to the refugees displaced from the conflict in Rwanda beginning in late 1950s through the 1960s. However from 1994 - 1995 the majority of these repatriated back to their country of origin. However, the current refugee population is more recent, with the oldest settlers having stayed for up to 11 years. Most of these are Congolese who entered the camp from 1997 onwards. For administrative purposes the Settlement is divided into zones and villages[3].

Population

Regarding population placement in the Settlement, the *Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 7* (2002, Pg.5) states that by July 2002 the population of the settlement was as follows: 6852 refugees were living in Kyangwali, including 5323 Congolese, 1384 Sudanese, 112 Rwandese, 20 Kenyans, 10 Burundians, and 1 Ethiopian. However, by the time of my visits in 2003 and 2006 the population had increased, mainly due to a large number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the Northern region of Uganda. Of these, 54 percent were male.

Gender Population Disparity

The sex percentage disparity in population underscores the need to address gender relations and gender related issues more carefully in a highly patriarchal setting.[4] Firstly, by the sheer high numbers of males, this demographically pointed to a gender imbalance in social relationships. In this connection were the obvious issues of Gender equality[5] and equity[6]. Secondly, there was the nationality distribution issue with Congolese and Sudanese overpopulating the settlement, thus eclipsing the other smaller groups in socio-economic, political and cultural activities in the camp. This implied that the influence of the two nationalities permeated the value systems, the social and political structures and cultures and practices in social interaction. This was another area during the theatrical disputations that participants, together with the facilitator, endeavored to unravel: the different dimensions of reactions to the cultural dominance by two cluster groups on the rest of the inhabitants.

The refugees situation is made worse by the fact that the coming together into a refugee settlement is often preceded by violence and traumatic situations that hardly prepares an individual for the cultural shock one encounters in a place like Kyangwali Refugee Settlement. A couple of refugees confessed of having remained angry at themselves for a long time and gradually turned their bitterness to the systems accusing them of connivance in their suffering.

An alert dialogical theatre facilitator seizes every dialogue opening as an opportunity for a performance subject. When using a problem historicization approach to build a performance narrative, a facilitator urges the participants to weave their individual narrative into one unified narrative concerning their early days at the settlement.

Understanding the Dynamics of the Refugees

Performance as an activity is realized through people acting or playing in space with a visible or invisible audience in attendance, creating a contact in a space that is defined by the boundaries of the action. In every day life, relationships between male and female are gendered creating distinguishing body language and physical movements. In a performance with refugees all these tend to celebrate or express critique, revealing the very essence of an individual especially those grieving the loss of family, friends, homes, possessions and livelihoods, personal identity, self-esteem, cultural and ancestral roots. The loss and grief is coupled with a new reality of procedural oppression, which leads to the emotional experience of "culture shock"[7] and being denied, disempowered, "castrated and helpless."[8] The theatre artist is duty-bound in such conditions not to be neutral to the facts that seem to leap out with silent screams from a group of people, even before they have made their view points known.

Kyangwali settlement is such a place where personal relationships are marred by misinformation concerning the socio-economic, political and cultural life that exists in a camp. This is as a result of an in-built administrative structure, which enhances the ideology of socio-economic, socio-political and cultural isolation. This ideology imposes a restriction on political freedom which, heavily enforced, creates fear and a sense of helplessness among men and women. The fear-factor is procedurally cultivated through social infrastructure and it uniformly impacts the refugees. During the first two days of my visit to the camp in 2003, I was disturbed by the silences that greeted me everywhere I went. I could sense fear in the refugees' facial expressions and in the way they held their bodies upon my appearance in a place. The fear expressed itself so loudly and vividly in a paralyzing manner that one could not escape noticing its impact on the community.

Pre-performance Decisions

Performance in this environment had to respond to both the explicit and the implicit, while the explicit is the cursor to the implicit, which in this case is the undefined root cause of this intense fear of the oppressive structure and the circumstances that feeds the structure. A *deconstructive* process is suggested as necessary to analyze the living conditions. However a word of caution is necessary here because in a Refugee Settlement there is no room for idealized protracted processes as obtainable in open environments. The diversity of ethnic groupings could not allow a theatre facilitator to loose sight of heterogeneity of the community. The way the men and women experience the oppression in a camp is quite different from other environments with alternative options.

The women move from the "double" jeopardy to "triple" even "quadruple" jeopardy. In the former the women are victims of the patriarchal society, which label the women as being inferior while in their state as refugees they are both victims of patriarchal society and oppressive structure and they are further labeled as power usurpers of the oppressed men. In addition to the women's worsened state, they also suffer the loss of "self identity" when they switch their social roles and also perform the roles of their emasculated males. The experience in this particular settlement is that in most cases the women had taken over the men's role as head of the house-hold and provider for their families in order to keep afloat. From our discussions, I learnt that this level of self-duplicity is attained through self-denial. The argument was that it was critical to some of these women to forego their selves in order to save the "other self" that is their male partners. The women saw their males drowning in depression of the loss of their cultural significance of their maleness. To bolster this point of male helplessness, a female refugee asserted thus:

> “One has to do what one has to do; otherwise we would have several suicide cases on our heads for not using our brains to be both women and men in this season.”

During the reenactment of the skit it was clear that for the women to carry-on both female and male roles with the ever depressed and often angry male present, they had to “*kufunga roho*” [or harden their minds] and suspend their “emotional self” and everything that defines their essence as women.

The fact that the Settlement is approximately 80 KM from Hoima town as the nearest urban center increased the sense of isolation leading to a loss of confidence, increased dependence on others, and depression. Undeniably, many males felt cornered for the first time in a new precarious social environment with fragmented or more-less non-existent cultural values to hold on. The men were in a continuous psychological battle with themselves and often outbursts flowing over to their spouses and children were the result. In the settlement the men seemed to have become victims of a well-knit oppressive structured system. As mentioned in footnote 1, men seemed to be the target of the oppressive machinery; in the words of a male refugee “…this is all because of fear and distrust that should they allow us to *act* equal as men; we might cause an uprising in the camp.” The latter became the most reiterated statement in our discussion of the choices the males made when in *role*. The facilitator at this point noted and exploited the phrase “act equal,” why not simply equal. The fact that they could only aspire to “act” and not “be” equal was in itself revealing and needed to be followed up as an entry point to dialogue.

The male refugees observed that their spouses and other females in general sometimes enjoyed privileges when it came to getting the administrators attention on matters of their personal security, permission to travel and trade. Like the cultural feminist[9] thinkers observed, a male refugee commented thus: the women were using their natural instinct to bond with one another to support each other.[10] In fact, women refugees supported one another morally and physically shared their rations and harvests. The women demonstrated strong solidarity among themselves, which was a challenge to the male refugees, who could not find similar psychological support from their fellow men. The artists endeavored to break into their socialized psyche, “to be a man is to endure in silence,” by encouraging them to talk about what they liked about their spouses resilience. However, this time around in our discussion a couple of male refugees expressed their sadness at being emotionally absent from their homes and further lamented their inability to protect their wives from being over-burdened with the manly tasks of providing for their families.

Sieving Facts from Sentiments

The theatre facilitator in this case had to deal with psychological and real material issues for performance. What is referred to here is the need to separate sentiments from problem issues that cut across the whole community. In this case the problem had to have a universal element, which required a collective solution. For example in our evening casual meeting I asked the women what they could do as women for the men to be empowered. The men were asked to be the judges of the responses the women gave. If any of the response satisfied the men's need then they would say so, which would be followed with the men and women examining the responses and assessing the possibility of its leading to a realization of the solution. Unfortunately most of the suggested responses that ranged from "more love" to "good food" to "being supportive" were all found lacking the kind of help the men truly needed.

The men too, were asked to make suggestions to the women on ways to help them (men). Sadly, the men did not have a single suggestion, except for the one plea that was made by one male refugee who asked the women to be more patient with them (men), promising that the situation will soon improve. This was followed with a prolonged silence on both sides. The facilitator knew she had tapped into their inner depth and that there was no point of return, but to forge forward searching for solutions to issues raised.

Pre-Performance Critical Considerations

Gender performances in restrictive spaces face numerous challenges:

Bureaucracy

The theatre facilitator has to seek permission to enter the settlement and interact with the refugees. However, it is possible to enter, but the facilitation methodology could prove catastrophic and lead to a revoke of permission. Because it was hard to get into the camp and interact with the refugees, it is advisable to do prior planning on how to implement the exercises.

Delayed Grief and Related Depression

This is most common with refugees as the circumstances that lead to their status happen very fast. According to one male refugee's experience he asserted that: "there was no prior warning that he would end up in a refugee camp all alone, with fragments of information about my family"[11] Settling in a new country/environment is never easy. In the process, most persons hardly have a chance to grieve. Once they have settled in - then the reality sets in leading to anti-social behaviour and depression.

Psychological Distrust of Outsiders

Settlement commanders and refugees are mutually engaged in mind-games of distrust, which is extended to visitors and researchers alike or theatre practitioners (personal experience.) The distrust rises from the nature of relationships expected in such an environment. The commander's role is to ensure security for all refugees, while the refugees hardly can trust the good intentions of the commander or those of fellow refugees from the same country. At the same time the refugees fear to be labeled as indulging in "un-Refugee Activities," which may result in punishments from the settlement commander.

Lack of Skilled People

The difficulty of finding someone with performance-related skills, as was the case in Kyangwali Settlement, provided an opportunity for facilitation working from a clean slate. In essence, lack of skilled performers but plenty of willing people around is an advantage the facilitator must exploit.

Time and Space for Meeting People

Depending on the kind of entry permission one has, setting an approproate time for meetings can prove a chancy process. It is important is to set the time when people have finished their lunch and when they begin preparing their evening meals, then exploit the in-between moments. Take a space that is flexible. Any good clearing opening with a tree with a broad canopy provides an opportunity for a more open participation and eliminates suspicion from skeptics.

Language

A language problem is unavoidable as refugees come from diverse cultural backgrounds; even those who share common background are sometimes unable to share cultural sentiments and are often dialectically dissimilar. However, in the case of Kyangwali the refugees are settled in zones according to their nationality and ethnicity, which makes the work of the facilitator much easier.

Freedom of Expression

It is critical for the facilitator to presume that the refugees under different conditions may not be able to express themselves as freely as they would like and it is a duty of the facilitator to create mood for openness in the discussions and role-playing.

Performance and Gender

The term performance is multi-faceted and, depending on the individual society, interpretation and appreciation of what constitutes performance varies. In this case, we discuss performance in relation to dramatic enactment and role playing which involve elaborate and purposeful efforts to staging a prepared performance before an audience. However, the elaborate part of preparation is not possible under certain environments such as those deprived of certain freedoms i.e. freedom of association/assembly, freedom of speech etc. Kyangwali Settlement is no exemption as an isolated constrained environment. Because of this, there is no freedom of access to information and communication by way of movement. A situation which does not enhance the inhabitants keeping up with the rest of the world on pertinent social issues such the gender discourse, economic and political empowerment, human rights education, etc. all of which are of critical importance to the refugees as it is to their counterparts in the open spaces

Obviously the theatre facilitator working in the Refugees Settlement is conscious of the restrictions that the Refugees experience and work within the constraints for their own good. Equally the facilitator works in cognizance of the gender inequalities and other gender based oppressions that exist in a given context. Linked to these operations is the facilitator's ultimate desire to use theatre to realistically mirror back to the participants the images they can not see of themselves. Through role playing and dialogue the true self is helped to surface.

Determining the Knot Moment

Timing in a performance for dialogical purposes is not easy. The facilitator must know the right moment for each and every process. For example, it is not easy to gauge the moment to "stop and start" a discussion[12] but an attentive facilitator is able with utmost precision to know the knot moment that unfolds the understanding of conditions of individuals who accept the conditions in which they live as the only expected alternatives. The apathy exhibited by men as the oppressed victims is not necessarily because of the oppression but it is likely to press more on the challenged individual ego and therefore can only be operated on from within. The procedure is through the unraveling of the hidden reasoning behind every given suggestion. This process often leads to a knot that halts further movement on a continuous discourse.

The knot moment connects with all the peripheral suggestions that link the problem with the symptoms, and every move from the knot will most likely touch tangentially on the perceived problem. In a nutshell, the facilitator remains within the domain of the participants' thinking and reasoning, leading them gradually to realize that the centre of the problem is not where they think it is but rather within their own proximity. The process of finding and unraveling the knot empowers the participants to develop confidence, critical analysis and questioning the issues for sustainable solutions.[13]

Emerging Issues

What is clear is the fact that the issues of the individual and the group can be dealt with at different levels. Individuals in most cases have an insight of what might be and what may not be as succinctly illustrated by the men's plea to their spouses. The plea for patience was indicative of suppressed acknowledgement that the problem was internal to them, more than the held perception of external pressure. This is to affirm the philosophers thinking that "it is not the consciousness of men that determine their being but on contrary their social being that determines their consciousness."[14] It is this kind of knowing that performing gender requires.

Specifically gender performance in restricted spaces such as a refugee camp, aim at answering the *why* and showing *what* questions and transforming the *how*, which determines the *when*. These questions when sincerely addressed give the foundation base for performance with sole purpose of making the participants aware on how to understand the nature of obstacles they face and the need to mobilize themselves for collective action. The *why* question reinforces gender analysis of how men and women are positioned in a performance and the issues assigned to them, are they gendered or are they gender sensitive? Within the latter context of gender sensitivity -- the theatre facilitator acknowledges through the performance structure that gender differences do exist by reflecting the differences in the choices he or she makes for the various categories.

Key Learning Points (KLP)

i) The Processes of Reconstituting "Groupness" for a Theatrical Event

The first step is to understand the historical background of the different groups. Although a group of refugees may come from a particular nation it does not necessarily mean that this group is homogeneous. The reality is often that the group is usually constituted by different ethnic groups, many of whom have their sharp differences and reservations based on their political, socio-economic and cultural differences. In a refugee camp situation the differences are exasperated by the mere fact of proximity and lack of options for mobility. According to Chuma Chiza, "*It is like being trapped in a cage with a foe who wants you dead for his/ her own surviva*l."[15] This remark was made amidst fears of bringing the Lendus of Congo in a camp where the Wahema people resided. On top of that there were fears of traitors or agents of the various countries having penetrated the camp and now masquerading as asylum seekers. The great suspects in this whirlwind of fear were the women and professional males. The whole scenario was rife for a violent exchange, as it had been in the Kyebitaka camp where Sudanese refugees had fought each other and burnt down community facilities including school classrooms.

ii) Gender Based Reinstitution

Gender based reconstitution is a key component of attitude modification, particularly in alienated environments. It refers to efforts made by groups of people adapting to their new environment. Gender based reconfiguration in a new environment is often a display of actions and choices put in place that reinforce men and women as equal partners in a process of day-to-day existence. The theatre activist taps into a system where these efforts exist, but in case they do not, it is the role of the activist to creatively create the conditions under which this would be made possible.

In this case, the theatre activist focuses on the environment's impact on masculinity and femininity and its contradictory effects on men and women in their natural and prescribed relationships. The theatrical discussions therefore aim at locating the divergences in their behaviour and values that contradict positive gendered actions, hence the theatre facilitator through collaboration with the participants attempts to reinstate a dialogical encounter.

The Erased and Constructed Identity

A close observation revealed that the persons that lived in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement were mostly preoccupied with issues of identity and autonomy. This struggle to hold on tenaciously on identity was immediately visible in their clustering together in their nationalities. Discussing their memory of the first days of arrival at the camp, I learnt that for most of them their initial response was to resist being identified as refugee/displaced. This they did by disassociation from those who seemed to have settled in. They announced their identities and countries or districts of origins with pride. However, over time this individualistic identity and pride was fast replaced by the loathed pluralistic title “the refugee.”[16]

Sadly, this taming is progressive implemented with all the psychological mechanisms of behavioral development with the attached incentives of rewarding good behaviour/conformity and punishing the bad/non-conforming manners. As in most cases human endurance has its limits, which could result in either positive or negative conformity. The latter (negative) development seemed to be the easier way of continuing the resistance against “it” (or the naming) and maintaining some level of dignity.[17] While adults continue their resistance, youths are eager to get out and explore the world beyond the settlement. The youths are keenly aware of the power of their identity, which they choose to take advantage of to advance.

How does Performance Intervene?

i) Series of Processes

Performance as an intervention works in a series of processes geared to aid the participants gaining the confidence to articulate their unresolved emotional and physical experiences. The preparation ought to take into account the states of men and women and the youths. This involves a recreation of scenes of unresolved issues and exploration of an individual story of the group’s choice.

ii) Tapping into the Innermost of an Individual

The process of Performance is to tap directly into the innermost of individual suppressed emotions. These can either be positive or negative, what is critical is to make way in dialogical manner, which stimulates the theatrical dialogue. Giving platform to all participants willing to share their own individual perceptions no matter how bizarre, may turn out positive as it often did.[18]

iii) Practical Cue

The facilitator must be quick not to get entangled in the emotional reflection of the group but rather should capitalize on the weakest point to delve deeper into the discussion of the problem or use it as a moment to refocus the group’s concentration on searching for the solution. This involves leading the group to understanding the root cause as being internal to the group and hence avoiding externalizing the problem. Internalizing of the problem is critical because it leads ownership of the problem. The success of the group’s search for a sustainable solution is dependent on their ability to decentralize the problem beginning from an individual level to the community level. It is this process of decentralization of the problem and the centering of the individual as subject in the process of their liberation, that points to the potential of performing gender in a restricted space as possible.

iv) The Facilitators/People Choice of Action

Creation processes in most of the performances involved the calling together of the community at the central point in case of Kyangwali Refugee Settlement it was held at Kasonga (the center) in Kyebitaka village. There was recognition of the castrated male and overburdened female that both yearn to be freed from the conditions of their new realities vs. environment imposition on them. Therefore during performance the facilitator guided the participants to perform Gender roles which meant each participant had to rediscover their previously conceived roles in their social/interpersonal relationship. The aim of forcing the participants to take roles previously held is important refocusing the participants back to themselves.

v) The Aim of Self-Presentation

Self-presentation aims at breaking the consequences of oppression, which manifest as detachment from history and free-floating in dematerialized and indeterminate world, a situation that undermine the refugees to re-establishment of self-semblance and hence control their individual autonomy and the new environment. Each individual participant had to come up with what he/she knew about the self in a relation to the other. The complications that accompanied this exercise was the inability of the adult males (30-50 years) playing as requested by the group claiming that they did not know how to perform their given roles even in pairs with their female counterparts. This was very revealing as they urged the female participants to play domesticated roles like school teachers, nurses, wife, harlot, food collectors, information disseminator, etc..

NOTES

[1] According to *Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 7*:
Kyangwali has several key types of limitations on economic freedom. The first is bureaucratic and insecurity-related limitations on movement that prevent refugees from participating in goods markets outside the settlement. The second is limitations on working that effectively exclude the refugees from external labour markets. Third, the settlement is highly isolated through transportation and information costs. This does not help to expand the small market within the settlement, and it also results in higher prices on goods imported into the settlement and lower prices on goods exported from the settlement. Finally, the refugees in Kyangwali are found to be politically isolated, and as a result suffer from taxes that constrain the development of the economy (2002)

[2] All in all, transportation costs resulting from the physical isolation of the settlement were a real barrier keeping the refugees from participating in external activities.

[3] The First Zone is Kasonga, followed by the largest Zone of Runyawawa (occupied by the Acholis as IDPs), followed by Kinakyeitaka, Nguruwe, Nyamiganda and Kyebitaka.

[4] Gender is often understood as a relational term, which refers to the socially constructed differences and distinctions between men and women. Or the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of the biological males and females. This suggests that what we know as the appropriate behaviour and responsibilities are not as a result of biology, but of the socialization process. Through socialization, biological males and females are equipped with what is considered a socio-culturally acceptable code of conduct, including appropriate roles, behaviours and identities.

[5] In this discussion, the author does not mean that men and women become the same, but rather their opportunities and life chances are equal. This means that there is no discrimination on the grounds of a person's sex. Shock-ingly in group oppression and labour exploitation the males tend to suffer the most.

[6] Here we refer to gender based negotiations for their right to fair and just treatment in all spheres of life.

[7] Culture Shock, which can occur when a person is transported from a familiar to an alien culture.

[8] This is more in relation to the men when they feel that they are not adequately supporting their families or that their wives are playing more active roles in running their families than they do. In most of the discussions on interpersonal relations there was a clear linking the identified attitude to the way the family members related to each other.

[9] Jill Dolan, The Feminist Spectator as Critic, (An Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1998), 86.

[10] A comment made by a Male Refugee in a post skit discussion, held at Kyangwali, Hoima District, August 2003.

[11] A comment made by a Male Refugee in a story narrative before the skit, held at Kyangwali, Hoima District, August 2003.

[12] Boal's technique of "stop and start" is described in his *Theatre of the Oppressed*. The stop-and-start technique implies simply that the action on stage is momentarily halted by the audience so as to raise other issues that are omitted or those that need questioning. This technique can be made to work by the theatre facilitator explaining the rules of the performance to the audience at the outset of the play. Both performers and spectators have their roles explained to them, and everyone is invited to participate. Such a method increases the vibrancy between the audience and the performers. See Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), 95.

[13] Alternatively the theatre artist aught to find means and ways to work with the refugees from the known (ideology of isolationism) to the unknown (the intimate self)

[14] Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 24.

[15] A comment by Chuma, a Congolese Teacher and Chairperson of Kasonga Camp within the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, August 2003.

[16] After six months or a year with no hope of returning home, the individual soon adapts like the others before him/her. He/she continues to identify himself/herself but now adds the loathed status; "I am a refugee." Then the adaptive mechanism kicks in and the individual gradually succumbs to the new identity because his/her sustenance depends on "it."

[17] "It" is used describe the resisting refugee's emotional response to their new reality that tends to strip them of their identity and individuality.

[18] Initial attempts to dialogue proved hard for our participants. They had so much to share about their current lives and their lost past. Some would get up and say a few words in their own dialects and burst out crying. Men and women wept together and as facilitator I urged the Chairperson to let them be. After the outburst we would resume and request the narrators to concentrate on the current life situations that wished to talk about. Obviously, I realize that obedience to time led to the leaving out of the past personal/group histories, a terrible omission on my part.

THEATRE FOR CHANGE in SOUTH BLUE NILE, SUDAN
Expressing personal experiences in story-telling

Nora AMIN

In March 2007 a theatre-workshop was organized by the SIHA network in co-operation with The Blue Nile organization for women and children. Instructor was Nora Amin, project manager Hala Alkarib and project coordinator Alser Al-saved.

The workshop was held at the Workers' Union and the Center of Peace Studies. It ran for 3 days on the 19th, 20th and 21st March 2007, from 9am to 3pm daily.

The participants were 15 women from different ages and backgrounds, recruited by the Blue Nile Organization for Women and Children (partner NGO of SIHA), with the coordination of Ihsas Medani. The group of women included teachers, students, social activists, housewives and average community women. The age range varied between 34 to 56 years old, except one participant, who was 18 years old. More then half of the participants had lived experiences of the war, displacement and refuge during the 1990's; especially those belonging to transitional areas such as Alkurmuk, Damazin and Airosaris. Women participating in the workshops were either shot at or severely wounded during the war, had been captives or had a first degree relative (father, husband or son) killed due to the war. The majority were displaced by the civil war in Sudan over different periods of time.

In the context of theatre for development, or participatory theatre, the most commonly known method remains Forum Theatre developed by Augusto Boal. However, in our workshop the situation would not allow this approach since I was working with traumatized people who were still under the effect of the war and its consequences. Usually in this case the participant cannot detach herself from her own experience in order to represent it and utilize it with the forum theatre technique. She remains at the phase where the experience needs to find its way out from its internal life in the memory to the external life of performance, communication and sharing. Consequently it would be possible to start utilizing the story by reconstructing it, adding to it, playing with it, and dealing with it as a vehicle for forum theatre in order to trigger alternative release or better management of similar situations.

Therefore, I had to seek a method to accommodate both the strong psychological component of the material and the theatrical techniques I was aiming to teach as a form of communication; the psychological component always comes first. In the case of, women suffering the effects of war; women who know each other through having lived, more or less, under the same conditions and experiences; women who live in the same community and share a common history, one finds that a sense of solidarity is easily born in the group to carry the difficulty of the psychological side of the experiences.

The first step of our method stressed the role of this group entity, and the solidarity and support it brings to the room. The circle was a simple and common form to adopt for the storytelling part of the workshop'. It helped everybody to see each other and feel surrounded by a collective caring energy. This gradually led to lessen the feeling of guilt and shame, and brought about a feeling of being part of a collective female experience where everyone is equal as a victim. In the circle form, the first expressions of personal stories took place; they were scattered inside the circle, sometimes a piece of the story was picked up by another participant who continued the story, added to it or found similarities within her own story. This technique was the first step towards the transformation of the story from internal to external; from the individual to the collective.

In this first step, it is risky to let the story be deconstructed or distributed too much amongst the group. We must carefully measure the dose of collective intervention and rendering, otherwise this could lead to the dilution of the story; the purpose is to develop the expression into a solid story, strongly rooted in the memory yet firmly grounded in a performance. To avoid this risk, it is necessary to guide the group to know its limits of intervention and to constantly be aware of the aim of this technique, which is to strengthen the original story and person, not to take it away from her. It is important to mention that this technique sometimes helps in filling gaps of information in the story and opens the door to connections to the rest of the stories, which we will explore later.

The second step in our method does not immediately go in the direction of further development and processing of the verbal story, instead it opens another door to expression of the experience which directly leads to different sources of the story; this door is the body and the sensorial memory. A series of physical exercises will accompany the verbal telling of the story. The exercises range from simple walking to mime which represents, or links to, the story.

It's worthwhile to address the difficulty with which the body starts to move or "be" in the context of these stories. I noticed a completely different physical attitude in that room during those exercises; compared to before we started the workshop. Somehow the body gets a sudden shock of remembrance and of feelings exposed, which leads it to hold back from expression and full presence. Yet, this is a perfect time to monitor the physical and sensorial traces of the original experience on the bodies of the participants. The slightest movement or gesture is a carrier of significance; the face tells it all, an absent look, the eyes look down or nowhere; this is all expressive and alive.

After repeating these simple exercises several times, a sense of ease can be seen; movement improves in speed, coordination and balance, but the difficulty of being present and expressing something never disappears; it should not disappear. Another technique is to take away the verbal story and have the participant continue in her movement and ask her to pour all expression of the story into the body, where every little detail would be a performance, a story, in itself. When this technique was performed and repeated it was a fantastic discovery for the participant; to know what her body can express, and to learn the value of the slightest gesture. We composed some slow movement sequences where the group realized how much their body is a carrier of their histories and identities (it is their history and identity), and how much their bodies can express and "live".

After we worked on the verbal stories alone, the physical expression alone and the two combined, the group was ready to proceed to a re-enactment of their experiences. This phase should not come until the group has worked through all phases of verbal work on the story (structuring, clarifying and dramatically performing it in a precise and interesting way), as well as the movement design relevant to the story. When each participant can be both in her own memory and in the performance of it, she is ready to re-enact the experience with very little risk, and in **i** front of an audience. This is exactly where the past and present meet: the past is her own experience which is still held back in shame and/or denial, and the present is her existence in the community as a valued and productive citizen. She can only become one if she is able to transform past experience into present existence; an existence supported by the group, an existence which denounces the sources of pain, violence and oppression. If her experience can come into that existence, it would mean that she is free as well as reconciled with her past, and able to move on.

This is when we stand directly at the centre of the concept of drama therapy, theatre and healing and recovery, performing the self, transformation/re-integration and even biographical theatre. Nonetheless, I have neither taken the approach of therapy directly, nor have I insisted on the scientific nature of some of my techniques. I have taken the decision to work in the natural environment of women sharing experiences, supported by a long tradition in Sudanese and Arabic culture, careful not to expose any strategies or techniques. I found that this tradition had always aimed to achieve something similar to what we wanted to achieve with our encounter, and that it is always better to have the original culture support such work. But of course I wanted to go further and to develop a full presentation integrating all the stories with the group participating with speech and movement.

The full presentation was the second biggest challenge of the workshop. I would not accept anything less than strong, self-confident and powerful performers. We went through a series of breathing exercises, where I could notice from the pace of breathing the character of the person and how much difficulty she was going through. Then voice exercises, where I observe how much vocal expression and articulation have developed simply by having more self-esteem and confidence as a result of working on stories and exchanging and sharing them. The voices became really clear and loud. When the stories were spoken with these true voices in the presentation, I saw new women standing before me. They were different from the first day I had seen them, when they had delivered their scattered stories. They now looked sure of themselves, proud to denounce the pain and the injustice, proud to be the witnesses of war and its effects and ready to expose all negative aspects in their community to raise awareness and avoid more pain.

As we composed the final presentation, everybody had to learn their lines, this is the most difficult task you can ask of a person: to learn her own story by heart, no additions or changes possible. They had to learn the movements and gestures by heart as well, and be very accurate with intonation, articulation, attitude and speed of delivery. We worked several times on how to adjust the speed of delivering the stories in order to fit the dramatic flow of the presentation; the two main problems were that they either said it too fast or too slow. Both problems were a reflection of the difficulty they had facing the community with the truth. Projection was another issue that stemmed from the same difficulty. As much as one is able to project her story, as much as she is free from it and powerful enough to disseminate it to the whole world; to live it is one thing, to perform it in public is another. The workshop helped everybody to live with - and to perform - the truth.

The presentation proved the success of the process; the stories were there and were performed and transgressed by each of them. The stories were fused and hence represented everybody; they were the stories of each and all. And the strong collective **i** performance brought a feeling of testimony, a feeling that goes hand in hand with the belief in change, in community support and in the rights of each citizen. The performance was a clear representation of the re-integration of what everybody would prefer to forget, but which could never be forgotten; therefore the only option was to transform it into positive existence. And that is what we did.

Stories from the War

Here are the original stories of three women who participated in the workshop: Mounira, Aisha and Mawaheb. They have written their own stories and delivered them to be especially included in this book. This process helped develop the expression of their experiences into a written form.

Having the intention and will to write their stories for publication meant a clear concept of social responsibility towards all Sudanese women. All the participants of the workshop were very sincerely engaged in developing their communities and reforming the condition of women. They have an unbeatable faith in life; a hope that nothing can destroy. For that hope in a better future, we publish these original stories. Our stories are not only testimonials, they are part of ourselves. They are our pain and our freedom. Our stories will always remain ours, but in retelling them they belong to us all.

- My story happened on January 12th 1997; It was the time of the North South war in Sudan. I was living in the town of Alkurmuk in South Blue Nile where I was working as a teacher at Khadija Bent Khowaylad primary school for girls.The town was controlled by the Sudan Army Force (SAF).

On that morning we heard news that the Sudan People Libration Army (SPLA) was about to enter Alkurmuk. Suddenly, I heard a bomb explode; I ran out of my house immediately. My thoughts were mainly on my students and how I could protect the little girls. I ran to the school and found the girls full of fear.

I escaped with my students and many other people. We reached the area of Albaraka near Alkurmuk. We were trapped and held as prisoners of war by soldiers from the SPLA.

Later that day an officer from the Sudanese army arrived in Albaraka and tried to negotiate our release with the SPLA soldiers; he was not given a chance, they immediately shot at him from all sides.

I was sitting with my school colleagues and students not far from the shooting. Several bullets reached us and one of them hit me in my right leg. I was injured in my right thigh and my thigh bone broke. I was very frightened and in a lot of pain.

I remained there for three days, I couldn't move and I had no medicine. Thankfully, because we were close to the boarder with Ethiopia, some Ethiopians had arrived and helped transfer me to a hospital in Ethiopia. After four days I was moved to a military hospital in Assosa town on the boarder with Sudan where I spent another 22 days. The nurses were very kind to me; they used to cry when they cleaned my wound. I was only given pills and injections, which did not make me any better. I thought of traveling to Saudi Arabia but my request for a visa was refused due to the bad relations between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia at the time; so I returned to Sudan. I started my therapy again at the Army forces hospital in Khartoum. I was operated on twice, the first time the surgical operation failed. After a month, the second operation took place with not much improvement.

I traveled to Syria looking for better treatment. The Sudanese government covered the expenses of my travel and therapy at a Syrian hospital. I was operated on twice in Syria, the first operation was to lengthen the thigh bone which was affected due to the prior surgeries in Sudan and to having stayed for long periods without therapy. The second operation was to attach a metal support to the thigh which was to be removed in one year; but I did not remove it on time.

I decided to pursue my career and move on, so I continued my university studies in Arabic Language and Islamic Law and let nothing stop me.

On 25 November 2006, the support was removed at Khartoum Educational hospital. My leg is now in good condition and I do not suffer anymore. I now live my life normally and I thank God.

Mounira Elsheikh

- My story began on the 20th of July 1993, when I was transferred by the Ministry of Education to the remote village of Magda. I loved my teaching career and my husband was very supportive of me. So we took our children and traveled from Damazine, the capital city of south Blue Nile. As the taxi left Damazine it broke down several times on the road, the last time the driver refused to continue, and we had to get off in the middle of nowhere. After almost 11 days, we reached our destination via donkeys that carried us and our luggage. The area in Magda lacked any education or health services. Surviving there would be our biggest challenge.

When my little boy Gehad became sick there was no health service to help him. Eventually, a private car from Damazine came to our area, I used that car to go with my son back to Damazine where he got the necessary treatment. We returned to Magda, but a few days after my son's health got worse. I could not find any solution and my husband was not around; he was in Damazine bringing some food and equipment for the village. I decided to take my son and go to Dandaro, a nearby village, where there was a hospital for animals: but time was not on our side, my son died before we reached Dandaro.

In June 1994, there was no water in the village. The residents of the village fled to Alteir mountain area where they could access some shallow wells. I moved with my family to the area of Kamir. After the rainy season started, shallow wells in Magda were full again, so the school principle asked us to return to continue the school year; we went back.

On the 20th of July 1994, we started our journey back to Magda. On our way down the road we ended up in an area full of landmines. My husband was carrying our smallest daughter, Refka, with him on the same donkey. A mine exploded underneath them.

My daughter died instantly but my husband's pain was unimaginable. His body exploded and scattered in the air before my eyes. Parts of his flesh were glued to the tree and the mountain, but my daughter's body was intact. She was dead but not in any way deformed; she looked serene. My husband was still alive but mutilated when I reached him. He called my name so I sat next to him. I read him verses of the Koran until his soul left his body.

God had chosen who would die and who would live in that instant; I was on the next donkey with my other daughter, Rofayda, and before us were my two older sons Diaa Alhaq and Bashir. The four of us survived the same mines that exploded under my husband's donkey. That is destiny.

My children were crying and screaming, but I was strong. I helped them to calm down. I hugged them and told them it was God's will and that we must accept it. I took my husband in my arms. With the help of many good people we gathered all the parts of my husbands body. They carried it and transferred it to Damazine, then to his parents' village where he is buried now. My son Diaa Alhaq is now in his final year in university, Rofayda is in her first year at university, and Bashir is passing his final year at secondary school.

During the last part of my story I was pregnant. When my husband and daughter were killed I had already reached my third month of pregnancy. Six months after the accident, I delivered my youngest child, Hameeda; she is now in the seventh grade. She is a living memory of survival.

Aisha Ismail

- On the evening of January 12th 1997, The Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA) invaded Alkurmuk from the east and the northwest sides of the city. The citizens were trapped inside.

I had just given birth the night before. The next morning, a Sunday, the city itself was attacked and people ran in all directions to escape. Some were wounded, some were trapped and others were killed. My family and I tried to run away but my body was still weak having just delivered a child. Nonetheless, we had to keep walking, leaving the town behind. While we were walking bullets were coming from all directions, I was shot in my left foot. My husband took our children to get them to a safe place and promised to come back for me. He didn't make it. I was left alone in the middle of a road outside of Alkurmuk until night fell; I did not move. The next morning I started to move and tried to walk; I reached Alzereeba village and found all the houses empty. I did not even have a drop of water to drink. I pushed myself to walk all the way to the main street with the help of a stick. While I was walking, I lost consciousness. When I woke up I found that I was surrounded by two soldiers from Sudan Army Force (SAF). They gave me water and dates and I moved with them. While we were walking, we were ambushed by soldiers from the other side. They killed the soldiers who were accompanying me. Then one of them pointed his rifle at me, but the soldier with him said, "She is a woman". At that moment, a car came with another group of soldiers who were well armed; they picked me up with them and dropped me at Albaraka village.

Later I managed to move to Ethiopian territory with Ms. Mounira Alsheikh. We received treatment at a hospital in Ethiopia. They offered to move us to Kenya; I refused but Ms. Mounira accepted and traveled there. Some of Alkurmuk's citizens came and carried me to Alkurmuk. I stayed there for several days until I could start walking again. I then moved to the village of Mayk, west of Alkurmuk. At Mayk my foot became more swollen, I could walk no more. Thank God, a man from the Bedween appeared with his camels, he carried me to the village of Beldego near Dandro. From there we moved to Deranek, and then to Damazin. I was operated on twice at the hospital in Damazin, then transferred to the police hospital in Khartoum. I was finally reunited with my family in Damazin.

My life is going ok, every time I look at my little girl born on that day, I feel so pleased that both of us are alive; but I will carry what happened to me forever.

Mawaheb Bashir Soliman

THEATER AND WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Bakare BABATUNDE ALLEN

PART 1. THE SILENCE OF FEMALE ARTISTS IN THEATRE IN THE NORTHERN PART.
RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL LIMITATIONS.

The Northern parts of Nigeria can be considered largely as Islamic since it is dominated by the Moslems, except for some few states, which are either mixed or partially consist of other religious groups. The Northern states of Nigeria are surrounded by neighbouring countries like Niger, Chad and Mali, three countries that can be referred to as Islamic nations. For these reasons, it is not wrong to say that beliefs and practices of the Muslims in the Northern parts of Nigeria will have many things in common religiously, culturally and traditionally with their counterparts in the Sub-Saharan area of Africa.

In the past, custodians of Islam often claim that Islam does frown at theatre and other forms of arts, while holding strongly to the belief that “God does not like any form of imitation of his work”. Going by these insights, it will not be fruitless to investigate the freedom and restriction of female artists in the Northern part of Nigeria. If they do exist there at all, they have to struggle against all odds before being able eventually to practice theatre. Others, although they would love to perform, were hindered by very strong social forces.

Female artists in the Northern part of Nigeria are at the disadvantage of expressing their artistic prowess freely, not because they lack the capability which their mates who reside in Lagos, Asaba and Enugu have (the three cities where the home-video and other artistic productions are being show-cased freely), but because the religious, cultural and traditional conditions guiding the activities of their immediate environment is far too strong for them to violate. States like Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti etc. in the South-West of Nigeria, which are dominated by the Yoruba people, have their own social, economic and political boundaries for the womenfolk too. The women undergo occasional spites, jeers and challenges from their male colleagues as well as family members who frown at women venturing into a trade regarded as reserved for men, and women are considered irresponsible when they venture into theatre, but there is still allowance for the female artistes to express themselves freely, with occasional supports here and there.

Some states in the Eastern part of Nigeria such as Imo, Enugu, Anambra etc., as well as some in the South such as Cross-river, Delta and Rivers are more liberal in the allowance given to female artistes to express themselves. Most of the female faces featured in the fast growing Nigerian home-video industry, popularly known as Nollywood, are from these states mentioned above, while only a selected few are from the Yoruba speaking part of the country. The Multi Choice cable popularly called DSTV, with one of its numerous channels called Movie Magic, showcases a good number of Nigerian home-videos, with numerous female artists featured. Most of the actresses featured are from the East, South and Western parts of Nigeria, as their names will readily attest to.

Hence, it will be a very interesting point of discussion in the realm of theatre to research into the reasons why females in the Southern areas of the country are given more freedom than their counterparts in the North as regarding the arts and the theatre.

Rituals and Theatre

Nigerian indigenous theatre can not be separated from the culture and tradition of the people of each ethnic group and geographical area in the country, connecting traditional festivals, ritual ceremonies and other forms of cultural celebration with theatrical performances. In many parts of Nigeria women play major roles in all the afore-mentioned social functions. They dance separately or in groups, sometimes with their husbands or, sometimes, with other men. They make all other women in the group look beautiful by applying the local make-up materials on them for the purpose of beautifying their bodies. They plait their hair and distribute the locally made fabrics called Adire and Aso-ofi to all performing artistes in the event to wear. All these are what we refer to as body make-up and costume today.

A good example of this is the popular ‘Alarinjo’ traveling theatre, which marks the growth and development of dramatic expression of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, in the early 1960s.

The growth of theatre in Nigeria can be described as a unique one. This is because it kick-started with no external influence. It was pure and raw. Theatricality is found in almost all the activities surrounding the everyday life of the people in Yoruba land, starting from the celebration of, and initiation into puberty, marriage, celebration of, and welcoming of a new born, burial of the dead, coronation of a new king or of chief, important rituals to the supernatural beings - gods and goddesses. We can find descriptions of these rituals in plays like Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King Horseman* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*.

The ritual female presence can not be found in the Islamic Northern part of Nigeria. Generally, women are not allowed to participate in all those daily life activities that may expose them to the attention of other men. However, the Fulani influence opened up the avenue for some activities in which young ladies can participate, but this does not necessarily mean that females who engage in such activities have the total freedom to express themselves artistically during the course of these types of celebrations.

In the Northern parts of Nigeria, girls are betrothed to their husband at a very tender age, sometimes as early as when they were born, but their marriage may not be consummated until they attain the age of eleven or twelve. This marriage is based purely on parental arrangement by both parents: that of the girl and that of her suitor, who must have offered the bride's parents material possessions which surpasses that of other men in the process of scrambling for the voiceless and innocent young girl. The young damsels are given no opportunity for a freedom of choice or of making any important decisions of their own, let alone of challenging the choices their parents have made on their behalf as regards to the kind of man they will like to spend the rest of their lifes with. The implication of this is that their opinion is not needed before making choices for them or in taking them to their husband's house.

Nevertheless, this paper is not in anyway pointing any accusing finger or blaming any individuals or institution, be it religious, cultural or otherwise, who have a strong belief in the tradition or cultural values of his or her land. Rather, it is purely a documentation of artistic findings and an investigation in the field of theatre studies. The primary aim of this paper is to investigate the challenges posed by culture, religion and tradition on women in the course of realizing their career goals as artistes. While one of its objectives is to document its findings and to use it as a basis of comparison to what we have today, finding a basis for comparing the present day belief to the original stand of Islam concerning Muslim women and theatre practice in the Northern parts of Nigeria, it will also serve as a case study for scholars in the theatre who intend to do more scholarly research on gender issues in Nigerian and African theatre, all the more so because not much is written on this topic.

African context

Across distance and boundaries in history and society, women have been placed on pedestals as goddesses, but imprisoned within domestic injustice (custom has been nothing but a tyrant hidden in every home). They have been romanticized in literature and lyrics, but commercialized in life (Ahooja-Patel, 1977: 83). They have been owned, used and worked as horses, even today (Ogundipe: 1994-107).

Generally, the condition of women in various walks of life across Africa and more importantly in Nigeria is a subject which needs ongoing and continuous research. This could be buttressed with the above quote from Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's essay titled 'African Women, Culture and Another Development'.[1]

It is very important to know that the limitation of female artistes is just a segment out of many deprivations artificially created by men in Africa to prolong and enjoy their long established phallic control over the female. The limitation, marginalization and silence of female workers generally, cuts across all works of life. It can be noticed in the banking sector, law practises, medical practises, day-to-day politics, within the four walls of the academic institutions and even in a good number of African homes. It is a societal thing, so it can be found in all societies where males and females co-exist in uneven power relations, reflected also in actual drama and theatre:

> …this trend is emergent to some extent as the playwrights' cultural and historical reserves as a storehouse from which different images of the woman could be drawn. In several of these cultures, despite the change imparted on her by modernization, the woman is still largely marginalised. Although her image may be salutary and dignified, roles ascribed to her centre around those of housekeeping and mothering. This has tended to give her male counterpart an advantage of leading in most, if not all of the social affairs especially those that are public. (Evwierhoma 2002:1)

Following from the brief background given in the introduction, it can be deduced that religion, tradition, culture and social formations are those strong factors that amalgamated to become the checks used by men and the society against women. For instance, the Shariah law, which is based on Islamic belief and tradition, and popularly embraced in almost all the states in the Northern part of Nigeria, has clear boundaries regarding what women can do in the society and to what extent they can go.

Next to Islamic law there is the problem of education for girls: a father, being the head of the family clan, finds it very difficult to send his female children to schools for proper education because in many households, females are believed to have their proper places in the kitchen, and are basically created for baby-manufacturing. Education for her is seen as a waste because she will end up getting married to an outsider, taking along with her the certificates of her education, which will rot on the floor of her husband's kitchen. Sending a girl to school is therefore regarded as a proper waste of time and waste of scarce resources. Learning how to trade however and sustaining the economic level of the home front could be the only other option left. The emphasis and attention is largely on the male child/children because he is regarded as the heir of his father's empire, i.e. the person that will take over from the father in continuing the patriarchic system of the family, where the voice of the female is never needed. Often, the male child/children enjoys sponsorship for their education at the expense of the female child, as what she realizes in her trade is being used to sponsor her male counterpart. Generally, the number of female children given sound education right from the primary school to the university level and who had the support of both parents in the North are few, as compared with their counterpart around the East or South of Nigeria. However, this does not necessarily mean that those from the East and South have all their requirements met regarding a qualitative education. The issue of this lack of support for the education of girls is not at all strange in Nigeria, where the situation in the North has now reached such a level that concerned individuals and groups within the rest of the country are now engaged in an intense campaign for better training of children and women in the area of qualitative education and vocational training. This campaign's aims are that in the nearest future women are no longer seen as a liability or as 'properties' within the household, but will be seen as valuable human beings who have a voice in society and who can contribute positively to the socio-economic and political day-to-day dealings within the community. We may call this 'women empowerment', and it is no doubt a very welcome development in our society, which is long over due. There is a long way to go, as at the beginning of the 21st century, women were still under-represented in management around the world despite their increasing representation in the workforce (Wirth, 2001).

Presence in the Arts

It is clear that female marginalization is not unique only to the realm of theatre and arts alone, but that it cuts across every sphere of the walks of life and that although it assumes different forms, female marginalization is a reality that is evident in our society and is justified using the excuse of our culture, tradition and religion in Africa.

Recently I interviewed a female artist form the North who did not want her name to be published. In this unrecorded interview conducted with a theatre critic and actress (because of security reasons, she granted me the interview on the agreement that her true identity would remain undisclosed to the public and that the interview would be used for academic purposes only, she said and I quote:

> "Being a woman will naturally deprive you of reaching your goals and your set objectives. The only thing that can help you a little is only if you marry a fairly understanding husband, who believed in liberal thinking and in doing things according to his own mind. In this part of the country, an actress is seeing as a decorated prostitute, because actresses are believed to be an infidel who exposes their body to the audience for money!
>
> I have to be mindful of what I do and say in the society; I can not even call myself an actress because that will be suicidal when the people in charge of law and social values get to know. I may be accused of having potentials of inflicting the younger girls around me with prostitution. But you are from the South Western part of this country, in Lagos for instance, the home-video is filled up with many females, women are well represented. Can the same thing happen here? You dare not try it! 'You want to usurp men's duty'? But I am hopeful that tomorrow will bring a new dawn."

The above lamentations shows the level of frustration which many female artists must be ready to face and tackle in the course of struggling to identify and practice their profession in the Northern part of Nigeria.

A brief glance at women all over the world today shows that women are oppressed. Another brief glance suggests that "education attainment," "participation rates," "occupational structure," private and public laws, family planning systems, technological advance and, above all, socio-cultural attitudes are all weighted against them (Ogundipe 1994 p.27).

Speaking of culture, tradition and religion in Africa, it must be noted at this juncture that the participation of women cannot be over-emphasized, as women are seen to be devoted participants, playing vital roles and fully dedicated to duty.

First generation playwrights, poets and novelists in Nigeria have tried in their various works, to paint the picture and portray the socio-economic and political challenges of being a Nigerian woman. The first generation of Nigerian female writers including Mabel Segun, Flora Nwapa and others who came much later such as Adaora Lily-Ulasi, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Zulu Sofola, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Stella Dia Oyedepo, Esther Bali, Ifeoma Okoye, Remi Adedeji, Tess Onwueme, Folashayo Ogunrinde to mention but a few, have all tried to express their achievements to the whole world, through their writing. These women are only a few of the women in Nigeria whose voices are being heard as compared to their male counterparts. They went through various stages and phases of struggle before their voices could be heard and the impact of their work were felt throughout the country.

Conclusion

The marginalization of female artists in the Northern part of Nigeria can not be separated from the general marginalization of women in the whole of the country. Theatre and drama are only a few of the avenues in which this is seen to be glaringly manifested. Limitation of women and their relegation to the backseat is seen in politics, in the banking sector and even in government establishments all over the country.

Although in reality a woman can and does speak, within the metaphor she has no voice of her own; when not brought to life, so to say, by man/musician she must remain silent. Depicted as responding rather than acting on her own initiative, described as “owned”, “used”, “tuned”, “played”, “repaired” as if she were a guitar among other possessions, she is in effect deprived of life or de-personified (Arora 1993:33).

This topic of female marginalization cannot be seen as old fashioned, neither can it be seen as new and deserving our attention in our society today. It is has been in existence for a really long time. Being an artiste, one cannot express oneself in isolation.

If women are given a chance and a voice to speak and express themselves artistically, they will use the stage to lodge and bring to the fore what they pass through, to sensitize the people in the society. Examples of movies in which this theme was acted out, are the home video films entitled *Pain of Womanhood* and *Widow,* staring the foremost Nigerian actress Liz Benson. In these movies, she represents the voice of widows, who go through a lot of anguish and pains at the demise of their husbands, as they are made to scrape the hair on their heads and drink the water in which their husband's corpses are washed, so that they can be cleansed of the guilt of their husband's demise.

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THEATRE AND WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Bakare BABATUNDE ALLEN

PART 2. WOMEN REPRESENTED IN DRAMA. OLA RITIMI'S *OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN AND* IBSEN'S *DOLL'S HOUSE* AS INTERTEXT.

This part of the paper intends to discuss the age-long belief among the Yorubas, especially the men, that women are 'properties' of men. Using *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as supportive play texts, the attitudinal resemblance and characteristics of the two husbands - Lejoka Brown in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Helmer Torvald in *A Doll's House* - will be discussed with regard to the specific individual treatment given to their women by both authors.

Despite the total difference in the period and/or time in which these two plays are written and coupled with the thousands of miles that separates the Norwegian soil from that of Nigeria, both plays conveniently show considerable links in terms of subject matter and thematic pre-occupation, showing that female marginalization is a universal phenomenon.

The story lines are however, not necessarily the same. While *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is crafted on the political system in Nigeria and the Yoruba traditional believe in custom regarding marriage and female involvement in the public sphere, *A Doll's House* is based on 19th century bourgeois conventions and the socio-economic aspect of conjugal agreement versus integrity. The obvious relationship between the two is the socially accepted unfair treatment of the two women by their respective husbands and the issues surrounding the union of male and female, which is painted well by the two playwrights.

> Ibsen's works have been both studied in schools and colleges and produced by a few theatre groups for varied audiences across the social spectrum in a context in which theatre has increasingly become an important cultural and communicative expression. This is also a situation in which communicative acts (utterances, artistic forms, and symbolic representations) are still expected to be both enjoyable -educating the individual about the outer social, political, and economic world while at the same time satisfying their inner mind. (Gecau, 1997: 202).

Some of Ibsen's dramas have had a considerable influence in Nigeria, which shows itself in a number of performances and adaptations by way of appropriation and transposition from one culture into another. Kimani Gecau, a Kenyan born theatre artist and scholar, has rightly pointed out that a good number of Henrik Ibsen's plays have gained popularity also in the Kenyan society in terms of what their thematics and subject matters represent, socially, politically and economically. More importantly, universities and colleges in the country recognised this fact and therefore, incorporated the teaching of Ibsen into their curriculum. This popularity that Ibsen and his works gained, did not end in Kenya but also cut across many other countries, including Nigeria, through agents such as playwrights, directors, and dramaturges, such as Ola Rotimi and quite a few other radical theatre artists.

What is this controversy that Ibsen created dramatically, both to males and females and across many countries, by allowing Nora to walk away from her marriage? And why should Torvald Helmer treat his wife in such a doll-like manner, even though she struggles to secure the financial means with which he was taken abroad for urgent medical treatment for the ailment that almost took his life? Should this gesture not be appreciated by the audience and readers, or should it be frowned at, because the avenue by which the finance came was dubious? This play has successfully achieved also an ongoing hot debate on the question whether separation or divorce should be the way out of marital challenges and difficulties. Another question that easily comes to mind is, to what level should a woman go to satisfy the needs of her nuclear family? What means or manner must she adopt, and does she have any justification to challenge or ask her husband any question should she feel there is need to do so? A glance at the synopsis of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* will no doubt open our minds to the critical discussion of this easy. For this reason, I will quickly narrate the most essential part of the play *A Doll's House*.

At the centre of the play is Nora Helmer, the wife of the newly appointed bank manager, Torvald Helmer and the mother of three young children. Torvald suspects that his 'little featherbrain' is extravagant and he wants to know how much money she spends. He monitors her spending. Nora's school friend, Mrs Linde arrives, asking Nora to beg Torvald for a job. Nora tells her that when they were first married, Torvald was very ill and she secretly borrowed money to finance a holiday in Italy, which saved his life. She is still paying the money back, from whatever she can save from her housekeeping money. Torvald offers Mrs Linde a job, but Krogstad, from whom Nora lent the money is about to be sacked by Torvald and wants Nora to intervene on his behalf. He knows that she forged her father's signature and threatens her with revealing the secret.

The climax of the play, according to *A Pocket Guide to Ibsen Chekhov and Strindberg* by Michael Pennington and Stephen Unwin, “is the transformation that takes place in Nora in the last act.” As Ibsen wrote, “ Nora is a big, overgrown child, who must go out into the world to discover herself and so may one day be, in due course, fit to raise her children- or maybe not. No one can know. But this much is certain, that with the perspective on marriage that has opened up to her in the course of the night it would be immoral of her to continue living with Helmer: this is impossible for her and this is why she leaves”.

She pretends to be *bird-brained* and this appeals to him. But Nora is shrewd and proves quite capable of paying her debt to Krogstad out of her housekeeping money while letting Torvald think she is extravagant. For much of the play, her behaviour is conventional: she has done everything for her husband’s sake, and is content to play games for him; flirt with Rank and dance the tarantella (the Neapolitan dance of death in which catastrophe is imminent even in its jollity – one expert described it as a ‘hysterical catharsis which lets women escape from marriage and motherhood into a free lawless world of music and uninhibited movement’) for both of them.

Towards the end of the play, Torvald gets to know about his wive’s secret and forgives her. In the conclusion, Nora gives him back his ring, takes his, and tells him that the only miracle that could have saved the marriage would have been if ‘they could have discovered some true relationship’. In the moments it took her to reach the front door, Torvald holds out some hope. But the final stage direction says it all: A door slams off, that is Nora walks away from her marriage. (Pennington and Unwin, 2004-31)

> But it was in A Doll’s House (1879) that Ibsen raises the deeply critical question of what he stated as “the desire for happiness and the demands of conscience”. He posits human civilisation would remain incomplete for as long as one half of the human race (female/women) remained in bondage. (Umar Buratai, 2002:35)

Torvald in *A Doll’s House* is not totally a bad man, as compared to Lejoka-Brown in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, whose action is entirely connected with self aggrandizement and selfish motives. He sets a goal for himself and cares less about who gets hurt in the process. However, the thinking of both characters is conventional. While Torvald is delighted with his new position at the bank and is looking for security and contentment, his attitude towards his wife is that of a bourgeois husband at that period. Lejoka Brown’s action is, however, dominated by his people's cultural, traditional ideology and continuity, a continuity of what his customs dictates and practises.

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, written by Ola Rotimi in 1966 and published in 1977, can be referred to as a product and an evidence of that realistic artistic initiative taken by Henrik Ibsen. Like him, Ola Ritimi studied *his* immediate environment carefully and understood those pressing issues vital to the development of human beings in society.

As his Nigerian follower, Ola Rotimi concentrated on making social problems a part of his subject matter, such as marital problems and male-female relationships.

In his plays he offers echos of the cultural tradition of the Yoruba that allowed women to participate in certain ceremonies. His works also remembers the fact that in the history of the Yorubas, women have played concrete and unforgettable roles as noble women warriors who gave heir life for the people.

History has it that a certain woman named *Moremi,* the queen of ancient Ile-Ife (the town that is believed to be the cradle of the Yoruba people) single-mindedly handed over the *Igbo* rebels to the then Ooni of Ife (the paramount ruler of Ile-Ife). The first question that comes to mind is where were all the men? A lot of them had been captured, killed and even chased away because of their cowardice, but *Moremi*, through the help of the river goddess of *Esinmirin* conquered the enemy of the Ile-Ife people. She was able to achieve this feat because she swore an oath that if she became successful at war, her only child, *Olu-orogbo* would be given in exchange on her victorious return back to her people. She had won the war and eventually fulfilled her promise, even though it was a highly expensive exchange, and in deep emotional and suffering pain, she gave up her only child to the goddess of the river, and the kingdom of Ile-Ife and the Yoruba people at large were set free. She courageously achieved what all the men failed to achieve. Untill today, she is continuously honoured and her praises are being sung throughout the shores of Nigeria, especially in Yorubaland, for her heroism. A shrine was built as well as other monumental edifices at the centre of the Ile-Ife township, and a very popular grammar school is named after her in memory of her heroic achievement.

Analysis of *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* in relation to *A Doll's House*

Ola Rotimi is a noteable Nigerian playwright, and has written several plays amongst which are *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, an adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex; *Kunrunmi*, a Yoruba historical play; *If…*, a communal tragedy; *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, a Benin historical play; *Man Talk, Woman Talk*, a play about gender struggle, as well as *Hopes of The Living Dead* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, both of which can be likened to Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People* and *A Doll's House*. His *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* will be used to buttress my points of analysis in the course of my discussion.

Some of the plays mentioned above, specifically *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, If…, Hopes of The Living Dead* and *Man Talk,Woman Talk,* represent a transition from the phase of writing plays that have to do with the supernatural beings, aesthetics, customs and tradition, to writing of plays with the thematic preoccupation of questioning the status quo; plays that portrayed Nigeria's socio-political problems.

> …in his later plays, *If…* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Rotimi has made a left about turn to confront not only the oppressors of the masses but to give a dialectical materialist's analysis of contemporary Nigerian social and political development. (Gbileka, 2001 - 19)

It is essential to add that Ibsen also changed from romanticism to writing realistic dramas/plays. He understood the social and dynamic significance of modern dramatic arts, the functions of art for arts' sake and art as the mirror of life because theatre is larger than life and possesses the power of opening many social ills to the public. The positive attitude of modern art must have prompted him to later change his themes, subject matter and ultimately, go into more radical writing in the latter stages of his work.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer, rightly says, and I quote:

> A writer responds, with his total personality to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of a sensible needle, he registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society. Thus the same writer will produce different types of work, sometimes contradictory in mood, sentiment, degree of optimism and even world-view. For the writer himself lives in, and is shaped by history. (Ngugi, 1982 - 47).

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Rotimi portrays a character, Lejoka-Brown, who shares some characteristics with Ibsen's characters, Consul Bernick in *Pillars of Society* and Tolvard Helmer in *A Dolls House*. Lejoka Brown is a retired Military Major, who takes to politics as a means to realize material gains. He has married three different women for different purposes. First, Mama Rashida, whom he inherited from his late brother; he married her for the mere fact that she had lost her husband and because "she is well-mannered, very quiet, and full of concern: a well-bred, African pigeon" (p. 9). She is more or less a dummy in Lejoka-Brown's house and she raises no opposition to his authority. She is obedient to him, a typical African woman, who will dare not ask questions when ordered. Second is Sikira, who he has married because he needed the votes of the women, if he was to win the elections, because Sikira is the daughter of the President of the Nigerian Union of Market Women.

> **Lejoka-Brown**: That woman's case is only for necessity, anyway – temporary measure. We need women's votes, man, if we must win the next elections
> (p. 10).

Liza is another one of his wives. She is an American-educated wife to Lejoka-Brown, working with the Red Cross, who he met at Stanleyville during a war in the Congo, when he was shot in the thigh. He married Liza because by her medical profession she will be more presentable and befitting to his status in the near future of his political career, should he eventually win the election.

Lejoka-Brown represents a number of Nigerian politicians who see political offices and appointments as an avenue for self aggrandizement, and at the same time, who have no regard for the womenfolk. He perceives them only as an end to justify a means, an instrument to his future political ambition.

> **Lejoka-Brown**: [triumphantly]. See what I mean? Everything would have worked out according to plan once the elections were over. See? I give Sikira lump sum capital to go and trade and look for another man or something like that; Mama Rashida remains right in this house of my fathers; and I move into Minister's quarters on Victoria Island. Liza joins me there: everybody is happy (p. 10).

On the one hand, Ola Rotimi depicts the perspective, cultural ideology, traditional orientation and popular mentality of certain people in Nigeria, many of whom are among his readers and audience, and who make up large parts of society who regard the womenfolk in the same manner as the character, Lejoka Brown. While Liza, Mama Rashida and Sikira are perceived to be the weaker sex and who have been relegated to the back seat in the society, both in the economic, political and importantly, in the social sector, they are also regarded as an instrument in the hands of men (Lejoka Brown) to achieve various objectives and reach certain goals. On the other hand, Rotimi has opened the eyes of the masses to the awareness of how politicians, who are meant to put the well-being and welfare of the people who voted them into political offices as their primary assignment, have been caught at home and abroad, and charged with series of allegations, varying from money laundering to misappropriation of public funds, misuse of power, embezzling, to mention just a few.

In many of his gender-focused dramas such as *Man Talk, Woman Talk* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Ola Rotimi represents the voice of the oppressed women through his artistic understanding in connection with the then prevalent socio-political and economic situation of his people. This he does by bringing the happenings of the past into writing, thereby making the readers and the audience conscious of the importance of collective responsibility in fighting for a just cause.

To Lejoka Brown, his two illiterate wives must tremble when he coughs and sneezes, because, in his eyes, their marriage to him is an honour. He therefore creates so much fear in them and it is not for nothing that Mama Rashida and Sikira refers to and addresses him as “my lord” whenever he calls.

Ibsen’s Nora walks away and out of her marriage with at least some excuses and apologies from Torvald, who pleads that he had realised his mistakes and that she should at least stay back for the sake of the children. Lejoka Brown on the other hand did not really bother when the two ‘dummies’ Mama Rashida and Sikira eventually leave him to rediscover themselves in connection with what they were capable of doing economically and socially within the society. He has already mapped out the plan on how he would systematically dump the two of them eventually. Liza is the only one he feels he can settle down with because of her social status and educational background. Liza is well educated and possesses those qualities that befit a cabinet minister which he aspires to be. He feels no guilt for his actions because it had been pre-planned right from the time he nursed the idea of participating in politics. His thinking is self centred and he certainly has no emotional attachment or love towards Mama Rashida and Sikira. Their co-existence is a matter of ‘necessity’.

His philosophy of life is ‘use and dump’. Lekoja Brown’s action in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* does not necessarily cover all the areas where women are been cheated, maltreated and relegated, but it is one of the many areas associated with the union of marriage and which often existing between men and women.

Liza, the only educated female character in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, notices the ill-treatment meted on Mama Rashida and Sikira by Lekoja Brown and she brilliantly opens their eyes to the fact that they can do something meaningful with their time, brains and hands, and so, she let them realise the need to be true to themselves in other to set themselves free from the captivity of Lejoka-Brown. She cautions them not to be rude and disrespectful to Lejoka-Brown, but ask for his permission and for financial support so as to afford them economic independence which they need if they want a better lot in the society and if they want to be economically sufficient. Mama Rashida, with the help of Liza, starts up a poultry farm, the first time she is being empowered economically.

> **Mama Rashida**: So, if my lord will talk to Alhaji Mustafa… (Tries to impress him with her new learning)… who has plenty land to supply; and if my lord will ask him for *Demand*, he will sell it to us for capital. Now, I can then go to the village farm and start my big new trade there. My lord can come to see old Mama Rashida and her chicken farm in Abule oja whenever he wants… (P. 72)

Mama Rashida succeeds in establishing herself in a business, while Sikira emerges as the candidate of the same political party which removed Lekoja Brown for all the anti-party he is been involved in.

> **Sikira**: (*declaiming*)**.** Rise up! All women of our land! Rise up and vote for freedom, or forever be slaves!
> **Lejoka Brown**: Who is that crab?
> **Okonkwo**: … Come have a peep, Major.
> **Sikira**: Vote… vote for me! It is true I am a woman, but that does not matter. It does not matter, because why? Because…
> **Lejoka Brown**: A woman?
> (**Lejoka-Brown** *and* **Liza**, *curious, make for the front door in time to see and hear* **Sikira** *say*)
> **Sikira**: MEN AND WOMEN ARE CREATED EQUAL!
> (Crowd cheers uproariously, dancing and singing as the procession goes out. Slow fade on **Lejoka Brown** who is consolingly embraced by a sur-

> prised and excited **Liza**.)
> **Madam Ajanaku**: No more, No less!
> **Okonkwo**: Well, major, how now?
> **Lejoka Brown**: Are you there…
> (Gravely)The world has come to an end.
> (P. 76)

Lekoja Brown is a typical African man, who refuses to follow the trends in which events unfold in the society. How a situation changes is not part of his understanding. He is buried deep in past ways of living which he inherited from his father and which his father inherited from his great-grandfathers. His statement while waiting at the airport for the arrival of Liza is a clear evidence of this:

> **Lekoja-Brown**: Here I am, running up and down, renting a flat, getting restless, going crazy! Just because… I mean, I whose grandfather had a hundred and fifteen wives, I tell you… one hundred plus ten plus five breathing wives all at once under his very roof! But here I am, with only two little crickets, expecting one more-just one more canary, and I can't just pick her up by the arm and say to her: "Woman, I forgot to tell you; but as the Whiteman says, 'better late than never!' Here - meet your other ehn… sisters-in-marriage!" (p. 28)

He refers to his two wives as little crickets meaning that they are nobodies, after all, a cricket is just a tiny, harmless insect, which lives in a hole. He is not worried about the two wives at home, because he knows that they will always do as he commands.

The last scene of the play confirms that Lejoka Brown's view and perception of women remains as rigid as ever, despite the fact that the two wives which he treated like invalids, just as Nora was being treated in *A Doll's House,* are able to bury their two feet deep in the ground and break free from the bondage of custom, tradition and culture which covered their vision right from the beginning of the play till that moment of discovery when Liza opened their horizon to the real world (reality).

His last statement is 'The world has come to an end'. Why did he say this? Because to him, the kitchen and the bedroom are the proper places where women, especially (his) wives must be kept for the rest of their lives. He does not believe that 'anything good can come out of their Nazareth', so it was a shock and it was distressing to him that Sikira, his wife who left his house in anger and frustration was the same woman that her party nominated for the same post which he himself was offered but was later withdrawn from.

It must be emphasized that Rotimi wrote this play when there was hardly a woman participating in Nigerian politics or even given any political post, so the idea of a house-wife, 'whose duty and obligation' is to cook, feed and rear children in her husband's house, going into politics and even over throwing her husband was strange and new to the audience.

Nora left her husband in pains and with a lot of parting emotional words, but she made up her mind to face the challenges of life she will be faced with as both a mother and as a woman, she is ready to use her brain and hands to gain new ideas and to move on with life.

> …If it is a battle and no victory that Nora (from *A Doll's House*) is about to encounter, she is ready with a youthful, strong, and golden armour. If she parts in pain, it is not mere sorrowful and patient acceptance of a pain that comes from the loss of ideals but a contention and striving for a new ideal (Salome, 167-1997).

The same with Mama Rashida and Sikira, they both parted from rigid tradition to face the new world and its challenges of being real human beings in charge of what happens to them. They don't have to be dictated to anymore, before doing the right things at the right time. Nora walks away boldly, and so does Sikira, even though her husband is not around to stop her, but Mama Rashida diplomatically and systematically walks away when she also realises the need for her to be independent.

> **Mama Rashida**: A-ah! What's happening? Sikira!
> **Sikira**: I' am going back to my mother!
> **Sikira**: (leaving). ***Our Husband has gone Mad Again!***

Sikira left Lejoka Brown when the continuous quarrel between him and his Doctor-wife (Liza) would not stop. She declared her intention to participate in politics after Liza had been able to open her eyes and that of Mama Rashida to the fact that they were not logs of wood but real human beings capable of using their brains and their two hands to achieve a lot in life. Lejoka Brown's attitude of turning Liza into a punching back is one of the common occurrences in marriages of our society today, which should also be addressed, as it has nothing to do with colour, tribe, race, country and age. It is a general and common problem that must receive collective attention and solution. Lejoka Brown did not realize that his lies and deceit to Liza that he has never been married (whereas there are two women in his house already) is unjust and unfair.

Conclusion

Women, through the ages have been made to pass through series/ phases of maltreatment. One cannot conclude by saying thanks to religious influences, because, as one 'claims' to liberate women, one tends to 'cage' them, all in the name of religion. But we should be grateful to Modernisation, qualitative education, positive awareness, series of workshops, campaigns against women slavery, battery, harassment, molestation, government and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria, to mention a few, and with the help of international bodies and organizations, through sponsorship and donation of necessary materials such as T-shirts, Vests, magazines, books, journals, etc., have gone a long way in enlightening the whole society. The fight and struggle to protect women is a collective effort and responsibility of all and sundry.

There are organizations in the Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education today, which have taken it upon themselves to see that women are not marginalized. There are scholarship schemes, courtesy of some International Organizations such as The Ford Foundation, Carnegie Mellon Foundation, etc. which ensure that brilliant but under-privileged female students are given a chance to get a sound education. There are awareness programmes on our television stations and radio stations that see to the broadcasting of these vital processes day–to–day. With all these, coupled with the fact that even women now know their rights and are making substantial efforts in pushing themselves into the fore front and hence, the limelight, with men also in support. In short, there are evident changes amongst the Yoruba, both males and females.

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WOMEN, POWER AND LITERATURE
Negotiating Gender in Anglophone Cameroon Drama

Naomi NKEALAH

Introduction

Anglophone Cameroon writing in the last decade of the twentieth century is marked by radical and revolutionary sentiments, most visibly expressed through drama which has dominated the literary scene from 1990 more by its quality of vision than by its volume.[1] Writing about the impact Anglophone writers have made on drama in Cameroon, Nalova Lyonga stated in 1993 that from Bole Butake and Bate Besong to Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh and Victor Epie Ngome there exists a repertory of about ten plays which are shaped in the avant-garde mould – new, bold, a step ahead of the political process in Cameroon – and which embrace a new vision where women's influence is no longer curbed by warped, myopic and anachronistic views.[2] This change in vision is mirrored in dramatic productions in which women work in partnership with men to create better conditions for their peoples. Theatre for development has gradually taken root as writers and social workers recognize its effectiveness in educating people at the grassroots level. Owing to the patriarchal nature of many communities in Cameroon, only slight success has been achieved in campaigns to give women a voice in public deliberations. Using two plays, Bole Butake's *Lake God* and Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, this article will examine portraits of women in Anglophone Cameroon drama against the backdrop of contemporary initiatives geared towards gender equality. The focus will be on the various strategies employed by female characters to negotiate power in a male-dominated society.

Negotiating Power in a Gender-based Society: Women in Cameroon

In their introduction to *Challenging Hierarchies: Issues and Themes in Colonial and Postcolonial African Literature*, Leonard Podis and Yakubu Saaka[3] note that one overarching feature that connects much of postcolonial discourse and debate is the persistent challenge to pre-existing hierarchies. These critics identify women's rights as one of such hierarchies, noting that much of the significant contemporary literature is concerned with challenging not only colonially inspired domination of women but also traditional patriarchy, with its lingering effects in postcolonial societies. Gender discourse has thus become a major area of scholarly research in many disciplines, including literature, law, theology and political studies. In the field of literature, both writers and critics have challenged existing hierarchies that force women into obscurity.

African literature in particular has witnessed the emergence of women writers like Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), Mariama Bâ (Senegal), Rebeka Njau (Kenya), Nawal el-Saadawi (Egypt) and Sindiwe Magona (South Africa) who have not only succeeded in creating for themselves 'a space of power' by virtue of their literary accomplishments[4] but also made the unveiling of women's realities the central focus of their writing.

For decades, female representation in male writing remained chauvinist and stereotypical. In a doctoral thesis in which she analyzes selected texts by women in oral and written literature, Lyonga argues in her literature review that the female character in African literature was often portrayed for male ends: as a symbol to the male on the brink of cultural alienation and emasculation (Senghor); as a "paragon" of African traditions (Achebe, P'Bitek, Amadi); as an appendage to a male visionary whose role is, however, blotted out once she has served her function of producing "the strong breed" (Soyinka); and, not least significant, as a flat whore (Ekwensi)[5]. I would agree with Lyonga that the male writer's persistent portrayal of females in such conventional roles is what led to the woman writer's revolt to trace an alternative of the African woman. Sadly, women's writing was not often applauded in the world of criticism, which too was dominated by men. Odile Cazenave affirms that it was in response to the marginalization of women and women's literature by male critics that women writers began to portray typically marginalized female characters in a favourable light, thus creating 'a privileged gaze and a greater space from which to freely express criticism of their society'.[6]

This assertion holds true for Cameroon women's writing which seeks to secure this 'greater space' by depicting ordinary women in their day-to-day struggle with political and socio-economic pressures. However, while Francophone women writers like Calixthe Beyala and Werewere Liking have received international recognition for their works which have become the focus of scholarly research in many lands, the same cannot be said of Anglophone women writers, many of whom remain unknown outside their home environment[7]. At this stage, it would be too ambitious to speak of "Anglophone women's writing" as a category since the volume of works produced by Anglophone women is still very minute compared to that of male writers.

As with the case of Anglophone writing in general back in 1978, it is time for critics to begin to ask why there is a dearth of literary creativity among Anglophone women.[8] The obvious answer would be the inaccessibility of education to women under traditional and colonial structures of governance. After all, it is not without consequences for women's education that the first secondary school for boys, St. Joseph's College, Sasse, was established in 1939 while the first secondary school for girls, the Queen of Rosary College, Okoyong, follows only 18 years later, in 1957.[9] This not withstanding, it is disheartening to know that 50 years after education was made available to females many Anglophone women are still not courageous enough to write plays, novels or poetry collections and to get them published. This pushes one to look beyond women's late access to education by asking the fundamental question: why did the colonial administration privilege men's education over women's? Emmanuel Konde's book, *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-dominated Cameroon*, provides a starting point in resolving this issue, because it not only traces the roots of women's exclusion from political activity back to the discriminatory nature of colonial educational policies but also underscores the superiority/inferiority ideology that characterized relationships between men and women:

> The absence of women from the political structures of colonial Cameroon resulted from the fact that access to western education was opened to them very late. Colonial reforms introduced to benefit women were few, half-heartedly implemented, and slow in materializing. A major factor that contributed to this outcome was the strong opposition that emanated from the indigenous male community. Cameroonian men were strongly opposed to any reforms that would lead to achieving any semblance of equality between the sexes. The colonial state obliged to the men's wishes because it did not desire a confrontation with them.[10]

Konde's study shows that educational policies in colonial times favoured men since they received formal training through schools, while women were considered to be homemakers and, therefore, excluded from this system of knowledge dissemination. But his study gains greater significance when he notes that men were apathetic to the education of women, owing to patriarchal ideologies on women's place in society. Thus, the discriminatory educational policies of the British and French colonial administrations were backed by prevailing patriarchal beliefs denying women access to any form of power. In other words, women were prevented from gaining access to education and from acquiring the skills needed to engage in activities that were considered to be for men only, such as politics and writing.

While colonialism may have given way to political independence and independence in turn to educational opportunities for both men and women, patriarchy has dragged on into postcolonial times, posing a major barrier to women's access to power. According to a study conducted by Joyce Endeley in 1999, the concept of women's empowerment was still considered as western, foreign or imported by both men and women in many parts of Cameroon[11]. Endeley's research findings on the Moghamo and Bafaw societies foreground women's lack of economic empowerment as a result of their inability to own or control monetary assets:

> Women in Cameroon live in a predominantly patriarchal society in which their economic dependency on men is reinforced by discriminatory laws and policies in public institutions. For example, women lack equal marital and property rights with men. Most women lack control over property, including land, which leads to their inability to operate profitable businesses requiring collateral and to a lack of access to banking and financial institutions.[12]

Endeley thus shows that the success of the struggle for gender equality in Cameroon depends largely on the regulation of government laws on women's rights and the transformation of patriarchal cultures. Sadly, though, it has been several years down the line and only relative success has been recorded. Although women now feature in parliament and other top-ranking government positions, it is hardly time to celebrate the attainment of "gender equality" since the majority of women still suffer patriarchal oppression. In his recent article entitled 'Gender Equality – Whose Agenda? Observations from Cameroon', Rogers Tabe Egbe Orock makes this pertinent observation:

> Most Cameroonian women still experience significant job discrimination and restrictions on other opportunities, compared with men. This is either because it is assumed that men are more physically suited to certain jobs, or because of broader cultural restrictions. It certainly cannot be argued that the agenda of gender equality has penetrated the grassroots in the same way as has happened among "higher" or "bigger" professional women in Cameroon.[13]

While Orock does not dismiss the concept of gender equality as irrelevant to modern Cameroonian women, he argues that its agenda has been appropriated by urban "elite" women to further their own rise to power. The result is that gender activism has become nothing but a political slogan. With few government projects genuinely aimed at elevating the status of rural women, it can rightly be said that the gender equality initiative has changed little for women at the grassroots level who continue to bear the brunt of unequal gender power relations.

What then have rural women done to ameliorate their conditions and educate their men on the values of mutual respect between the sexes? Anne Tanyi-Tang carried out field research in the Mundemba sub-division (Anglophone region) in 1990 and reports that the women in this area resorted to theatre as one of the media through which they could draw the attention of their oppressors – notably men and government administrators – to the plight of women and articulate their views on political, economic and socio-cultural matters affecting women. As a researcher, Tanyi-Tang observed and participated in performances by the Fabe women of the Bima tribe and the Christian Women's Fellowship (CWF) of Mundemba Town. Her analysis of these two performances reveals that although cultural taboos prevent women in the Mundemba sub-division from expressing their opinions in the presence of men, they have used theatre performances to good effect in voicing their views in public spheres:

> The women in Mundemba Sub-Division have realised that the major problem some of the women face is financial dependency on their men. Because of their dependency, they perpetuate the ideology of female subordination. They have realised that they could be instrumental in challenging and transforming this ideology, and in order to achieve their ambition they have turned to theatre as one of the means. … The women were not asking for equality; rather, they wanted men to recognise women's potential and thus treat them like responsible human beings. … Men should believe in complementary roles. Men should understand that women have certain strengths and men have theirs. These complementary roles should merge for the benefit of a community.[14]

The use of popular theatre by women in rural areas is not peculiar to the women of Mundemba sub-division. Over the years, workshops have been organized to initiate theatre performers, development agents and village communities into the practice of theatre for conscientisation and mobilization[15]. As a playwright and gender activist, Tanyi-Tang has been involved in theatre for development projects aimed at raising awareness on women's potential to contribute to the development of their communities. The renowned playwright, Bole Butake, has also in recent years moved into theatre for development as a more effective way of reaching women in rural areas with messages on birth control, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and other matters affecting women's health in Cameroon. In an interview conducted with Butake on 7 January 2008 at the University of Yaoundé 1, I asked Butake the following two questions:

1. In your foreword to *Lake God and Other plays*, you state that your aim in writing is to 'further improve on the status of our womenfolk by awakening and empowering them in various spheres of life'. To what extent can you say you have achieved this goal?

2. To what extent can you say that theatre for development has succeeded in empowering women in Cameroon?

To both questions, Butake responded that he has achieved success to a greater extent as his efforts to educate rural women on their rights and abilities have yielded much fruit. Using the theatre for development approach, he has been able to conduct a series of workshops with women in the North West province of Cameroon. An example is the case of the Bororo women of Ndonga-Mantung division, who, as he noted, were initially very shy, but by the end of the first day of the workshop had overcome their inhibitions and mastered the art of improvisations.[16]

Applied theatre or theatre for development has thus been more effective in educating rural women on gender equality than any form of formal education. As Tsitsi Dangarembga shows in *Nervous Conditions*, women's acquisition of higher education does not necessarily translate into an acquisition of gender power, for patriarchal laws are so pervasive that they affect women of all classes, social status and educational background; the difference lies only in the degree and intensity of the oppression. Even as writers, Anglophone women have had to brave the tides of patriarchy in order to question society's construction of "woman" and woman's place therein. In response to the widespread consumption by Anglophone Cameroonians of Nigerian films depicting women as symbols of familial and social disintegration, Joyce Abunaw wrote a film entitled *Potent Secrets*, shot in Yaoundé in 2001, in which her intention was to critique female representation in Nigerian films by presenting the same 'familial issues from a woman's perspective'[17]. Abunaw confesses to a number of doubts and questions she had to come to terms with as she wrote the script for her film:

> What does writing from a woman's perspective mean? How significant are these issues I want to raise? Do they disturb the general peace? What if the director finds my concerns trivial? These doubts are real, and they will confront any serious-minded African woman who has been made to look at the realities of womanhood as trivial and too parochial to be of "national" interest. Thus confronted with writing "woman", there is always this anxiety laced with the fear of rejection in the African cultural market place. Despite the growing number of African women writers, writing one's self

> as subject is still like standing naked in front of the mirror with others watching. What you see, they see. Writing thus becomes an interpretation of one's self, a presentation of one's reflection from the self.[18]

Abunaw's experience not only shows the extent to which social mores inhibit women's creativity but also underscores the courage needed to overcome such cultural barriers to women's emancipation.

That Anglophone women need extreme courage to reject popular opinions that propagate conformity to established patterns of acceptable social behaviour is not an overstatement. Asheri Kilo[19] affirms that social taboos inhibit women's participation in theatre and women have had to work hard to overcome their fears and become more involved in public activities designed to improve their status:

> The most fertile of such taboos lingered for a long time on sex and also on female related issues. It was taboo for a decent woman to expose herself through acting. This reduced female participation in the theatre in the early sixties. Also the kind of roles attributed to female characters in the plays made women shy away from performances because actresses suffered prejudice from society, which could hardly differentiate role-playing from reality. Today, women have become aware of the irrelevance of these taboos and societal opinion and are playing quite challenging roles in performances. Today, married women make some of the best performers in some theatre companies such as *The Flame Players*.

As a lecturer of drama and theatre arts, Kilo has written and directed several plays at the University of Yaoundé and later at the University of Buea and, therefore, her assessment of the factors responsible for women's reservation to participate in theatre performances can justifiably be accepted as well-founded. As shown above, it all boils down to social values informed by patriarchal norms. The good news is that women are gradually overcoming their inhibitions and taking a more active part in the creative arts, as Kilo notes. Butake's experience with the Bororo women of the Ndonga-Mantung division provides evidence of this forward movement.[20] This changing role of women in written literature and dramatic and oral performances calls for increased scholarly research on Anglophone writing. But although there has been a number of critical works on the evolution of the literature, the question of female representation has not received adequate attention.

In an article entitled 'Women's Role in Democratic Change in Cameroon', Roselyn Jua argues that although women have been actively involved in the quest for true democracy in Cameroon their contributions often go unacknowledged in the literature, for 'they remain forever in the background, hazy characters who furtively appear and then disappear without any worthwhile mention'.[21] The contribution of traditional women's groups to political change in Cameroon is only one avenue of women's activities that has largely been ignored in literary writing. Jua notes the militancy of the Anlu of Kom in 1958 and the Ta'kembeng of Bamenda in 1992, showing the extent to which these two women's societies changed the political history of Anglophone Cameroon. Bertha Sume Epie-Eyoh points to these women's actions during the 1992 State of Emergency as part of the historical evidence that women have been the backbone of many political marches in support of democracy or in demonstrations against repression.[22] The role of women's societies in Anglophone Cameroon, especially in the Grassfield region, is one that cannot be undermined. In an anthropological study of women in Nso, Miriam Goheen found that women support men's investments outside the domestic sphere by assuming responsibility for food production, provisioning the household, and producing children – who form the basis of symbolic and material wealth.[23] Thus, one expects Anglophone writing to capture women's strengths in traditional society as much as it seeks to impress the Anglophone identity on its readers.

It is in an attempt to acknowledge women's contributions to political and socio-economic development that Anglophone writers have begun to write plays and novels in which women not only feature prominently but also function as agents of change.[24] In the foreword to *Lake God and Other Plays*, Butake states that his aim in writing is to 'further improve on the status of our womenfolk by awakening and empowering them in various spheres of life'. Like Butake, Besong has challenged established patterns of female representation by creating exceptionally strong female characters. In his play *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, the major female character, simply called "Woman", emerges as an educator of the downtrodden masses, a revolutionary leader, and a combatant of foreign exploitation.[25] These two playwrights are outstanding in their projection of female characters as empowered human beings. In both *Lake God* and *Requiem*, one finds a male perspective that is progressive and refreshing, for these writers challenge social constructions of femininity in radically conceived ways not so evident in many other works published between 1985 and 1999.

A comparative analysis of these two works would reveal a new vision in which women become the initiators of change. Both Butake and Besong seem to be reconstructing history along gender-neutral lines, for the concept of gender power appears to be subsumed within the bigger framework of communal interests. By gender power, I mean simply the power acquired on the basis of one's being socially defined as either male or female. Thus, within this social construct, the exercise of power in the public space is the preserve of men, whereas women remain confined to the domestic or private space. How then do women negotiate power in the gender-based societies depicted in Butake and Besong's plays? In Butake's play, the women use their bodies as a site of resistance against male complacency, while Woman in Besong's play uses her knowledge of the evils of the ruling government to form a political movement against it.

'Knowledge is Power': Portraits of Women in Bole Butake's *Lake God* and Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*

Bole Butake is one of the first writers to recognize the need for Anglophone writing to mirror women's contribution to social development. In several of his plays, Butake presents female characters who take firm action to effect meaningful change in their societies.[26] In *Lake God* (1986), for example, the fight against foreign encroachment is a fight championed by women. Set in a village and built around a historical event – the Lake Nyos disaster of 1986 – the play dramatizes the anger of the lake god who has been neglected by a traditional ruler.[27] The Fon, the highest authority in the land, has converted t Christianity and now refuses to perform the usual sacrifices due to the god of the lake. The *Kwifon*, the men's secret cult, cannot take any action against the Fon as it has been banned for its activities. Attributing the Fon's stubbornness to the influential presence of the Christian missionary Father Leo, and the Fulani cattle rearer Dewa, the Fibuen, the women's secret cult, decides to take action to rid their land of these two. Its members meet and administer the oath of sealed lips by which they decide to deny their men their food and their sexual intimacy, but without revealing to them the reason for their actions. Eventually the men get to understand the reason for the women's "strange" behaviour and resolve to act accordingly. After consulting with Shey Bo-Nyo, the high priest of the lake god, they re-establish the *Kwifon*. Kwifon invades the Fon's palace and gives the Fon an ultimatum to lead the village in the much-needed sacrifices or else incur the wrath of the lake god. The Fon stalls and *Kwifon* is forced to drag him out of the palace, but before the sacrifices are performed there is an explosion in the lake. Five persons survive the explosion and are seen lamenting their loss in the final scene. In this play, Butake strives to depict his female characters as essential spokes on the wheel of change. Traditional society is presented not as one in which women are excluded from active participation but as one in which both men and women play a role in effecting change.

Like Butake, Bate Besong's writing focuses primarily on the struggles of the oppressed in a corrupt political environment. As part of the marginalized in society, therefore, women tend to play prominent roles in Besong's plays. More significantly, they often emerge as revolutionary leaders, armed with the power to enlighten the ruled on the vices of their rulers. This is the kind of image Besong presents in *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, a play depicting the overthrow of an unpopular regime by the oppressed masses. Just as Butake does with the Fibuen in *Lake God*, Besong places a female character at the forefront of a struggle against authoritarian rule. Woman inflorms Student of the ills of the ruling minority and advises him to join the progressive forces in ousting the corrupt regime of Akhikikrikii. Student acquiesces and together with Woman, Poet as Mandela, the soldiers, the workers, the market women and the unemployed academics (Akonchong and Gambari), they storm the presidential palace demanding Akhikikrikii's head. Seeing the tenseness of the situation, Akhikikrikii's supporters abandon him, and he is forced to commit suicide as a way of escaping the people's wrath.

In a society where gender equality is still considered a western concept even by women in urban areas, it can be said that these two writers have taken a bold step to represent women in a manner that is less demeaning, less stereotypical, and less conventional than it was done by some early writers such as Mbella Sonne Dikopo and Sankie Maimo.[28] Butake does not adopt the women-above-everything-else approach; rather, he believes in men and women working together in partnership. We see in his plays a writer who is conscious of the prejudices surrounding women's role in his society and yet he chooses to address those very issues, albeit using a conciliatory approach – women initiate a process of change and allow the men to see that change is indeed effected. Both Butake and Besong present in their plays fictional worlds in which women become agents of change, a factor which gains significance when one remembers that the Cameroonian society is deeply patriarchal and thus the exercise of power is inherently a male prerogative. These two writers seem to have turned the tables of patriarchy to the effect that gender becomes a socially-constructed phenomenon wherein the line between "male" and "female" can always be neutralized. With this point in mind, we shall now look at the role played by women in two plays, Butake's *Lake God* and Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, and analyse the significance of the role of women as political activists and as protectors of land.

Women as Political Activists

In Bate Besong's *Requiem*, we see the exploited and oppressed masses revolting against an unpopular regime. This revolt begins with an awareness-raising campaign spearheaded by the female character Woman. The play opens with Woman responding to Student's complaint about the arbitrary imprisonment of people who refuse to conform to the system. She tells Student that 'in a country where the rulers have betrayed the ideals of their people to benefit themselves, prison can only be the throne of honour' (3). She helps Student to understand that injustice and oppression are central to Akhikikrikii's rulership, and that Student can only avenge his comrades' death by fighting against 'the enemy within, whose stomachs are made of coded accounts, the sweat and blood of workers' (3). Student is thus able to see that the enemies of the people are not only the westerners, the Ambassador and Swiss Banker, but also the indigenous ruling minority made up of Akhikikrikii, Holy Prophet Atangana and Etat Major Andze Abossollo.

The role of women in this play is significant because it is the means by which the writer achieves conscientisation. We have to remember that *Requiem* is a play of conscientisation and revolution, as the subtitle indicates. By conscientisation here, we mean the "educating" of the downtrodden in society to the extent that they develop a heightened sense of critical consciousness. In other words, they become aware of important political and social issues that affect their well-being and this awareness moves them to take action against the perpetuators of their suffering. This is exactly what happens in the fictional world of *Requiem*. The role of Woman in consciousness-raising is evident right from the beginning of the play when she speaks to Student about the injustices of Akhikikrikii's government. Her thought-provoking words and "factual" accounts of injustice open the boy's eyes to the realities around him. He realises that 'the enemies of the people are those who institute mass famine to create new overdrafts for the already rich …, a vile class determined to oppress and wreck the land' (4). These words indicate that he has attained that height of political consciousness necessary for revolutionary action. He is now ready to confront his oppressors: 'We must break the chains that hold us in bondage!' (4).

Woman seeks redress for the unfairness of the corrupt government in power by not only enlightening Student on the ills of that government but also by persuading the soldiers to see the futility of defending a government that is already doomed for destruction because of its corrupt practices. She appeals to the soldiers' nationalistic spirit, telling them that 'by standing aloof from the struggle [they] squelch the seed of the struggle' (46). In this way, she succeeds in getting the soldiers to join the revolutionary forces.

Besong in this play shows that revolution begins with conscientisation – raising awareness among people – and he not only uses Woman to fulfil this role of consciousness-raising but also places her at the forefront of the revolution itself. If we agree that raising awareness involves imparting knowledge on to others, then we will accept that Woman in this play creates an environment in which Michel Foucault's concept of power and knowledge becomes a truism. The power/knowledge binary is the heartbeat of Foucault's writing, for it has been argued that a central hypothesis of the genealogical explanation of phenomena in terms of will-to-power is that 'knowledge is power'.[29] David Hoy explains that for Foucault

> the "is" connecting knowledge and power does not indicate that the relation of knowledge and power is one of predication such that knowledge leads to power. Rather, the relation is such that knowledge is not gained prior to and independently of the use to which it will be put in order to achieve power (whether over nature or over other people), but is already a function of human interests and power relations.[30]

This suggests that the acquisition of knowledge necessitates the exercise of power while, on the other hand, the exercise of power has as a prerequisite the acquisition of knowledge. Put in the context of Besong's play, this power/knowledge complementarity is played out when, after being schooled by Woman, both Student and the soldiers decide to join the unemployed academics and market women in a move towards the overthrow of their corrupt leader. We can say that their will to act was dependent on the acquisition of knowledge about the corruption inherent in Akhikikrikii's government, and once that knowledge was acquired, the revolution became an automatic move. Thus, it is Woman, through her role as a political activist, who sets the stage for the revolution. This female character becomes the symbol of a people's salvation; she is the central piece that propels the actions of the play.

Woman's role in raising awareness is also evident in Butake's *Lake God* when the Fibuen (the women's secret cult) decides to take decisive action, after the Kwifon (the men's secret cult) had failed to react to the urgency of getting the Fon to sacrifice to the lake god. Addressing the women assembled at the village square, Yensi emphasizes the need for unity of action and oneness of purpose: 'We must be one person to succeed in our present undertaking. We must be one woman' (24).[6] To coerce their men into revolting against the authoritarian Fon, the women decide to starve them physically and sexually, the success of which decision depends entirely on their determination and solidarity. This plan of action proves effective in awakening the men's consciousness when eventually a group of men, in consultation with the chief priest of the lake god, decide to reinstate the Kwifon, which then proceeds to take the necessary action against the Fon.

It is important to state that in a traditional society such as the one Butake presents in *Lake God*, political matters are dealt with in meetings involving men only. Women's power is limited to the domestic setting – the kitchen and the bedroom. In the play, however, we see a traditional society in which a ruler's dictatorial policies have robbed men of their power to summon meetings and deliberate on issues affecting them. When the play opens, we learn that the Kwifon has been outlawed, and thus its members have become 'impotent men'[31] since they are incapable of functioning as a productive political unit. In this situation, the women use the power they possess within the domestic space to negotiate entrance into the male world of decision-making. By withholding their bodies and their food from the men, they in effect take control over the affairs of the land. They become, in symbolic terms, the men of the land. Thus, not only is the male/female separation line neutralized, but, in fact, the display of gender power is reversed. It is only towards the end of the play that we again see the men regaining their potency, but of course at this stage the lake god has run out of patience and disaster is inevitable.

Women as Protectors of Land

From pre-colonial to post-colonial times, land has been a major source of conflict between people of different families, tribes and nations. A brief glance at Cameroon history takes one back to the Douala land problem of 1902-1913, a situation provoked by the German attempt to expropriate Douala land and re-sell to whites at higher prices.[32] The prominence of land as a motif in literary writing is reflected in many literatures of Africa. In East African literature, for example, the land theme is a major concern, especially in the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o who, in *The River Between*, *Petals of Blood* and *I Will Marry When I Want*, not only addresses the complexities surrounding land ownership but also highlights the Kenyan's attachment to this natural resource. In both *Lake God* and *Requiem*, we see how women become protectors not just of cultivable land but of the motherland as a whole.

In *Lake God*, Butake shows that farmland constitutes the axis around which the rural woman's world rotates, particularly because her family depends largely on its produce for sustenance. It is no coincidence that the women in this play take extreme measures to protect their land from ruination. The Fulani cattle rearer, Dewa, poses a threat to these women not only because he owns a good deal of cultivable land but also because his cattle destroy their crops. The Fon sells land to Dewa and in return 'part of Dewa's herd belongs to the Fon' (28). Because Dewa represents capitalist exploitation, the women decide that he must leave the land. However, Fon Joseph cannot order Dewa's eviction because he is in partnership with him. Neither can the Kwifon take action against Dewa, having been banned by the Fon. Faced with a corrupt ruler and a group of powerless men, the women decide to act. Thus, there is a case of power struggle in which Dewa and the Fon are pitted against the women, while their husbands remain invisible at this stage of the conflict. The Fibuen becomes the decision-making body in the land and we see it in motion when the women embark on "operation starvation". This is a strategic move to awaken the men to their plight. Maimo, for example, is denied his usual bowl of foo-foo, a meal made out of maize flour, the same maize (corn) that Dewa's cattle has destroyed in Ngangba. This deprivation makes him so angry that he slaps his wife. His report of the incidence to his friends provokes a discussion about what needs to be done to remedy the situation:

> Maimo: … My wife wiped the tears from her face, looked straight into mine and said in a cold voice that if I really wanted to eat foo-foo, I should go to Ngangba and make the cattle leave the land instead of beating up a defenceless woman who has been fighting all her life to feed her husband and the children. …
> Fisiy: That is a heavy story. It shows that the women are determined.
> Forgwei: What is to be done?
> Lagham: Good question. What can we do to expel the cattle people and their cattle; especially as our Fon and our people are also cattle owners? It is clear that until the cattle leave the land, no adult male is going to eat properly or sleep with a woman. (30)

This discussion reveals that the men acknowledge the urgency of finding a solution to the problem at hand. It is clear that if the women are going to extremes to protect their farmland, it is because their families depend entirely on the products of the land for sustenance. Their choice of action is no doubt informed by the knowledge that the men cannot survive for long without physical food and sexual intimacy. This knowledge becomes a power tool in their hands as they use it to wield control over the menfolk. As Lagham confesses, unless they expel the cattle rearers from the land 'no adult male is going to eat properly or sleep with a woman' (30). The men are thus forced to meet the women's demands, and, in effect, gender power becomes a negotiable asset.

Like the character Yensi in Butake's play, Woman in *Requiem* is the figurative mother hen ready to protect her chicks from the destructive claws of predators. In her discussion with Student, she lashes out at those who exploit the country's resources for their own selfish gain, who 'decree famine for the peasants' (9) by misusing and misappropriating the revenue derived from the country's natural resources. When the revolutionary forces finally confront the presidency, Akhikikrikii tries to exonerate himself of corruption by stating that 'it was the French and the corrupt civil servants [he] appointed into government who embezzled Sonara money' (59). This, however, fails to convince the people who are determined to make him answer for his misdeeds. It is obvious that his alliance with the Swiss Banker and the Ambassador involves the siphoning of state funds into his personal bank accounts, which is why he becomes their major target when they attack his palace. The play ends with Akhikikrikii committing suicide, possibly overwhelmed by his sins. In a symbolic sense, the country regains peace and tranquillity, and the final words of the play 'DAWN! MUSIC!' signifies a new era of better governance. Thus, woman in this play moves beyond her role as a protector of farmland to embrace a much bigger, significant role as a defender of the motherland.

Conclusion

The portrayal of female characters as agents of change in the two plays discussed above indicates that Anglophone Cameroon drama is not unsympathetic to matters of great importance to women, such as their involvement in politics. The writers' vision, although utopian to a larger extent, is challenging in its conceptualisation. It compels the reader to see the Cameroonian society in its potential to move beyond its enslavement to patriarchy and embrace new forms of male/female relationships in which gender power struggles are replaced by meaningful partnerships based on common goals. We can only hope that this trend will continue in Anglophone writing and that its readers will get the message.

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Notes

[1] Lyonga, p. 175.

[2] Lyonga, p. 175.

[3] Podis and Saaka, p. 1.

[4] Podis and Saaka, p. 4.

[5] Lyonga, p. 58.

[6] Cazenave, p. 10.

[7] While a woman writer such as Makuchi (Juliana Nfah Abbenyi) is internationally recognised, albeit mainly for her critical writing, others such as Anne Tanyi-Tang, Eunice Ngongkum and Ngoh Agnes Nzuh who live and work in Cameroon are less known in the international world of criticism.

[8] In an article entitled "Literary Creativity in Anglophone Cameroon", Curtis Keim and Karen Keim (1982) provide a synopsis of several articles written by Anglophones in which they attempt to identify the factor responsible for the dearth of literary creativity in Anglophone Cameroon. They go on to outline a series of debates that followed the publication of Patrick Sam-Kubam's article "The Paucity of Literary Creativity in Literary Cameroon in *ABBIA* 31-33 (Feb.1978, pp. 205-208). The debate involved spontaneous writing in which educators, journalists, university students, government administrators and creative writers put forward their arguments and counter-arguments using several media, including scholarly journals and local newspapers such as the *Cameroon Tribune* and the *Cameroon Outlook*. Among the factors that came out of the debate as being responsible for the comparatively low level of literary output in Anglophone Cameroon were the British colonial system which invested little in education (argument by Bernard Fonlon), the limited access of Anglophones to publishing houses (view of Sankie Maimo), and the poor standard of English owing to the linguistic interference from French and Pidgin English (opinion of Richard Ngwa-Nyamboli). According to Keim and Keim (p. 220), the significance of this debate lies not only in the ideas it set forth but also in the degree of self-consciousness and self-evaluation it created.

[9] Gwei, p. 33.

[10] Konde, p. 3.

[11] Endeley, 2001, p. 34.

[12] Endeley, 2001, p. 34-35

[13] Orock, p. 95

[14] Tanyi-Tang, p. 35.

[15] see Eyoh, Hansel Ndumbe, 1986.

[16] Personal interview with Butake: 7 January 2008, University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon.

[17] Abunaw, p. 44.
[18] Abunaw, p. 47.
[19] Aheri-Kilo, p. 114.
[20] MBororo women are generally very shy and conservative.
[21] Jua, p. 180.
[22] Epie-Eyoh, p. 185, especially her detailed discussion on the activities of the Anlu and Ta'kembang is noteworthy.
[23] Goheen, p. 8.
[24] This research focused mainly on works published between 1990 and 1999. Between 1999 and 2007, there have been many more Anglophone writers who have made great efforts to address the issue of female empowerment in their writing. Of particular significance is the emergence of female writers such as Anne Tanyi-Tang and Makuchi whose works are invaluable additions to feminist literature in Cameroon.
[25] Nkealah, p. 18.
[26] see Ngwang
[27] On 22 August 1986, an unfortunate incident in Lake Nyos, one of the great lakes in the North West Province of Cameroon, left thousands of people and cattle dead. Survivors of the Nyos desaster reported that on that fateful day the lake turned a bright orange colour and emitted a gas that smelled like rotten eggs. It was this gas that killed most of the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, both human and animal. Scrientific research into the causes of the Nyos disaster later revealed that the killer gas could have been carbondioxide that had accumulated at the bottom of the lake over the years.
[28] In Dikopo's novel *Because of Women* (1968), the lead female character, Ewudu, is portrayed as a prostitute, one whose sexual activity threatens the stability of society. Maimo's *Succession in Sarkov* (1986) is about a succession crisis in a village, and the women characters in the play are mainly mouthpieces for tradition.
[29] Hoy, p. 129.
[30] Hoy, p. 129.
[31] phrase from Odhiambo
[32] see Eyongetah & Brain, p. 75.

THE VOICES OF SILENCE
Women Playwrights in Egypt

Nehad SELAIHA

1. In the Beginning was the Body

Reading through the history of theatre, one is immediately struck by the total silence of women's voices in the classical traditions. In classical Japanese drama, men usurped the roles of women, and still do in Noh and Kabuki plays. In classical Greece and Rome, the story was the same; women, who were allowed few economic and legal rights, were denied access to the stage and forbidden to attend performances. The ban also covered slaves!

The only females who could perform in public were the street mimes and dancers whose art was, by definition, a silent one; they spoke in the only medium their patriarchal culture allowed them - the language of the body. The fact that they were also slaves explains why sometimes they had to sell their sexual favors together with their art. In a society which regarded the female body as property and exchangeable economic commodity, this was, perhaps, inevitable; it explains the label "actress-courtesans" which is attached to those early pioneers in many theatre histories; sadly the association of the two professions still persists in some societies.

Christianity did little to improve the situation for female artists in Europe. If anything, it virtually put a stop to all theatrical activities. Curiously, however, it was from the folds of the church that the first known woman playwright emerged. In the mid-tenth century, when there was virtually no theatre in western Europe, a nun of the Holy Roman Empire wrote six dramatic texts in her convent in Gandersheim (in what is known now as Germany). Fittingly, she adopted the name Hrotsvit, which means "strong voice"; she had broken the silence of centuries.

Hrotsvit's plays were a brave attempt to challenge the images of women inherited from classical drama. However, since they were never performed (except perhaps within the confines of her own convent), they had little impact. Her voice is like a clap of thunder that helps only to intensify our sense of the silence that oppressed women centuries before she spoke, and was to continue for seven more centuries afterwards.

When theatre made a comeback in the renaissance, women found themselves once more excluded form the stage and their roles, including the great Shakespearean ones expropriated by males in drag; imagine Cleopatra played by a boy! When women were finally admitted into the male province of theatre as actresses and writers, they were either treated in the classical fashion as actress-courtesans, or arranged for immorality and accused of plagiarism. Many of them found it expedient to conform to the dominant cultural codes and, indirectly, helped to enforce the inherited images and gender-specific social roles. Nevertheless, the 17th century was a definite watershed in the history of women and theatre in the west. They broke the masculine monopoly on the spoken word on stage and there was no stopping their voices afterwards.

At this point, the reader may wonder why an article about women playwrights in Egypt should take for its starting point the fortunes of their sisters in the west. The answer is simply that whenever a patriarchal system obtains, women, whatever their country or religion, invariably end up in the same boat. The history of theatre in Egypt may be considerably longer or shorter than in the west, depending on one's position in the controversy over the meaning of the word. But whether we go along with E. Drioton's claim that theatre was known and practiced in ancient Egypt, or maintain with his opponents that it was not known until the 19th century, one fact remains clear: in either case, the written text remained for long the property of men and it was often inscribed on women's bodies and voices.

Compared to later periods, the lot of women in ancient Egypt was an enviable one. As wives, they were treated with courtesy, allowed to share the husband's tomb as well as his bed, and to accompany him not only on his fishing trips and outings, but also on official occasions, such as receiving a gift from the Pharaoh. Nevertheless, they seldom ruled, rarely became priestesses, were privately educated, if at all, never became scribes or held public offices.

Very little, however, is known about the social status and way of life of the females who took part in the religious rituals or other public performances. One assumes that those chosen to impersonate the goddesses Isis and Nephtis were treated with respect. But what about the other female dancers, singers and performers who entertained on other occasions, private or public?

The essentially patriarchal nature of ancient Egyptian society persisted into the subsequent Graeco-Roman and Christian eras, growing harsher and more intolerant towards women. As Eve replaced Isis, the female body became irredeemably the site of sin and women were taught to distrust their own voices, even in private. For centuries afterwards, written language and the public arena were to remain, almost exclusively, male.

Islam gave women many rights and privileges but stopped short of abolishing slavery or advocating the complete equality of the sexes. It could not, therefore, erode the many prejudices against women in the cultures it subsumed under its banner. Consequently, in Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo or Cordova, or any Islamic city, women continued to be confined to the same roles they had played earlier in Greece and Rome.

Dancers and singers

Entertaining the master, his wives, and his male guests at banquets was one of those roles. Indeed, the female slave-entertainer forms a permanent feature of the "harem" in any Islamic period, and the entertainment was by no means exclusively artistic. Like their sisters in Classical Greece and Rome, those women spoke in the language of the body, addressing the senses as dancers and singers, and were valued as much for their sex appeal as for their art.

Away from the harems, in the streets and market-places, we find an Egyptian equivalent for the old Roman female mimes and dancers. In his *Modern Egyptians,* Edward Lane, writing in the early 19th century, speaks of "the Ghawazi" and other dancing-girls who "perform, unveiled, in the public streets, even to amuse the rabble".

Dr. Magda Saleh has made "The Ghawazi of Egypt" the subject of a stimulating "Report" which she published in the Egyptian quarterly *Folklore* in 1987. The Report makes several interesting points; but the one that most concerns us here is that as early as the 16th century, and possibly a lot earlier than that, a tradition of public female performance existed, relying heavily on body language. It existed, it must be remembered, despite Islam's hostility to the public display of the female body and voice, and at least two centuries before Egypt became familiar with the European theatre.

The insights Dr. Saleh provides into the life-style of those women and their social status further corroborates their similarity to the earlier "actress-courtesans" of Greece and Rome. They were regarded as a moral menace, and their activities were sometimes banned. On one occasion, at least, they were exiled to Upper Egypt. Nevertheless, some of them "possessed considerable wealth" and they could “in the case of repentance”, to quote Edward Lane, marry “a respectable Arab.”

The same choice was open to the actress-courtesans in the Roman Empire in the 6th century, thanks to the charms of the famous mime and dancer Theodora. In *Feminism and Theatre,* Sue-Ellen Case tells the story of Emperor Justinian’s infatuation with the erotic dancer and his wish to marry her.

“However, the law decreed that actress-courtesans could not become Roman citizens and thus could not become the legal wives of citizens. Justinian’s desire, along with the new Christian concepts of repentance and salvation, produced the edict of 521 AD which declared that actress-courtesans could repent, renounce their profession and become the legal wives of Roman citizens.”

Like the Roman citizen in the 6th century, the “respectable Arab” in the 19th could marry a public dancer without, as Lane points out, becoming “generally considered as disgraced by such a connection”.

In both cases, too, respectability entailed the suppression of the performer’s artistic talents and her withdrawal from public life. And, indeed, the connection between female respectability and public muteness and invisibility lingers to this very day. Recently, the number of Egyptian actresses who have “repented”, renounced the profession and worn the veil has reached ten - a significant and mind-boggling fact!

When theatre arrived in Egypt from the West in the 19th century, the image of the actress-courtesan was one of its trappings. Initially, many productions were amateur and exclusively male. But as theatre became professional and commercial, directors and managers began to look around for women willing to act. They could only find them on the fringe of society, in minority groups, among expatriates, or in the economic lower depths.

One of the earliest pioneers in this direction was Ya’coob Sannu’ who is regarded by many as the real founder of the Egyptian theatre. For his professional company, which lasted only two years, 1871-72, he hired two Jewish girls and undertook their training; both were illiterate. Milia Dayan and her sister were soon followed by others, and by the turn of the century, the phenomenon of the actress and actress-singer had become familiar.

The following thirty years saw a substantial rise in the number of Muslim actresses, some of whom possessed considerable talent. The fortunate ones se-cured a degree of social respectability by marrying into the profession or working in prestigious companies. Fatma Rush-di, who liked to be called "the Sarah Bernhardt of the east", did both. She married director and dramaturg Aziz Eid, and together they set up their own company in 1927. Behind the project was the couple's desire for more artistic freedom, but they soon ran into financial trouble.

They had pawned some of their furniture to start the company but more funds were needed. Miss Rushdi soon found a reliable friend and sponsor in a Jewish businessman by the name of Eli Adrui. The story of the friendship is recorded in her memoirs published under the title *Kifahi* (my struggle). The friendship cost Miss Rushdi her marriage; she was divorced in 1928. The company, however, survived for seven years and the ex-husband continued to manage it and direct Miss Rushdi in her famous classical roles. The moral of the story is obvious.

The ghost of the actress-courtesan was a difficult one to exorcise, and it contributed not a little to the general view of theatre as a frivolous and dissolute profession. Even men, sometimes, were actively discouraged from pursuing it: Yusuf Wahbi's father publicly disowned him when he took up acting, and Tawfiq El-Hakim was summarily packed off to France when he showed a predilection for dramatic writing. Both resisted and went on to become leading figures in their respective fields. But it was a battle few women were qualified to wage.

In such an atmosphere, and given the general antipathy to female self-expression and the many social conventions governing it, no woman playwright could be expected to emerge. For the woman playwright and director to be born, a radical change in the attitude to women and theatre was needed, and this did not come about, if at all, until the sixties, and for a very brief period.

That was the period when the government embraced the theatre and used it as an active weapon for propaganda and for social and ideological change. Since then, twelve women are known to have written at least one play, but only six of them have managed to get one work or more performed on the stage. It seems that women playwrights in Egypt still have a long way to go, even though they have finally broken their silence.

2. To Speak or Not to Speak

The list of women playwrights in Egypt is depressingly short. When you have counted in everybody, including the one-timers and those who never made it to the stage, and even if you add for a bonus Amina El-Sawi who adapted some novels in the sixties, the number does not exceed eleven.

Compared to other Arab countries, however, Egypt does not seem to have done too badly in the space of forty years. Besides, if we were to expand our theme and make it “women dramatists in Egypt”, we will find that at least six women have tried their hand at television drama. My business here, however, is with women who specifically wrote with the stage in mind.

The first of those was Sofi Abdallah whose *Sweepstake* was performed in 1951-52. The play, which is not available in either manuscript or print, was a social drama about the trials and tribulations of the poorer classes. Theatre historian Samir Awad remembers it as faintly reminiscent of Gorki’s *Lower Depths,* and as technically unimpressive. There was nothing fresh or challenging about it in either stagecraft or point of view, he declares; it seems also to have had its fair share of sentimental morality, according to him..

The faults of the play may have been many, but they are the kind that one frequently comes across in first attempts even by men. Criticism, however, traditionally a masculine domain, tends to be particularly niggly and inordinately censorious when it comes to women. As early as the 17th century, Aphra Benn noted with bitterness this sad fact of literary life. It is a pity that Sofi Abdallah, the first Egyptian woman playwright, did not possess the stamina of her British counterpart. She never wrote another play and for years afterwards *Sweepstake* remained an oddity.

Sofi’s example, however, together with the progressive ideas of the period, inspired other women to repeat the attempt. Saniya Qura’a followed with a group of historical plays. They received little critical notice and their theatrical viability was never tested in performance. Though published, all copies of the book seem to have evaporated; I am still trying to locate one. In the same boat with Qura’a’s unstaged, vanished texts are the plays of Nadia Abdul Hamid, which were published in the sixties. At the moment, no real appreciation of the merit of either writer can be made.

Next, we meet Amina El-Sawi, busy adapting novels for the stage, including Naguib Mahfouz’s *Midaq Alley.* El-Sawi, however, soon deserted the stage; she wore the veil, called herself an “Islamic writer” and devoted her energies to TV. serialized religious drama. For the next burst of female dramatic activity we have to wait a number of years. And, indeed, it is at once a curious and sobering fact that the decade renowned as the golden age of the Egyptian theatre should have produced no female directors and only two original plays by women.

In 1968, the avant-garde branch of the National staged Layla Abdul Baset's one-act *Papers, Papers!* It was to be the beginning of a long and arduous struggle to build up a career as a playwright and win recognition. Unexpectedly, Abdul Baset's marriage to director Abdul Ghaffar Ouda did not make it any easier for her. She was silent throughout the seventies, and her total output to date remains very meager. Apart from some television work and a couple of adaptations of foreign plays, she has written only four plays, three of which are in one act, and two are monodramas.

The only other woman writer to make it to the stage in the sixties was Fataheya El-Assal. Hussein Gom'a directed her *Swing* for the Alexandria National in 1969 and *The Passport* followed in 1972 at the Gomhuriyya theatre. In the eighties, she produced two more plays; *Women Without Masks* was presented at El-Salam theatre, but not before the censor had axed the "women" from the title; *Betwixt and Between,* however failed to get a sponsor and eventually appeared in book-form. Currently, El-Assal is fighting hard to give her latest play, *Women's Prison,* a viewing chance.

With five full-length theatre pieces, countless radio plays, twenty T.V. plays and 22 T.V. drama serials, Miss El-Assal is by far the most prolific woman dramatist in Egypt and the Arab world. She is the only woman too who has made writing her sole profession and source of income. This appears all the more striking when we consider her beginnings. Indeed, she can be said to have had the most inauspicious childhood possible for a future writer.

Born into a family which believed that girls should be kept at home and ignorant, and rigorously coached in the rituals of female obedience, El-Assal never went to school and was denied a home education. Fortunately, she married journalist and would-be-novelist Ab-dallah El-Tookhi. Not only did he help her teach herself to read and write, but also coached her in left-wing politics and Marxist philosophy. At the first signs of her literary talent, he encouraged her to write and introduced her in the right circles. Understandably, El-Assal has little patience with the brand of feminism that regards man as the arch enemy.

"I have no quarrel with men," she asserts. "If anything, I am a man-lover," she adds laughing. "My quarrel is with capitalism and the patriarchal ideology and systems it has spawned," she goes on; "these are the forces that oppress both men and women.” About the traditional images of women and the gender-specific division of social roles, she says: “some roles are imposed by nature, like child-bearing. I do not mind those, so long as they do not exclude other possible roles. I bore four children myself and enjoyed it. But I also enjoy writing. I would resent it very much if someone tried to stop me writing. But I would resent it equally if someone tried to stop me having children or looking feminine.”

Not infrequently, El-Assal’s moderate views have made her unpopular with the radical feminists. “The feeling is mutual,” she confesses. The first time she went to a Marxist meeting she was greeted with a lot of harsh criticism from her female comrades. “ I was all dolled up and they were all in jeans and men’s shirts, with their sleeves rolled up. I told them I was quite willing for my mind to be improved, but will not have my body tampered with”. These women, she maintains, are as bad as the Islamic fundamentalists who urge women to obliterate their femininity by wearing the veil. “I fully support the equality of the sexes”, she says, “but I also recognize their difference”.

Freedom of the mind

In El-Assal’s thought and writing, the freedom of the body is deeply linked with the freedom of the mind. The historical confinement of the female body to the home has been, in her view, the main cause of women’s intellectual backwardness. “Denied education, social mobility and access to public life, how can women hope to develop their minds, or become artists or scientists?!” she exclaims.In such circumstances, any kind of creative writing becomes difficult, and writing plays becomes well-nigh impossible.

A woman, she explains, can weave novels out of her simple and limited daily experience. Theatre, however, is a communal art and a public forum; it tackles broader issues and requires a public type of discourse, more comprehensive, dialectical, and politically conscious -- in other words, the type of discourse women are rarely trained into. Besides, very few women can write good plays without seeing some first; how else could they learn the craft? In most Arab countries, however, including Egypt, theatre-going is still regarded as an almost exclusively male pastime. If women are allowed to go at all, they seldom choose the play themselves or go without a male relative.

No wonder the number of women fiction-writers far exceeds that of women playwrights. For one thing, writing novels does not involve going out, mixing with actors and directors or staying out late at rehearsals. Besides, fiction is better suited to the housewife's daily pattern. Unlike drama, it does not require long periods of uninterrupted concentration and planning. A novelist can interrupt her writing to answer the door, see to the cooking or the baby without substantial damage. For a dramatist, this could prove disastrous. Serialized drama, however, whether for radio or television, is a different matter, she points out. It is closer to fiction and can afford to ramble and digress. It is, therefore, a form of writing that women can easily accommodate within their daily routine. " I suppose that is why I wrote so many," she adds.

Now that the children are all grown-up and married, El-Assal plans to devote more time to stage-writing. It would be a pity if she didn't. Her long experience in radio and television have given her a sureness of touch and a degree of technical confidence that other women playwright, with rare exceptions, lack. Her last three plays are more original and experimental in form, and more challenging and daring in their ideas.

The only other woman playwright whose artistic stature matches El-Assal's is Nehad Gad; sadly her promising career was tragically cut short by cancer after only two stage plays. Both are fine specimens of dramatic writing and evidence a great talent - which makes one regret all the more deeply her untimely death in 1989.

Unlike El-Assal, Miss Gad was a late arrival on the theatrical scene. It took her twenty years to discover the medium best suited to her talent. She was born into an upper middle-class family, the only child of an aging couple. Her father's job as a police commissioner meant frequent moves to new towns, new homes and new schools. Very early on, the little girl discovered that books were the only friends she could carry with her from place to place. By ten, she was a voracious reader, and by twelve, she was writing stories.

Though painful, this lonely childhood brought with it a lot of independence. At 17, Nehad was working as a journalist, writing short stories and children's strip-cartoons, and also reading, first science, then English literature at Cairo University. She made an early, unhappy marriage which lasted only a few years. Shattered by the experience, she left for the States after the divorce. There, two events happened which significantly influenced her later career. She read for an M.A. degree in drama and met her second husband, playwright Sa-mir Sarhan.

For the next ten years she was in close and almost daily contact with the theatrical world. This gave her the valuable first-hand experience of the stage she needed. Armed with both theoretical and practical knowledge of drama, she felt confident enough to embark on her new career as a professional playwright.

Her first play *Adila* was a virtuoso piece for one actress. The late Naima Wasfi undertook the part and Zaynab Shumees directed. The< production which opened at the Tali'a theatre in 1981 was indeed an all-woman show - written, designed, directed and performed ex- clusively by women. This pleased Nehad no end.

The production delighted many and dismayed a few. Those dis-liked the candid image Nehad projected of the frustrated, materialistic and petty-minded middle-class housewife. She was told that she ought to challenge those traditional images of women by presenting different ones. Nehad would listen calmly to such criticism, then shrug her shoulders innocently and say: "I write about life as I see it around me, not as I think it should be." Among friends she would add: "I think what is wrong with women's writing is that they tend to write themselves into their works and idealize a bit. The result is that their heroines are always good, sensitive, and intellectual. I would like to see some of them in real life. If our patriarchal culture can produce such fine specimens, why challenge it then?!"

In this and her next play *The Bus Stop* (an expanded version of which, renamed *On the Pavement,* became a smash-hit) Nehad insisted on telling the truth, however painful and unflattering. Nothing annoyed her more than when critics regarded her second heroine Safiyya as a symbol of Egypt in the hallowed tradition of the sixties. " I write about real women," she often said, "not about symbols. Safiyya smuggles in a big video machine under her clothes at the airport. I don't think a symbol can do that. Saffiyya is a very ordinary Egyptian middle-class woman who gains awareness at the cost of great suffering. She is shown at the beginning uncritically upholding the bourgeois world-view and value-systems, and blithely free of any intellectual concerns. Her dreams are simply a husband, children, an elegant home and a fat income. The rest of the world can go to hell for all she cares. At the end, however, she realizes that the dreams she was taught to cherish are nothing but traps designed to ensnare unsuspecting female into bondage, humility and exploitation".

Between *Adila* in' 81 and *on the Pavement* in' 86, Nehad Gad wrote a film-script and called it *Women.* In it, she completely reversed the traditional images of the hero and heroine. She made the hero a negative, idealistic dreamer, and the heroine a positive, down-to-earth realist who sacrifices her moral and professional principles as a lawyer to keep the family going.

After watching the film, I told Nehad jokingly: "If you go on like this, you will soon be called a woman-hater!" She replied:" I am not attacking women. I am simply saying that in societies like ours, many women cannot afford the luxury of ideals. In their daily struggle to ensure the physical survival of the family, they have to be sometimes ruthless and even unscrupulous realists. Most women spend nearly half their lives cooking, cleaning, washing and nursing the sick. I don't see how they can remain romantic!".

El-Assal's and Gad's tolerant view of the male stands in sharp opposition to Nawal El-Sa'dawi's. In her single play *Isis* she goes all out to advocate and affirm the supremacy of the female. The ancient Egyptian goddess here is not a character, but simply a mouthpiece, and a noisy and long-winded one at that. The text is marred by an over abundance of speeches, exhortations and ideological debates.

The central conflict between the authoress, disguised as Isis, and the patriarchal culture embodied in Set is represented in terms of white versus black and is depressingly lacking in dramatic complexity. More disconcertingly, it never seems to move or bring about any real change. It does not even move in circles. One cannot here speak of dramatic action. The characters never seem to do anything but yap at each other. To cover up for the lack of dramatic action, El-Sa'dawi treats us to some gory scenes of physical violence, involving murder, rape, female circumcision and two castrations on stage, As the horror piles up, the whole thing becomes ridiculous and vulgarly sensational.

Isis, published in 1986, was never performed and is, perhaps, un-performable - not on account of its structural faults (worse texts have been performed), but on account of its iconoclastic message and radical views. It is precisely this, however, which makes it very exciting reading. Its dauntless questioning and intellectual audacity remain unparalleled in all the writing by Egyptian women.

Roughly of the same generation as El-Sa'dawi, Fawzia Mahran is blissfully free of that brand of aggressive feminism. Reading her *Ca- buchi* after El-Sa'dawi's *Isis* is like hearing Chopin after a raucous concert of jungle music. Indeed, the play itself closely resembles an oratorio. The voices of the characters - a bishop, a nun, a young Palestinian couple and their Israeli torturers - are sensitively orchestrated to render the color and texture of their emotions. To the external conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, Mahran adds a more complex internal one between the peaceful teachings of Christianity and the political necessity of fighting. Both the arch bishop of Jerusalem, who gives the play its name, and the nun Margaret-Martha are embroiled in this conflict, and their doubts, prayers and self-questioning provide some of the most moving scenes in the play.

The stage-sets Mahran suggests in the published text, as well as many of her stage-directions, reveal her sharp awareness of the multiple languages of theatre and the value of light and pure sound. It is a pity, therefore, that the play was never seen in performance. Her other play too, a realistic short piece about the frustrations of a sculptor, was also published in a magazine, and also remains untested on the boards.

The three remaining names on our list of Egyptian women playwrights belong to a younger generation. Nevertheless, all their available work was produced in the eighties, making it the richest decade in women's plays.

Nayla Naguib, a trained actress who retired in the seventies, wrote four plays of which only *Two in Bliss* was seen by the public. The other three are available in print. In the mid eighties, Miss Naguib became engrossed in her career as a professional translator and gave up writing. One play on Scheherezade remains unfinished.

The other two, both poetesses, have so far proved one-timers. Neither Wafa' Wagdi's lyrical *Nissan and the Seven Doors,* nor Fatma Qandeel's more robust and rebellious *Scheherezade* have any sisters. Miss Wagdi, however, has written a lot of poetry since then and won a state award. Miss Qandeel, on the other hand, seems to have vanished into thin air. After the production of her play at the Youth Theatre, she went home to the provinces and no one has heard from her or about her since. She may have been discouraged by the undeservedly modest success of her play and decided to give up, or she could be married and bringing up a horde of children. Whatever the case, the result is that she has been disturbingly silent for years. Her Scheherazade, however, still speaks to me and tells me how she never consented to marry the misogynist butcher Shahrayar on the one thousand and first night, and how she led a revolution to overthrow him. Her story is good, and I keep wishing for more. But she always says, with a sigh of sorrow, that her creator's voice dissolved into silence before she could teach her another story.

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INVISIBLE COLLABORATORS;
Women Dramaturgs in the United States and Egypt

Kristin JOHNSEN-NESHATI

Even without complicating factors like gender and geography, the role of the dramaturg is a problematic one. In the United States, where dramaturgy training programs have taken root and major theaters frequently employ dramaturgs, theater artists disagree on their role. Should the dramaturg be concerned mainly with season planning, or should he or she take a more active role in research, fine-tuning the script, or serving the production as a whole? Answers depend on who's asked and what stake he or she holds in the production. Interestingly, while America's finest MFA programs routinely teach dramaturgs to work in all these areas and more, directors and playwrights graduating from similar prestigious institutions come away with different impressions of what constitutes a dramaturg's job and whether or not dramaturgs merit full inclusion on the production team. Consequently, many American dramaturgs still find themselves renegotiating their role for each production and, consciously or not, justifying their involvement. Imagine if stage managers or designers had to work this way.

In new play development, playwrights and directors often see the creative partnership for developing new work as a powerful two-way connection that risks a short-circuit with the addition of a third party. Unlike the stage manager or designer, the new play dramaturg routinely works on the text itself as it's still taking shape, and this can make him or her an adversary to the playwright and director occupied with finding the story itself. Another challenge for the dramaturg rests in the less-codified way in which he or she must respond to the demands of each new project. One production may engage a dramaturg's skills as a writer, editor, translator, or interviewer; another may call on his or her directorial eye, musical or design sensibility; still another may require expertise in a given period, style or field. While the dramaturg's duties vary considerably from one production to the next, one duty remains constant: to serve as a representative of future audiences, watching and listening with an open mind and heart.

The challenge of promoting dramaturgy's importance is compounded by its ultimate dispensability. In his article "Dramaturgy and Silence," Geoffrey Proehl articulates the difficulty facing production dramaturgs in search of a recognized place at the table. "The dramaturg," he explains, "is not finally essential to the rehearsal process. To maintain otherwise would require redefining too much theatre history" (Proehl, 27). True. Excellent theater has been born without a dramaturg as midwife. Looking back, however, one could say the same for the director, whose specialized role emerged in Europe only in the 19th century. Of course, with or without the title, someone has always served the function of a director. And be it a playwright-manager, actor-manager, or modern director, that artist likely sought feedback from another pair of trusted eyes and ears—perhaps a friend, spouse, colleague or "dramaturg." Proehl cautions dramaturgs against fixation with concrete evidence of their artistic contributions: "It takes a degree of humility to acknowledge that someone else is a project's author, to come to terms with one's authorial silence in a world that worships authors…. A person called a dramaturg may well be central to understanding and creating the dramaturgy of a performance, but as a discipline we need to reaffirm the importance of creative dramaturgy, even if the dramaturg's role in producing that creativity is as brilliant listener, not brilliant author" (Proehl, 31).

The term

At the centre of the dramaturg's ambiguous position is the history of the term and controversy over its function. The ancient Greek word "dramaturg" meaning "composer of drama" was adopted by German writers in the neoclassical period, with "dramaturge" as the French variant; likewise, "dramaturgie" was used in the 17th century France and Germany to mean "dramatic composition" (OED,797). In the 18th century, a shift took place. The German playwright G.E.Lessing used the term "Dramaturgie" for his collection of theater criticism written between 1767 and 1769 while he was employed by the Hamburg National Theatre (Schechter, 17). Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy* boldly challenged the productions of his own theater, often criticizing the acting, directorial interpretation, and audience response. As a champion of Aristotle and Shakespeare and an opponent of French drama, Lessing sought to influence not only contemporary theater practice but steer public taste toward a style of playwrighting he found more aligned with German sensibility. By demanding excellence in all aspects of German theater and reforming the profession from within, Lessing redefined an ancient term and become the first modern dramaturg.

Wit Lessing's innovation, a linguistic split emerged. "Dramatiker" became the new German term for playwright, and "Dramaturg" assumed the meaning of literary and theatrical adviser to the director. Dramaturgy developed along these lines in most parts of Europe where reinterpreting classical texts became critical to the politicized theatrical scene in the 1960s and '70s, which was strongly influenced by the theory of Bertolt Brecht. In British and American theater practice, the term is still loosely defined to allow for a variety of roles, including playwright, translator/adapter, literary manager, researcher, outreach specialist, grant writer, as well as the rehearsal based production dramaturg. Production dramaturgy is now well established in postwar Britain and Germany, where Brecht and Heiner Mueller were among its most celebrated practitioners. (Schechter, 20-3)

Indeed, German audiences have grown so accustomed to dramaturgs' commentaries, artist interviews, and visible presence around the theater that they have been known to patronize productions featuring famous director-dramaturg teams. In France, however, both the term and function of the dramaturg remain contested beyond the context of theatrical adaptation.

Interestingly, despite a long history of incorporating European elements in their playwriting and theater practice, playwrights and directors from Egypt have rarely called on production dramaturgs as a rehearsal resource. Dramaturg involvement is generally restricted to the text and, primarily, literary adaptations. Anecdotally, Egyptian theater practitioners report that production dramaturgy may, in fact, exist, but often in an informal sense, with friends or colleagues sometimes attending rehearsal to offer feedback based on observation. With the growing numbers of Egyptian women playwrights and directors exploring new content and methods of working, the production dramaturg offers not only a valuable resource for cultivating new voices and modes of storytelling, but also a possible emerging role for women theater professionals seeking to enter the field.

Dramaturgy's appeal to American women has risen sharply in recent decades. Where does this growth come from? Professional round tables and articles on gender and dramaturgy offer multiple explanations, and here are some of the most common. Dramaturgy offers women a legitimate place at the rehearsal table, a bridge between the worlds of professional theater and academia, access to spectacle with behind-the-scenes anonymity, artistic influence without the full responsibility of artistic leadership, and a collaborative approach that matches women's strengths and preferences. In her article "The Dramaturg as Androgyne: Thoughts on the Nature of Dramaturgical Collaboration," Tori Haring-Smith argues, "women make better androgynes than men do, being better trained to combine the empathic and distanced points of view that define a dramaturg's outlook." "Women are trained to be androgynous," she adds. "For them, the role of the dramaturg offers considerable influence—even if that influence is rarely visible" (Haring-Smith, 143). Interestingly, some of the most desirable traits in a dramaturg (professional flexibility, good listening skills, and a supportive approach to collaboration) may give the female dramaturg artistic influence within the privacy of the rehearsal hall but little market value outside it. In "Women's Work: Gender and Dramaturgy," Tamsen Wolff remarks on her professional experience as a dramaturg working in the United States: "For me, the struggle to prove the worth of the feminized qualities and functions so entangled with dramaturgy is harnessed to an anxiety about distancing myself from anything regarded (or disregarded) as feminized. This strikes me as a persistent feminist bind: to accommodate or even celebrate traits of labor traditionally marked as female without promptly being marginalized professionally, socially or economically as a result" (Wolff, 103-4).

For American women entering the field, the notion of having a voice in rehearsal can be confused with having an equal voice. Haring-Smith observes: "Despite their many duties and the extent of their influence, most dramaturgs remain relatively invisible—a hidden but powerful force like the epigrammatic 'good woman' who stands hidden behind every 'good man.'" (Haring-Smith, 142). Regarding the artistic triad of playwright-director-dramaturg, she adds: "When dramaturgs collaborate with writers, they work from a consistently subordinate place within a definite hierarchy, just as they do with directors. It is always the playwright's script, just as it is always the director's production" (Haring-Smith, 141). "How, then," she asks, "can dramaturgs be effective and influential while remaining subordinate in the artistic hierarchy that is the production team?" (Haring-Smith, 137).

Feminized position

According to Egyptian dramaturg Hazem Azmy, whose work as a critic and theater scholar has led him to compare dramaturgical practice in Egypt, the U.S., and the U.K., the production dramaturg, regardless of gender, operates from a "feminized" position. About the prospect of Egyptian women entering professional dramaturgy, Azmy notes that social pressures would dictate a compromise of their professional aspirations. "Because they're already feminized," he explains, "women could be accepted as dramaturgs in Egypt today only if they were willing to serve as glorified stage assistants, but not in full partnership with directors and playwrights in rehearsal" (Azmy, personal interview).

How can the dramaturg avoid being "feminized" in the triad of new play development? Azmy offers a suggestion from his own professional practice, which is to commission new projects. When the dramaturg is the agent responsible for bringing playwright and director together, the artistic team behaves differently.

No longer is the dramaturg solely a respondent to others' ideas, but a producer with a vision and the professional connections to realize it. Tamsen Wolff challenges dramaturgs to show similar professional initiative:

> The most-touted example of this kind of approach is Jan Kott's, whose *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* so influenced Peter Brook, among others. That instance stands out in part because of the way in which the usual dramaturgical power dynamic was realigned: rather than a dramaturg/critic following and supporting a director's vision, a dramaturg/critic initiated a vision. If dramaturgical attempts to come at questions of theatre from different directions and through public avenues were more common, the perception and position of the profession might shift in response (Wolff, 104).

According to Azmy, some dramaturgical experiments were taking shape in Egypt in the 1980s, but the dramaturg was generally expected to justify the director's choices rather than question or challenge them, or to work as a true partner throughout the rehearsal process. He describes theatrical collaboration in Egypt as "very difficult," blaming an educational system that rewards individual artistic development over collaborative work. "Artists think you have to know each other or be friends to collaborate," he explains, "but it's not true. You just have to be able to 'play ball.'" "One good thing about dramaturgy," he remarks, "is there's no single genius creating the work" (personal interview). Azmy sees potential for dramaturgy both to challenge the cult of personality of the director and offer a model in the political arena. By expanding the director-playwright relationship from a two-party dialogue to a three-way conversation, Azmy believes the dramaturgical process offers a productive method for artistic collaboration and conflict resolution. Nevertheless, independent theater artists in Egypt struggle to compete with politically safe theater for state support, so how far can they push the limits of collaborative experimentation before arousing official suspicion?

Haring-Smith interprets the emergence of the dramaturg as a positive sign not only theatrically speaking, but for society in general. She points out that society values individual achievement to the detriment of collaborative work. "We seem to assume that an artist's greatness is diminished when his work is acknowledged to be a collaborative product. The dramaturg's role is an active objection to the notion that all great art is the product of a single individual's activity. The growing presence of dramaturgs is one of many signals that our individualistic culture may soon come to recognize creativity as a social activity. When that transformation occurs, dramaturgs will be more readily recognized" (Haring-Smith, 143).

In her article "Women in Arab Theatre: Finding a Voice," theater scholar and director Dina Amin describes numerous pioneering women Arab artists who acted, directed, and wrote for and about twentieth-century theater. Among them was Tahiyyah Karyioka, an Egyptian who began her career as a belly dancer, but later took up acting. In 1962, she and her husband, Fayiz Halawah, founded a theater company. Interestingly, Amin refers to Halawah as "the director, dramaturge and star of most of the theatre's performances." One suspects Halawah's dramaturgy was geared toward adaptation and other literary tasks, since his duties as director and actor would conflict with the distance necessary for production dramaturgy. Amin identifies Karyioka as the more popular of the two, drawing audiences because of her celebrity and "political satire… comments on current affairs and … candour" (Amin, 28). The company garnered attention in the 1970s for its resistance to government censorship. According to Amin: "When the censorship tried to stop her play *Yahya al-Wafd! (Long Live the Wafd!)* by court order, she took the case to court, won the lawsuit and mounted the play" (ibid.). Together, Karyioka and Halawah arrived at a method of collaboration that brought them a level of success neither could have found individually.

Nehad Selaiha, theater critic for Cairo's *Al-Ahram* weekly and professor of drama and criticism at the Academy of the Arts, writes that the earliest appearances of women on the Egyptian stage involved their following a script that "remained the property of men though it was often inscribed on women's bodies and voices" (Amin, 26). Selaiha's remark on gender, power and performance calls to mind the paradox of the live event. The interdependence required for theater gives rise to the spontaneity, volatility, and multiple points of view that excite audiences while heightening the struggle for artistic control.

New collaborations

Cairo-based independent theater artist Nora Amin has arrived at a way of working that allows her flexibility in the kinds of theater she performs. As a critically acclaimed actor, director and choreographer, Amin brings a strong dance background to her collaborative and solo work. Concerned with censorship, gender and movement as they influence story telling, Amin contextualizes the appearance of the female body on the Egyptian stage in her article "The Image of the Female in Egyptian Theater":

> Acting [in Egyptian society] remained a profession with a bad reputation, both for men and women, but since the honor of a man is unquestionable, and unconnected to his body, female actors [were] more criticized … than their male colleagues because they put their bodies on public display and …let go of their

> privacy, their honor…. And since the value of honor in our oriental society was always the criteria [sic] to judge people … the female performer became an outcast by definition. And an outcast is very easily a rebel as well (N. Amin, 1).

From her dealings with government censorship, Amin has learned to exert control over her message often by replacing language with movement. She describes her productions as so deeply rooted in physicality that one understands little from reading her scripts without watching them in performance. She writes:

> I aimed to create a physical metaphor that can say in movement what the performer could not say in words … it seemed like a good strategy *vis à vis* censorship, but my concern was more to let the body speak for itself…. Above all, I wanted to express with the body what belongs only to the language of the body (N. Amin, 4).

For her, experimentation is both "the key to change" and "also the fruit of giving yourself the right to reorganize the world … and destroy the rules" (Amin, 4-5). Reflecting on the various types of collaboration she has initiated throughout her career, Amin remarks that "the best collaborations in concept, design, and implementation were those based on cultural exchange. The process was really that of … mutual learning" (N. Amin, personal interview).

A clear example of the dramaturg's role in facilitating "mutual learning" from elsewhere in the Islamic world is the Oyun Yaz Project, a year-round collaboration among Turkish playwrights and theater artists, including dramaturgs, from the United Kingdom. Founded in 2004, the Oyun Yaz Project seeks out first-time dramatists from five major cities in Turkey. Of approximately 400 new playwrights, 11 are invited to participate in the spring Oyun Yaz Festival, when new plays are presented to the public and "playwrights play the leading role" (Oyun Yaz, "About the Festival"). Of the 11 plays featured in 2007, five were written by women.

By contrast, a New York-based group of Arab and Arab-American women artists experimented with a new model of collective authorship that decentralized the formal duties of a playwright, director and dramaturg. This was *The Panel,* the 2006 theater piece that emerged through the collaboration of Leila Buck and Rania Khalil with the Nisaa Arab American Women's Collective. Through a process of joint brainstorming, solo writing and collective critique, Buck and Khalil shaped the perspectives of eight women into a satire on gender and representation, inspired by the personal experiences of the group. Performed at Arab women's conferences in Princeton and Chicago, the play centers on a panelist, moderator, journalist and audience members engaged in a seemingly serious discussion of

"Arab American Women in Performance" that dissolves into a free-for-all peppered with a host of female Arab stereotypes. While Buck served as the hub of the group and its leader, the creators included ethnic Arabs and non-Arabs, actors, a performance artist, writers and professors, as well as several women with no theater experience at all. Buck brought in colleagues, who were not dramaturgs in a formal sense, to serve as an "outside eye," inasmuch as she associates dramaturgs with textual work rather than rehearsal. Reflecting on the collaborators' contributions to the piece, Buck adds: "I think we were all dramaturgs and directors at one point or another" (Buck, personal interview).

Even in the absence of a formal dramaturg, theater artists frequently recognize the need for a disinterested observer. Theater scholar Fawzia Afzal-Khan invokes the involvement of this outside perspective with the text. In her article on street theater in Pakistani Punjab, she observes that "members of [the] Lok Rehas [troupe] invite WAF [Women's Action Forum] activists to read their scripts and provide constructive criticism" (Afzal-Khan, 43). For collaborative work, especially, the dramaturg offers a valuable perspective as benevolent "outsider" to a process requiring total immersion from its artistic team. According to Proehl, "The central significance of having someone called a dramaturg work on a production is that attaching this name to a living presence encourages everyone involved in a production to attend more carefully to what is ever present but often under-examined: the inner workings of a play" (Proehl, 27).

Three other examples of dramaturgical collaboration involving female artists from the Islamic world include: *Return to Sender, or Letters from the Land of the Chador,* written by the Iranian playwright Mohammad Reza Mortazavi, directed by Helena Waldman, with dramaturgy by Susanne Vincenz, presented in 2006 at the Göteborg Festival of Theater and Dance in Sweden; Compagnie Faim de Siècle, a European- and US-based company run by Pakistani-born director Ibrahim Quraishi, who has used a dramaturg on occasion; and *Figures from Iraq,* a production by Naas Theatre Company (comprised of Iraqi artists in exile in England, Germany and Holland), written and directed by Faris El-Mashta with dramaturgy by Lamice El-Amari.

Problematic as it may be, the role of the dramaturg is only just beginning to find a place in women's theater collaborations in the Islamic world. While American women dramaturgs are still engaged in defining their own professional identity and the level of visibility that entails, several female academics and students I've met in Egypt see dramaturgy as a viable "foot in the door" to professional theater, giving them greater artistic access than they would otherwise have. Although production dramaturgy has yet to be fully explored in Egypt, the rise of its women writer-directors offers possibilities for engaging the dramaturgical process to challenge traditional ideas about content, language, authorship, and performance. Such a change would require a cultural shift in training programs to prepare their graduates for more collaborative work. By involving dramaturgs in rehearsal, Egyptian women artists could test the theories of American dramaturgs who believe that by expanding the core developmental partnership from two to three (or more), they can replace hierarchical rehearsal models with new ones that are more inclusive, experimental and collaborative.

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THE POSTCOLONIAL PERFORMATIVE: Constitutions of Gender and National Identity in (post-) Ottoman Drama

Michiel LEEZENBERG

In contemporary criticism, the concept of the *performative* has come to take a central place. It first appeared as the idea that utterances like "I hereby declare you legally married," do not *describe*, but rather *create*, facts in the world (Austin 1962). Later, the concept of performativity has more generally indicated the creation of social realities in and through our actions. Thus, Judith Butler presents an influential argument that gender identity and sexual orientation are no facts of nature or inner psychological truths: rather, they are performatively constituted in our own and others' words and deeds; the same would seem to hold, by extension, for other social identities like ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation.

Here, I will try to operationalize these ideas for the study of modern drama. First, I will briefly discuss the key points of Butler's view of the performativity of gender and its relevance for drama studies. Second, I offer some criticism, focusing on the question in how far it is rooted in specifically modern Western (and especially American) circumstances, and whether it can be unproblematically applied or extended to the colonial and postcolonial non-western world. A performativity-based approach turns out to suggest new questions regarding the reconfigurations of local gendered agencies, which do not fall prey to the widespread discourse of hegemonic imperialist or colonial ideologies. To illustrate this, I will discuss the changing and contested constitutions of gendered national identities in two comedies dating from different parts and periods of the modern Islamic world, viz., Jacob Neroulos's *Korakistika* (1813) and Lenin al-Ramly's *Bi'l-'arabi al-fasîh* (*In Plain Arabic*) (1993).

1. Introduction: gender studies and postcolonial studies

There are some interesting structural analogies between women's studies, or more generally gender studies, and postcolonial studies. Here, I would like to sketch some of these analogies, and address the more complex theme of the interactions between gender studies and postcolonial theory. I will do so by focusing on the influential work of Judith Butler, a prominent feminist theorist who has recently turned to postcolonial themes; but the thematic field is, of course, far broader.

In western universities, one can roughly see three phases in the development of women's studies, or academic feminism. In the first phase, studies generally focused on questions of how the contributions of women to the development of, say, science or the arts have over the centuries systematically been downplayed or ignored. In the second phase, roughly covering the 1970s and 1980s, questions of *representation* and social imaginaries came to the fore. This was the period when gender studies distinguished biological sex as opposed to socially constructed gender, and focused on the study of gender imagery, i.e., the imagining or representing of societal phenomena and behavioral patterns as 'typically' male or female. A third phase, roughly starting in the early 1990s, criticized earlier gender studies for their heterosexual bias, and promoted the concept of *performativity*; at the same time, a shift towards deconstructive techniques as originally sketched by the French philosopher Derrida took place. Judith Butler was a pioneer of this shift towards performativity and deconstruction.

In postcolonial studies, similar trends can be observed: following an initial phase in which authors argued for acknowledging the importance of, say, Muslim, African, or Chinese contributions to civilization (as, most famously, cheikh Anta Diop did for the African case) a second phase thematized the very concept of 'civilization' assumed in earlier histories, and started looking at how non-western cultures were represented as a way of supporting this hegemonic civilizational discourse. The canonical text here is, of course, Edward Said's famous *Orientalism* (1978), which focused on western representations of the Muslim world in the orientalist sciences; according to Said, these sciences were intimately linked to imperial projects. In the third phase, postcolonial theory has likewise been dominated by deconstructivist approaches, most influentially in the work of theorists like Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

Intriguingly, however, the concept of the performative does not appear to have gained a similar hold of postcolonial work on the Middle East or the Islamic world as it has in gender studies, except in the work of Saba Mahmood and a few others. As a result, much work remains to be done on the interaction between gender, (post-) colonialism and national identity. I hope to present some possible points for further elaboration below. There is also an important link to the new roles that languages plays in all this, especially in literature and drama.[1]

2. Judith Butler on the performativity of gender and other identities

I now turn to Judith Butler's work as the prototype of the 'performative turn' in gender studies. In her earliest writings, Butler (1990) criticizes the opposition between ‘sex’ as a biologically given notion and ‘gender’ as a socially constituted identity. In particular, she rejects the (often implicit) assumption of heterosexuality as part of the allegedly biologically endowed sex, that is, as an inescapable fact of nature. She then mounts the (Foucault-inspired) argument that biological theory, just as any other theory, in important ways constitutes of the very objects it speaks about, and that hence, the objects of which it speaks (e.g., ‘naturally’ heterosexual male or female human beings) are as much discursively constructed as allegedly merely social identities.

Instead of being given, expressed, or represented, Butler famously argues, gender identity is *performatively* constituted. She takes the idea of performativity from the English philosopher J.L. Austin (1962), who had observed that there is a class of so-called performative statements which do not merely describe but actually *create* facts; more generally, Austin argued that the words we speak are not generally mere descriptions *of* the world but actions *in* the world, that is, genuine *speech acts*. Thus, in saying “I christen this ship the *Maxima*” or “I hereby declare you legally married,” speakers may actually create the fact of a ship being called the *Maxima*, or of two people being married.

According to Butler, gender identities as either male or female, and heterosexual or homosexual, are likewise performatively created in and through one’s own and other’s words and actions; thus, she argues, there is no inner gender essence hidden behind one’s outward behavior: most famously in the case of the drag queen, i.e., a man dressed as a woman, she holds, one’s gender identity is *just* what one enacts.

At least as important to Butler’s argument is the notion of *iteration* or quotation, which she takes from Derrida (1988). Expanding – and radicalizing – Austin’s discussion, Derrida charts the ways in which speech acts may fail to have an effect. Most importantly, he takes up Austin’s idea that theatrical performance is such a case of non-serious, and hence vacuous, parasitic language usage: according to Austin, someone saying “I am the king” on stage is merely quoting or pretending to say something, and thus not really performing an effective action. Derrida, by contrast, argues that this possibility of failure, that is, of a speech act being quoted or iterated in different contexts in which its original effect is lost and new effects are achieved, is not a marginal nuisance but in fact a condition of possibility of speech acts. Non-serious speech acts can have serious effects, and serious speech acts can fail to have any effect at all. The most consequential historical example of a pretended speech act having a serious effect is perhaps the American declaration of independence (1776): in the British colonial context in which it was uttered, the people proclaiming it had no *right* to declare themselves independent; but in the very act of declaring their independence, they performatively claimed for themselves the very right to do so. Thus, the American Founding Fathers, by declaring independence from Great Britain in 1776, were not sovereign and serious speakers, but simply *pretended* they were. The most powerful nation on earth is so to speak founded on the *imitation* of a declaration of independence: that is, on a fictional or parodying and subversive speech act. That seems to be food for thought for theories that would marginalize such kinds of language usage.[1]

Butler extends this point about the fragility of performatives to gender: for the performative constitution of a gender identity to be felicitous or successful, she argues, the act of naming a person's gender has to be repeated time and again; and each of these naming performances is equally at risk of failing. Hence, gender identities are always insecure and capable of being resignified or subverted. This is especially true for the ironical or subversive performance of gender in drag: by imitating a female identity, a drag queen *parodies* – and thus undermines – both male and female gender norms. Thus, for Butler, gender performativity may also be subversive. This is not to say, of course, that the constitution of gender identities is wholly free and arbitrary, and up for unrestricted performative constitution; but it is rather less stable and unproblematically given than is often assumed. Gender identities are created from the moment we are born: for Butler, the call "it's a boy!" or "it's a girl!" said of a newborn baby is a performative creation of a gender identity as much as a description of an identity already in existence; for all its apparent naturalness, it is in fact unstable. This instability becomes clearest in the cartoon of a wet nurse holding up a newborn baby and saying enthusiastically "It's a lesbian!"

Butler extends the notion of performativity from a specific and explicit form of ritualized linguistic behavior into a generalized and implicit feature of social action in general. Likewise, she suggests that iteration and iterability, the potential of social actions to be taken out of context and reappropriated and resignified, as a general underlying structuring factor of the social world, as against the assumption of unambiguous structure and agency in functionalist social thought (1997). According to Butler, Austin located the power or effect of performatives in the purely linguistic rules that inform their proper use; the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1991), by contrast, wholly delegates the effect of successful performative to the legitimate social authority with which speakers have to be endowed beforehand. Butler, however, undermines the – at first sight obvious – distinction between the linguistic and the social (1999). She objects, rightly in my opinion, that Bourdieu's view not only boils down to a Marxist account of a social-economic base wholly determining a linguistic superstructure; it also forecloses the very possibility of subverting existing authority to conduct felicitous speech acts, e.g., by arrogating in the very speech act a power to speak that has not been granted by others, as in the case of the American declaration of independence.

Although originally working on gender, Butler has subsequently generalized her approach to other forms of identity, say, racial, ethnic, or religious. In *Excitable Speech* (1997), she turned her attention to 'hate speech,' such as racist utterances, disparaging references to homosexuals, and pornography. While being sympathetic to the minorities that feel offended by such speech, and exposing its performative effects as going far beyond the mere 'expression of opinions' with which hate speech is often legitimized, Butler casts doubts on efforts to protect minorities by a sharpening of the laws. In her view, it is precisely the logic of the state governing through laws that supports hate speech in the first place. It is precisely in order to arrive at a notion of resistance that transcends the mere appeal to the laws (and hence reaffirms the authority of the state) that Butler argues that the effects of hate speech are located neither in the words themselves nor in any sovereign subject uttering those words. Being a kind of performative language, that is, a kind of action over which nobody has full control, she argues, hate speech allows for subversive reappropriation, and it is here that one should search for more radical forms of opposition and resistance.

In this later work, the potentially problematic interrelation between different identities and different minorities, each with their different claims to rights, protection, and dignity comes to the fore. It does, however, remain within the conceptual and normative confines of the nation state,- in this case, America. I will return to this point below.[2]

3. Gender as performative: An ethnocentric concept?

Operationalizing Butler's work for non-Western contexts, and more specifically for the study of non-Western drama, is a task that is far from trivial; but it may be rewarding. Butler herself makes a few points of comparison with drama (1993). She suggests that the subversion of gender identities may be compared to what Bertold Brecht has called 'refunctioning' (*Umfunktionierung*), or the upsetting of existing social relations; but she does so in a less strictly materialist mode. Likewise, the uncontrollable effects of gender performance, and the potentially crucial importance of parody and subversion, blur and upset the conventional opposition between the theatrical and the political, that is, between the serious games of power in the 'real' world and the non-serious, pretended language use of the theater stage. But these are mere first shots.

More importantly, is the implication that performativity-based approaches crosscut familiar theoretical oppositions between economic base and cultural superstructure, and in particular between hegemonic and subaltern formations. Such notions, Marxist in origin but at present still widespread, leave insufficient room for local, individual agency; they also risk relegating such allegedly 'merely cultural factors' like linguistic, national, or sexual identity, to the secondary status of being mere epiphenomena of such grand structural political-economic phenomena like capitalism, colonialism, and more recently neoliberal globalization.[3] It is here that I think its relevance for the study of Middle Eastern culture lies. Butler's work has become tremendously popular in the Anglo-Saxon world and in Germany, but as far as I am aware, it has had no effect in the Arabic or Islamic world. My suggestion is that the postcolonial criticism formulated in the wake of Edward Said's famous *Orientalism* (1978) is still informed by quasi-Marxist notions of hegemony, agency and identity that are being problematized by such more recent exercises as Butler's.

According to Butler (1998), new social movements like feminism, gay liberation, and emancipatory movements emerging in specific ethnic groups and religious minorities are no mere superstructural phenomena, as classical Marxists would hold; nor are they mere particularisms that pursue their own identity politics at the expense of a unified and strong Leftist movement. She argues that a truly democratic Left would welcome rather than disparage such cultural movements. More importantly, the performativity of gender and other identities, being based on contestable iteration rather than on structural or functional factors, may actually upset or call into question the very division between material base and cultural or ideological superstructure. Thus, one may argue that, e.g., Arabic 'culture' or 'tradition' is not simply inherited but performatively constituted, repeated and changed. In fact, the very Arabic expressions for 'culture' (*thaqâfa*) and tradition or heritage (*turâth*) are neologisms: they are an integral – if not constitutive – part of the nineteenth-century Arabic literary Renaissance or *nahda*. As will appear below, I think that it is here that work like Butler's may be useful for current debates, which seem to remain stuck in rather rigid base-superstructure oppositions and in rather fixed terms of hegemonic as opposed to subaltern agency.

But is such a concern with gay liberation and drag queens, formulated in an occasionally demanding language of enormous theoretical sophistication, at all relevant for the wder world, and especially the non-Western world? This question was raised, in a violently polemical style, by the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1999), who argued that Butler concerned herself with the luxury problems of highly educated and well-paid women in western academia, and that ‘real third world women’ needed food, education and protection from physical violence rather than such theorizing about subverted identities, drag queens and the like. Although Nussbaum’s criticisms are often misguided and at times ferociously unfair, they bring out the more general challenge of operationalizing western academic ideas in third world-contexts quite dramatically. In fact, applying Butler’s ideas to a postcolonial context is not at all a straightforward or trivial matter. Here, I sketch a few points of relevant criticism.

One line of criticism that remains to be developed is the suggestion that the very notion of performativity that plays such a crucial role in Butler’s and other’s work may be ethnocentric. Thus, Michael Silverstein (1976, 1979) has argued that Austin’s idea that some statements explicitly perform what they purport to describe is merely a projection of assumptions present in everyday modern English in the first place. In other words, the notion of performativity belongs to a so-called *language ideology* shared by present-day speakers of everyday English but not necessarily by others. Here, I have no time to discuss this point with the detail and attention it deserves. The central question would be in how far Butler’s reconceptualization of performativity inherits some of the more problematic notions of Austin’s original concept of performative language, especially its assumption of ‘semanticity’, that is, the belief that the referential or denotative function of language is basic or logically prior to other functions, such as the emotive or the expressive.

This brings me to another, partly related point of criticism against deconstructivism. Derrida’s deconstructivist reading of Austin deconstructs and renders problematic oppositions like those between constative and performative utterances, or between serious and non-serious speech; but it does not transcend them, or give them up in favor of a better equipped vocabulary. In fact, it is precisely Derrida’s point that we cannot radically transcend such problematic oppositions, but merely ‘reinscribe’ them in a more self-conscious way. This point, in its turn inherited from Heidegger’s musings on the seeming inevitability of the ‘western metaphysical tradition,’ becomes especially problematic in non-western and postcolonial contexts, for which the western metaphysical tradition is not as obvious a point of reference as it is for the likes of Derrida.

This stricture against the uncritical universalization of specifically western philosophical doctrines would also seem to apply to Butler’s work. For one thing, she (like Spivak) is at times rather selective in which concepts she sets out to deconstruct; thus, at one point, she argues that it is 'essential' to capitalism to demand heterosexual identities as underlying the family as the minimal unit of production and reproduction (1998). This claim is not only historically quite wrong (cf. Fraser 1998//9); it is also remarkably essentialist. Likewise, Butler takes 'the nation state' as a singular monolithic entity, arguing that the state depends for its legitimacy on the nation, and hence "requires periodic expulsion and dispossession" (and by extension, perhaps even the extermination) of national minorities (2007: 33). This seems an equally sweeping and overhasty generalization, which could, and should, be complemented with a closer historiographical attention to how different nation states did in fact arise and to how minorities have in specific circumstances been incorporated, cultivated, assimilated, or oppressed,- and, in fact, how they have been constituted in the first place.

Butler would probably the first to acknowledge all this; but her work not only lacks historical depth and concrete historical analyses, it also stays within the confines of present-day western academic discourse. To meet the former point, her work could be fruitfully supplemented with historical or genealogical analyses that trace the historical emergence, transfiguration or disappearance of ethnic, sexual, religious and national identities, especially in interaction with changing practices of government. To meet the latter, one could reinscribe her work in a more consistently postcolonial perspective; it remains to be seen, however, whether such a reinscription would merely complement Butler's work, or instead would more radically dislocate her main ideas.

In her more recent writings, Butler herself expresses an interest in non-western experience, but generally abstains from detailed discussion, pleading a lack of relevant expertise (e.g. in Butler & Spivak 2007). All this leaves open the question how Butler's views on the performativity and fragility of sexual, national and other identities would fare in (post-)colonial and/or third world contexts. And on this point, some criticisms may be, and have been, raised. Thus, in his study of changing modern Arab conceptions of and attitudes to sexuality, *Desiring Arabs* (2007), Joseph Massad takes Butler to task for the ethnocentrism he thinks is implicit in her attempts at universalizing sexual rights to include those of gays and lesbians. By universalizing specifically Western forms of sexual subjectivity, Massad argues, Butler risks excluding non-western cultural formations that are not based on a homo-heterosexual opposition. He then comes to the conclusion that

> The categories gay and lesbian are not universal at all and can only be universalized by the epistemic, ethical and political violence unleashed on the rest of the world by the very human rights advocates whose aim is to defend the very people their intervention is creating (Massad 2007: 41).

One may or may not agree with this particular point; but I think there is a more important underlying question here. On Massad's view, which is backed by an impressive amount of evidence from modern Arabic literature and journalistic texts, modern Arab conceptions of sexuality and sexual perversion are entirely the result of the internalization of a hegemonic modern western sexual morality. Likewise, in the postscript to his erudite and sophisticated study *Before Homosexuality in the Arab World, 1500-1800*, Khalid al-Rouayheb (2005) argues that modern Arab conceptions of homosexuality (*mithliyya*) and sexual perversion (*shudhûdh jinsiyya*), are Victorian (i.e., Western) in origin. The problem with such analyses is that they depict Western intellectual influence as somehow pervasive and inescapable, and leave no room for any Arab agency at all. This point seems to hold for a good many approaches to the cultural and intellectual history of the Arab-Islamic world: they tend to be informed by a quasi-Gramscian discourse of Western, capitalist, or imperialist hegemony, against which local actors conduct a desperate and ultimately futile struggle. Not only studies like Massad's and al-Rouayheb's are informed by this imagery, but also, for example, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi'''s recent *Contemporary Arab Thought* (2004). It remains an open question in how far other Marxist-inspired approaches currently popular in the study of the Middle East and the Arab world share these or similar assumptions.

Against this, I would like to employ the notion of performativity as a means to create more room for Arab (and more generally, subaltern) forms of agency. This is, of course, not to downplay the demonstrably crucial and often violent role that colonial domination has played in the formation of modern nation states and modern sensibilities in the non-western world. I do take issue, however, with the implicit assumption that imperial hegemony has been inevitable, omnipresent and all-powerful. The idea of imperialism as inescapable is attractive for many reasons; but I think it is both conceptually and normatively problematic. Conceptually, it risks ignoring local dynamics and local agency, and projecting one particular stage of imperial domination, that of the truly global expansion of, in particular, British rule around the turn of the twentieth century, onto other geographical areas and historical periods where such domination simply wasn't around. This is especially true for the Ottoman empire, which as such was never colonized. Likewise, new cultural movements towards linguistic reform, cultural nationalism, and a concomitant rearticulation of gender relations, started already in the late eighteenth century; that is, before imperial rule had gained a serious foothold even in areas like India and Algeria. In other words, postcolonial studies would benefit by systematically questioning the *extent* of imperial cultural hegemony in different areas and periods, rather than assuming it as given and global.

The view of western cultural influence as omnipresent and hegemonic also has non-trivial normative consequences: in describing modern phenomena like strictly regulated national and sexual identities as merely the result of western hegemony, one is but one step away from rejecting them wholesale as inauthentic or at odds with native traditions. This brings critics like Massad and others dangerously close to populist third-world political leaders, who argue much along the same lines. More importantly, and even more paradoxically, though, the very talk of authenticity is *itself* a western import: as authors like Aziz al-Azmeh (1991) and Bassam Tibi (1981) have argued, both Arab nationalism and Islamist thought have crucially been shaped by nineteenth-century European conceptions, especially German romantic-nationalist discourse of cultural purity and authenticity.

Without wishing to take sides in such and other questions here, I would like to suggest that they are indeed worth asking. In particular, I would like to zoom in on questions concerning the changing forms and conceptualizations of agency, prior to, under, and after colonial domination (which likewise comes in different shapes and degrees), and against the background of new nationalist movements and nation states. Put differently: the modernizing Islamic world witnessed the rise of modern selves endowed with new and more strictly regulated sexual, linguistic, and national identities, in accordance with which male and female individuals acquired new rights as citizens and new responsibilities for their actions. Not only did new articulations of gender play a crucial role in all this; the reconceptualization of language was equally important, and interacted in complex ways with such new sexual and national identities. Put differently again: sex is a linguistic affair.

In consequence, I would like to study these – admittedly vast – questions by focusing on the relatively concrete topic of the interrelation between language and sexuality, or gender, in a few (post-) Ottoman plays; being theatrical, they involve not merely gender representations or gender ideology, but also the actual performance, and performative constitution, of gender in and through language usage. Drama may be a particularly suitable art form to study these broader developments, as it was arguably a predominant form of the new public uses of language that started spreading in the Ottoman empire in the nineteenth century; not requiring the audience of theatrical performances to be literate, it could reach a rather greater audience than written media like newspapers and books. Not being a specialist on Ottoman, Arabic or even Western traditions of drama, I can do no more here than sketch out a few lines of research that I think may be promising.

4. (Re-) Constituting Gender in (Post-) Ottoman Drama

I would like to conclude with a brief discussion of two plays loosely related to an Ottoman context, viz. Jacob Rizos Neroulos's *Korakistika* (1813) and Lenin al-Ramly's *In Plain Arabic* (*bi'l-'arabî al-fasîh*, 1992). The choice of the former play may seem puzzling at first sight: the Greeks are usually treated as part of European history. It is all too easily forgotten or downplayed, however, that for centuries, Greeks were an integral part of the Ottoman empire, and that they thus, in a very real sense, 'belong' to the Islamic world as much as to Europe. In fact, the Greek case is an ideal place to explore the very construction of the European West and the non-European Orient that is still widely taken for granted nowadays.

Neroulos's *Korakistika* premiered in 1813; apparently, it was rather popular: it was reprinted several times. I have no detailed information when, where, and for exactly what audience it was first performed; presumably, it addressed the better-educated Greek-speaking (male) population of the Ottoman empire, or more specifically Istanbul; but there are indications that other locals, whether or not Christian, attended the performances, too. The play is not only a very early example of Ottoman drama (which is often, but erroneously, believed to have started in the mid-19th century only); it appears also too early to have been shaped by anything like 'colonial' or 'imperialist' influences (*pace* Gourgouris 1996). Its author, Jakopos Neroulos, was a member of the Phanariot elite of the Greek-speaking, orthodox Christian population of Istanbul; his *Korakistika* was intended as a satire of attempts at reforming the Greek language of writing and education, both as a way of better adjusting it to modern science and politics and as a preparation for Greek national liberation. The very title of the play is a pun on the name of the most prominent linguistic reformer, Adamantios Korais, who is depicted here as a lower-class provincial upstart, and even as a French-inspired revolutionary.

Intriguingly, the play presents a linguistic problem as essentially a sexual one. Ioanniskos, a young Greek man, falls in love with Helleniske, a girl of marriagable age, whose father Sotirios tries speak in the new, reformed language. This soon leads to difficulties: not only do other characters often fail to understand what he is saying; but also, at one point, does one of Korais's parodied neologisms, *eladioxidioalatolachanokarikevma* (a new term for 'salad dressing'), literally get stuck in Sotirios's throat. The victim, in acute danger of choking, is cured by being forced to say the local dialect word for ‘oil’ (*ladi*); immediately after pronouncing it, he regains breath. The young man then persuades Sotirios to abandon the foolishness of this new ‘korakistic’ language, and in reward gets the hand of the latter’s daughter. In a none-too-subtle conclusion, Sotirios announces he will burn all his copies of Korais’s reformist review, the *Logios Hermes*. Thus, both linguistic reform and national progress are described and performed in obviously gendered terms of sexual union. At first blush, Neroulos’s comedy seems conservative in character, as it tries to confirm existing relations of gender and language against korakistic innovations; in fact, however, it anticipates a new national identity based on the public use of a national (that is, unified) language, where class differences are downplayed in favor of a newly construed national identity. Thus, in the final scene, strongly reminiscent of Goldoni’s *Servant of Two Masters*, both the master and his dialect-speaking servant are married to their beloved.

It is tempting to read Neroulos’s play as treading in the footsteps of ancient Greek comedians like Aristophanes and Menander; Thus, Lascarides’s edition (1928: 117n) calls attention to parallels between Neroulos’s neologism and those in Aristophanes’s *Ekklesiazousai*, 1169-1175; but it is not clear whether Neroulos was familiar with this play. In fact, he appears to have been informed and inspired primarily by the dramatic tradition of Enlightenment authors like Molière and Goldoni rather than by ancient Greek comedy. It is not at all clear in how far Aristophanes was anything more than a vaguely familiar name to an audience of that era. Ironically, at the very time the *Korakistika* was published, the pagan heritage of ancient Greece was in the process of being reconstituted into a corpus of classical Greek literature and a body of classical moral learning (as distinct from religious doctrine), by none other than Adamantios Korais, the Greek linguistic and educational reformer ridiculed in the play. One should therefore not overemphasize the continuity of ‘the Greek tradition’, but precisely explore how this very entity, a continuous national literary heritage, was constructed. The same holds for the slightly later Arabic project of recovering, or even constituting, a specifically Arabic literary tradition or cultural heritage (*turâth*) during the Arabic literary renaissance or *nahda*.

The play’s characters, especially the female ones, are often made to speak in local dialects, presumably as a source of amusement for the sophisticated urban audience for which the play was originally conceived. The play does not, however, feature any simple opposition between written standard and spoken dialect as, respectively, hegemonic and subaltern formations; nor does it treat the spoken dialect as the source and location of romantic identification with the ‘people’s national spirit’, as would come to happen later in the nineteenth century, in Greek as in many other languages: it mostly excludes the dialects of lower-class speakers from outside of Istanbul as ‘barbarism’ or ‘vulgar expressions’ (*chydaïkè*). It is only towards the end that the main character Sotirios acknowledges the power inherent in local dialect expressions: having been forced to say “lachanosalata” (cabbage salad) to force the unspeakable *korakistika* word out of his throat, he asks:

> “can it be that that vulgar and barbaric word *lachanosalata* has such an energy?”[4]

Further, whatever parody takes place in this play seems to be conservative, or elitist, rather than genuinely subversive in its intent. At the same time, however, this conservatism seems self-undermining: the characters do in fact unwittingly take over many of the innovations of the new language introduced by Korais and others; and by performing the need for a new language in public, the play paves the way for the very linguistic nationalism it claims to oppose. The upper-class Constantinople dialect is not simple used or reasserted, but rearticulated as the basis for e new public, and indeed national, language for the entire Greek *genos* (nation). Finally, the nationalism and gender reconfigurations of this play can hardly be the result of western hegemony, and even less of imperial colonial rule, as neither had been established by that time (pace Gourgouris 1996). In other words, by taking a more thoroughly historical approach, one may question anew some longstanding assumptions of postcolonial theory.

This also holds for the other play I would like to discuss: at first blush, Lenin al-Ramly’s *In Plain Arabic* (*bi’l-arabî al-fasîh*) (1992) presents a similar comic treatment of the interrelation between language, gender, and national identity. It does so, however, in a rather different context: the Ottoman past is a distant dream here, and even British colonial rule is rather less clearly present than is modern American-style imperialism. Perhaps most importantly, the Egyptian nation state is clearly assumed as a self-evident framework,- rather more self-evident in fact, than the pan-Arabic nationalism thematized and ridiculed in the play.

More than *Korakistika*, the play involves a concept of the nation as based on a shared culture, that is, on a consensus of shared norms and values. It also involves a rather more radical opposition between civilizations, whether this is expressed as a clash between imperialism and the third world, between West and East, or between Christianity and Islam. This discourse (*khitâb*) is common to the present-day Arab world and the (neo-) liberal West (which are thus ‘divided by a common language’). One question that still awaits an answer is exactly how such a shared if antagonistic vocabulary came about.

In Plain Arabic was staged a mere few months after Saddam's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent war against Iraq, a series of events that led to unprecedented splits among the Arabs. The fact that most Arab countries, including fierce rivals or enemies like Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, joined in the international coalition against the Iraqi invaders, more than ever before exposed the notion of Arab unity as largely an outdated fiction. The play discusses this fiction, as well as other forms of Arab self-deceit, taboo and shame, in a joking manner. The theatrical convention of using dialect for Modern Arabic comedy is here exploited to the full. Indeed, the conventional division of labor between Standard Arabic as a medium for serious literature and dialect as a vehicle for comedy becomes thematized in the very title of the play. *Fasîh* may mean 'clear' or 'unadorned,' but also 'flowery;' moreover, it is etymologically related to *fusha*, the term for standard Arabic (which is precisely the language variety *not* employed in this comedy).

As in *Korakistika*, differences between various dialects are put to maximum comical use: the various characters (which, I am informed, were originally played by an all-Egyptian cast) are distinguished in performance by use of mimicked regional dialects and by other joking references to the stereotypical traits of the Arabs from different countries (thus, the Saudi is rich and rather bigoted, the Lebanese a corrupt tradesman, and the Sudanese is drunk throughout the play).[5] There are clear political allusions, too: thus, the Iraqi character Antar appears on stage speaking with a thick Iraqi Bedouin accent, and parodying the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's martial masculine body language; thus, in the same performance, both linguistic and gendered identities are parodied, and thus opened up for subversive resignification.

The big question is, of course, in how far such a resignification or subversion did in fact take place in the performance and in its wake. There are reasons not to be overly sanguine on this point: predominant Arab attitudes about national and sexual identity do not appear to be seriously dislocated in the play, and may not even have been radically challenged by it: it just repeats, and thus performatively reproduces, existing stereotypes of both Westerners and Arabs from different states. Thus, one may well ask if the comical performance of a discourse of national identities, imperialism, and civilizational clash may actually, and undoubtedly inadvertently, reinforce rather than subvert such discourse. Thus, Mieke Kolk (p.c.) informs me that one European theatrical company considered staging *In Plain Arabic*, but eventually decided against it, considering it to sexist or at least appearing such, and fearing that it would only serve to strengthen local racist stereotypes about Arabs. Speaking with Butler, the potential for subversive resignification of the relations between sexes and nations is real, but restricted and contested.

This brings us to the question of performing gender. In ridiculing the myth of Arabic unity, *In Plain Arabic* exposes the instability of the norms of both Arabic national identity and Arabic masculinity. This link between nationalism and sexuality becomes clearest when the play's male Arabic characters decide to take revenge for the perceived Arabic national humiliation by developing the plan to seduce a large number of western women. This plan for a mass seduction is presented, and glorified, as an attempt to conquer the whole West, and as an act of resistance against 'imperialism and Zionism.' By extension, the play's characters reject any reference to their own faults, weaknesses and divisions as a zionist conspiracy. Thus, the mythical Arabic unity is depicted as having a problematic relation both to the truth and to sexuality. At one point, it emerges that all Arab males have visited the same brothel, but none wants to admit it to his friends, let alone making it publicly known. Elsewhere, it appears that they may have been infected with the AIDS virus, but do not want to be confronted with that possibility. Thus, a problematic masculine national identity is both criticized and reproduced by the play's different characters.

Whereas *Korakistika* ended in a double marriage, *In Plain Arabic* ends in a double divorce, with two women – one Arab and one British – leaving their Arabic fiancés. It closes with a frantic attempt, interrupted by remarks from all sides, at singing the national anthem, almost as a last-ditch attempt to preserve Arabic pride and unity. Although the latter thus appears to have a much more pessimistic undertone, both plays appear to be similarly ambivalent regarding the language forms that shape national identity: in parodying – and in part obviously ridiculing – particular forms of dialect or ideology-laden discourse, they simultaneously criticize, reproduce, and reformulate language-based national identities. Moreover, in both plays, gender identities are clearly conceived as a part, or function, of national identities. Both explicitly link national pride to sexual violence: *Korakistika's* female protagonist Helleniske narrowly avoids being raped by a gang of Albanians; and the Arab characters in *In Plain Arabic* appear to reduce their interaction with European women to questions of Arabic national honor. To judge from these plays, sex is indeed a thoroughly linguistic affair.

Conclusion

The idea that gender is performative suggests that there is nothing inevitable or 'natural' about gender relations. The same holds, by extension, for national and other social identities. Both Neroulos's *Korakistika* and al-Ramly's *In Plain Arabic* turn out to involve new nationalistic articulations of gender identities, and both show how ambivalent such identities are, through their – partly unwitting – play of quotations or imitations. By affirming apparently conventional forms of language and family life, *Korakistika* in fact paves the way for a wholly new kind of gendered national identity. By mimicking familiar gender concerns like men's preoccupation with honor and leaders' martial body language, *In Plain Arabic* provides an ironic comment on Arabic masculinity. Even an apparent affirmation of loyalty, such as singing the national anthem, may turn out to undermine national feeling, or at the very least in exposing its problematic character. This leaves open, however, the question in how far both plays in fact succeed in, or even aim at, subverting existing attitudes and stereotypes. Drama does not necessarily express any beliefs; but it may open up space for dialogue and negotiation, even if the result of such dialogue is not always subversive.

For postcolonial studies, the relevance of these considerations is that one may look with renewed attention at local agencies: one should neither take them as given or unproblematic, nor treat (gendered, national, religious, and other) social identities as determined by structural factors like class structure, existing gender ideologies, modes of production, or colonial domination. Instead, it may be worthwhile to study the rise of identity politics more generally, against the background of both nation state formation and empire, whether it is the experience of British imperialism or the rather different experience of the Ottoman empire and Muhammad Ali's reign in Egypt (or what is usually called *turkiyya* in Sudan). Two perhaps somewhat unexpected perspectives offer themselves for study here: on the one hand, gender, which may reveal people's deepest concerns and anxieties, is one angle from which to look at national and other identities. On the other, it emerges that the modern Greek experience is crucial, not only for the later rise of German nationalism that consciously modeled itself on a newly created image of the ancient Greek *Kulturnation*, but also for the various nationalisms that emerged in the Ottoman empire iduring the nineteenth century. In a way, it has also contributed to the shaping of the nineteenth-century opposition between 'East' and 'West': the Greeks were progressively isolated from their Ottoman surroundings and purified into the original and most authentic representatives of European civilization.[6] A final question raised by the juxtaposition of Greek and Arabic plays from different periods is whether and in how far the nineteenth-century constitution of an Arabic literary and civilizational heritage by the various actors of the Arabic cultural Renaissance or *nahda* was consciously modeled on the Greek experience. While I do not have much to say about this at present, I think that some surprises may await us here.

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NOTES

[1] I have discussed such questions concerning the politics of the non-serious language of comedy in Leezenberg (2005).

[2] For the sake of simplicity, I leave the important psychoanalytical dimension of Butler's work out of the present discussion. A treatment that would more complete justice to her argument would at least have to include a discussion of her use of Freud's concept of melancholia and Lacan's notion of the imaginary.

[3] This does not apply, of course, to the kind of postcolonial criticism developed in the work of authors like Bhabha and Spivak; but this does not appear to have gained a wide currency in the Arab world, either.

[4] Greek: "ammè didetai na exhèi tosèn energeian è chydaïkè kai barbarikè lexis lachanosalata?" (Lascaris 1928: 122).

[5] In fairness, I should add that the Sudanese audience of the original presentation of this paper failed to appreciate al-Ramly's intended irony; particular offense was taken at the suggestion that all Sudanese are drunks. Possibly, the play was not sufficiently ironical or subversive existing national stereotypes.

[6] For a famous, if overly polemical, description of the ways in which the image of ancient Greece was cleaned of all its 'Afro-Asiatic' (i.e., Egyptian and Phoenician) elements and turned into something purely European and indeed Aryan, see Martin Bernal's Black Athena (1988).

IMPOTENT MEN, ENERGIZED WOMEN
Performing woman-ness in Bole Butake's Dramas

Christopher ODHIAMBO JOSEPH

Introduction

To appreciate the thrust of this paper, it is important to have a brief glimpse of Bole Butake, the Cameroon playwright, director, theatre practitioner and intellectual, and the drive behind his art. This entails engaging with his literary and theatre biography that has come a long way, beginning with his ambitious project to redress what was then perceived as 'literary barrenness', to echo Taban Lo Liyong,[1] in the Anglophone speaking Cameroon literary landscape. Reading a paper, "Home and Exile: The African Writer's Dilemma', that Butake presented in a conference, one gets the strong feeling of Butake as a man anxiously in search of an audience. A desire and drive that eventually catalyzed him to originate a creative writers' journal, *The Mould*. But *The Mould,* he seems to have realized was not the vehicle to get him to the audience he so desired. He explains, "…*The Mould* ceased publishing in 1982. By this time I had discovered that drama and theatre were the more likely to satisfy my search for audience than poetry and prose had done, for the simple reason that a play can be watched by a large number of people and is at the same time a form of publishing." As such, with this new insight, Butake begun scripting and producing plays for the proscenium arch stage. But a twist of fate, led him to the audience that he had all a long been searching for: the grassroots people. This he found, through his own encounter with theatre for development as he so enthusiastically proclaims:

> The astounding success with the women participants at the workshop, as evidenced by the discovery that they could actually create a play on their own problems, cast, rehearse and perform it at an audience of two thousand people in a total of three days, proved to me beyond reasonable doubt, that the participatory methodology was a very effective tool of informal education at any level. Ever since, I have either been asked by some non governmental organizations to submit projects on given themes or I have written projects and submitted them for possible funding (9).

Butake's literary and theatre biography is not dissimilar to that of most other creative artists in postcolony. It reveals the anxieties and tensions underlying the relationship(s) between the wielders of political power and the artist who is ever suspected of subversive activities. In this paper I explore how Butake dramatizes the technologies of domination and self in four of his plays[2].

Butake's plays under scrutiny - *Lake God, Survivors, And Palmwine will Flow*, and *Shoes and Four Men in Arms*[3] - can be read as play-texts that are strongly concerned with power relations and its exhibition in patriarchal society. The object of this paper is not however, an analysis of how such power relations and their display are represented in Butake's drama but to interrogate more specifically the way that these power relations and their display result in an effective agency of the women. This interrogation is interesting because, as actors in these plays, the women's physical presence appears to be somewhat peripheral. But ironically, in terms of socio-political transformation(s) in the society of the imaginary work they tend to have a much stronger presence. Indeed Butake's plays seem to depict a world in which women are already constructed, construed and defined as subalterns. This is one reason more, that it is important to analyse how women who initially seems to be absent actors, ever on the margins of the society within these dramatic constructions, eventually end up creating a strong presence in the re-arranging and re-ordering of power relations.

It is important to point out that in all these plays the women, at the beginning, are restricted to their traditionally patriarchal defined domestic spaces and roles, engaged in the quotidian activities as opposed to the men who are supposedly, engaged in the 'serious roles' of running the core affairs of the community. These women are already inscribed in their traditional roles as defined by the patriarchal traditions and systems, correlating with what Elaine Showalter refers to as female culture in which "historians distinguish between the roles, activities, tastes, and behaviours prescribed and considered appropriate for women and those activities, behaviours, and functions actually generated out of women's lives" (David Lodge 1988:345).

Impotent men: Ways of power over bodies

In Butake's drama, the central conflicts are usually not gendered; the women are drawn into the conflicts as a reaction to reinstate a sense of 'cosmic balance' that has been destabilized as a result of masculine power plays: plays where the power relation between the ruler (always male), and his male subjects often remind us of a relationship that Achille Mbembe has described as "mutual zombification of both the dominant males and those whom they apparently dominate. This zombification meant that each robbed the other of his vitality and has left them both impotent (*impouvoir*) (Mbembe 1992:4). Thus, in Butake's plays, the power relations specifically between the ruler and his male subjects deny each the vitality, eventually making both the dominant ruler and his subjugated subjects impotent, even if figuratively. That the ruler and his instruments of exercising power or 'governmentality'[4], to use Michel Foucault's concept of governance, acts as a way of power over the bodies of male subjects within the dramatic imaginary, it obviously follows that women too, even if the way of power is not directed over their bodies directly, remain targets of this exercise of power. The power subjects also wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of the men in the society on whose bodies power is exerted upon.

Transitory Spaces

An interesting aspect of these plays is their setting(s) in transitory spaces. This is significant because it appears that women, in Butake's plays, tend to subvert patriarchal power structures in such transitory moments and spaces. This capability of women to demonstrate agency in such transitory moments and spaces resonates well with Chinyere Grace Okafor's observation that: "In times of distress, when the security of the community is threatened, women are often called upon to save the situation." (1994:9). Indeed, in all the four plays under scrutiny when the communities in Butake's imaginary are in distress, especially in transitory moments and spaces, it is the women characters who use their bodies as sites of resistance, making it possible for the community to regain its sense of 'equilibrium'. Even the most cursory engagement with the four plays reveals that each one of them is set in a fluid transitory space and moment in the history of the imaginary society. For example, *Lake God* is set in an imaginary society that seems to be grappling with the very dynamics of 'transiting' from traditionalism to modernity, while in *Survivors,* the main action of the play takes place in a kind of a 'liminal' space, an in-between place, where the five main characters' journey has abruptly been brought to a stop by a voice, later revealed as that of a military officer who has been harassing men at the market prior to the holocaust (60-1). In *And Palmwine will Flow*, a new Fon (traditional chief) has just inherited the throne of power from his late father and the setting captures this transient mien of the society at this particular moment. Finally, *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* obtains its physical setting in a vulnerable, fluid space under a military operation combing out supposed 'subversive elements' who have been involved in protest demonstration against a dictatorial military order.

In a very fundamental way, it appears that these transitory moments and spaces have significantly disturbed the patriarchal power structures in the different imagined settings that Butake (re)presents in his drama. Within the transitory moments and spaces power relations shift, become very unstable and fluid. In these transitory moments and spaces those entrusted with communal power and authority appear to be more interested in condensing and investing such powers and authorities into their own bodies, whilst at the same time deploying those very powers to undermine traditional patriarchal power relation systems. But what is even more disturbing is the way in which this new power concentrated in the singular body of the ruler is performed. Bodies exercising this power, predominately male, direct it at the bodies of their subjects, usually men. This strategy of exercising power reminds us of Foucault's concept of how power is usually exercised over bodies. One of two ways, Foucault argues, "is the way of power over bodies where power relations have an immediate hold upon [the body], they invest it, mask it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 1977: 25-6; Harland 1988:156). It is this way of power of bodies over other bodies that seem to be displayed explicitly in Butake's drama, especially in the specificity of the power relations between the dominant male (ruler) and the dominated male (subjects). In *Lake God* for example the new Fon - the ruler (chief) of the community - inherits the throne from his father, and because of the influence of Western education and strong affiliation to Catholic doctrines, he is strongly intent to transform this previously traditional society to a modern capitalist economy. To achieve his project of modernization, Christianization and civilization of his society, he outlaws all the existing patriarchal structures and systems of governance beginning with Kwifon, the men's secret cult and the most important authority in the people's lives whose members he detains: a clear case of power over bodies. The very act of outlawing the male institution of authority can figuratively be interpreted as an act of 'de-masculinizing' the men in this society, rendering them impotent and irrelevant. But in an interesting twist of irony, it emerges that the Fon himself is impotent, both literally and metaphorically. Literally, he has failed to sire a child with his wife Angela, and as such she has become a subject of ridicule among women. Metaphorically, the Fon has relegated all the powers and authority governance bestowed upon him by virtue of his position, to the Catholic priest Father Leo, who makes all decisions on his behalf. As Shey Bo-Nyo the priest of the Lake God aptly puts it:

> Keep your hands off me, you scoundrels. I will see the Fon. He must listen to me. The white man has brought trouble to the land. He has killed our gods and the Fon is impotent (Lake God, 9).

Indeed impotence is not only motific in Butake's plays but seems to recur in post-colony whenever there is a display of power relations. Mbembe (1994) graphically demonstrates the exhibition of this impotence motif in post-colony.

In *Survivors,* a sequel to *Lake God*, Butake uses five survivors of the apocalypse to show how the way of power over bodies makes men to become impotent. Among the survivors are an old man, a middle aged man (Ngujoh), a woman (Mboysi), a boy (Tata) and a girl (Mbolame). The group appears as if it is a nucleus family but in actual sense it is not. The five have been brought together by the hand of fate. We encounter these characters on their way to a place called Ewawa where they expect to find a new sanctuary after the ruin of their own land. As was mentioned earlier, they are therefore in a state of transition. It is within this transitory state that the way of power exerts itself over their bodies.[5] A voice from an invisible being takes control of their bodies, giving out orders that direct their bodies in particular ways, reminding us of Foucault's idea of panoptical - that system of control of bodies in modern capitalist societies. The voice becomes a way of power of a particular body over the bodies of the underprivileged masses.

Voice: Don't Move! Don't move! Halt! (Characters freeze. After a while they turn round uncertainly and walk in the direction from which they had just come). Don't move! Don't Move! Halt!

Old One: There is no going forward. And there is no turning back.
Ngujoh: Terrifying voices. Old one, did you see anything? Anyone? (Survivors, 60).

The voice literally reduces the survivors into prisoners within the 'liminal' space that they find themselves confined to. The voice ensures that they can not move forward or backwards. Finding themselves in this prison-like situation, the male characters realize their own inadequacy. They have no real power to challenge or confront the voice. It is in this 'liminal' space that they 'accept' their impotence, confronted with the fact that as 'men' they are incapable of securing their freedom. This awareness prompts them to recognise that maybe it is the woman – Mboysi - who might liberate them from this prison-like situation (as will become clear later in this paper). In *And Palmwine will Flow* once again Butake confronts the reader with yet another transitory situation. Just as in *Lake God* a new Fon has inherited the throne of power and similar to the Fon in *Lake God* he also punctures the traditional patriarchal structures of power, which he invests into his own body. Thus his body becomes the symbol of all power: power emanates from his own body to be exerted over the bodies of his male subjects, on the one hand, through physical torture. These are bodies that are perceived to stand in opposition to his power. The following dialogue between Shey Ngong and Tapper captures the way of power as torture quite succinctly:

> *Shey Ngong*: Where is Nsangong now?
> *Tapper*: I was coming to that. Shey. When those three rogues threw me out of the bush, I took the road leading because I knew you would be waiting. Halfway through, I met with Tashi. You know Tashi, don't you? It was he who gave me the details. The things that are happening in this land are pregnant, he said. Imagine a respectable man like Nsangong, tied with ropes to a kolanut tree as if he were a cow and whipped by worthless thieves. Yes. They whipped him thoroughly until he began to bleed in several places. Then some people in the crowd intervened and carried him to his compound. He could no longer walk. But, I tell you, Nsangong is a man. During all that time that he was being tortured, he never opened his mouth. Not even a sound of anguished pain or despair. That man is a man. It was his courage that encouraged some people to intervene and so saved his life, Tashi concluded (And Palmwine, 99).

On the other hand, bodies of the male subjects who do not stand in direct opposition to his (Fon's) way of power are also made impotent but in a more seductive and subtle manner. The Fon organizes carnivals, festivals and celebrations at which the subjects get so thoroughly intoxicated with palm wine that in the end they can not perform any productive activities. As Mbembe notes, although in a different context but still very relevant to our argument, "these bodies could just as easily be in a state of abandon, caught… 'by the beer, the dancing, the tobacco, the love pumped out like spit, the strange drinks, the sects, the palaver-everything that might stop them being the bad conscience of their Excellencies'." (Mbembe 1992:13). But the Fon too, ironically is not spared of this impotence. The 'Fondom' has indeed become a land of drunkards and no meaningful activities seem to be taking place. The Fon and his subjects are perpetually engaged in festivities in the palace.

In *Shoes…* we encounter yet another transitory site. The play is set in a state of emergency. The soldiers are in a 'clean up operation' to clear the place of dissidents and subversives. The community has been involved in protesting demonstrations against the autocratic gestures of their military leader - the general. During the life of the play the usual lives of members of this community have been temporarily interrupted. This interruption of the usual way of life once again reminds us of Mbembe's observation of how power is performed in post-colony: "(these same) bodies can be neutered whenever they are thought to be 'disfiguring' a public place, or are considered a threat to public order (just as demonstrations are crushed in bloodshed) - whenever the *commandment*, wishing to leave imprinted on the minds of its subjects a mark of its enjoyment, sacrifice them to the firing squad" (Mbembe1992:13). It is indeed the raw performance of power which renders the men in Butake's dramas impotent. In *Shoes*…the soldiers use punishment to create fear amongst the citizenry. This is in fact Butake's most masculine play. It is a play in which the soldiers, apart from their commandant are obsessed with the performance of masculinity, their manhood. They torture other men and rape women. But once again, this excessive display of masculinity appears to be an escape mechanism from their own impotence, as one of them bitterly declares:

> *Fourth*: Who do you think is staying? We have been four men in arms being used like play things, like toys even, by a small nyama-nyama group of very corrupt thieves and self-seekers, to humiliate, to torture and to kill our own brothers and sisters, the suffering people, in the name of a law and land which they manipulate at will and in which they have no faith (*And Palmwine*, 141).

Thus, this obsession with performance of masculinity is a response to their own threatened virility by their seniors. In this play it is significant that only the four male characters are physically present on the acting space, all the other characters are off- stage and their presence is signified by their voices responding to the actions of the soldiers. To a great extent this play remind us of Foucault's explanation of how power manifests itself in capitalist economy when he argues that it, "forces bodies to a new kind of labour, to extract productive service from. This involves an actual 'incorporation of power into the bodies of individuals, controlling their acts and attitudes and behaviour from within" (Foucault, 1977, 1997, 1980; Harland, 1988:156). This is indeed apparent in the manner in which the four soldiers respond to the way of power from their superiors as incorporated in their own bodies.

Bodies' own Ways of Power: Performing Woman-ness

Having demonstrated how men in Butake's drama are rendered impotent, that is both as the dominator and dominated, it is now important to turn to the ways women in these dramas respond to the dominant-dominated male power relations.

In fact the way that woman-ness is performed in these plays maybe best understood once more by taking recourse in Foucault's conceptualisation of power relations, especially his argument that such relations are not over determined, and can indeed be de-settled, destabilised, contested and are escapable (Foucault, 1977, 1997, 1980; Harland 1988). Though, as it has emerged from the foregoing discussion, the way of power in Butake's plays seems to be mainly directed at the bodies of the male subjects, paradoxically however it is the women's bodies that resist the ways of power that render the bodies of their male counterparts impotent. This is a slight deviation from Foucault's conceptualization where it is the body that poweracts upon which in return resists that same power. Thus in Butake's plays this understanding and interpretation of the ways of power and its exercise is both deconstructed and subverted. In his imaginary world it are the women who seem to embody what Foucault considers as "way of power which is the way of the body's own power, the body's own force of will and desire… a power of the body that opposes the power over bodies, and thereby represents, the source of all revolution' (Harland, 1988: 156). When male bodies have been rendered impotent in Butake's imaginary world, it becomes the women's project to generate power of their own bodies to resist the way of power from the body of the ruler and his agents. The women's desire and will to reinstate 'cosmic equilibrium' leads them to search for appropriate strategies and tactics to confront the way of power that renders the bodies of their male counterparts impotent. It is in this sense that the bodies of the women in these plays can be interpreted as political symbols since they get involved in demonstrations and physical confrontation. As Foucault has argued, "the body is political only when it is used as a symbol" (Foucault, 1977; Harland, 1988:163). Thus, in Butake's drama the woman's body is symbolically deployed to participate in political action; confronting and challenging dominant agents of power that make their men impotent.

In *Lake God* the women's realization that their men's impotence is a result of the domination by the Fon and Father Leo, catalyses them to revive their own secret society - the Fibuen - that has been dormant since the new Fon came to power. The Fibuen, a site of rituals, provides them with possibilities of establishing a sense of sisterhood, as such enabling them to create a strong bond of unity, quintessential in confronting the way of power of emitting from the Fon's body as well as from the bodies of their husbands over their own bodies. The dialogue below will most appropriately suffice our illustration:

> *Yensi*: I lack words with which to express my joy. The happiness that is in my heart cannot be shown on my face. The happenings of today have shown that, in spite of what some people say, the ways of the land are alive.

> We must be one person to succeed in our present undertaking. We must be one woman. Some have only recently been given into marriage. Their bellies are hot. There are others who cannot control their emotions of love and sympathy. There are still others who will easily succumb to threats and the fear of being beaten. You all know where we have built the sanctuary of the Fibuen. We have taken it away from that place which I don't want to call by name. The sanctuary is the refuge for those without a heart. Go there if you cannot look your man in the face and tell him to go and eat shit.
> *Chorus*: (laughter) he he he! Haa! Wus!
> *Nkasai*: Listen, Yensi, this thing is not as easy as you want to make it look. There are women here who, as soon as we disperse, will start disclosing everything as if their mouths are leaking.
> *Kimbong*: You speak the truth, Nksai. Where is Ma Kushan? We must all take the oath of sealed lips.
> *Yensi*: Ma Kusham? Ma Kusham? I beg you come forward and conduct the rite (*Lake God,* 24).

The women recognize that unity is paramount for them to resist the power of the Fon that has been deployed to render their men impotent. It becomes therefore incumbent on the women to deal with issues that have been ordinarily in the male domain. The men can not meaningfully organize themselves to protect their households because the Kwifon, their institution of authority has been outlawed. The women therefore take these roles, making themselves visible through protest and demonstration against the Cattle Keeper's transgression on their farms. In a true sense the protest is indirectly targeting the Fon's power and authority. They march to the Fon's palace carrying one of the culprits - Dewa- but the Fon fails to respond effectively to their concerns. Realizing that they cannot challenge the authority of Fon without the support of men, they change strategy and tactics. Thus instead of confronting the Fon, the women decide to direct their protest against their own husbands. Deploying what Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfare (1994) refer to as the "every day forms of resistance - the 'weapons of the weak' in the mundane, informal, diffuse and often individualistic activities (24) the women aspire to provoke the consciences of their husbands. They refuse to serve them with meals and also deny them sex. These symbolic gestures become significatory, re-awakening the men from their somnambulist state. They are forced to begin asking themselves fundamental questions in regard to the women's behaviour. Finally they realize that the women's act was indeed a gesture of communication, signalling them to act against the transgressions of the Fon. Indeed the men realize that they had abdicated their responsibilities as the heads of their households. Thus the women's symbolic gestures lead them to some kind of praxis. Eventually, reflecting on their role in the ensuing drama of events in their community, they decide to take appropriate action, reviving the Kwifon even when its leader is still in detention, and using its inherent powers to confront the Fon. However, by the time they confront the Fon, physically forcing him to lead them to perform the sacrifice to the Lake God, it is already too late; the god can no longer be appeased. The Lake God unleashes his rage destroying the entire land for the five survivors: an old man, middle aged, a middle aged woman, a boy and girl. It is therefore possible to conclude that it was the performance of 'woman-ness' that leads to the new consciousness in men and the coterminous resistance against the power and transgressions of the Fon and his patron, Father Leo. Admittedly, in *Lake God*, the bodies (of women) that had been construed as peripheral are the ones that through the development of new consciousnesses eventually confront the body (of the Fon) that had exerted power over their bodies.

The Play *Survivors* is most probably Butake's best illustration of ways of power over bodies and concomitantly the body's own will and desire to resist power exerted upon it. As mentioned at the beginning, *Survivors* is a drama of transition, vulnerability and resilience. The characters we encounter are the survivors of the apocalypse that is dramatized in *Lake God.* As this play begins, the five survivors are on a journey in search of an alternative place. But on their way, they are confronted by an invisible voice that literally, exerts its power over their bodies. The voice, acting in similar ways to Foucault's panoptical technology of surveillance, controls their movements, their gestures and their conversations; in fact their thought processes. As one of the characters, Old One aptly captures it: " There is no going forward. There is no turning back. We are caught in the web of spider (*Lake God*, 63). The voice uses its mystic powers, to transfix them to this transitory-(liminal) - space. Even though Tata the boy demystifies the voice by revealing that it is the voice of the Officer who harasses men in the market place, this revelation does not demystify the power behind the voice as exemplified by the following dialogue:

> *Tata*: I saw nothing. But that terrifying voice is the voice of Officer.
> *Mboysi*: The voice of who? How do you know?
> *Mbalame*: Officer?
> *Tata*: Every market day, they come and catch me.
> *Ngujoh*: Because of tax. The people who carry guns. The people who wear khaki clothes and catch men. (Lake God, 60-61).

The body of this Officer who has been symbolizing the way of power of 'governmentality' over the bodies of other men - forcing them to pay taxation - before the catastrophe, now boosted with the power of a gun, makes the men absolutely impotent. This impotence is concretized with the men conceding that they did not have power to neither fight nor negotiate with the Officer. It is this realization that drives Ngujoh out of selfishness, rather than his goodwill, and makes him propose that Mboysi, a woman, should go and negotiate with the Officer on their behalf (*Lake God,* 63). Implicit in his suggestion is that Mboysi can use her femininity/sexuality as a site of disempowering the Officer. A position, that obviously perpetuates myths and stereotypes constructed about women as deceitful; alluding most probably to the biblical narrative of Samson and Delilah. Ngujoh's thinking reinstates a masculine mindset where a woman is perceived an object of assuaging male ego and sexual desire:

> *Ngujoh*: (Looking at Mboysi) We can get him to negotiate. With her co-operation.
> *Mboysi*: What do you mean? With my co-operation?
> *Ngujoh*: You can speak to him in the language he understands, having been a teacher at our school. *Moreover, you are a woman with great charms.*
> *Old One*: *Oh hoo! A woman will soften the hardest heart*. (Emphasis mine, Lake God, 63).

But Mboysi interprets her drive to negotiate with the Officer as a natural maternal instinct to preserve the survival of this community of survivors, as the following dialogue between her and the young girl illustrates:

> *Bolame*: I want water, mother. I am hungry, mother.
> *Mboysi*: Be patient, child. I will go to Officer… (*Survivors,* 65)

Predictably, the relationship that develops between Officer and Mboysi is limited to a sexual exploitation: the Officer is using Mbosyi's body as an object of his sexual pleasure in return for food and clothing. Paradoxically these 'goodies' are actually donations meant for the use of the survivors. An interesting dimension to the power relation that initially develops between Mboysi, the subaltern and Officer the dominant power is best illustrated by what Mbembe (1992) describes as "illicit cohabitation, a relationship made fraught by the very fact of the *commandement* and its 'subject' to share the same living space" (p.4). Mboysi's conscience and sensibilities are however heightened when she comes to the bitter realization that she has been (ab-)used by the Officer as well as by Ngujoh (*Survivors*, 78). This marks the counterpoint in her relationship with the Officer as she now decides to deploy her body as a site for resistance. She defiantly proclaims that: "I will show Officer that in spite of his gun and loud menaces, he is only a man, mortal" (*Survivors*, 79). Thus her body now reacts to the Officer, a way of power, in a more conscious way: no longer as an object, but more as a subject. Now, no longer innocent or naïve, she deploys her femininity to contest the ways of power of Officer over her body. Like the trickster in the folklore, she deceives the Officer to give her his gun which symbolically signifies his phallocentrism, and therefore his masculinity. With the gun in her possession, the Officer is deprived of his manhood and can no longer perform power. Without the gun, the Officer becomes impotent, reduced to the level of the other men that he had used the power of his gun to make impotent. Mboysi captures the sound more dramatically when she ridicules the Officer: "Wait a little. I just want to make sure it works. (She pulls the trigger and Officer dives unto the floor. Mboysi laughs mirthlessly). So it really works eh? And you, crawling like a worm on the ground, so you can be reduced to this?" (*Survivors,* 83).

Although Mboysi's has neutered the Officer, the celebration of her heroic deed is cut short when she is shot dead. And lying dead, the Officer who has shot her can only bemoan the loss of a potential sex object. He comments:

> Walahi! She was really a beautiful woman. I now understand. But where did she get those crazy ideas from? And a woman of such beauty! Very strange, indeed. (Raising voice) Corporal? Bring your men and clear out the casualty…What a beautiful body to waste! Strange! Very strange! (*Survivors*, 85*)*.

In *And Palmwine will Flow* the new Fon has usurped all power and concentrated it in his own body. In addition, he has turned the 'Fondom' to a land of perpetual carnival, festivals, ceremonies, celebrations and merry-making. He ensures that his subjects are drunk on palm wine throughout. Consequently, he ends up with a community of impotent male subjects who can no longer question his authority, having suspended the council of elders that would have provided checks and balances to his power. The only people who still stand in opposition to the Fon are Shey Ngong and the Tapper. However, those who stand in opposition to the Fon's way of power are killed and their bodies thrown into the forest. Because men have been rendered impotent, Butake privileges the bodies of women in the project of resistance against the ways of power of the Fon. In alliance with women, Shey Ngong and the Tapper plot how to reinstate the sanity back to the community by stopping the festivals and celebrations that make the people perpetual drunkards and therefore impotent. Possessed by the spirit of Kibaranko the Tapper invades the palace and destroys all the pots of palmwine, burns the palace arena where people have been feasting. But this is not all; the women also meet in their secret society and decide to curse the Fon by presenting him with fluid from their vaginas. It is the sight of this abomination that brings him back to his senses, but Kwengong, Shey Ngong's wife, breaks the pot on his head and killing him. More important in this play is the central position that the women take after the overthrow of the Fon and his acolytes of sycophants. The women now share with their men the political public spaces as opposed to the more private domestic and ritualistic spaces. In fact it is Kwengong, Shey's wife who finally pronounces how the people should be governed in future and avoid a situation where power would be congested in a single person's body ever again. She proclaims that: "He cannot be Fon. The women have decided. No more Fons in the land… The people will rule through the council of elders led by Shey, here. The day that he takes the wrong decision, the same day, the people shall meet in the market place and put another at the head of the council of elders." (And *Palmwine,* 113). The decision that the women take on how power should be exercised closes with Foucault's idea that:

> Every particular deployment of power implies certain possibilities of struggle and resistance- a resistance that never takes the form of a total rejection of "power" but which rather will be manifested as struggles aimed at the particular and distinctive configurations of power. (Schmidt& Wartenberg, 1994:288).

In *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* Butake uses the bodies of old women as both a site of taboo and resistance. In this largely masculine text where the soldiers are performing their manhood, it is the threat of the secret society of the old women that restores a sense of order in the ensuing state of anarchy, where soldiers have taken the law into their own hands and are violating the rights of the civilians, torturing men and raping women. Thus the way of power emitted by the bodies of soldiers over the bodies of civilians only finds resistance from a threat from the old bodies of women, as is exposed in the following dialogue:

> Stage directions: *Bootsteps of many people running off. Sarcastic laughter of old woman off.*
> *Female voice*: Come take you chop no my bikkin. You di lun wet again/ Soja man witi long. Long gun di lun woman na lun? Na only nyong girl wuna fanam? Shoes, shoes! Wus kana shoes soja dem go chakara country so and den beat Chila dem and chakara nyong dem lass?

> *More old women's voices.*
>
> ………………………………………………………………………
>
> *Third*: The Kil'u women. Very old and very dangerous women.
>
> ……………………………………………………………………………
>
> *Second*: Why were soldiers running?
> *Third*: Captain, you know what it means for an old to expose her nakedness before your eyes?
> *Fourth*: A curse beyond measure.
> *Third*: The end of your manhood. What is the use of being a soldier without your manhood?
> *Second*: Where have they been? I have never heard of them before.
> *Third*: They have always been around. Kind of the Mountain of Elephants. Sleeping volcano if you see what I mean (*Shoes*, 138).

A reading of the four play-texts reveals how Butake deploys the woman's body in different ways as a technology of resistance. Though women do not take central roles in the plays, it is eventually their acts and reactions that are more liberating, given that in all these plays men have been made impotent as a result of power being concentrated in the body of one person, the ruler. The dramatization of power relations in these plays seems to concur with Schmidt and Wartenberg's interpretation of Foucault's concept of power that, " power must be seen as productive rather than simply as repressive, and always emphasized that every attempt to exercise power always carried within it certain specific possibilities of resistance" (Foucault 1994:304).

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Notes

[1] Taban Lo Liyong's statement about the Literary barrenness in East Africa has become the reference point on major creative discourses in Africa. However it specifically made reference to East African literary landscape in the immediate post independence period. (See details: *The Last Words*, Taban Lo Liyong).

[2] Butake has written a number of plays such as *The Rape of Michelle* (1984), *Lake God* (1986), *The Survivors* (1989), *And Palm-wine will Flow* (1990), *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* (1993), *Dance of the Vampires* (1995) all published in the collection *Lake God and other Plays* (1999). Other plays are *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon/Zintrafff et la Bataille de Mankon* (1993), with Gilbert Doho published, 2002. *Family Saga* (2005), and *Betrothal without Libation* (2005).

[3] All these plays are found in the collection *God Lake and other plays* (1999).

[4] Foucault uses the term 'Governmentality, as a guide to trace the genealogy of the modern state in terms of how power and politics are interrelated. However in this paper we adopt Foucault' more encompassing deployment of as it, in its older usage as forms of power and processes of subjectification. (See for instance Foucault, *Power ed.* James Faubion *(2000), Politics, Philosophy, Culture: interviews and other Writings 1977-1984; Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault Habermas Debate. Ed* Michael Kelly *(1994),* Foucault: *Discipline and Punish (1977) and Power/Knowledge (1980);* Thomas Lemke, Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique unpublished paper (2000).

[5] in Foucauldian sense. See for details *Discipline and Punish*, 1977.

GENDERIZED AND SUBVERSIVE SPECTATORSHIP

The case of two Zimbabwean Plays

Nehemia CHIVANDIKWA

Introduction

Gender and sexuality are closely related terms in Zimbabwe. Gender refers to the attributes that differentiate males from females while sexuality refers to the "object of choice and modalities of erotic desire for pleasure or reproduction" (Howard 1994:67). In this study, gender mainly refers to economic, social, and cultural relationships and roles between men and women. By sexuality, I refer to bodily systems, relating to sexual relations.

Recently, the major object of different kinds of feminisms has been the attempt to liberate women from what is considered to be various forms of domestic and public exploitation and oppression. In Zimbabwe, popular cultural forms and texts such as soap operas, film and theatre, project images of gender and sexuality which have generated a lot of interest and attention both within and without feminist discourses.

While there has been commendable efforts in interpreting and analysing gender constructions in cultural texts, spectatorship of these art forms, particularly theatre, has not yet received the kind of attention that I think it deserves in Zimbabwe. It is as if the audience is thought to be passive. I therefore intend to explore practices and assumptions about theatre-going in Zimbabwe, but within the specific confines of gender-related meanings. This interest has been inspired largely by the "… emergence of thinking about the viewership for performance as a gendered phenomenon …" (Bennett, 1998:265).

The object of this paper is to interrogate the relationship between two performance texts, namely, *Zvatapera Todini*? (What Shall We Do?) and *Africano-Americano,* and their audiences in different performance contexts. The first intention is to explore and demonstrate how gender representations in the two plays are objectively implicated in patriarchal hegemony. The second objective is to show how spectatorship in performances of these two plays was heavily gendered though differently in varied performance contexts. Lastly, the study proffers some suggestions on how both gender constructions and viewership in theatre can be enhanced in order to make a significant contribution to gender relations in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical framework

The current project is located in reception theory which has been shifting radically from ‘texts’ towards the role of the reader or audience in the process of interpretation (Regan, 1998:295). As already noted earlier, the reader or audience is an active recipient if not producer of meanings in cultural art forms. In this regard, criticism in reception theory focuses on the following; (a) the kind of reader/spectator which given texts imply (b) codes and conventions which spectator decode, (c) mental processes that occur as readers or spectators move through a text (d) socio- historical differences that might distinguish one response from another (ibid).

In light of the above, this paper seeks to demonstrate how spectators of *Zvatapera Todini?* and *Africano-Americano* were influenced by various needs, wants and other socio-historical factors to construct the kind of meanings they constructed in specific performance contexts. More importantly, the study seeks to demonstrate how some spectators, particularly women, ‘neutralised’ and ‘deflected’ the hegemonic force of some of the representations in the texts. All this seems to confirm the thesis that performance is a transaction between performers and the auditorium and that the image of a passive audience is a “… figment of the imagination, a practical impossibility …” (Kershaw, 1993:17). I am therefore keen on arguing for the potential of theatre spectatorship as a subversive enterprise within the specific realm of gender relations.

Feminization of HIV/AIDS – *Zvatapera Todini*? (*We are perishing: What shall we do?*)

Zvatapera Todini? was produced by Monte Casino High School girls and it was written and directed by Anna Ndebele. The production was premiered at Waddilove High School in Marondera at a theatre festival, and subsequently performed at other performance venues in Harare, Marondera, Plumtree and Macheke.

Zvatapera Todini? is an artistic attempt to raise awareness on the dangers of HIV/AIDS. One of the serious issues the play raises is that it is not only the ‘promiscuous’ who are affected by HIV/AIDS, but that also the ‘innocent’ are affected as much as the ‘villains’. The conflict between Mr Dzoro the protagonist and his wife reflects the power struggles between men and women in patriarchal Zimbabwe. Mr Dzoro takes his wife for granted; he does not respect her at all. She is crudely despised and abused. He does not expect Mrs Dzoro to challenge him at all. Mrs Dzoro is presented as a ‘typical’ wife who is powerless to challenge his abuse and prejudice. All she wants is her husband to come home and provide financial assistance to the family. His promiscuity is never challenged. To this extent, Mrs Dzoro is largely an object of pity, a hopeless woman - an image that feminist discourses obviously vehemently object to. The narrative seems to suggest that there is no alternative for women who get infected by HIV/AIDS as a direct result of the sexual behaviour of their husbands, except to plead for ‘benevolence’.

The same situation characterizes the relationship between the protagonist Mr Dzoro and one of his prostitutes, Sharon, who is entirely dependent on him. One gets the impression that this kind of gender representation takes it for granted that the emotional and economic dependence of women on men is culturally and spiritually ordained.

Objectification/Commodification of Women

Visually and verbally, the play tends to objectify and commodify women through sexual and other cultural metaphors. This is quite curious because this play was conceived, devised, produced and performed by women. Perhaps this is a classic case of the ‘oppressed’ internalising oppression and cooperating in their own domination.

Generally, negative images and metaphors of female sexuality abound in this narrative. Sharon the prostitute’s sexuality is explicitly explored. She is a light woman whose body structure is accentuated by a very short skirt which exposes her thighs. Her breasts are barely covered. Costume is meant to emphasize her feminine sexuality in which size is an important factor that constructs Zimbabwean female sexuality where emphasis is placed on the “… contours, curves and sensuality of a large well-formed African form…” (McFadden 1996:23).

There are problems here in this construction of female sexuality. First, the fact that the production seems to reinforce the stereotype of females as sex objects for the erotic benefit of the ‘male gaze’ is an unfortunate complication in gender relations. Secondly, the cliché of a prostitute wearing a mini-skirt or ‘revealing’ clothes could be objectionable on the premise that it is a ‘myth’ which is sometimes used by insensitive men to justify the rape of women.

Dialogue in *Zvatapera Todini?* also reinforces these stereotypes. For example, Sharon the prostitute usually brags crudely about her sexual performance in a bid to extort more money from Dzoro. She says “*Zvinobhadharwa ka izvi. Iwe unoti zvandinoita zvishoma*” (You have to pay. You know my competence). What she means is that her ‘performance’ in bed is so high that she deserves lucrative payment.

This brings to the fore the pertinent question and problematic of the feminization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwean theatrical representations where it is usually constructed as a prostitute’s disease. This trend is also common in Ghana where women with enchanting eyes, gap between their teeth and plum legs are projected as a danger to man (Dogbe 2002:95). In any case, Sharon’s ‘contours’ and ‘curves’ in her well-formed sensual body is a danger to men whose promiscuity in most cases is clumsily challenged, if at all.

At the same time Mrs Dzoro represents qualities of a virtuous but unfortunate woman. She is a very positive image of an “ideal” traditional African woman who is patient and responsible. She can be equated to the “… idealistic image of the woman as the symbol of beauty, family stability and moral fibre of the whole nation …” (Chimhundu 1988:148). This is indeed a very positive construction of motherhood in the Zimbabwean context. Surprisingly, however, this traditional identity of a woman is not questioned in the context of HIV/AIDS. It is an extremely problematic representation of motherhood a much as it is tragic. Typically, Mrs Dzoro is always weeping, regretting and verbalizing her troubles. Physically she is a pathetic and sorry sight. She is always coughing and vomiting. The texture of her hair and skin are a source of cruel jokes and ridicule among some voracious gossiping women in her community. (Here again we have another negative cliché of womanhood). The vivid descriptions by the gossiping women of her emaciated body, weak gait, ceaseless coughing and persistent diarrhoea is an intensely depressing experience. Most of the scenes which feature female victims of the HIV/AIDS pandemic conjure up images of horror, hopelessness, desperation and death.

In short, this theatrical narrative represents women at different but negative levels. At the first level, HIV/AIDS is projected as a disease that is brought by ‘immoral’ and vicious female prostitutes. At the second level, ‘innocent’ and ‘virtuous’ women are imaged as hopeless and passive victims of the disease. The latter characterization is deliberately meant to evoke pity from the audience.

Female ‘resistant readers’ in two contexts

In this section I focus on the reception of this production in different performance and social contexts. The first context is the performance at Monte-Casino High School which was dominated by women of varying age groups and social backgrounds. The majority of them were high school students, apart from female teachers and villagers from surrounding villages and farm communities. The second performance was at a theatre festival at Waddilove High School where spectators were evenly balanced in terms of gender representation.

At Monte Casino, it was clear that the narrative did not achieve its apparently intended impact, especially where the women characters wept, wailed and verbalized their troubles, for example, in the prologue, epilogue, and the last scene, two girls and their mother wept uncontrollably for some time. Most members of the audience were visibly irritated and put off. The intention of the creators of the play was to show the horror of HIV/AIDS so that the audience would fear engaging in behaviour that could potentially attract HIV/AIDS. Yet there is an apparent irony and contradiction. At Monte Casino, as the female performers wailed and shouted in serious mourning, most members of the audience burst into uproarious laughter.

The above two responses raise two critical issues. First, when some members of the audience closed their eyes and ears, it suggests that stereotypical images, in this case clichés of female suffering, when over-emphasized on stage, have the danger of repelling the audience. Secondly, the response of laughing at images that are meant to evoke pity and sorrow also confirms the notion that simplistic and negative stereotypes can be very familiar and unchallenging to the audience (Hatcher 1993, Rohmer 1996.)

Another clearly unintended impact is that Sharon the prostitute was a ‘darling’ among the mostly-female members at Monte Casino. Most of them would cheer wildly each time she appeared on stage. Why? Maybe they were celebrating her aggressiveness and feminine assertiveness. Perhaps since most of them were young women living in a social context where they were becoming conscious of patriarchal hegemony, their response was an act of ‘rebellion’ against both male domination and the specific images in the narrative. Probably in their individual and collective minds, Sharon represents the beauty of feminine sexuality, which was being abused by the producers of the narrative. If this reading is correct, then the play did not achieve its objective of creating a stereotype whose conduct the spectators should shun. In fact, young female spectators frequently remarked that, *Garinya rakazvipengera* (The prostitute is cunning and assertive). The tone of the remarks did not suggest disgust, but ostensible admiration. In short, female spectators at Monte Casino functioned as ‘resistant readers’ who analyzed a performance’s meaning by ‘reading’ against “… the grain of stereotypes and resisting the manipulation of both the performance text and the cultural text that it helps to shape” (Dolan, 1998:289).

At Waddilove, spectators’ responses were again genderized. Female spectators continued to celebrate objective or perceived female assertiveness. There was an added dimension in that some young spectators would hurl insults at male ‘culprits’ and traditional women in the narrative. Challenging male characters was an open ‘revolt’ against domination in social, economic, and cultural and sexual domains. However, the verbal ‘revolts’ were not as boisterous as those witnessed at Monte Casino, perhaps because of the presence of ‘respectable’ members from Harare and Marondera which presence made the young female spectators self-conscious. Nevertheless, it was quite evident that female members of the audience contested male domination in *Zvatapera Todini?* The representation of traditional women as typified by the image of Mrs Dzoro’s mother was resisted primarily because it celebrated women who have internalized patriarchal ideology. In essence, what young members of the audience were probably suggesting is that they did not like the traditional image of a submissive and subservient woman who colluded in her own ‘oppression’.

On the other hand, male spectators at Waddilove generally enjoyed technical aspects of the narrative such as music and dance, perhaps because these functioned to satisfy the ‘male gaze’, since the costume worn by female performers had the potential to erotically stimulate them. In any case, males in the narrative are addressed as active subjects, for example, the promiscuous Dzoro is never depicted as having fallen sick, while “his” victims fall sick and die from HIV/AIDS. It is possible that males enjoyed this production largely because it pandered to their prejudices and gender attitudes.

Limited Female Agency: *Africano-Americano*

Africano-Americano was produced by Iyasa Theatre Company and directed by Nkululekho Dube in 2003. Subsequently, the production went on tour in and outside the country.

Africano-Americano is about cultural awakening from a girl who marries a white American man. The couple goes to America where the girl called Africano loses her identity and adopts American values. However, she is abused, oppressed and shunned in America. Eventually, she decides to come back home. Unfortunately, she is murdered by her husband Americano before she manages to go back home. The play is a portrayal of Zimbabwean culture with issues like marriage, sexuality and courtship being explicitly explored.

Birth of a Star

There is an extent to which the female protagonist Africano represents female agency and subjectivity. In the first instance, her birth is hailed by the community as the birth of a star. It is an unusual birth which seems to draw parallels with the birth of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith. The birth can also be equated to the birth of Unosilimela in Credo Mtwa's *Unosilimela*. Africano's birth is celebrated as a communal event in the community. The whole village anticipated her birth in a collective tension. As soon as she was born, the whole community erupted into a frenzy of celebration. Children, elders and mothers danced, sang and ululated to celebrate the birth of a 'Star'.

After having been initially fooled and dumped by Americano, she underwent a cultural and intellectual transformation through which she vowed to reclaim her identity. The mere fact that these heroic attributes are attributed to a female character is a real progressive development considering that in most cases in the Zimbabwean imagination, passivity is a female attribute while activity is a male one. Africano's ability to confront Americano's delinquency and promiscuity in his own 'turf' in America, is admirable indeed. She is depicted as a great fighter both physically and ideologically.

However, as a cultural construct, *Africano-Americano's* transgressiveness has real limits. To begin with, the marriage between Africano and Americano is meant to transcend personal levels as it largely symbolizes the "marriage" of the cultures. So this marriage is a metaphor for the domination of African cultures by western cultures. Viewed from this perspective, the feminization of the African continent can be regarded as an unfortunate metaphor as it implies that Africa is being dominated because of her 'feminine' attributes such as passivity, naivety and immaturity.

At the surface level, the narrative reinforces sexual stereotypes. At an early age, Africano and other young girls are lavishly admired by young boys who lustfully examine Africano's backside, legs and breasts. In Zimbabwe, these parts of the female anatomy define feminine beauty and sexuality. But then in this instance, they are typically paraded for the erotic pleasure of males. The white man, Americano, marries Africano in order to 'consume' her 'sensual' body.

Lastly, *Africano-Americano* excessively romantizes traditional cultural practices and values while glossing over or completely ignoring its patriarchal hegemony. It shows the 'ideal' traditional African marriage as the one that preserves and sustains the marriage institution. The 'contaminated' or 'Americanized' marriage and courtship practices are shown to be unAfrican and problematic. In my estimation, this excessive glorification of traditional values and practices benefits patriarchal ideology at the expense of engaging in critical dialogue on gender relations.

Reception in three contexts

I focus on the reception of this production in two contexts. First, the performance at Mpopoma Hall in Bulawayo, a working class residential area, was attended by school children, their parents, officials from government and municipal workers. On a balance of scale, the audience was dominated by females. The second performance at Entumbabe hall was almost entirely composed of male artists from different disciplines such as music, dance, theatre, sculpture and film. Lastly, I will focus on the reception of this performance in Austria as it was related to me by the directors as well as it is partly reflected in a DVD documentation of the performance.

In respect to the production at Mpopoma hall, females sympathized with the female protagonist giving the impression that most of them were engaged in self-pity. There was a post-performance review and discussion of the performance which was heavily genderized. While the males tried to agree with the thesis of the narrative that interracial marriages do not work, and that it is not good to abandone one's cultural values and practices, female spectators had an oppositional stance to the performance texts. They basically challenged the image of a violent white man who is cruel and insensitive to his wife. They raised many issues. One of them was that in general, unlike their black counterparts, white men are honest. If they do not love a woman, they can communicate clearly, whereas a black man finds it difficult to tell his wife or girlfriend that he is no longer in love with her. This was viewed as blatant deception. Secondly, it was alleged that white men are generally romantic, unlike black men who were labelled as unimaginative, abusive, violent and hypocritical. Of course, all these were stereotypes which were vehemently contested by male spectators. In fact, the majority of males seemed to derive their pleasure from technical and formal elements such as the brilliant music and dances which thrilled them. I think just like *Zvatapera Todini*, there are formal, social, historical as well as contextual factors which limited the potential of *Americano-Africano* to stimulate the audience at Mpopoma Hall to engage in a constructive gender dialogue.

The reception at Entumbane Hall in Bulawayo was different in may respects. Being dominated by male adults and artists, the audience was rather more aesthetically conscious than the Mpopoma audience. Some artists and critics had been invited to give comments and suggestions as the director was already preparing for an European tour of the production. The spectators critically examined issues relating to cultural meaning and authenticity in addition to what seemed to be their main interest, which was formal and technical techniques in dance, acting and vocal articulation. However, most of the comments and suggestions were inflected with gender emotions and tones. Many flowery superlatives were lavished on female performers in relation to their 'beautiful dances',' melodic' and 'angelic' voices. In addition, female performers were dressed 'provocatively'. The music also intensified this male pleasure. For example, the song "*Stimela*" in scene 8, almost hypnotized the audience. This is a popular South African township song with strong love and romantic lyrics. It describes the figure of a beautiful woman (Africano), who attracts a man who is prepared to sacrifice his whole bank account to marry her. Lyrics like, 'lovie', 'sweetie', 'babe', 'my thambo' (my bone) and 'my chocolate' permeate the song. The lyrics are merged with beautiful instrumentation from guitars, piano and saxophones. At the performance in question, spectators were really moved by the song and accompanying dance routines from young female performers.

I am arguing that indeed the Entumbane audience was gendered as the mostly male spectators 'looked' at women. It is as if this particular performance confirms the assertion that the conventions of popular narratives are such that "… women are both erotic objects for characters within the story and erotic objects for spectators within the auditorium …" (Regan, 1998:296). It is not surprising then that most compliments were heaped on the performers and not necessarily on the roles they played. Substantive ideological issues were not given much attention, I think mainly because the male spectators were 'partaking' of the 'sensuous' female bodies.

The director of this production revealed that in Europe generally, the production had what can be termed political receptions although overall, there was no homogeneous reception. (Interview, 10/04/2007). Indeed responses varied from performance to performance. Of course this reinforces the observation that the reception of a performance is influenced by context, nature and background of the audience and the general ways in which expressive factors are manipulated. For example, the general political interpretation of this production in Europe is as a result of the context where Zimbabwe is on the spotlight due to its land distribution programme that is perceived to be largely racially and politically motivated.

However, my main interest is one performance in Austria where the audience was a mixture of Zimbabwean and Austrian males and females. Of particular interest was the presence of the members of the Gays and Lesbian Association of Zimbabwe. There were heated arguments on many issues such as racism, the political situation in Zimbabwe and cultural identity. Some heterosexual men generally expressed regret that Africano lost her identity to American culture. However, this debate on identity was subtly extended to the question of sexual orientation and identity. Somehow the discussions from homosexual men implied that heterosexuality was also fraught with hypocrisy and contradictions, involving such issues as marital rape and freedom of expression. I would say that homosexual viewership of *Africano-Americano* was in complex and subtle ways transgressive of heterosexual 'hegemony'. However it is signicant to note that while indeed a group of Zimbabwean gay people was clearly a subversive subculture, it still exhibited gender imbalances as it was dominated by men. Another interesting aspect is that in performances that were held in Zimbabwe, there was not a single performance where gay people expressed and articulated their sexual identity. Of course this could be attributed to the sensitivity of the homosexuality issue in Zimbabwe. For example, *Sipho Sami*, a play about human rights of gay people received a controversial reception in Harare in 1998. However, what must be emphasized for purposes of this study, is that socio cultural and ideological factors impose their own challenges on the viewership of gendered performance text. Nevertheless, this specific reception in Austria usefully confirms that genderized spectatorship can be further problematized and complicated by issues of sexuality, race and ethnicity (Bennet 1998).

Toward engendering subversive spectatorship

It is possible to enhance subversive spectatorship which I think is the major basis upon which meaningful dialogue can emerge from theatrical representations. Here the emphasis is on stimulating the spectator to be able to manipulate theatre images as objects of intellectually and ideologically challenging all forms and manifestations of gender oppression and exploitation in their communities.

One of the serious concerns emanating from this study is the issue of stereotypes both artistic and social. There is an extent to which some stereotypical images and metaphors blunt revolutionary viewership of performance texts. However, I must point out that stereotypes are not necessarily ineffective in engendering subversive spectatorship. In fact every playwright or creator of a theatrical text employs stereotypes at one level or another (Hansen, 1993:92). Stereotypes have their own artistic advantages, one of them being that they enable the audience to easily access social messages as the audience can develop certain expectations of specific characters which can be an effective source for the continuous engagement with the narrative.

The major weakness in Zimbabwean theatre seems to be the abuse or negative use of stereotypes. In addition, most stereotypes in *Zvatapera Todini?* and *Africano-Americano* are too simplistic, which renders them to be undemanding. Generally, an audience needs challenging images and characters which can fully engage them. It is within this realization that theatre artists and theoreticians have encouraged creators of theatrical texts to go beyond typification "… to give characters individualizing traits that separate them from the same type …" (Brocket 2000:46). Such characterization and imaging can be really compelling and fascinating. For instance, the construction of stock, pitiable, passive and hopeless women characters in both *Africano-Americano* and *Zvatapera Todini?* could be one of the main reasons why the two performances received both unfavourable and unintended impacts. What this suggests is that the use of negative stereotypes can severely limit the transgressive potential of performance texts even those narratives which are meant to question gender domination and exploitation. I would recommend the construction of compelling, challenging and fascinating male and female characters who are constantly and heroically struggling against complex social forces of death, deprivation, disease and indeed all manifestations of gender domination.

Closely related to the foregoing perhaps is the need to constantly innovate conventions, metaphors and symbols which 'denaturalise' oppressive gender relations while subtly encouraging constructive engagements between men and women. It is therefore critical for Zimbabwean creators of gender representations to consider deconstructing misconceptions about manhood and womanhood in ways which are sensitive to socio-cultural and socio-spiritual values, mores and practices. Such transgressive narratives can be constructed and 'marketed' in such a way that they attract the spectatorship of both males and females. In this way, it is very possible to take advantage of the gendered nature of theatre viewership to use theatre as a forum for transitive gender dialogue (Boal, 1998:79). This is quite practical in

Zimbabwe where an audience is more than just a context to the performance, it can be an equal partner in the theatrical process. (Rohmer, 1996:69). Actually this is already happening within the domain of protest political theatre particularly at Theatre-in-the-Park in Harare where pre-performance and post-performance discussions are resonated and extended in the media, particularly newspapers. In fact discussions on political theatre are limited in the public media because they are prone to censorship. Transgressive gender narratives are not subject to censorship in Zimbabwe. Once theatre shows on gender relations are popularized on both the printed and electronic media, they can easily attract both males and females to the theatre. I contend that if all performance and contextual elements are adequately taken into account, subversive gender narratives in theatre will potentially breed transgressive spectatorship.

Conclusion

It emerges that gender representation in Zimbabwean theatrical discourses is pregnant with immense potentialities as well as many impediments, complexities and contradictions. For example, the analysis on *Zvatapera Todini?* clearly shows that a production that is conceived, created and produced by women will not necessarily advance the interest of women. These possibilities and contradictions have to be interrogated if gender-imaging is to be a potent ideological and cultural force in gender relations.

However, what is also very critical is that both creators and researchers of theatrical texts have to navigate the dynamics of spectatorship in theatre. In the first instance, by its very nature, the theatrical space is potentially subversive of the social order. It is incumbent upon theatre practitioners to innovate codes, symbols, and conventions which will make it possible to actualize these subversive potentialities. At the same time, theatre academics can theorize on spectatorship in creative ways which can offer a range of possibilities for practitioners. I submit that the potential of the theatrical space to transform skewed gender relations has not yet been fully explored, not only in Zimbabwe, but perhaps in the rest of Africa. But how does the theatrical space offer these possibilities? Augusto Boal, proffers what I think is one of the best answers to this question, when he writes;

> … This special space (theatrical space) is propitious to discoveries. And the person who discovers or is discovered, is transformed …

I contend that a spectator who is challenged and transformed intellectually and ideologically can be easily inspired to engage in personal and collective socio-cultural and socio- political practices which can potentially revolutionize gender structures in their communities.

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DARK OUTSIDERS; ETHNICITY, IDENTITY AND THE MOTHERLAND

The Cruelties of Migration, part II

Mieke KOLK

"Migrancy …involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are a constant subject to mutation."[1]

Tales of exile are as old as the world. The epic heroic story of the Wanderer returning home is an essential part of every mythology. Re-inventing origin and *telos*, a beginning, a first, the narration of exile offers confirmation of an identity put to task, a lost position regained.

The timely loss of context, the loss of a surrounding where things which one does and says are understood as 'natural' often work out in a series of traumatic experiences where identity-markers like class, age, gender, religion and ethnicity are determining factors of different forms of imprisonment in the past, to be overcome in a nearby future.

During the 20th century, the post/colonial heritage has deconstructed the narration of exile from the archaic, more tragic model of the Emigrée, the Wanderer walking the earth, and has created a new model in a political modern mood: the world of the postwar Immigrant, the temporary Refugee, the ex-student.[2]

Last year I presented in this conference a short lecture on the best selling exile-novel of Tayeb Salih from Sudan, who studied and worked in England and published his book in 1966 in Arabic and 1969 in English: *Season of Migration to the North.* [3]

The novel offers the two just mentioned, different perspectives, that is two different times and places where two scenarios are played: one before the Second World war and one after, one in England and one in Sudan. The first has the universal tragic modality; in the second, the world of the narrator of the story and that of the author conflate: modern times.

This year I decided to concentrate on the work of a South African friend, an author of stories and plays, a theatre director, translator etc. Anthony Akerman had lived for 17 years in the Netherlands in a self-chosen political exile and returned in 1992, when the racist regime in S.A had fallen.

Rereading his first drama texts from between 1983 and 1995, I was struck by the surprising analogy with the Sudanese novel. What Tayeb Salih did in one book, offering two models of exile-literature, Akerman worked out in two plays: *A Man out of the Country* and *Dark Outsider* [4]. The first is a text on the life of a South-African refugee at the end of the 70ties, adapting and surviving in his guest land, the second is a drama around the South African poet Roy Campbell, a dark wild soul living in the London of the Bloomsbury times, of the Woolfs, Vita and Harold etc. etc., and later in Portugal.

Both African writers, the black Sudanese and the white South African reflect (on) the process of entanglement of male sexual identity, African black and white machismo and stereotyping, and a fundamental insecurity to live where African soil did not support and carried their 'maleness' any more.

I would like to explore these analogies in the re-construction of Africa as 'home', as 'homeland' and its meaning for both black and white male identities in Diaspora. I will focus first on the work of Akerman.

Like him while working on *Dark Outsider*, I will keep in mind the remark of Michael Hastings: *In theatre all biography is fiction, and some fiction is autobiography.* Fiction, fact and biography stand in a fluid relation.

1. The Lost paradise

I met Anthony Akerman, born in South-Africa in 1949, in the beginning of the 1980ties in Amsterdam where he lived and worked mostly as a theatre director. In his self-chosen exile, he suffered nevertheless from a deep sense of loss that focused on the loss of home, of Africa.

In one of his stories, written after a visit to the borders – not to be tress-passed- of his motherland (*The Road to Maun* [5]) he mentions the description by Doris Lessing of the pull that Africa exerts on the exile as an old fever, always latent in the blood or an old wound throbbing in the bones as the air changes.

"I never got Africa out of my blood and after so many years it resurfaced like a severe bout of Malaria": a homesickness trying to be assuaged by food and music and 'Africa-ness' in his home from home.
That was in 1985.

He came back to Amsterdam and went on writing and directing his own plays: the anti- military, anti-racist *Somewhere on the border* (1983)[6] and a *A Man out of the Country* (1989), and directed most of the plays of Athol Fugard and new plays often connected with South African themes.

A friend, first through the theatre, we discussed his typical Anglo-Saxon style of writing and directing, which in Dutch theatre developments then was considered traditional and rather old-fashioned. Strongly under the influence of an international Avant-garde that started in the US, terms like postmodernism and deconstruction were slowly introduced in our critical work, the classics were turned inside out breaking story, characters, and time and space.

His irritation about these phenomena went deep. Educated in solid forms of realism, the dispersion of the story in favor of ungraspable identity-constructions was unacceptable. He accused us, critics and theatre makers, of a lack of seriousness both in art and life. A message not clear was no message at all.

I wondered and pondered about this abhorrence of changing theatre-forms, which I myself considered fascinating, valid and refreshing. At a certain point, I thought that his rejection went deeper than a discussion about what kind of theatre functioned best on a political level. For myself, and Anthony, forgive me my arrogance, I formulated his resistance like this: not being able to part from a particular form and style since it would oust and betray his frame of thinking, cultural memories and, in a way, his mixed but overwhelmingly South-African-English cultural and educational heritage. Lose this, lose all, or worse, betray the past, betray Africa.

Now, some twenty years later and, maybe, better educated myself, I would prefer to take refuge into more abstract psycho-analytical, Lacanian terms. I would like to emphasize a cultural dimension to the concept of the Symbolic Order, the world of cultural fixed symbolization and representation, (Akerman's educational heritage) and connect the term with those of the 'cultural screen' (what can be seen and said, culturally speaking) and the 'cultural imaginary', the imaginary unconsciousness that frames self-image and image as a base of the first steps in self-recognition and a feeling of identity.

It is this underlying Imaginary Order, which binds everybody in the motherly realm of symbiosis and desire, that Julia Kristeva connects with the Platonian chora as an undefined space of undetermined articulations.

Returning to Africa after more then ten years Akerman writes: 'It was healing to walk through a familiar world. It was my world. I belonged. I marveled at what I had always taken for granted. I vowed I would never do so again. I luxuriated in familiar smells, sensations, sounds and colors. Every night I went to locate the Southern Cross in my sky.' (Maun,3)

But literally standing on the borders of his motherland, South Africa becomes blurred and seems to disappear: 'On the other side of the fence the bush feld looked just the same as it did on the Botswana side of the border. It was curiously disconcerting. I'd expected to feel something extraordinary. I'd thought that my heart might miss a beat. I'd feared that I might do something reckless and dramatic. Nothing happened. We stood there in the immense stillness of empty places.' (Maun,3)

The 'lost paradise' is always a delusion, argues Kristeva

Identities and stereotypes[7]

Writing from a 'position of damage'[7] of displacement, im/migrant authors widen and diffuse the generic boundaries of (auto) biography. Negotiating their own and their characters identities on the borderlands between immigrant, expatriate and citizen they have to deal with aspects such as race/ethnicity, history, biography, class, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, and Post-colonialism. And that in a double sense where the homeland and the guest land are different cultural and moral spaces.

Where the identity of author and/or of character is male, "the encounter between self and other offers the cultural primal scene of recognition and functions in two ways: as the recognition (or mis/recognition) of the other sex as well as of the other/foreign culture." (Gerhard Neumann)

The strangeness of the woman becomes based in the differences of the two confronting cultures or with those interwoven.

When I gave my first article the title *East/West differences as War between the*

S*exes*[8], I was led to this statement not only by Tayeb Salih's black male hero Mustafa Sa'eed in London, who sets out to liberate Africa from British domination with his penis, and conquers four women in a row. Also, a list of Sudanese writers up till the beginning of the 21th century, fit this model. Their heroes, seduced by 'over-sexed'/ liberated western women in their new countries, leave in the end the strange land for Sudan and the girl back home.

The two migration drama's of Akerman seem to take also the 'love-interest', he speaks about a 'love story' for Mary and Roy Campbell, as the center of his narration. As in true life, I suppose, the female characters are in essence the foreign country, just by being not from Africa. They are born-betrayers, so to say.

In *A Man out of the Country*, the girl-friend Maria betrays her lover Tristan and refuses to accept the daily-life Africania including his South-African friends.

Mary in *Dark Outsider* is not only very English, but also bi-sexual, she starts a relationship with Vita Sackville-West.

In her excellent introduction to the publication of Akerman's plays in 2000, Lesly Marx writes about the close ties between sexual and artistic impotence and the loss of identity in exile.

"As in Tristan, in *a Man out of the Country*, Roy's (Campbell) masculinity is profoundly tied to his sense of belonging to South Africa. Exile is pervasively felt as a kind of death in *Dark Outsider*, heralded most obviously by the title.

Bereft of his homeland, married to a woman who cannot live in South Africa, he is in constant danger of being artistically dispossessed, resorting to vitriolic, if acute, epigrams against his perceived enemies".[9]

Vitriolic epigrams, even violence, drunkeness and a writers blocks….they are too weak a shadow of this hunting youth:

At an exclusive dinner-party in Sevenoaks, Roy Campbell remembers:

"At the age of eleven I could bring down a charging buck with a single shot and knew most of the answers in the bush. When I was last out in Natal a drive was arranged of those big Javan deer, about the size of a waterbuck. (…) I took a stick from one of the beaters and leaped into the stream to intercept. I came straight at him and unhooked the dog off his horn. He dived at me and caught me by the armpit in the fork of his horn while I crashed him over the hump with my stick (…)

The Native beaters and Umnugeni all stood round in a circle and watched this.

Then they composed a song about it on the spot."

Roy sings a praise-song in Zulu and performs a Zulu dance

"I grew up among the Zulu's. They are a race of aristocrats, who were conquered by a nation of grocers. The Zulu's have only one art- conversation. But their conversation is always worth listening to." (p. 65)

Akerman gives much attention to this 'masquerade' as the stereotypical South African. In a paper, presented in 2002 at the University of Durban-Westville, he speaks about his first play as a 'dramatic essay on the white male psyche' and continues his argument in speaking about Campbell's character as wearing a mask that kept slipping: "Among colonials he was an European and among Europeans a colonial: among cowboys a poet and among poets a cowboy". (David Wright).

One of the masks was that of "a swaggering South African He-man (…) representing some of the worst attributes of the South African male ethos in general: intolerant, bigoted, violent, anti-intellectual, regarding artistic inclinations as prima facie evidence of homosexual tendencies".[10]

There is a rather fascinating coincidence between Roy Campbell's performance, repeating the stereotype of the South African white male and the mimicry of Tayeb Salihs black hero Mustafa Sa'eed who performs 'the beast in the jungle' calling himself a yes/no Othello.(Black is African is Sudan)

Both the celebrated S.A. poet and the brilliant student from Sudan, now teaching in London, are living in the England of between the wars; both characters deal with the humiliation by an (upper-) class society, progressive and promiscuous while exploring different sexualities. And racist.

Or how would you call this:

"Dada fought in the South African war. Quite frankly it escapes me why anyone should *want* South Africa ", says Vita.

“Unless you were born there”, answers Roy.

And:

“As we drank tea, she asked about my home. I related to her fabricated stories about deserts and golden sands and jungles where nonexistent animals called out to one another. (…) There came a moment when I felt I had been transformed in her eyes to a naked primitive creature, a spear in one hand, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles.

What race are you, African or Asian? she asked.

I’ am like Othello- Arab-African. (…) My face is Arab like the desert of the Empty Quarter, while my head is African and teems with a mischievous childishness ”. (Salih, 38)

“An African Giant in the English scene”, writes the Sudanese author, and in a form of excessive mimicry the character of Mustafa Sa’eed occupies an aggressive and transgressive position in his novel. When ‘mimicry’ as a concept of Indian scholar Homi Bhabha, aims at a “copying of the colonizing culture, behavior, manners and values by the colonized, containing both mockery and a certain ‘menace’, a blurred copy, then it must be clear that this black character mimics and plays at the same time with the expectations and values about the black man in a white and colonizing culture.

Migration is a two way traffic. The voyage into ‘otherness’ does not offer the traveler a feeling of authenticity and individuality. Experiencing a deep sense of un-belonging and uprooted-ness he/she runs the constant risk of being turned into his/her own cliche and stereotype. On the other hand, the stereotype seems to offer a moment of ‘real’ identity, be it a hysterical over-identification with a socially prescribed role, as Freud described it.
When in Rome, do as the Romans do, writes Akerman in a short story.

Motherland, home

“Immigrant writing crucially overlaps with postcolonial literature in the spatial negotiation of “home” and belonging, either in terms of a loss, a quest, or a desire” writes Heike Paul in her *Mapping Migration*, 20

When we look at the three texts under view we can differentiate between several scripts.

1. **The script of loss**. What is remarkable in Akerman's play about his period living in Holland (*A Man out of the Country*) is the way how the character Tristan represses his 'Africa' with exception of some token symbols, and his denial of the possibility to go home.

Africa is in his friends, Dean and Chris, on their way back. Akerman describes them as ' the real south African white sort', fed up with British-ness. They represent his youth, his love and hate at the same time. Africa is also in Samsom, the black fugitive: his Africa is black in the many stories of white suppression.

With a one way permit on his way out, he started looking for a new country and learned the languages so that he could speak / in freedom. But nobody spoke with him, yet. Tristan occupies the in-between position: the professional South African Exile, trying to write, desperately, the Great South African Novel.

2. **The script of the quest**

The *Season of Migration to the North* offers the continuity of two scripts folded into one. The nameless narrator having just returned from studying in Great Britain, meets stranger Mustafa Sa'eed who has settled in his village on the Nile. He starts to tell his story to the narrator, and it is the narrator who reconstructs it after Mustafa Sa'eed has disappeared in the Nile. The past of wonder-boy Sa'eed in England, his sexual adventures, the killing of his wife, his punishment and redemption, living now in the small village describes in a way the heroic and romantic tale of earlier times.

The quest of the narrator is a more recent one.

Returning home confronts him not only with the winds, sounds, smells, the sun, the heat and the warmth of his family "as if a piece of ice was melting" but also with ' the prison-house' of the rural traditions going back to eternity.

Not accepted as a 'intellectual', doing some 'useless' work in Khartoum, he becomes involved in a love-drama with Hosna, Sa'eeds Sudanese wife.

Not being able to make a decision there is bloody murder again, hushed up by the village. What is *Home*? Less of a paradise, more a decision to live.

3. **The script of desire**

It becomes clear that being a migrant, being in the in-between situation, is something different from a has-been traveler. When the eventful and often tragic life-line has ended, the story can be interpreted and re-constructed in the direction of *telos*, of making sense. But the open-ended story of the migrant is another one, as we can see in the texts of Akerman and Tayeb Salih. Compared with the apparent passionate hero, the position of migrant himself (the characters of Tristan and the Narrator), is an ambiguous and empty one.

In a way, he is the double of the hero (Roy Campbell and Mustafa Sa'eed) but also his shadow. Mirroring each other, they offer a form of identification that is both fulfilling and false. Fulfilling because the identification fills the empty space of the in-between, the recognition of a past as presence and the acceptance of loss. False, because the heroic stories are re/constructed, written out of lack and desire, as a projection of feelings greater than the daily life stories, the possibilities of experience of the migrants themselves.

Tayeb Saleh published his novel in English, only some years before Anthony Akerman arrived in London.

As authors and artists, they developed comparable strategies in dealing with the
cruelties of migration, its desperation and deep sadness.

Through Salih, I could read the plays of my old friend Akerman, in a more connected and fruitful way. Or so I hope.

Exiled like you and severed from my race
By the cold ocean of my own disdain
Do I not freeze in such a wintry space
Do I not travel through a storm as vast
And rise at times, victorious from the main,
To fly the sunrise at my shattered mast
Roy Campbell (Tristan da Cunha) p.2

Notes

[1] Ian Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity,* Routledge, 1994, 5

[2] Timothy Brennan, 'The National longing for Form', in Homi K. Bhabha, ed, *Nation and Narration*, London, 1990, 63

[3] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, Penquinbooks, 1969

[4] Anthony Akerman, Dark Outsider, Three plays, Witwatersrand University Press, 2000

[5] Anthony Akerman, 'The Road to Maun', unpublished manuscript

[6] Anthony Akerman, *Somewhere in the Border*, Frascati "het Hoge Woord", 1985

[7] Heike Paul, *Mapping Migration, Woman's Writing and the American Immigrant Experience from 1950s-1990s*, Universitaetsverlag Winter, Heidelberg, 1999

[8] Mieke Kolk, Sha'za Mustafa: 'East/West Differences as War between the Sexes, an introduction', and Mieke Kolk,' Re-inventing Identities; Season of Migration travels to Theatre in the North', in Mieke Kolk (ed*) Rituals and Ceremonies in Sudan; From Cultural heritage to Theater*, Amsterdam, 2006

[9] Akerman, 2000, XVII

[10] idem, 4

LOSING MAGIC AND FAITH DURING MIGRATION
Why the West is jealous of those who still believe

Maartje NEVEJAN

The last six years I have been working with a group of non-Western immigrants kids who now live in Holland. I filmed their stories during Dutch naturalization while at the same time they were going through the transformation from children to young adults.

I made two TV-series about them: **Couscous and Cola I and II**

In the fist series, made in 2004 and broadcasted worldwide on *Al Jazeera* in 2007, the kids debated with their peers in America in the deeply hated Bush-country.

In the second series we went back to Africa, to Morocco and Ghana. Now we wanted to debate with the African kids who stayed in Africa, while our kids left for Europe. Who is better of?

Of my group of 14, 12 kids lived in Africa the first ten years of their lives.
The Moroccans:

Most of the kids lived with their mothers in Morocco

While the fathers worked in Europe. The boys were the man in the house, since the father was absent.

When they reached puberty they were sent to their fathers in Holland whom they hardly knew.

In Ghana

Lots of kids were left behind by both parents at the age of three or four. The parents went to Europe and the kids were given to the family.

Money was sent to Africa from Europe but in lots of cases not spent on the kids it was meant for, but on their nephews and nieces. The myth of the loving African extended family was in reality not true at all. The abandoned children were used at Cinderella's to clean the house of the guest family.

When the kids reached puberty they were brought to Holland as well and had to trust parents they did not even remember. But what they did remember was their being abandoned. The depth of this trauma only slowly became clear to me.

When coming to the West at the age of 12, both groups, the Ghanian and the Moroccans had to obey the strict rules of the fathers put on them in order to survive in the western world, this world filled with temptations and forbidden fruits. In this way the end of childhood corresponded with leaving Africa and coming to the West.

Their real trip from Africa and the Middle East to the West symbolized in this way a rite-of passage: leaving their motherland of childhood for a country where they have to struggle for sexual maturity, religious responsibility and the full rights of the adult: the age of reason.

In psychological terms, this fall out of paradise means to leave the magical world of childhood, gain knowledge and to enter the cognitive world of symbols.

The Couscous-kids, now living with their fathers, soon found out that their independent life of Africa, where a ten year old has already lots of responsibility, was over. Their parents, full of fear for the dangers and decadences of the West, locked them up and disciplined them, again, as little children. In school they had to learn a new language, which also set them back as little children learning to talk. A reason for much anger and shame. The second shock was the awareness that the West very much believes in the brains, the sciences, in education and the freedom that comes with it.

My 'West'

Since the 1960ties the West entered a new area.

Most people stopped believing in God and the authority of religious leaders, we invested in a just society where equality and emancipation were main issues. We became strong individualist. Taboos were broken, science influenced our lives more and more, TV and computer brought us closer to the rest of the world. I remember my grandmother saying: Nothing is holy anymore nowadays. She was not talking about religion only, but about lost of things in daily life: less ritual, less family- and community activities. We became richer and healthier, so it worked.

Now what I see in the West is that, deep down, there is sadness about our saying goodbye to the magic potential and spirituality of the universe.

We gave up the magic, we declared God dead, stepped out of the suffocating ties of community life. We know we are alone in the world; there is no comfort any more in a higher power that knows best for us and loves us always. No life after death, no mystery!

And that deep sadness leads, in my opinion to a revenge on the newcomers in Europe. It is as if the West also wants to rob other cultures from its magic dimensions.

As if we think: “We gave something valuable up, paid the price for it, now you have to give it up as well”.

We dare to say that religion is something backward, God and Allah delusions and believing a sign of retardation. We look down on especially women and their spiritual life and call Africa a lost continent.

As a teenager I used to hate those Dutch, white, middle-aged men, working as journalists, scientists, cynical, nihilistic, hedonistic, mocking at everything that could be valuable or give you a good feeling. “Try living in an honest way” they seemed to say,” face the emptiness of life.”

Being an adult looked like a nightmare to me. Being a woman, even worse. As a woman I also felt a sort of stubbornness about being faithful to my heritage as a magical female warrior. Going to the theatre-school became a perfect antidote for me. Theatre is magic.

The last few years I see the intellectuals in the West raising their voice even sharper against people who believe. The West is radicalizing: being religious is like being retarded and backward.

Not surprisingly the believers get very angry and radicalize as well.

The wound

The Couscous-kids were fifteen years in the first series and only a few years in the West. We could see the transformation taking place in them**.**

Coming from countries, where Christians and Muslims alike are drenched in religion and faith, they were now in a place where people ridiculed the religion, the values of the motherland and their mothers in Africa or the Middle East. It felt as if they had to denounce their life of the first ten years in order to get accepted here. They showed openly the wound.

The wound we all have to go through in a sense, but not in such a negative context.

We tell the kids they have to forget about their heritage and integrate in our system with big rewards.

I have seen kids, who slowly take over the values of the West and start condemning their background at the cost of a growing self-hatred and the loss of the magical world inside them.

Other kids feel a renewed loyalty to their heritage, the magical world, their religion and in the end their mothers. They radicalize in a rapid pace. More religious then ever, they condemn the West for taking away the magic of their childhood, losing it in a double way during the transition to the West: the magic world of their youth turns into the adult pragmatics of their new homeland.

And they blame the West for this loss of paradise, do not see it as an inevitable process, the natural way of life.

This is the ground on which my series take place. I have been wondering why the kids developed such a hate towards the West. Why they were so offended by things we thought funny or concepts we defended as a freedom? In the series we see all the doubts, fears and tears, and the loyalty of these teenagers, trying to create their own life in between those two realms.

One of the reasons that the series about the Dutch non-western immigrant-teenagers was recognized worldwide is, I guess, that we all live between these two realms or, have to live in both realms. They show us our own pain and we witness their courage in finding their way to integrate the two worlds.

Dreams

The process is both internal, in themselves, and external in the world.

Globalization does not mean a molding of all diversity into one form, one content, one cultural perspective or one ideology. Not just the West and the Rest. Like we have to embody both the magical feminine and the cognitive masculine in ourselves, we also have to accept the diversity in cultures and countries.

The next step for me meant to talk openly about this wound we all have, and the price we are willing to pay for it.

It are the personal stories about what is difficult or exiting in living in the West or Africa that create intimacy on a global scale.

We learn more about ourselves and each other and ultimately more about the human condition.

As Shakespeare said:

We are such stuff
As dreams are made off
And our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

DANCING WITH THE VEIL
LETTERS FROM TENTLAND in the Fadjr Festival in Tehran

Hubertus Martin MAYR

Introduction

Against the background of a Western notion of Performing Arts, women's contemporary dance in post-revolutionary Iran must appear very peculiar.

According to the laws of the Islamic Republic, the body is a "source of sin and shame"; [1] its features have to be covered, making its physicality disappear behind the protective veil or *hijab*, the Islamic official female dress. One might think that this would mean a deathblow to any art form defined by movement and the performance of bodily acts, but yet, dance and performance art is very much alive in post-revolutionary Iran.

How could something that is so obviously contradictory exist? Considered as a series of restraints, the situation of the performing arts in Iran suggests another form of "poor theater". [2] Poor not in the sense of a chosen renunciation of materialistic properties for a higher purpose, but rather a theater poor in the use of the human body that the Polish director Grotowski considered as the very source of all meaning in theater. But although it seems that only the written word remains a last resort of relative freedom to the performing arts in post-revolutionary Iran, it are just these restraints on bodily representation that, meant to overcome, challenges a new creativity.

The work of choreographers like Mohsen Hosseini, Farzaneh Kabouli, Behrooz Gharibpoor or Hamed Mohammad-Taheri, to name just a few, appears as a proof of these creative strategies. Not only does dance and performance art exist in contemporary Iranian culture, it designates also an artistic genre that significantly contrasts with Western discourses on modern dance. Thus, research on contemporary dance in Iran must address questions that relate to the strategies of presentation in the process of the performance practice, must ask how an artistic form, apparently bereft of most means of expression, still can have a voice of its own, and must investigate its position in Iran nowadays.

Admittedly, those rules of modesty in dress-code and body behavior that govern social life in Iran and that apply, in a similar manner, also to the performing arts, appear to be in total opposition to any ideal of Western contemporary dance, standing for a maximum of freedom and visibility of bodily expression and body language. Yet, such a view negates the very possibility of an *alternative* dance aesthetics.

In this paper, I will therefore try to point out how, besides being an obvious restraint, the imposition of Islamic values on the performing arts, especially on originally Western forms such as contemporary dance, offers a whole new array of aesthetic possibilities. I will argue that, in the same way that the veil, as the most striking part of Islamic female dress, also served women's emancipation and empowerment in post-revolutionary Iran in the past twenty years, it can help institutionalize a legitimate Iranian/Islamic form of contemporary dance and performance art. To illustrate my point, I will draw on the example of Helena Waldmann's Iranian dance performance *Letters from Tentland* that premiered on Tehran's Fadjr Festival in 2005.

Historical context of contemporary dance in Iran

Though contemporary dance appears, at least at first glance, to be subordinate to other forms of cultural production in post-revolutionary Iran, it would be wrong to assume that dance does not have it's rightful place. In fact, throughout the history of Iran, theater and dance has always been manifest in religious rituals and traditional entertainment. There are those passion plays like the *ta'ziye* dramas commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hosseyn, or humorous performances comparable to those of the Comedia dell'arte like the *ruhowze*, *takhthowze* and *siyahbaze*. Even if dance has always been subject to religiously motivated restraints, especially since the arrival of Islam in the seventh century, it persisted in folk/ethnic dances and the spiritual Sufi dances of the whirling dervishes. [3]

The origins of contemporary performing art forms in Iran have to be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when, as part of the Qajar governments plan for modernization, a number of students were sent for off to Europe, introducing aspects of Western culture upon their return. Despite political fluctuations and changing governmental consent for the performing arts in the following decades, Persian drama evolved into a serious art form developing proper means of representation of rising social and political awareness. Still, it was not until the reign of Rezâ Shah Pahlavi (1925-1979) that women gradually started populating Iranian stages, assuming those female roles that used to be played by men. At first, only practiced by non-Muslim women, the abolition of the veil in 1936 gave an important boost to Iranian contemporary theater and dance by female performers. In Pahlavi Iran, especially in the nineteen sixties and seventies, the performing arts witnessed their most fruitful period, in terms of playwriting and performance as well as production techniques and stagecraft. The opening of dance schools, mostly run by professional dancers from abroad, was a first move in an attempt to professionalize the genre, trying to institutionalize contemporary dance as a serious, and most of all, secular art form.

Still, the predominance of the written word over visual culture in Islamic countries gave contemporary dance a difficult standing in Iran. Persian audiences expect stories that disclose their meaning in words. Contemporary dance is, by the same token, often perceived as a cant, a sort of "secret language" and met with incomprehension. [4] Trying to overcome this traditional conditioning embedded in ancient religious reverberations, choreographers struggled to "re-establish dance" in a contemporary form as, what Mohsen Hosseini refers to, "a theatre beyond words". [5] Still, the presence of religiously induced, strict governmental regulations remained undeniable present in that period, manifesting itself in censorship, the banning of socio-politically charged publications or stage productions and the harassment of their authors, directors/choreographers or performers. As a consequence, Persian drama resorted increasingly to symbolism and hard to grasp cryptic forms:

> Persian drama as well as other arts and forms of artistic expression generally adapted enigmatic forms, perhaps in hopes of avoiding the wrath of government censors and police. Moreover, some playwrights, while avoiding risky subject matters, resorted to creating highly esoteric experimental works that were intellectually inaccessible even to the educated patrons of the Iranian theater. [6]

The onset of the Islamic Revolution in Iran with the symbolic burning of the Rex Movie Theater in Abadan in 1978, annulled a great part of those efforts of previous decades, though not succeeding in eradicating all Western influences from the performing arts. Iranian dramatists either left the country to continue their work in exile or stayed and adapted to the changed cultural climate, subjecting their work to the laws of the Islamic Republic. Ever since, contemporary dance in Iran has been considered a sinful activity corrupting Islamic values and has been banned from Iranian stages. In the nineteen nineties, dwelling in a climate of suspicious tolerance suspending between careful concessions and harsh censorship, so-called "motion-theatre" gradually reinvented the genre as a form of "rhythmic movement" compatible with the religious doctrine. "Motion […], that is movement with meaning instead of eroticism", according to Majid Sharifkhodaei, until 2004 chief censor and director of the Dramatic Arts Center in Tehran, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's supervisory body. "Dance needs a meaning, or else it is not understandable."[7] Coming full circle, motion attempts to integrate the notion of contemporary dance into the predominant culture of the written word in Islam. Choreographer Hosseini says:

> [Motion] denotes a principle of structure that subordinates dance to dramatic arrangement – a principle that is conceived as a kind of composition of dramatic action. Dance in this sense becomes a poetic instrument.[8]

Censorship brings the events on Iranian stages in line with the theocracy's rules and regulations. However, it remains questionable as to whether it constrains the performing arts in Iran or, on the contrary, it represents the very momentum enabling them in the first place by its preventive supervision.

The landslide win of Mohammad Khâtami in the 1997 presidential elections marked the onset of a "new revolution" advocating a policy of cultural change and liberalization "on issues ranging from religious reform and cultural expression to women's rights."[9] Appointing the reformist politician Atâollâh Mohâjerâni as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Khâtami's notion of a "dialogue of civilizations" and a "civil society" promised to establish a more liberal environment for Iran's cultural production seeking the reconciliation of traditional values and modernist endeavors. According to Mohâjerâni:

> Islam is not a dark alley. Everyone can walk freely in the path of Islam [...]. We must create an atmosphere of peace and tranquility in all centers of culture, where all citizens can express their ideas and where the seeds of creativity can blossom.[10]

Although Mohâjerâni lifted a number of important restrictions, especially regarding the Iranian movie industry, his influence on the cultural climate of Iran was short-lived. After an failed attempt at impeaching him in May 1999, Mohâjerâni resigned in October 2000, folding to political pressure. Reminiscent of the fire in the Rex Movie Theater, the Tehran City Theater was set alight during the Persian New Year holidays in 1999, heralding a gradual return to traditionalist values not only in the field of cultural production. Ultimately, the election as president of the "archconservative layman" Mahmud Ahmadinejâd in 2005, "appeared to mark the collapse of the reformist and pragmatist movement in Iranian politics."[11]

Regarding this historical timeline, *Letters from Tentland*, a dance performance of German choreographer Helena Waldmann with Iranian performers premiering in January 2005 at the Fadjr Festival in Tehran, should have been one of the last contemporary dance performances of the reformist agenda. Already under reformist rule it is a much contested project: no less than ten censors have to approve of the performance and only after tenacious bargaining can it finally premiere. On the eve of the presidential elections, it became a landmark performance. In fact, a number of performances in Iran following the premier in Tehran, a tour from April 20 until May 16, 2005, had to be cancelled because of the approaching elections. [12] In 2006, after having played 43 shows in 17 countries, the performers are eventually advised by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to "immediately stop 'writing letters' in all the world" and to break contact with Waldmann. [13] Anyhow, *Return to sender – ~~Letters from Tentland~~*, Waldmann's following performance based on the same concept with Iranian dancers in exile, is asked again to apply for the 2007 Fadjr Festival, but was not invited.

The (in)possibility of representation in Islam

In Islamic countries, the performing arts have always been struggling on two fronts: On the one hand they give rise to images that conflict with traditional anti-iconism, on the other hand they operate in a gray area of a religiously motivated body-politics and sexual morals.

Islam, as guideline to all aspects of social life, has always had a crucial influence on the development of art in Islamic countries. In fact, it is virtually impossible to delineate the border between sacral and profane art. Independent movements towards a form of secular art were mostly due to Western influences. Still, even profane art cannot negate its religious origins. Influences of Islam on the development were various. The most obvious aspect is the ban on the pictorial representation of human being and animals, a restriction originating in the early history of Islam but still relevant to this day in many Islamic cultures. Along with the establishment and consolidation of Islam on the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century B.C., the Prophet Mohammed banned all gods of the pre-Islamic cultures, their idols and the practice of idolatry. [14] Though the Quran does not explicitly state this prohibition, it can be found in the Hadith, the oral traditions of the Prophet Mohammed. He who creates images would be punished the worst on the day of resurrection. This punishments would endure until the punished would breathe live into his images – a, by all means, eternal punishment. [15] In practice, though, the ban on images was handled less rigidly, giving gradually rise to some accepted forms of pictorial representation such as miniature paintings or calligraphies.

Nonetheless, whereas compared to most Western cultures painting and sculpting already rated low in terms of religious acceptance, the performing arts played even less of a role, as “staging” the human body, they proved to be reluctant to the ideological instrumentalization in Islam. Moreover still, the ban on images resulted in establishing a view on corporeality that also backfired on the perceiving subject.

> The prohibition of the depiction of the physically living soul gave rise to a society where individuals had a problem with looking at their own bodies, and with the idea of exposing and presenting them to others. This in turn gave rise to a sort of implicit non-acceptance of the body. [16]

In reflecting the taboo of its pictorial representation back on the body itself, which led to discomfort of both sexes about their bodies, the body became considered unsuitable for representation. More importantly, however, the human body has always been religiously connotated in Islamic cultures, making it an issue extending far beyond the realm of representation.

In Islamic cultures, the body, especially of the female, is considered a vessel holding an untamed sexuality that invites sin and corruption, inviting any form of behavior clashing with the Koran and its exegesis. Women are said to posses a supernatural sexual energy capable of corrupting the morals of religious men and, as an implicit conclusion, society as a whole. Social interaction between men and women is governed by strict rules of modesty. In public, women have to be protected from the gaze of unrelated men by wearing, in compliance with the rules of *hijab*, the Islamic veil that conceals the physical aspect of their body, usually leaving only hands and face uncovered. [17] To men, those same rules apply in a similar way as the moral obligation to avert the gaze from women, especially those unveiled. [18] *Hijab* functions accordingly in two ways, protecting women from the forbidden gaze of men, but also men from their weakness for women. Although it can be differentiated between two major forms of *hijab* in post-revolutionary Iran, a fashionable, more liberal variant (*rupush* and *rusari*) as opposed to an orthodox, fully covering one (*chador* and *maghnae*), [19] both have in common that they visibly conceal greater parts of the body. In a performance context, a domain where the body’s freedom of movement is crucial, the veil addresses both the concern of Islamic culture about the representation of the human body and the religious demand for a modest body politics.

The ontology of the veil

In post-revolutionary Iran, veiling refers to a practice of normative modesty governing all aspects of social life. In the traditional understanding, the veil serves as an instrument of gender segregation and a symbol for chaste behavior. It is part of a religious ideology that subordinates women to men; the traditional role of the woman is that of wife, daughter and sister, most of all though that of mother as a "vehicle of procreation". [20] Yet, the meaning of the veil and its sociocultural implications exceed its religious context. In the West, especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent war on Afghanistan, the veil, demonstrating the "intransigence of the veiled woman as an icon of oppression", [21] has always been associated with notions of backwardness and inferiority. Leila Ahmed argues that this view stems from a colonial narrative, which at the end of the nineteenth century, exploited the practice of veiling to discredit Islamic societies as uncivilized by Western standards and thereby justified imperialist endeavors. Defending Islamic culture against such humiliating claims, the Islamic world appropriated a similar rhetoric to establish the veil as an icon for the legitimacy of all Islamic customs in a narrative of resistance, with far reaching consequences.

> The veil came to symbolize in the resistance narrative, not the inferiority of the culture and the need to cast aside its customs in favor of those of the West, but on the contrary, the dignity and validity of all native customs, and in particular those customs coming under fiercest colonial attack – the customs relating to women – and the need to tenaciously affirm them as a means of resistance to Western domination. […] Standing in the relation of antithesis to thesis, the resistance narrative thus reversed – but thereby also accepted – the terms set in the first place by the colonizers.[22]

The emergence of the veil as a symbol of resistance consolidated the allegations of the colonial powers, involuntarily integrating the Western discourse of the veil, with all its negative connotations, into the Islamic culture. In Iran, as Farzaneh Milani observes, the veil has been throughout history the subject to a myriad of different personal and political interpretations: "[a]n emblem now of progress, then of backwardness, a badge now of nationalism, then of domination, a symbol of purity, then of corruption." [23]

After 1979, it became one of the cornerstones of the Islamic Revolution. No woman, whether Muslim or not, was allowed anymore to appear unveiled in public, violations being severely punished. Veiling established a clear delimitation from the style dictate of the West, diminishing class differences between the different layers of Iranian society and cleansing public space of immoral aspects. Through veiling, women are perceived to attain a morally healthy form of female sensuality that accentuates femininity without eroticizing it. Furthermore its color politics serve as an indicator of ideological commitment to the Islamic Republic. All dark colors, especially black, denote "respectable" revolutionary values, bright colors the "disgraceful" aspects of Western decadence.[24]

Against all dire predictions, foreseeing the objectification of women under the rule of Islam, veiling turned out to become a powerful means of female empowerment in post-revolutionary Iran. As Ziba Mir-Hosseini observed, the enforcement of *hijab* served as a catalyst to increasing visibility and participation of women in public life and politics: "[B]y making public space morally correct in the eyes of traditionalist, it legitimized women's public presence."[25] The veil, once prominent symbol of gender segregation, came to stand at the center of a silent revolution integrating emancipatory ideals of women's rights into the religious discourse of the Islamic Republic.

On a meta level, veiling is more than an ideological construct of normative modesty, determining principles of social interaction between self and other. It is a "ritualistic expression of culturally defined boundaries […] mak[ing] a clear statement about the disjuncture of the private and the public."[26] The veil spans as an extended metaphor over all aspects of social life in Iran, denoting any form of boundary zone between instances governed by that duality: "high walls separate and conceal private space from public space; the inner rooms of a house protect/hide the family; the veil hides women; formal language suppresses unbridled public expression of private feelings; modesty suppresses and conceals women; decorum and status hide men; the exoteric meanings of religious texts hide the esoteric meanings; and perspective-less miniature paintings convey their messages in layers instead of presenting a unified and clear vision for a centered viewer."[27]

The theater as an art institution that deliberately stages the human body and as a legitimate part of Iranian social life where unrelated individuals, both male and female, performer and spectator, come face to face is governed by the same principles. In obeying the rules of modesty, the performing arts in Iran incorporated the Islamic Republic's "aesthetics of authority"[28] to develop a proper performance vocabulary, an aesthetics that creates meaning *not in spite of the veil, but because of it*. It is based on a, by Western standards, reversed understanding of semiotics. Meaning is created, not by a signifier's referral to a signified, but by the deliberate concealment of the first to distract attention from the latter. As Islam scholar Hamid Naficy put it: "Iranian social hermeneutics are driven by […] dynamic and artful strategies, which are essentially based on distrusting the manifest meanings and concealing and protecting core values." [29] Especially in post-revolutionary Iranian film such aesthetics have already been thoroughly explored, encoding the rules of modesty in the actors' dress, behavior and emotional expression. Naficy argues that any object obstructing the physical boundaries of the spectator's field of vision that suggests a demarcation between public and private can be conceived of as a veil. Furthermore, cinematic techniques are apt to induce immaterial forms of veiling: Long shots make the female body visually retreat to the background, rack focus blurs its outline beyond recognition, veiling its very physical presence. The actors' emotional expression and affective behavior complement this aesthetics adding a symbolic dimension. The avoidance of bodily contact and the averted or desexualized look between men and women, the avoidance of any direct eye contact between either screen characters among one another or screen characters and the spectators, casts a veil over the realm of the interpersonal in Iranian film.

The performing arts, especially those where women participate, draw on similar techniques, veiling both the body of the performer and his/her intentions. In the following, I want to demonstrate how such an aesthetic is manifest in Iranian women's contemporary dance, using the example of Helena Waldmann's *Letters from Tentland.* Doubtless, regarding the history of its creation, *Letters from Tentland* has to be considered in many respects representative of the status quo of reformist contemporary dance development in post-revolutionary Iran. Most strikingly for an Iranian dance production is its entirely female cast. Six Iranian performers, shielded in light nylon igloo tents, let an aesthetic of female corporeality emerge that reconciles with the religious doctrine of Islam without confining the (female) body's freedom (of movement). Behind the protective veil of the tent, the impossible becomes possible. As the collaboration of a Western choreographer and Iranian performers, *Letters from Tentland* continues the tradition of pre-revolutionary dance development in Iran. In fact, Waldmann is the first Western choreographer to be allowed to work on behalf of the Dramatic Arts Center in post-revolutionary Iran. However, its aesthetics is not the singular product of one culture, but the result of an intercultural experience. Whereas local choreographers often have to play their part in censorship and self-censorship, [30] Waldmann chooses not to back away but literally overcome the censor, developing together with her performers an enigmatic dance vocabulary that incorporates her Western reaction on the restrictions by accepting body- and dress-codes of her guest-country Iran.

Aspects of an aesthetics of veiling

“If you are interested in reality, if you want to put reality on stage, you have to slip a simple, protective veil over what is real”, states Waldmann, “ only with this veil does the real become perceptible.” [31]

In *Letters from Tentland*, it is more than a veil that masks what Waldmann perceives to be “real”. To Waldmann, veiling refers not exclusively to the material constitution of the Islamic dress, but to an extended metaphor, denoting any form of concealing or hiding. *Letters from Tentland* impressively illustrates this point uncovering different aspects of veiling that, alone or in combination, determine a very distinct overall aesthetics. As with Naficy, in Waldmann’s performance, we can differentiate between two major forms of veiling: a visual form obstructing the perceiving subject’s gaze and a symbolic one referring to all means of an allegoric signifying process of contiguity. Apparently unveiled, the “real” only shows after the end of the performance when the performers invite the audience onto the stage and behind the curtain for the *Postscript*, a personal encounter without veil. The mechanisms of gender segregation, however, remain intact. No men allowed!

Undeniably, the most striking aspect of the visual veiling in *Letters from Tentland* lies in the fact that all six performers move within nylon tents that they do not leave until after the end of the performance. As if guided by an invisible hand, the tents execute, similar to a second skin, dance movements that would, under normal circumstances, not be permitted to a female body on stage. Only for once, the unveiled bodies of the performers appear as blurry shadows behind the lowered semitransparent stage curtain. It serves the purpose of, on the one hand veiling the stage events over again, and, on the other hand of obscuring the idea of representation as such. As a border between stage and auditorium, it elucidates most visibly the notion of a separation between the private and the public in Islamic cultures. Yet, this extended socio-cultural implication dawns on the spectator only after the end of performance. During the *Postscript*, it functions as a symbol of traditional gender segregation.

Although those two instances of veiling stand out as dominating the overall aesthetics of the performance, they can be complemented by two more, less apparent ones. The tent and the curtain as dominating signifiers of material veiling make the viewer overlook the fact that the bodies of the women inside the tents are already completely veiled. Although not wearing the long traditional Iranian attire, all six performers are completely dressed including headscarf. Those few times that the bodies can be seen outside the protective shell of the tents, the performers assume positions that allow no conclusion about the contours of their bodies. When all six show at the end of the performance in the entrance of the last remaining tent to invite the female audience to join them for the *Postscript*, the individual shapes of their seated bodies become absorbed in the crammed space of the tent and in the anonymity of the hardly contrasting colors of their clothing. Only performer Pantea Bahram, the tenant of the dark blue tent, wears, by contrast, strongly contrasting white clothing. At best, the windows of the tents allow for a quick glimpse of the hands, faces, hair or parts of the upper body of the performers. Anyhow, there can be no talk of an unveiled vision here. These windows, made of a fine nylon mesh, can be compared to *mashrabiyya*, wooden screens traditionally used as decorative lattice-work covering windows in ancient Islamic architecture.[32] It protects the privacy of the household without obstructing vision from the inside to the outside. Fadwa El Guindi makes a similar point when comparing these architectural structures to the ornamented face cover of an Afghani *burqu'*. [33] In *Letters from Tentland*, such protection is manifest in the way that the windows function as diaphanous mirrors, both letting light filter into the tent and onto the bodies of the performers and reflecting it back, bathing the performers in small shadows and dazzling reflections. All what remains visible of the performers' bodies is always distorted.

In a more elaborate sense, the theater as an art-institution is already clearly separated from the rest of the world. As a space of illusion it casts a veil over reality. The following statement by the tenant of the blue tent appears in this context like a confirmation of this notion:

> You know what: I stay in my tent and nobody can touch me here. I'll do my own theater in my tent and you cannot see me. I am my own theater. Even if I sing now, here and alone, what you forbid, you won't hear my singing. [34]

Veiling in theater, thus, is comparable to a kind of meta-theater, veiling over a veiled space. Still, also nonmaterial staging devices contribute to veiling and visibly draw a line between the public and the private. These include forms of optical concealment that are, at their basis, of nonmaterial nature, yet perceivable to the spectator as visual effects. In *Letters from Tentland* these effects come specifically from the use of projections and the play of light and shadow.

Even before the performance has started, the lowered curtain separating stage and auditorium becomes the projection surface for a vast number of photos from Waldmann's Iran journeys. Each one of those shows tents and their different forms of usage in Iran, from a sun tent on the beach up to an emergency shelter for earthquake victims. As soon as the curtain has been drawn the projection of a grid pattern, again comparable to *mashrabiyya*, falls onto the tents on stage. Later again, a large-scale photo of the Tehran skyline is projected against the stage background and the tents standing in front of it. Repeatedly text fragments in German or Farsi appear. Apart from those static projections, a recurring element is the visual flooding of the stage with text, a myriad of Farsi characters moving from one side to another, converging and blending into each other. All of the texts are taken either from *Seven Beauties* by Persian poet Nizami or *Summerhouse, later* by German writer Judith Herrman. A video projection shows the hazy white silhouette of a female dancer, being moved from one tent to another.

Behind those immaterial images emerging from the projections parts or the entirety of the stage disappear. The tents and the stage curtain, as such already a means of material veiling, are enclosed in an immaterial veil of light. Similarly, the absence of light lets images emerge in the form of shadows, hiding in turn the shapes they originated from. Right at the beginning of the performance, the weak light of battery torches throws the blurred silhouettes of the performers as shadows on the outer skin of the tents. Later, through the semi-diaphanous curtain, the shadows of the unveiled women can be made out another time. In fact, this form of silhouetted portrayal marks the rare occasion in *Letters from Tentland* that the natural contours of the female bodies are, at least, vaguely perceptible. This is especially remarkable when we consider that “everything that might indicate that the fate of the people in the tents is of any specific relevance to women” [35] was censored before the premiere in Teheran. The shadow becomes thereby the counterpart of the practice of veiling through projections. It unveils while optically covering its origin. Here *Letters from Tentland* brings to mind the aesthetic of shadow theater.

However, also without a direct signifying content, the play of light and shadow contributes to this form of immaterial veiling. Once the performers show behind the windows of the their tents, the inadequate lighting renders it often almost impossible to make out more than suggestions of their faces, hands, hairline or parts of the upper body. Even when spotlighted, most of the light is being absorbed by the tents’ fabric. Only the white clothing of performer Pantea Bahram reflects the stage lights, giving her a luminance that sets her apart from the other performers, focusing attention on her body and its contours.

Symbolic veils emerge whenever the new, the critical or the forbidden is presented under the cloak of the known, the uncritical and accepted. The redefinition of contemporary dance in post-revolutionary Iran as motion is a first, general indicator of that practice. The labeling as rhythmic movements diverts attention away from the fact that the subject of contemporary dance is the body, its object the exploration of the boundaries of the physically possible. In theater, symbolic veiling is manifest in signs constituted by signifiers and signifieds that do not seem to stand in any form of apparent semantic relation, even blatantly appear to contradict each other. It is in the context of the cultural system of censorship that new signification emerges. *Wispers* (2004) of actor Narges Heshempoor's Moaser Theater group, for example, thematizes such subjects as alcohol, prostitution, sexual violence, abortion and suicide, pretending that the four women on stage are all of Christian belief. [36] The symbol Christianity veiles any contextual relation to Islamic culture. With an entirely female cast, Roberto Ciulli realizes physical contact between stage characters in Frederico Garcia Lorca's *Bernarda Alba's Haus* (2004), paradoxically enough by making femininity the symbolic substitute for male stage presence. [37] In *Orpheus* (2001) choreographer Mohsen Hosseini uses oversized surgical masks to accentuate the female sensuality of his dancers. [38] It appears as if censorship interferences must not be understood as defining restrictions, but rather as a source of new creative ways that replenish the semiotic vocabulary of an aesthetics of veiling.

In *Letters from Tentland* the concept of symbolic veiling is deeply rooted in the performance's choice of dramaturgical devices. Its title already suggests that its self-conception is not that of a dance performance, but rather that of a long-distance correspondence of letters from an imaginary country to an unknown recipient. The tents become envelops, the performers both messenger and message in a conceptual circle of pure mediality, closing in the *Postscript*. *Letters from Tentland* makes use of the aesthetics of the written word, a form of representation thought of as uncritical. The breath of the forbidden adhering to contemporary dance in post-revolutionary Iran is veiled by the suggestion of intermediality. This impression is still reinforced by the repeated projection from the work of Nizami. In a similar manner, the name "Tentland" obscures any references to the reality of the city of Tehran and issues of women right's in the Islamic Republic. *Occupied Territories* or *Letters from Tehran*, alternative titles that had been discarded in the making, still bear witness to the original problematic of veiling the performance's true intentions.

The potential for unveiling, the disclosure of a super ordinate meaning in *Letters from Tentland*, lies in the very choice for the letter format and the intermedial use of the aesthetics of the written word. The written word has all along been a last resort to women for free expression and critical reflection in post-revolutionary Iran. Not only does the literary tradition of Iranian woman writers coincide with the first acts of public unveiling in the nineteen twenties, Milani argues that writing and publishing is synonymous with unveiling:

> "Writing, with its potential for public communication, for entering into the world of others, could be considered no less a transgression than unveiling." [39] Words become a veil enabling the transport of meanings that women cannot express in any other way. The letter format of *Letters from Tentland* obscures the performance nature of the stage events, legitimizing it by implication as a medial sign carrier.

Although the visual concealment of the performers in the tents appears as the performance's dominating form of veiling, there is also a symbolic implication to that practice referring back to the realm of the written word.

Point of departure in the making of *Letters from Tentland* was the double meaning of the word "chador", meaning both the earlier mentioned orthodox form of *hijab* and tent. On stage, the tent objectifies not only one, but both signifieds of the linguistic sign. The semantic relation between tent and veil determines the context for all signification in the performance. In its primary function the tent serves as a means of material veiling, a veil covering the female body. But, beyond its phenomenal appearance, against the background of the semantics of the linguistic sign, it has to refer inevitably to the veil. In the gaze of the perceiving subject the phenomenal veil is replaced by the image of the veil. This pictorial veil becomes the medium of collective symbolizing in the process of reception. It expresses the internal images of the veil while serving as a metaphysical projection surface for collective or individual associative external images. The physical presence of the veil in the form of the tent obscures, via the collective contract of Persian language, the symbolic presence of the associative image of a veil that assumes as a medium the primary sign function.

Conclusion

Letters from Tentland departs from a similar aesthetic understanding as Hamid Naficy already described for Iranian film. Waldmann tries to bring in line the rigorous rules of Islamic dress and the liberal nature of Western contemporary dance. Yet, in this attempt she goes one step further than Naficy. *Letters from Tentland* makes distrusting manifest meaning a virtue, glorifying the secrecy of hidden signification. Waldmann does not try to meet the minimum requirements of veiling, she tries to exceed them by all means. While Naficy describes an aesthetic that resulted from a coming to terms with the religiously imposed restrictions in Iran, Waldmann drives the whole concept of veiling ad absurdum. For one thing, it is not limited to the individual body of the performer, for another, it comes to bear on the spectator as a multilayer construct of material and symbolic veils.

The tents cover the bodies of the performers as extensively as the curtain all stage action or the projection the entirety of the staging area. Also the performance's all encompassing self-concept of being written messages makes the physical presence of dancing bodies recede to the background. Under this conceptional veil, all the different forms of veiling overlap. The veil in *Letters from Tentland* is therefore not limited to the two dimensions of material concealment, but also a depth structure. It is in the interplay of the different aspects of veiling that *Letters from Tentland* emerges as an aesthetic experience. Every one of them serves as medium for the associative symbolization of the perceiving subject, every time they overlap results in a pluralization of meaning. As such, the perception of the spectator unfolds as an oscillating movement between what he/she is being shown and what he/she is being denied; on the one hand, between the medium and the image it conjures up, on the other hand, between the different media and their images among one another.

This aesthetic excess makes the veil emerge in all its complexity as an autonomous phenomenon. In his mind, the spectator separates the image of the veil from its carrier, thereby exposing the physical body and giving it back its autonomy. Yet, the veil, be it a tent, curtain, projection or subordinate concept, does not lose its primary function of concealing the body in the process. Rather it serves a visual abstraction in *Letters from Tentland* making the female body emerge as a physical phenomenon in the mind of the perceiving subject. It is an aesthetic that puts a strong focus on phenomenality, yet not by means of physical exposure, but by its notorious denial.

Against the background of the Iranian culture, the aesthetics of *Letters from Tentland* appears revolutionary in its boldness. In the context of the Waldmann's work, it is the consistent progression of a theatrical aesthetics typical of the artist. In Iran, it was met by a politico-cultural necessity. It remains questionable however, as to how far such an aesthetics can contribute to establishing a proper, secular form of contemporary dance in Iran. Although at first tolerated by Iranian censorship, *Letters from Tentland* was ultimately forced to a halt by the authorities.

Without a doubt, from an aesthetic perspective *Letters from Tentland* is an extreme example, the condensation of a myriad of aesthetic impressions simultaneously acting upon the spectator. As such, it comes as no surprise that this aesthetics of veiling conflicts with Iranian authorities. However, some of its aspects could give new impulses to the Iranian dance scene, since *Letters from Tentland* not only exemplifies a possible aesthetics for contemporary dance in Iran, but, in fact, reinvents the representation of female corporality. Quite comparable to the *Triadic Ballet* of Oskar Schlemmer, the performance defines a new standard of aesthetic expression in dance. Waldmann not only sets an example for novel Iranian dance aesthetics, she might have created its very prototype.

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Notes

[1] Ahmed El Attar, "A source of sin and shame. The body in the Arab world," *Ballettanz* 3 (2004): 34.

[2] For details see Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, *Towards a poor theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[3] Although much has been written on the history of Persian drama and dance before the Islamic Revolution (e.g. M. R. Ghanoonparvar and John Green, *Iranian drama: an anthology* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1989), Willem M. Floor, *The history of theater in Iran* (Washington: Mage Publishers, 2005), Medjid Kan Rezvani, *Le théâtre et la danse en Iran* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962)), only little can be found for the period since 1979. For a short overview of the history Persian theater and a recent account on post-revolutionary drama, see M. R. Ghanoonparvar, "Persian plays and the Iranian theater," *Colors of enchantment: theater, dance, music, and the visual arts of the Middle East*, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001); for a short history of dance in Iran and post-revolutionary developments, see Elton L. Daniel and Ali Akbar Mahdi, *Culture and customs of Iran*, Culture and customs of the Middle East (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006); for the problematic of dance in post-revolutionary Iran, see Anthony Shay, *Choreophobia: solo improvised dance in the Iranian world*, Bibliotheca Iranica, no. 4 (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1999) and Mohsen Hosseini, "Why nobody moves in Iran. Theatre beyond words," *Letters from tentland: looking at tents: Helena Waldmann's performance in Iran*, ed. Susanne Vincenz, TanzScripte (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005).

[4] See Hany Ghanem, "Der Körper im Schatten," *Ballettanz* 3 (2004).

[5] Mohsen Hosseini, "Why nobody moves in Iran. Theatre beyond words," *Letters from tentland: looking at tents: Helena Waldmann's performance in Iran*, ed. Susanne Vincenz, TanzScripte (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005) 81.

[6] M. R. Ghanoonparvar, "Persian plays and the Iranian theater," *Colors of enchantment: theater, dance, music, and the visual arts of the Middle East*, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001) 94.

[7] Majid Sharifkhodaei cited in Arnd Weseman, "Die Diktatur der Scham. Auf der Suche nach dem Tanz 25 Jahre nach der Revolution im Iran," *Ballettanz* 3 (2004): 32. [my translation]

[8] Mohsen Hosseini, "Why nobody moves in Iran. Theatre beyond words," *Letters from tentland: looking at tents: Helena Waldmann's performance in Iran*, ed. Susanne Vincenz, TanzScripte (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005) 81.

[9] Robin Wright, “Iran’s New Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 79.1 (2000): 133.

[10] Atâollâh Mohâjerâni cited in Ibid. 142.

[11] Elton L. Daniel and Ali Akbar Mahdi, Culture and customs of Iran, Culture and customs of the Middle East (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006) 35.

[12] See Helena Waldmann, “How Tentland was created and became a wandering caravan,” Letters from tentland: looking at tents: Helena Waldmann’s performance in Iran, ed. Susanne Vincenz, TanzScripte (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005).

[13] Helena Waldmann, web-letters May 2006. [my translation]

[14] See Silvia Naef, Bilder und Bilderverbot im Islam vom Koran bis zum Karikaturenstreit (München: Beck, 2007).

[15] See Wim Raven, Leidraad voor het leven: de tradities van de profeet Mohammed (Amsterdam; Leuven: Bulaaq; Kritak, 1995).

[16] Ahmed El Attar, “A source of sin and shame. The body in the Arab world,” Ballettanz 3 (2004): 34.

[17] Koran 24:31 – And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty […]. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 2000) 290.

[18] Koran 24:30 – Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty […]. Ibid.

[19] See Faegheh Shirazi, “Islamic religion and women’s dress code: The Islamic Republic of Iran,” Undressing religion: commitment and conversion from a cross-cultural perspective, ed. Linda B. Arthur, Dress, body, culture (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000).

[20] Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, In the eye of the storm: women in post-revolutionary Iran, Contemporary issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994) 7.

[21] Alison Donnell, “Visibility, violence and voice? Attitudes to veiling post-11 September,” Veil: veiling, representation, and contemporary art, eds. David A. Bailey, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) 134.

[22] Leila Ahmed, Women and gender in Islam: historical roots of a modern debate (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 164.

[23] Farzaneh Milani, Veils and words: the emerging voices of Iranian women writers, Contemporary issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992).

[24] See Shahram Khosravi, Young and defiant in Tehran, Contemporary ethnography (Philadelphia; Bristol: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[25] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Islam and gender: the religious debate in contemporary Iran, Princeton studies in Muslim politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 7.

[26] Farzaneh Milani, Veils and words: the emerging voices of Iranian women writers, Contemporary issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992) 23.

[27] Hamid Naficy, “Poetics and politics of the veil, voice and vision in Iranian post-revolutionary cinema,” Veil: veiling, representation, and contemporary art, eds. David A. Bailey, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) 139.

[28] Shahram Khosravi, Young and defiant in Tehran, Contemporary ethnography (Philadelphia; Bristol: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[29] Hamid Naficy, “Poetics and politics of the veil, voice and vision in Iranian post-revolutionary cinema,” Veil: veiling, representation, and contemporary art, eds. David A. Bailey, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) 139.

[30] See Hany Ghanem, “Der Körper im Schatten,” Ballettanz 3 (2004).

[31] Arnd Weseman, “Covering - Discovering. Helena Waldmann’s performance strategies,” Letters from tentland: looking at tents: Helena Waldmann’s performance in Iran, ed. Susanne Vincenz, TanzScripte (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005) 99.

[32] See David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros’ introduction to Veil: veiling, representation, and contemporary art, eds. David A. Bailey, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) 16-39.

[33] See Fadwa El Guindi, Veil: modesty, privacy and resistance, Dress, body, culture (Oxford: Berg, 1999) 99-102.

[34] Helena Waldmann, Letters from Tentland, DVD, Ecotopia Dance Productions, 2004.

[35] Helena Waldmann, “How Tentland was created and became a wandering caravan,” Letters from tentland: looking at tents: Helena Waldmann’s performance in Iran, ed. Susanne Vincenz, TanzScripte (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005) 23.

[36] See Peter Kümmel, “Der Zensor und sein Gast.” Die Zeit 12 February 2004: 39.

[37] See Rüdiger Schaper, “Die Masken der Märtyrer.” Der Tagesspiegel 4 February 2004.

[38] See Arnd Weseman, “Die Diktatur der Scham. Auf der Suche nach dem Tanz 25 Jahre nach der Revolution im Iran,” Ballettanz 3 (2004).

[39] Farzaneh Milani, Veils and words: the emerging voices of Iranian women writers, Contemporary issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992) 6.

Between two homes, Moroccan artists in migration

By Paula VAN ZIJL

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to present to you today a review of the international and intercultural art exhibitions which the Upstream Foundation organized recently in the Netherlands and Morocco. It was an honor for me to be the curator for these exhibitions.

In 2005 Morocco and the Netherlands celebrated 400 years of political and cultural relations, and on this occasion a number of manifestations, exhibitions and meetings were organized. But hardly any of them focused on the Moroccan artists who, for several years now, live and work in the Netherlands.

Therefore, the Upstream Foundation organized a dedicated exhibition with ten Dutch Moroccan artists titled ‘Kunstmarokkanen”, which literally translates into ‘MOROCCANS in ART’. The central theme was: “how does the native culture influence the work of an artist?”

The exhibition travelled along seven Dutch cities and in every city discussions were held around a specific theme, like: Art and Politics, Art and Architecture or Art and Economy.

Most of the participating artists denied the influence of their cultural background on their work. They did not want to hear about it! In their opinion they are just artists and the only thing that counts is the artistic value of their work.

Like the artist Hamid Kanbouhi said: “I’d rather not participate in this exhibition with this title, it´s too political! Art is being used here to discuss a political issue. Let them clean their own street. I prefer to work in my studio and make art.”

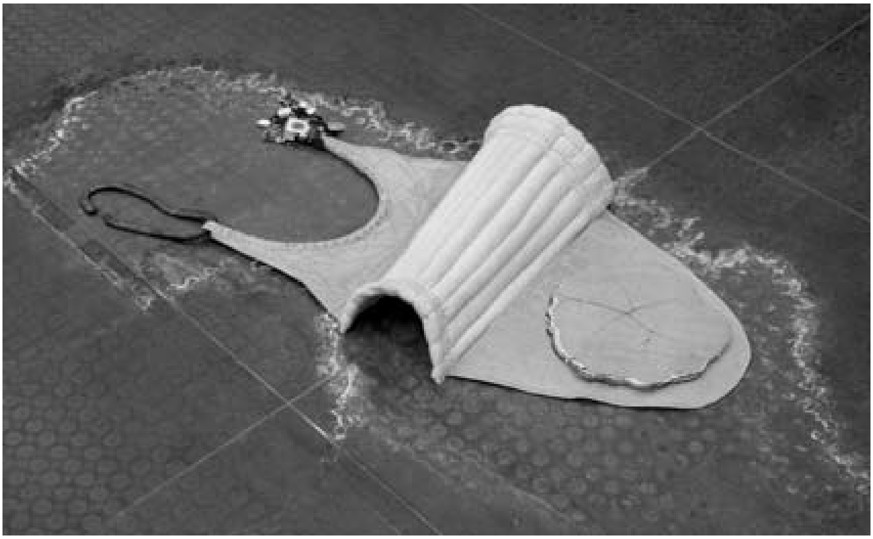
He was right of course, but in some situations art or artists can be part of creating new relationships between countries and people, with respect for the autonomy of the work of the artist.

During the exhibition tour in the Netherlands Upstream got in touch with the ONA Foundation of Morocco. Together with ONA an exhibition was then realized with the same Dutch Moroccan artists plus a number of Moroccan artists who live and work in Morocco. In total sixteen artists presented their work in Rabat, Casablanca and finally in Fez.

It was a great experience to show the work of the Dutch Moroccan artists in their native country. How would the visitors react to the work of for instance Aziz Bekkaoui or Amel Bouazizi and how would the artists feel, showing their work in Morocco?

For most of them it was just a great feeling to show their work in their native country. I was specifically interested to learn how the three female artists, Amandine Meunier, Amel Bouazizi and Wafae Ahalouch el Keriasti, felt about the gender issue in their work and about showing their work in Morocco.

The reaction of Amandine Meunier was quite clear. I Quote:



"First of all I would like to say that my work is not about the gender question. Of course I am a woman, so you can look at my work and try to find what is feminine in it, but it is not of my concern when I work.

Secondly, I would like to say that I am not a Moroccan artist. I was born in Morocco with a French passport and I currently live and work in the Netherlands.

(8 years in Morocco, 9 years in France, 1 year in Denmark, 12 years in Holland, what culture does this makes me part of?)

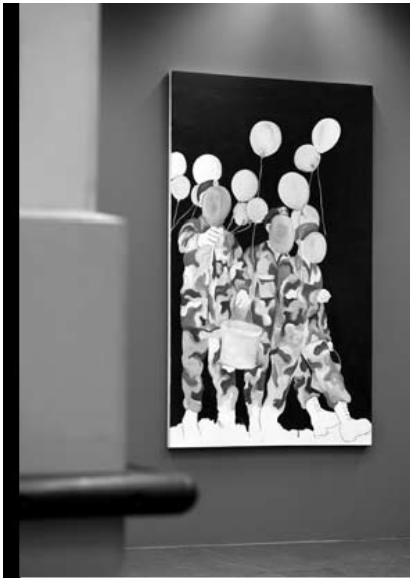
In my work the issue for me was about displaced people in general, rather than about Moroccans specifically, or how to deal with identification when one cannot refer to one exclusive home country anymore? It is not about ***identity*** *- this remains a personal issue for any individual - but about* ***identification****: where do I come from, what is my nationality?*

For me, being a bit from everywhere means that I carry pieces of everywhere with me, that I am an "outsider" wherever I am, that I think and speak in 3 languages. Not part of here, not part of there while yet having in me, kept, learned, appreciated, and selected elements of both here and there. I am not from here or there, I am from in-between, being halfway somewhere.

End of Quote.

Amel Bouazizi noticed that her work was more focused on the Netherlands, where she sometimes even forgets how much freedom she has to manifestate herself artistically, by getting used to it. She sees herself first of all as a Dutch artist and the gender issue is not part of her work at all.

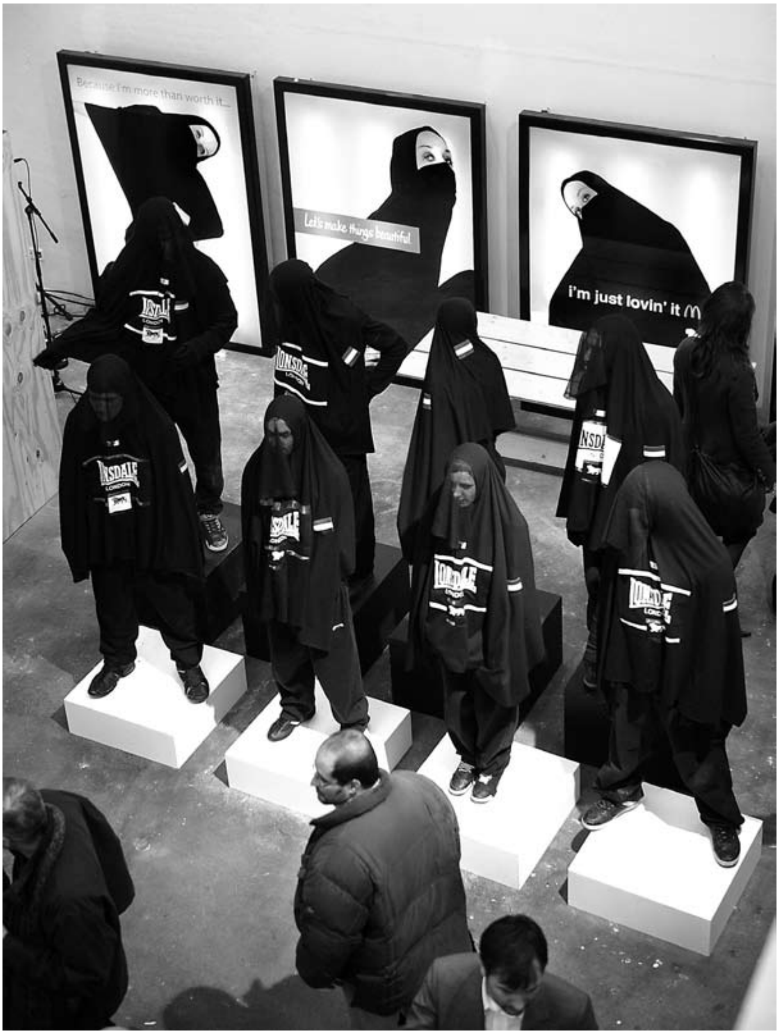
Wafae Ahalouch el Keriasti noticed that only because other people focus on her Moroccan background, she is attended to it, not by herself. She creates work that has a critical and cynical side. She hopes that it will make people think about the world they are living and acting in. For her the gender issue is becoming more and more part of her work.



These three women, except maybe Wafae focus on their identity as an artist and their work and none of them seems to be trying to make a statement to the world with it. Also, having their work presented at the exhibition in Morocco did not have any specific political, gender related or cultural sensation with these women.

But… when we take a look at other parts of the exhibition, there **is** one artist who is making a statement on the gender issue: **Aziz Bekkaoui**.

By showing the installation *Times Burka Square* he focusses on the double role of the burka. In this installation he creates confusion: the photos are showing beautiful women but in a double context. Western marketing with the burka used as a forced costume for beauty. Clothing functions as a second skin and identity of the user, and covers what he or she doesn´t want to show to others.
Aziz Bekkaoui used the burka also at the exhibition in a performance with young people dancing in the street. Even the public was invited to wear one, which was really confusing. Especially for the men.


Because I'm more than worth it...
Let's make things beautiful
i'm just lovin' it
LONSDALE
LONDON

When the performers were dancing with the burka´s on, nobody knew whether they were women or men. But, as the artist said: doesn't the advertising business try to make all women look the same, with their perfect teeth, hair, lips and clothing?

Aziz' issue is not only that the burka is repressing women, but he also ridicules the beauty ideals of the West.

With this performances and installations Aziz initiated an interesting discussion in a very simple but effective way.

I conclude.

Anyone can draw his or her conclusions from these exhibitions. Apart from their artistic value and content they have generated many ideas in support of a continued relation between Morocco and the Netherlands. The gender issue, the cultural identity and the political issues in the work of artists will definitely come back in the symposium that will be organized next year, where we again will talk about how art may influence politics, social life or economies to bring our two nations closer together.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Paula van Zijl

Note

The Foundation Upstream has been founded in 2002. In that year they organized a big exhibition in Hoorn and Amsterdam during the celebrating year of 400 years relation between East and West. Artists from China, Afrika, Sri Lanka, India and Indonesie created a work on the theme: negations between East and West.
Actually Upstream is busy in creating new intercultural exhibitions national and international.

Biographies

Nora Amin, is an *Egyptian* based writer, director and dancer/actress in Cairo. Her texts, translated into English and German, won her many prizes, as did her directions and adaptations performed in the theatre.
Traveling and working in the USA, Holland and in Germany, she was visiting professor in Arabic drama and dramaturg/director in intercultural theatre projects. With ITI Germany she also worked in Sudan.

Osman M. El-Badawi (*Sudan*) studied Education and Drama at the undergraduate level in Sudan. In London, he obtained a Diploma in TV. Production and Direction, and another Diploma (with honours) in Film studies, and completed his M.A in English Theater Studies at Lancaster University in Britain.
He was previously Head of the Drama Department of the Institute of Music and Drama, Khartoum, Sudan. At present he is Dean of Student Affairs and assistant professor of Drama, Communication, African literature and Criticism at the University of Gadarif, in the East of Sudan.
Over the years he participated in many theater- and drama productions mounted by the National Theater and The Nuffield Theater of Sudan and Britain, respectively.
Currently he is pursuing his studies for a PhD in "Performance and Performativity in the Nuba Cultural Practices".

Babatunde Allen Bakare (*Nigeria*) started his career as a theatre practitioner and scholar in 1996 as a certificate student in Dramatic Arts Department, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. He gained admission to the Centre of Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo to study Realism of Henrik Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov.. He is a D.Phil candidate at the Drama Department of University of Stellenbosch, South Africa at the moment.
In 2005, Tunde visited Yale School of Drama, New Haven, Connecticut as an invited scholar to assist an MFA graduating student who directed *Hedda Gabler,* one of Ibsen's most challenging dramas to put on stage.
As a versatile theatre practitioner, Tunde has directed and acted in over a dozen of major plays of Osofisan, Soyinka, Ibsen and Rotimi to mention but a few.

Nehemia Chivandikwa is a lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of *Zimbabwe*. He teaches Applied Theatre, play-making and theatre design. He has published several articles on educational theatre, theatre design and theatre for development. He is currently studying for a Ph.D on the follow-

ing topic: "*Engendering Community Participation in Theatre for Development: A reflective investigation into Zimbabwean Projects*". His forth coming publications include, television soaps, political theatre in Zimbabwe and action research methodologies in applied theatre.
Chivandikwa has also participated in Theatre for Development Projects on Health and Sanitation, Political violence, Gender conflicts and Civic awareness. He has been involved in a Fullbright Sponsored Community Theatre Project, which focused on using theatre to explore prejudices based on nationality.

Dr Kirstin Johnsen-Neshati is associate professor of Theatre of George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia (*USA*) and Dramaturg for *Theatre of the First Amendment*. She is also a director, critic and freelance theater writer, and has translated several of Chekhov's plays. Her current works examines the interplay between traditional and intercultural pressures on contemporary theater practice in select regions of the Islamic world.

Dr Jessica Kaahwa, lectures in the Departments of Drama and Literature at Makerere University, *Uganda*, which is where she also received her Masters degree. Widely traveled, Dr. Kaahwa's undergraduate degree is from University of Benin, Nigeria where she also worked as a broadcaster with the External Service – Radio of Nigeria. Dr. Kaahwa went on to study Theatre History, Theory and Criticism at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she received her Ph.D. in 2001. Dr. Kaahwa has been the architect of a number of national initiatives that have sought to use theatre and media as a constructive force in conflict settings and for health improvement. A good example is her recent experimentation with "Theatre for Personal Meaning" and "Theatre for Conflict Communication." She is currently working on integrating "Process Theory" into theatre-therapy practice.

Dr Mieke Kolk teaches at the Institute for Theatre Studies of the University of Amsterdam, *The Netherlands*. She publicized four books on Women and Theatre / History, Theory, Practice. Since 2001 she concentrated on the development of intercultural contacts between East and West, creating exchange-programs with Egypt and Sudan and co-organizing conferences on Arabic drama and theatre and its Western counterparts. She is editor of the proceedings of these conferences in Belgium, Morocco and Sudan.

Dr Michiel Leezenberg teaches at the Department of Philosophy and the MA program Islam and the Modern World at the University of Amsterdam, *The Netherlands*. His research focus's on the foundations of linguistic and social sciences, the changing perception and reception of ancient Greek drama, and the intellectual history of the modernizing Islamic world. Publications: *Contexts of Metaphor* (2001) and, in Dutch, I*slamic Philosophy: A History* (English translation in preparation) and recently *The Curse of Oedipus: Language; Democracy; and Violence in Greek Tragedy.*

Hubertus Martin Mayr, *from Germany*, studied Dramaturgy, Cultural Analysis and Cultural Economy in Cologne, Paris and Amsterdam and works as a freelance dramaturge for Dutch, Flemish and German production companies. His interest in Eastern performance practices, especially Islamic discourses of performativity, was sparked by a fascination for the aesthetic challenges Western theater practitioners were faced with upon staging in Islamic countries.

Maartje Nevejan,
Founder and director of **Couscous and Cola global** and **Couscous and Cola I and II**, she is an independent documentary maker working or *Dutch* Public Broadcasting System but also for Al Jazeera. She founded www.couscousglobal as an independent platform.
Maartje was originally trained as an actor in The Netherlands and the USA, she founded her own theatre group, became a documentary filmmaker and is now a new media-director.

Naomi Nkealah is a doctoral candidate in the Department of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. She holds an MA *cum laude* in Pan-African Literatures from the University of Pretoria. Her articles have appeared in some South African journals such as the *English Academy Review* and *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (Journal of Literature). She has also published short stories in magazines and journals and has received some recognition for her creative writing.

Dr Christopher Odhiambo Joseph is associate professor in literature and African drama at Moi's University in *Kenya*, Department of Literature, Theatre and Film-Studies. He is currently Mellow Research Fellow at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, SA.

Dr Nehad Selaiha, is professor of Drama and Criticism at the Academy of the Arts in Cairo, *Egypt.* She is also the drama-critic of Al-Ahram Weekly, a prominent English newspaper in Egypt. From 1992 on she is the main author, critic and historian of Egyptian theatre and the absolute authority in new Arabic drama and theatre. She published three books with her articles on *Performances*, *Writers* and *New Directions* (the Movement of Independent theatre-makers in Cairo) in Egyptian theatre.

Drs Natasja van ‘t Westende, studied Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University, *The Netherlands*. She did research for her thesis in Sudan concerning music, gender and Islam and carried out projects in the field of documentary filmmaking. In Khartoum she worked for War-Child, a Dutch NGO, as manager of cultural and educational projects and gave trainings. She is now program-manager of *Dancing on the Edge*, a yearly festival on contemporary dance and theatre form the Middle East.

Paula van Zijl, studied and teached at the Academy of Social Studies, *The Netherlands*.
In the 90ties she started working as an adviser and manager of cultural projects in the North of Holland. Since 2005 she produces and does fundraising for cultural projects in Holland and abroad.