

The Trickster astride: The Lingering nature of African Orature

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother **Millicent Apondi Chiteri** for planting in my life the notoriety to tell stories against all opposition to this oral tradition. That this dissertation is based on orature (oral traditions) is a germination of that fertile seed she interred in me. As she rests in glory, I am forever proud of and indebted to her, for the artistic expression born of her creative indulgence in my upbringing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISERTATION COMMIITTEE.....	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Trickster Narrative.....	5
1.2 Scholarly Content.....	7
1.3 Literature Review.....	8
(Playwriting/orature, Performative Writing, Auto/Ethnography)	
1.4 Dissertation Organization.....	32
CHAPTER 2 REFLECTIONS (Oral Traditions)	37
1.2 Orature versus Westernization	54
CHAPTER 3 THE TRICKSTER’S JOURNEY BACK.....	64
3.1 Orature (Ritual passage of Circumcision)	66
3.2 Orature and Marriage.....	86
3.3 Westernization and Formal Education.....	93
3.4 The Trickster’s Journey Back.....	95
CHAPTER 4 DRAMATIZING THE STORY	
The Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festival.....	134
4.1 Drama Festival Management.....	137
4.2 The Kenya National Drama Festival.....	157

4.3 Drama Festival Organization.....	158
4.4 Drama Festival Adjudication.....	161
4.5 Drama Festival Workshops.....	168
4.6 The Dramatized Solo/Choral Verse.....	169
4.7 The Dramatized Narrative.....	174
4.8 The Creative Cultural Dramatized Dance.....	181
4.8 The Play.....	190
5.0 The Making of a Festival Play.....	199
CHAPTER 5. <i>RECREATIONS</i>	206
CHAPTER 6. <i>INTROSPECTION</i>	256
BIBLIOGRAPHY	276

Abstract

This dissertation is based on two pieces of my artistic work namely, auto ethnography based personal narrative under the title, *The Trickster's Journey back* and a play under the title, *Recreations*. Relying on my orientation in African orature (oral traditions) and understanding of modern playwriting, I want this dissertation to cut across two distinct worlds of performance in my community -the traditional versus modern. These two worlds find confluence in the Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival that this dissertation undertakes to discuss. The impetus of this dichotomy is derived from my interaction with the unfolding historical antecedents in Kenya before, during and after independence.

The two pieces of work mentioned above have been crafted to illustrate the power, craft and impact of stories and storytelling (orature). In so doing, my dissertation will though orature (oral traditions) and the written play, explore the elemental features that characterize oral performance and the modern play, using auto ethnography as both the process and product of my research. In the context of oral traditions in my community, the story of an individual is basically a reflection of a communal whole and thus collectivizing a community in my mindset exhibits how one person can attest to the fact that the human body is the space as well as the vehicle for artistic expression. How the story of a community is reflected in the life of an individual is the thrust of my indulgence in this dissertation. This research also focuses on highlighting traditional African story/tale as enshrined in orature (oral traditions). In a nutshell this research is to

appreciate the lingering nature of the story as it navigates several levels of inhibitions through time.

Chapter One (Introduction)

When Professor Elaine Lawless of the English department at University of Missouri suggested that I could write a narrative based on my personal life, I was for a moment taken aback. It is unheard of in my community to write and/or say things about one's life without being considered a braggart. However, after I understood Professor Lawless to be suggesting that the lens of ethnography and auto ethnography can provide the opportunity for a research process and be the basis of a research product, I began to reflect upon some African values which put the individual in a collective whole that could be considered for auto ethnography. My community believes in a communalistic essence in which the "I" in the social sense refers to more than one individual, because the policy of "I am because you are, and since you are therefore I am" (Kumar, 2002), ties every individual to a communal whole and enforces interdependence to each other and the environment.

The African community from where I hail subordinates the individual to cultural elements that submerge individuality while promoting collectivity. It is for this reason that I will use this dissertation to elucidate the role of the "I" Vis a Vis that of the communal group. As I write this dissertation, I will be using my perspective by placing myself in the cultural seat from which to reveal through ethnography how a community can be embodied in one person. I have therefore decided to use the notoriety of my community to tell stories as the basis upon which I want to discuss the role and power of the artistic field of storytelling.

Our people hold as true the adage that the African is a notorious storyteller because story and storytelling permeate every facet of African existence. The story of an individual is equal to that of the community and has the dual capacity to be manifest in the individual as well as being played by the individual as a representative of the community. The storytelling habit is also going to be understood as an obligation because every aspect of the African life is a story.

A story can be manifest in the individual through ritualistic practices and symbols discoverable in traditional lifestyle, making the African body the place where cultural elements are played. Thus the notion that the African body is the space on which performance was played becomes an integral part of understanding African existence in the communal set up. A story can also be played by the individual in the process of his or her actual enactment of artistic properties of performance; it is therefore my conviction that tracing my own life within the context of African culture is reflective of a whole community in terms of their beliefs, practices, and performance conventions. Because of the need to realize an auto ethnography of my life; I would like to define that aspect of study by reverting to two distinct worlds. The first world is that of the traditional African life in Kenya before independence which reposes in orature, and second, which is the modern world as represented by the civilizing consequence of colonialism.

This dissertation will by extension look at the place of orature before independence in Kenya, out of which I have written a personal narrative-*The Tricksters Journey Back*, tailored to reflect the rituals of passage in my community and how these melded with modern life as experienced in the cities. This is how the idea astride comes in, a vast majority of people in my community have safely oscillated between adhering to

their cultural and traditional life while accepting and practicing modernity. This balancing act is typical of the African trickster character and is in essence playing the astride.

I will also trace the origin of external influence on African performance traditions and orature by colonialism, and how this led to the establishment of the Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival. The Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival will be the basis of my discussing a play entitled *Recreations*, which is a direct product of this festival and a response to modern playwriting albeit with vast influence of orature.

I have decided to employ the metaphor of the trickster, an African stock character that dominated narrative performances across Kenya because only this character summarizes the ability to adapt to dynamic forces and surmount challenges. Harold Scheub in a prologue to his book (Scheub, 2013), highlights the importance of the trickster character by referring to its existence as an eternal moment and the moment of transition. It is inconceivable how orature could exist in several forms without understanding how that very existence is eternal and limitless. The notion of transition is based on the ability of orature to remodel and transform itself from generation to generation.

It is solely due to the capacity of orature to transition and still retain its power and eminence, that I consider the trickster character as the exemplification of resilience and staying power of orature. The essence of orature is discoverable in how like the trickster character it rules supreme, even in the face of myriad external influences against

which it has survived in various forms today. According to Scheub (2013), the African trickster character is the trick hero who like a butterfly, struggles to free itself from the cocoon. Nothing summarizes this contention better than the relationship between orature and other forms of art, than the realization of its power to transition and blossom- a kind of metamorphosis.

There is no doubt in the fact that the one leg that I have perpetually had in the traditional world of African orature, while playing by modern standards like all my peers in art in Kenya, lends me the indubitable tag of the trickster astride. The unshakable shackle of tradition, culture, and norms that permeate the rituals of passage from birth to adulthood in my community in particular, and Kenya in general, thrust upon the average traditional African the tag associated with a character whose mainstay in African orature; was to navigate through odds and hurdles in order to remain above water in every situation. The African trickster character was exemplified as that very diminutive, almost physically insignificant individual who thrived on trickery and charm, to scale challenges by summoning the faculty of wit.

There is no denying the fact that the African trickster character did not always get away with, or even out rightly get his way through the art of survival and trickery. In some crucial cases he/she met his/her match, and either got outwitted, or paid a heavy price even after outwitting one or a group of challengers. Nonetheless, the African trickster character seldom took or played the fools role (Morgan, 2013). The trickster character dominated and took pleasure in overcoming as opposed to being overcome.

In my tradition the trickster character was represented by a hare, that very calculating, swift, and diminutive creature always at risk of annihilation by the bigger and marauding animals. The hare was in constant threat of death by mauling because to many characters they were temptation for a good meal. The hare thus cut into size such bigger and stronger animals like the elephant, lion, giraffe and hippo among others. But the hare was not the only trickster character; such slow and smaller animals like the chameleon and tortoise, also featured prominently as stock trickster characters. In fact, hare oft times fell victim to the tortoise or the chameleon, who outwitted him/her and rose above him/her through sheer trickery. A short trickster story will augment the point on vulnerability of hare as trickster character mentioned above.

Trickster Narrative

Once upon a time on a hot afternoon, hare and chameleon met on the way to the market. Chameleon, realizing the daunting task of hobbling to the market decided to challenge hare to a race. Hare, amused, laughed this off as a sour joke and was about to walk by when the chameleon raised his voice in a stern declaration, that he was serious and was ready to bet all his fortunes on this endeavour. Hare salivating for a prospective booty in return for decisively winning the race, took the challenge and the race ensued.

After running for a while, hare began to look back sure that his challenger was lagging way behind. The finish line was already in sight and there was no sign of chameleon. Hare began to savor the eventuality of a big win and the booty that was his to lose. When hare reached the finish line, he decided to turn around and sit facing the direction from which he knew chameleon was going to come. He was ready to wait for as

long as it was going to take a chameleon to arrive. But alas! Hare was deceived because just as he was about to sit, the chameleon cried out, “take care pal, do not sit on me. Don’t you have eyes to see that I have been sitting here long before you arrived? Look I have won the race!”

End

What hare did not know was that as the race was beginning, chameleon jumped onto his tail and was enjoying the “ride” from him until they both reached the finish line, when he jumped from hare’s tail as he was turning to look in the direction from which the race begun. This story is important for me in the sense that the African story has weathered several storms and like the traditional trickster character, been able to jump on the tail of every challenge to be transported through time.

The African trickster character has perpetually been exposed to the existence of two opposing worlds, the one world that they belonged to, and the other that stood in opposition to theirs threatening to wipe them from the face of existence. It has therefore been the constant vigil of the trickster to either out rightly trick their way, or ride on the tail of their adversaries. Based on the analogy afore mentioned, it is the intent of this dissertation to trace the life of the story, as that element whose existence today is purely courtesy of its capacity to linger in every form, structure, and genre of art today.

The interaction between traditional forms of art/performance and western norms tend to pit two tricksters against each other in much the same way that Hare, the erstwhile trickster, was pitted against another trickster-chameleon. In the end the weaker of the two tricksters win, and exemplifies the argument in this dissertation that, against the wave of

changing times and genres, the African tale/orature has weathered the storm while sitting comfortably in the tail of a more marauding trickster.

This dissertation focuses on the life of a traditional African storyteller, and how interaction with the contemporary world fathoms a duality of artistic consequence. The art of orature permeates my life in a manner reminiscent to a dual carriage embodying storytelling, and modern playwriting. Through narration in the first person, sparse dialogue, songs, dance, recitation, proverbs and sayings, I am able to discuss the survival of traditional orature in a performance piece entitled-*The Trickster's Journey Back*. Likewise, in recognition of the influence of a new artistic world order, I have written *Recreations*, a play instructed by conventional modern playwriting, but anchored in the lingering nature of the story.

Scholarly Content

In this dissertation I would like to discuss how my indulgence in modern playwriting has been largely influenced by the adherence to orature/storytelling. In so doing, I will discuss performative writing and writing for performance, as literature that governs how I feel about the indelible mark of artistic expression thrust upon me by the ever-lingering power of storytelling. I want to share how my experience as a traditional storyteller meld with modern conventions governing playwriting, and how orature lives side by side my playwriting.

Having written plays for the drama festival in Kenya for nineteen years, I want this dissertation to speak to the act of writing a play which I did chiefly because it was going to compete at the festival. Thus, writing for the festival is the reason that I consider

performative writing as important in understanding how ethnography constantly governs the product called the drama festival play in Kenya.

Literature Review

As a scholar of the theatre in its modern concept, I will ground this dissertation on the principals of playwriting, while paying greatest allegiance to my background as a storyteller governed by traditional orature. I will therefore discuss specific literature on playwriting that speaks about the relationship between storytelling and playwriting. I am also particularly interested in discussing how the transition from orature to writing took place in a country grappling with forces of tradition, and modernity/Eurocentric theatrical conventions.

Playwriting and (Orature)

There are several theories by eminent modern playwrights that examine playwriting whether only for dramatic literature purposes or for theatrical performances. I am particularly interested in the epic theatrical style of Bertolt Brecht, mainly because his breaking of the fourth wall is reflective of the traditional African so called “theatre without walls”. The works of Brecht were a direct departure from the traditions, whereby the audience and the performers were separated by the proscenium arch (Malgorzata, 2010), which strongly implies that Brecht, like the traditional performer of orature, was interested in doing plays that broke the fourth wall.

Thinking about Brecht, and his idea of epic theatre, makes me regard traditional orature as being in opposition to modern playwriting that strives to adhere to theatrical engagement strictly as formal business, which is tailored to separate the performers from

the audience. The works of Brecht thrill me because he was strictly conscious about sticking to the folk culture (Malgorzata, 2010), and the tenets he upheld about what a storyline in a play should strive to uphold. I have perpetually strived to identify with the very close connections between epic theatre and African orature, which is why they influence my writing about and for performance.

Brecht's epic theatre and the stage practices it embraced, were very easily relatable to the indigenous African performance traditions because in essence, epic theatre did not rely on formula but professed a set of principles surrounding not only written texts, but also performances whose mainstay were to encourage dialogue between the performer and the audience (Bryant, 2000). Orature like epic theatre relied upon the stories and plots that drew heavily from traditions, and therefore hinged more in the past while at the same time acknowledging that new challenges emerged, that could fathom engagement with dynamic forces as and whenever they became manifest.

I am particularly interested in the fact that orature like epic theatre, advocated the role of the audience as cardinal in the rendition of a story. The fact that stories were basically drawn from historical performance practices and were dynamic enough to inculcate emerging issues, summarizes the work of orature as being among other things the means to comment on social dynamics. Social outpourings in my community were experiences handed down from our history, although in many cases, the past was important in making the present understandable and palatable.

From my knowledge of the composition of orature, the context of a story was based on understanding that issues of the day could best be interpreted, and appreciated,

through narrative journeying into the unknown. The storyteller importuned the audience to travel with them into the world of the distant past, that was not merely about glorifying that past, but about drawing from the world of fiction to reflect upon an immediate reality.

It is in this light that I appreciate Brecht's epic theatre for not only peeping in the past as the means to critique the present, but also for making the art of storytelling a timeless venture (Bryant, 2000). It is interesting to note that whenever the storyteller and the audience partook in the journey to the distant past, they were agreeing that orature was actually about fiction, which separated the world of the story from both the storyteller and the audience.

Relying on my experience as a traditional storyteller and being versed with the tenets as well as the basis for orature in my community, I am very comfortable with aspects of epic theatre that extolled storytelling and narrative power in message delivery. Brecht enthralls me by adopting a didactic approach to the stage, that makes his writings and performances incline towards what has been described as a "parable" play (Styan, 1981).

The terms didactic and parable are very familiar with my community's tradition of using proverbs, and sayings while telling a story in order to importune the audience the need to interpret metaphorically loaded content, so as to teach as entertainment was going on. At the same time the didactic approach of epic theatre fits very well with traditional orature in my community, because the storyteller was in no way considered the all-knowing figure just because they told stories. Everyone in the audience was apt at

storytelling and could deliver the story as much as, if not better than whoever was in the centre of storytelling platform.

As was the case in my community, epic theatre advances the tradition, and practice, of making the stage a platform from which to investigate social issues and challenges (Bostock, 1998). The concept of a stage as a public platform here very much departs from the thought of an abyss, that separates the audience from the actor/performer, as if one was the world of the living and another the world of the dead (Bostock, 1998).

Both the storyteller and the audience constituted a potent body that merged through an interplay recognizing the power, contribution, and responsibility of each other in performing for a unitary cause. The idea of a public platform was based on a common understanding of the story, and the role it was supposed to play during the session when it was being delivered. The thought that the actor was going to superimpose a story and the themes on the people was as remote in African orature of my people, as in epic theatre of Brecht. Brecht in solidarity with traditional orature suggests in his works that what the performer/actor can do, the audience should do doubly. That is why Brecht believed in the fact that it was easier to play the teacher than to play a hero (Bostock, 1998).

The hero in African orature was the message and not the person telling the story, the storyteller was always subordinate to the story, which was told for, and on behalf of the audience. The storyteller could be described as a mere facilitator of the story they were telling, and therefore did not have the chance to play the hero. The message and the

moral that a story carried were the heroes, and therefore virtue was exalted instead of the personality telling the story.

I remember mother telling us a story about the trickster hare and how he loses his tail after being caught by other animals, who want to punish him by making a meal of him for tricking them. When hare tricks his way from the marauding animals, he flees, but leaves his tail in the hand of his assailant. The hare is not the hero in this story, and neither are his assailants. The hero is the moral that even when one gets away with trickery or other vices, there will always be a symbolic mark on them as a reminder about their misdeeds that society does not appreciate.

If the story was meant to deliver a message of moral importance, it would be a fallacy for the storyteller to be the focus to the point of being the hero, thus dissolving the essence of the story. This is why I identify very strongly with Brecht's dismissal of the Aristotelian catharsis, which in a sense means that the audience is taken to the point before the story started (Bostock, 1998), making it seem like the message of the story has been withdrawn from the audience, and replaced by the hero character.

In as far as the structure and composition of orature among my people was concerned, when the story was over, the storyteller marshalled the audience to help put the story in its perspective - the fictitious past. Of utmost significance was the fact that getting to the stage to tell a story was not enough and neither was the fact that there was a storyteller and an audience. The story was an entity unto itself, and both the storyteller and the audience "called" it from the world of fiction where stories were said to repose. It

was a matter of sacred importance to be able to summon the story and tell it to an audience just as it was sacred to bid farewell to it.

In essence, after the story was done and gone, the audience took away something that came with it but let it go. Which in my community was done in unison by the storyteller calling; “A story is going, a story is going,” to which the audience responded, “Let it go, let it go”. In my understanding, this situation very much reflects epic theatre idea of alienation that helped arouse astonishment in the listeners, as opposed to eliciting empathy (Bostock, 1998).

The intention of a story was supposed to ensure that the audience carried away something with which to investigate their own actions, in relation to the expectations of the moral requirements of the community. This position would not be effective if the story went away with the performer, so that empathy became the dominant product of a storytelling session. Brecht advanced the principle of stripping the stage of all forms of magic, and this effectively ensured that the audience was not led to empathetic trance by adopting a precluded emotional state of mind (Styan, 1981).

It interests me how in envisioning a role for his actors, Brecht, ensured that the actor was at a distance from the character they were playing, as well as the situation they were involved in on stage (Styan, 1981). The story and the situation in my community likewise, were like the cloak that the storyteller donned and doffed when the business of storytelling was over, which enabled the works of Brecht like in traditional African orature, arouse thinking, investigation/enquiry, and subsequent response from the spectator.

Every person in the community knew the goings around them, and needed only to be led into the story through milestones that would necessitate investigative as well as analytical minds, in order to appreciate the message in a story. Thus, with the stage stripped of magic, Brecht's work extolled the idea of alienation; which relied upon the distance between the actor and the character, in order to convey passion without being passionate (Styan, 1998).

In my community, the idea of alienation was applied in situations where animal characters were used so that imitation and mimicry helped the performers to distance themselves from the symbolic characterization they were portraying in the story. Playing multiple roles by use of vocal inflection and mimicry, performers in my community succeed in playing alienation that was at the very heart of Brecht's theory of "verfremdung" (Styan, 1981). The result of establishing distance between the actor and the character in my community was that it enabled a shared experience to exist between the actor and the audience, as well as ensuring that every time a performance was done it was new, distinct, and unrehearsed.

Stories told in my community were in the third person because they dwelt in the past, which made it possible for objectivity to rule the storytelling sessions. The past was the springboard on which the storyteller stood to help them assume a transitional moment, from which they would disembark when the session was over. This way like in epic theatre, the actors would help the audience understand the link between their present realities, and the moral world of the past. In epic theatre this scenario worked for the actors because they would engage in reading stage directions as a way of elucidating the issues not perceivable to the audience (Styan, 1981).

In my community, fables were still used as the means to delve into the distant past in order to understand the present. For instance, when an ogre tale was told about how a forest was inhabited by a hairy, ugly and scary ogre, that could devour any human being that did not heed advice, it would seem like there are still forests and actual ogres today. But the metaphor of a forest referred to human beings, and how in their psyche they devised impropriety against each other.

The story teller's work was to make the message in the story vivid, and then let the audience own the resultant direction of flow that the story adopted. The story did not belong to the storytellers; they were merely facilitators of a session that was akin to a formal classroom today. Also instructive for me in epic theatre is the fact that Brecht, as opposed to Aristotelian idea of the tragic hero, created the un tragic hero (Bostock, 1998).

It is very intriguing for me to imagine how in the French classical a secluded space was left in the middle of the space occupied by actors, for the so called impartial third party associated with the "thinking man" (Bostock, 1998). The person regarded as the thinking man was actually a third party in the performance scheme of things, notwithstanding that there were already actors and the audience.

The essence was that the so called thinking man was in fact a member of the audience, and thus a spectator, although this was a spectator of high rank. Which meant that status in the performance arena helped elevate some persons in the society over others, by use of one tragic character on stage, whose sensationalization of events stretched reality (Bostock, 1998).

Brecht's epic theatre supports the African loathing of sensationalization by breaking the fourth wall, and eliminating the space occupied by the so called thinking man. In epic theatre the performance space strictly comprised of the performer and the audience. The weight of issues around which stories revolved required not the tragic hero, but a sage personality whose role was to help the audience to contextualize and own through internalization, the messages derived from performance. African orature was not structured to depict status, and therefore could not subscribe to the notion of the thinking man occupying a central place in performance.

Brecht advocated epic theatre whose "narrativation of the stage" highly resembles African orature (Davis, 1998), whose mainstay was the use of oral narratives to propel performance. Here epic theatre through dialecticism reveals the difference between acting, which is about sharing, and living, which encourages identification with the message (Davis, 1998). The opportunity in African orature to share and identify with issues and challenges in the community were the primary purpose for storytelling, and epic theatre aptly echoes this.

The tenets surrounding epic theatre are very instrumental to my understanding and practice of playwriting, because as a person caught in between two worlds, it has been instructive for me to rely on my understanding of traditional orature, while writing for the stage in keeping with modern playwriting conventions. Having a deep grounding in orature makes it easy for me to critically appreciate epic theatre, which I hold as being a written contextualization of African orature.

Finding links between orature and epic theatre is the result of two plays that I will present later in this dissertation. Also of interest to me as an African performer of orature, are specific ideals held by Aristotle, while dealing with the subject of playwriting as storytelling. According to Tierno (2012), Aristotle's examination of plays like *Oedipus Rex*, demonstrates timeless truths about dramatic storytelling which in essence suggests that, at the heart of Aristotle's philosophy, there lies the cardinal value of storytelling.

The fact that all aspects of a performance exist chiefly to augment the story is as profound in orature in my community, as it was in Aristotle's views of dramatic playwriting. In my community the story was tied to very serious and compelling issues which were told with the aim of furthering morality, while at the same time castigating vices.

As I delve into modern playwriting, I keep pinching myself to ensure that I do not lapse into the habit of adhering to other matters of conventional scripting, at the expense of highlighting pertinent traditional modes of loading a scripted story with the moral questions of the day. It is for this reason that I applaud Aristotle's obsession with tragedy, because through tragedy, matters of high level importance to the society are explored ((Tierno, 2012). In fact as Tierno (2012), states, matters of morality are cardinal to the survival of the community and need to be addressed with a tinge of seriousness.

As a writer of plays that reflect the challenges in my community, I have had the tradition of using symbolism in characterization as a means of exposing how the high and mighty also fall from grace to grass. The purpose of performance therefore is to present

strong story plots that according to Tierno (2012), can support elaborate structures to sustain a strong moral message.

This scheme of things belie the thought that Aristotelian tragic character was aimed at separating the high and the mighty from the lowly, thus creating a situation whereby the plot was chiefly about personalities and their agenda, as opposed to telling the story in keeping with the demands of the society from which the story was created.

Just like the structure of an oral story was a big boost to the composition, I like to appreciate that Aristotelian plot structure, and the idea of a catharsis (Tierno, 2012), emerge from strong emotional outpourings that held tight on moral issues. It is however disturbing to me that the manner in which tragic moments in Aristotle's scheme of playwriting played out was rather harsh and ultimate.

In my community moral advocacy superseded punishment by death because the community believed in recreation as well as rebirth, which made it possible for the storyteller to tell a serious story with a caveat. As a result I have engaged in playwriting whereby optimism is the resolution to otherwise unforgivable happenings that Aristotelian tragic scripts, would not let go without blood and/or death.

According to Cole (1960), Aristotle appreciated dramatic storytelling which he considered as a science, thereby proposing very dramatic guidelines to sustain the story. As a performer of orature, I see this as the basis for dramatization in the process of building a story, even though orature in my community was characterized by the one person narrator which eliminated action and reaction that two characters experienced in modern acting.

As a narrator, I have been cognizant of dramatization as the most effective way to relate to the audience. The narrative composition and structure have moments of both monologues, and dialogue that allow the storyteller to dramatize the story. It therefore follows that whenever the shift occurred from storytelling/orature to conventional playwriting, the result was a product of the understanding that dramatization would follow through dialogue.

The difference has been that where there would be one character playing multiple narrative voices in orature, in a conventional play multiple characters have emerged to enable dramatic truth to be appreciated. Still, as I will prove in this dissertation, a one person narrative can still fathom dramatization with myriad voices indicative of different roles.

In essence the storyteller told the story through dramatization, and therefore, the dramatist today writes the play because they are storytellers. Cole (1960) suggests that the dramatist always needs to turn their attention to the cardinal laws of narration, its logic, and the deep necessity of presenting a unifying idea stronger than a mere collection of happenings.

The African artistic expression overrides the fact that there is something or a story to be told and pays attention more on how the story is told to meet artistic standards, than on the fact that a story has been told. Since my interest in playwriting stems from the need to transition with time from an oral performer to a modern playwright, I acknowledge and associate with Cole's (1960) assertion that the myth, the

parable, and the fable, are the fountainhead of all fiction through which is seen most clearly the didactic moralizing employment of the story. I am thrilled that even as I have one leg in the world of orature, and another in modern playwriting, the elemental factors of engagement are not different. I have therefore very loyally held onto tenets of orature, as I engage in modern playwriting.

Performative writing

I have immensely struggled in my efforts to understand and appreciate the term performative, as it appears to be about stagnation of the story through print, after it has been sort of hijacked from the stage. Traditional orature that I am more familiar with not only professes the telling of a story, but also telling it anew every time it is told. At the same time, traditional orature was flexible and the story took a life of its own when the narrator was on stage; and responded to the needs, mood, and contribution of the audience to tailor performance.

After the transition from tradition to modernity became a reality, the stories needed to be elevated, which made it inevitable that what was initially only designed for performance started to survive in another form. This way, as a performer of orature I am not only able to resort to something more than merely a means of expression, but also bear the capacity to put on paper those elements that help me to appreciate the need to see myself in the eyes of other people in written form, and still call the product a performance.

According to Tyler (1986), performative writing is the energy that evokes identification and emphatic responses by creating a space where others might see writing in the context of performance as well. I have imagined how through my adherence to orature, the art of storytelling can be the subject of a written piece that instructs performances in a fixed manner. I say a fixed manner because traditional orature in my community put emphasis on not only telling a story, but also telling it anew each time it was told.

Thus performative writing to some extent robs us of the newness that comes with actual performance. Which Tyler (1986) has suggested can be redressed by the fact that performative writing goes beyond merely recording experience, to being the means to an experience. In this regard it is possible to replay performances based on experiences that readers can identify with from the written page.

Tyler (1986) strongly suggests that performative writing derives its power in the fact that it has the ability to tell a story of human experience, a story that can be trusted and used because it is raw, genuine, and finds articulation through form, poetic expression and through art. Somehow this resonates with me as a believer in orature, because it suggests that performative writing relies on the idea of the story, and the artistic expression behind it.

I am particularly elated by the fact that performative writing does not individualize the story but enables the interplay between the singular “I” and the plural “I” (Tyler, 1986) that instructed orature. The retention of the place of the communal

whole in the contextual elements of performative writing is laudable, because through this, the temptation to rely on one person's point of view and their experiences whether good or bad is diffused.

Human experience may at times be presented with such a bias that the communal whole is submerged in overriding fiction. Nonetheless, I have said in this dissertation earlier that the personal can only suffice, if it is based on reflecting a communal entity. Therefore, when Pelias (2014) says that performative writing recognizes that individual bodies provide potent data base for understanding what the political and hegemonic systems write upon human bodies, I cease to worry that performative writing is a transition to the death of orature. I have written a personal narrative entitled *The Trickster's Journey Back* as a summary of how the human body and experiences mirror contact with political and cultural forces that shape responses and behavior.

As a personal narrative, *The Trickster's Journey Back* helps me to explore what Denzin (2003) calls an inquiry into the limits and possibility of the intersection between speech and writing. In this piece I appreciated that speech as an aspect of orature endows a performer with properties that can be put on stage, and also be written for readership. Although I must hasten to suggest that whenever a written piece is approached from the stage, its life is more transient than when it exists only to be read.

It is also important to acknowledge the fact that as orature slowly gets replaced by the written script, the audience shifts from the traditional active one, to another that

is passive and relies on reading. The story as an aspect of performance is regrettably dying, and as modern playwriting takes over, the elemental features of traditional orature infiltrates other genres of art and performance.

Since orature is slowly being overtaken by modern playwriting, performative writing as Denzin (2003) says, teaches us to write events that have passed, which allows us to learn how to play the past when it happens again in the future. Of course storytellers relied upon using the language of the past tense as an indication of originality of thought, even though those thoughts were clothed in very high metaphors.

The test of originality today can make the taste of orature in performative writing sour, because the risk of conceptualization may inculcate new insights not envisioned in the original context. It remains to be seen if through performative writing, whether the writer's faithfulness to the social, political, their own reflection and experiences (Clair, 2003) can be retained, even when the performance is done by another person from a different cultural background.

The fear of loss of authenticity as orature turns into performative writing is assuaged by Clair (2003) when she suggests that doing the art of performance is as much a process pursued by the perceiver, as would the writer. This is a strong indication of the responsibility of the perceiver of the written piece, as they engage in unravelling the intents of the writer.

I am particularly comfortable about the existence of fidelity to the cultural elements in a written piece, even when the writer is not always the person performing

the art. Claire (2003) strengthens this position by stating that both the writer and the perceiver are performance initiators, because they both strive to engage in the aesthetic process.

If the perceiver is a passive recipient of a written piece for performance, then they have a hard time digesting it if they hail from a different cultural background. But if the perceiver is the designated performer, then they naturally have an eye and ear for the traditional tropes, metaphors, hyperbole and metonymy explored in the written piece (Clair, 2003).

In order to cement the two worlds of orature and performative writing, Berleant (1991) summarizes the situation by speaking of the blurring of traditional distinctions, an integration of the creator of art, the aesthetic perceiver, the art object and the performer. I first find the notion of blurring traditional distinctions deceptive because without these distinctions the art is amorphous and does not incline towards a specific audience as would have been intended by traditional orature.

Traditional distinctions are the identification indicators that lend credibility to a performance and blurring these dims the essence of the art it seeks to create and highlight. On the other hand, there is need for a kind of integration of the creation of art; so as to reflect the dynamic forces of change from traditional to modern conventions. This integration I suggest must be faithful to the form and structure of traditional orature, which are crucial in maintaining traditional aesthetic values.

In *The Trickster's Journey Back*, I hinge my performative writing on dramatic structure that hinges on dialogue but still maintains the traditional narrative voice, songs, sayings and proverbs, to reflect the aesthetics of traditional art. I am therefore convinced that as orature travels through time to find a haven through modern dramatic conventions; in a very significant and compelling way it still lingers, which is why discussing performative writing is crucial to this discourse.

As I study the elemental basis for performative writing, I sometimes decry the loss of flavor that live traditional performances had. The fact of change from tradition to modernity has definitely diluted the essence of performance. Thus I have strongly supported the idea of writing, while paying attention to what really constitutes performative artistic aesthetics. Such ideals have led to my perpetually paying attention to the structure and composition of orature, in order to keep the artistic fire blazing.

In this regard (Pelias, 1999) says that performance is important for enabling knowledge get disseminated, but laments the fact that many writings merely say that a performance occurred, yet in the reporting, strips that performance of its life and soul. Sad though this is, the truth is that while shifting from performative writing to writing about performance, it really matters who is doing the writing.

The writer ought to be deeply aware of, if not be part of the community that the performance originates from, in order to bridge the issues of authenticity and adherence to cardinal principalities enshrined in every performance. Pelias (1999) continues to lament the loss of originality during the transition from performance to

writing, and emphatically states that no art can translate the art of the stage to the page. Performance is a live rendition of issues using physical and vocal properties uniquely engineered for this aspect of art, therefore, there is no way a substitute means of expression may replace it.

Indeed even as Pelias (1999) continues to state, detailed descriptions objectively presented with theoretical or historical contexts, do not replace the actual physical performance. Analyses of performance done in written may shade light to specific points of concern by the writer, but will never rekindle the performance modes inherent in live performance. As I write plays to respond to the need to preserve performative elements, I acknowledge the fact that even conventional playwriting does not compensate the type of originality experienced in actual performance of orature.

Pelias (1999) concludes his concern for the dearth of originality in writing about performance by admitting that when well-done, the reader may gain some feel for the event, some understanding of the participant's perspectives, and some grasp of the aesthetic power. This combination is aptly put to summarize the need for heightened objectivity in so far as reporting performance is concerned; however the nature of reporting needs to be cognizant of the fact that aesthetic power can best be exhibited on stage. An artistic mind may interpret and appreciate written aesthetics, but this may be restricted to those values that repose in speech, as opposed to physical performances.

Ethnography and Auto ethnography

As I embark on reflecting upon my interaction with two worlds, I cannot avoid the pressure to be faithful to both, albeit in very diverse ways. I am a product of parents and a generation that lived in the deep past of my tribe/people, and anything outside this position was supposedly foreign if not modern. I was born and brought up in the city and this has had a tremendous impact on my performance perspective and how I view the world.

Emerging from colonialism barely two years before my birth, the city where I was brought up was at the formative stage of civilization; and because several people from different tribes converged in this city, there were clashes that went beyond mere village/tradition and modernity. Every Kenyan tribe bears individual and uniquely different traditions, and owing to the absence of a national cultural milieu, the struggle to identify oneself with a specific cultural orientation was gargantuan.

It was therefore an act of ethnography for me to take the advantage of vacation visits to the village to interact with my grandparents and eschew their world view, while inquisitively delving in their past, which in a very impactful way reflected my own past through generational and genealogical perspective. Pride of place goes to my mother who brought with her the essence of tradition to our bedside every night that she told stories that bore the stamp of orature and traditions, that enabled me to separate my tribal inclinations from the myriad friends and neighbours I had in the city.

The personal experiences mentioned above amount to ethnography, and supports what Adams et al (2015) refer as the vehicle that helps us confront the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between sound practice and social constraint. I am honestly unable to describe whether I am an outsider in as far as my community is concerned. I have a strong feeling that the concept of outsider needs to be given serious thought with the view to be fair to everyone delving in ethnography.

If I was born in a culture and by occupational mobility found that I had to live away from my ancestral home, does this imply that when I begin to understand my cultural background I will be an outsider? Also, supposing I am born and brought up in the geographical location of my community, would I be an insider by geographical delimitation? My answer to the questions above is that an insider is that person born and brought up in the culture irrespective of geographical delimitations.

However, owing to various cultural influences people in my community have lost their touch with traditional and cultural tenets and have become pseudo outsiders, thus making them strangers to their culture. These to me are insiders albeit in a trance. It is like being in a wakeful slumber from which one requires very little prodding to be cognizant to the realities of the culture. Many people of my tribe and community still practice and believe in varied traditional elements of life, even when they are away from the village. They eat, speak and interact in keeping with their tradition, and are therefore walking ethnographers.

As a storyteller made and brought up in the culture, I deem my work as a performer and as a scholar, as being in the domain of auto ethnography. I feel so deep in the culture of my community, that any lens I use to peep into my own past and that of my fore parents, endow upon me an insider perspective reporting about the culture.

Adams et al (2015) define an auto ethnographer as being a storyteller in search of narrative rationality, which refers to stories that are plausible, trustworthy, reliable and true to experience. I have said that I personally partook in storytelling after I was sat down and told these by my mother, grandmother or grandfather. These stories are as real to me as they were decades ago when they were told to me.

I am today not struggling to make them plausible; I am striving to relay them from my experiential point of view, albeit with modern artistic conventions like playwriting. When Adams et al (2015) speak of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, they seem to understand that outsiders to the culture may conduct anthropological research; and thus collect stories that they later want to interpret, in order to come up with a final rendition devoid of loose ends and what they call, “contradictions”. Orature exhibited several versions to every narrative rendition, and the performers knew that these versions were not products of contradiction. Instead, they were responses to different situations and challenges in time and place within the social set up.

In my understanding, performing orature and narrative as an auto ethnographer bears more narrative fidelity as a mode of engagement, because I have first-hand

experience in my culture. I am thrust in the position where I can critically analyze the community in relation to dynamic forces militating against it. My reflections are accurate means of sharing with others from within and out of the culture through storytelling and playwriting.

As Adams et al (2015) would attest, my engagement in auto ethnography has enabled me engage in deep seated self-reflection, that helps me to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the present and the political. As a storyteller, I acknowledge the power of the story to not only reflect upon issues in the community, but to also comment on them. Today I look back at the norms that welded the community together against the backdrop of challenges wrought by modern lifestyles.

The product of these challenges is an auto ethnographic lamentation of the loss of values through absorption of modern and always enticingly irresistible ways. As a playwright in this generation, where the fusion between tradition and modernity is the order of the day, I recognize that the role of an insider doing auto ethnography becomes all the more important; and to be awake to this challenge, answers to Adams et al (2015) who believe that the auto ethnographer's role is to not only describe and critique cultural belief and practices, but to do so through lived experiences. I am going to state again and again that the content of the stories told in my community had the primary aim to critique human folly while at the same time extolling morally acceptable ways.

The self-critiquing mechanism provided by orature was backed by the understanding that both the performers and the audience, shared roots in the ethic and cultural base from where the narratives grew. I still uphold and cherish the deep rooted cultural values of my people, even though after interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds in Kenya as well as visiting different parts of the country; I am able to draw similarities and accept the stock elements that instruct my ability to universalize issues that allow for the retention of my cultural base in relation to those of the others.

Adams et al (2015) suggest that stories by ethnographers are artistic and analytical demonstrations of how we came to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experiences, and I cannot agree more. The narratives told to me by my mother were very artistic in nature, and I have today only improved the artistic value of those stories. I have written plays that extoll artistic expression unique to the culture, and these have been very analytical because stories were told with highly metaphorical content requiring imagination and exceptional creativity to appreciate.

The Trickster's Journey Back will infuse sayings and proverbs that helped critically appreciate cultural experiences, while exhibiting linguistic prowess of both the storyteller and the audience. Storytelling under orature is not a cloak that one wears when needed and removes after use; it is a domain into which you are inducted if you are not born in the culture.

When a person gets to the point of critical evaluation of cultural experiences as an insider, they are only adjusting the cloak that never gets removed. It is from this

perspective that I consider the role of auto ethnographer as a reporter whose role is to appreciate, critique, and preserve traditional and cultural lifestyles through experiences and practices reflective of what Adams et al (2015) call the demonstrative power, craft and responsibility of stories and storytellers. This is why I have a story to tell everyday-everywhere.

Dissertation organization

Chapter Two: Reflections

In this chapter I echo the purpose of this dissertation by providing background information as to how my conceptual framework is instructed by traditional life as handed down to me by my grandfather. In this chapter I transition from the untainted world of my grandfather, to a more dynamic one seen through my mother who handed the storytelling tradition and practice to me. This chapter looks at the relationship between tradition and orature, through the lens of various genres of narratives, storytelling sessions, performance of orature in its various forms, and who the performers were.

Through this chapter I strive to retrace the nature of the tradition of orature in my community and its deep rootedness in those who performed, or had the tradition handed down to them through time. By standing in between the world of my grandfather and that of my mother I will be dealing with issues of tradition versus modernity and revealing the challenges this posed to orature and the development of theatre in my country. The dichotomy of tradition and modernity, and how these overlapped into the practice of theatre in Kenya is an important ingredient in this chapter.

Chapter Three: The Trickster's Journey Back

The personification of a trickster character explained in the introduction of this dissertation is the heart of this chapter. *The Trickster's Journey Back* is a narrative rendition based solely on the genre of orature, and the product is an exemplification of the rituals of passage in my culture, and how the fusing of the world of tradition with that of modernity played out in my life to produce a blend that is dominated by traditional orature.

The Trickster's Journey Back, is in essence a product of my indulgence in traditional orature while living and experiencing modern life in the city of Nairobi-Kenya. It is like taking a stroll down history and memory lanes, through my own observations and interaction with persons who actually lived and practiced traditional orature. Consequently, the narrative of *The Trickster's Journey Back*, is crafted to inculcate elements of rituals of passage like circumcision, naming, courtship, marriage, and death. I therefore elucidate personal touch with all the rituals and the eventual demise of my mother, which helped me understand how rituals connected with death played out.

At the same time as the trickster astride, I reveal how modern rituals of passage reposed in the several layers and levels of education, modern courtship and marriage, employment after school, and Christian treatment of my mother's demise-it is indeed a *Trickster's Journey Back!* The Trickster's Journey Back also exemplifies the storytelling structure replete with the omniscient narrative voice, use of dialogue, songs, proverbs, and riddles among other elements of orature.

Chapter Four: Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festival

This chapter critically highlights the Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival from its inception by the colonial establishment for their own entertainment, and as the tool for separationist dramatic practices from which Kenyan Africans were excluded, to the present organ through which the Kenyan organizers set to Africanize drama in Kenya. This chapter appreciates that the national drama festival is the confluence between colonial theatrical traditions, and the urge by Kenyan Africans, to Africanize, indigenize, and control theatrical practices independent of colonial machinations and dominance.

The dynamism that the national drama festival has undergone, and the entire organizational framework will be discussed in this chapter. As a vehicle for advancing African dramatic conventions, the national drama festival will be discussed from the point of view of the place and opportunity to advance orature while adhering to new modes of theatrical understanding. The difference between drama and theatre will be discussed, with the aim of establishing the role of the drama festival in promoting one or the other through performances. The character of the national drama festival will be enumerated, in order to evaluate the essence of the festival as the basis upon which to build a national theatrical character.

Chapter Five: Recreations

This chapter is all about a play entitled *Recreations* which is based on the marriage between two traditions –western and traditional African (orature). As a product of orature, I am virtually a storyteller and therefore my interaction with the world of modernity and my city upbringing, have merged to fathom a recreation of sorts. I am cognizant of the power of regeneration that occurs, when a person imbues elements of two variants. Being a player in the traditional world of orature, my integration into the new world of modernity can only be described as a recreation. In this play, I stand outside the box of modernity from where using my orature based spectacles, I peep into the clash between modernity and tradition and alas! I see the recreating power of modernity on traditional mores.

Social issues far removed from traditional norms dominate my perception of a new world order and as the ethnographer that I have become, the play *Recreations* helps me evaluate the place where we have migrated to, socially. Through an omnipotent narrator in the character (Wosia), the story of the past is told about the new, and is actually a recreation of who we all have become. This chapter is going to discuss how the social set up and historical antecedents are the springboard for many renowned playwrights. The play *Recreations*, far from being a clash between modernity and tradition in my country, also supports the dual capacity of the trickster character- astride two worlds.

Chapter Six: Introspection

I was tempted to consider this chapter a conclusion to this dissertation but be that as it might sound, I want it to be the place for me to lament our theatrical “death” and trace where in essence we as a nation lost the path to finding our identity in the theatrical maze of self-discovery. This chapter helps me to look deep into the happenings in our country in relation to other parts of the world, that have made a brand of their theatre by shaking off all inhibitions be they political, cultural or entrepreneurial. This chapter could well be the place to cry for a national theatre distinct to our heritage and born of our traditional orature to fulfil our insatiable demands and appetite for art, through enterprise, pedagogy and professionalism. This chapter suggests that the test is definitely going to be in a unique and tested doffing of all shackles thrusting our heritage into the quagmire of political expediency.

Chapter Two: Reflections (Oral traditions)

The term orature is most definitely derived from the word oral, which in essence means that African performance of stories was done through the medium of the mouth and preserved from generation to generation through speech/mouth. It has however been argued by many African storytellers that with the advent of writing, oral traditions became preserved in written form and thus like literature that is based on the written word, oral literature became preserved as orature through the written word. The term orature is in this dissertation aimed at revealing the state and manner of performances in my community, before colonialism came with modes of performance far removed from traditional entertainment.

Many scholars describe orature as the dividing line between modern and traditional performance types, and that orature is the mediator between the two distinct worlds, filtering information and transferring norms and values through performance (Gvanquist 1993). It is the very desire of this dissertation to discuss the conflict between modernity and tradition, which makes it interesting to appreciate that orature being the basis for traditional African art remains an integral vehicle for the transportation of values, not only of cultural importance but of artistic value as well.

In an attempt to define orature, one would be tempted to dismiss it as the very epitome of African traditional performances that relied on the word of mouth for its transmission. What is lost in the myriad notions surrounding the essence of orature is the fact that far from actual performances, orature has come up for study and has been widely written about for purposes of preservation and diversity. The desire to preserve orature in

written arose from the fear that as many traditional storytellers were getting scattered by the rural urban migration, the central points of origin tended to lose the ties that held individual communities and their traditions together.

Also of major concern was the need to share orature and the diverse elements therein, across communities and the world over. This is exactly why orature is studied in Kenyan schools as oral literature, making an intriguing case of how everything that was basically transmitted by word of mouth could at the same time be part of literature. It is therefore variedly accepted that orature is actually a broad phrase that includes literature in its various forms including proverbs, riddles and sayings (Gvanquist 1993).

That orature involves performance and the interaction between the audience and the storyteller, means that the gist of orature is in the relationship between the storyteller; also referred to as the performer, and the audience that is supposed to be active in an interactive relationship. When it comes to understanding orature from the perspective of only that which is performed, the line between this position and that which assigns orature to a subject of study preserved in written form becomes mostly blurred. As an expression of art, orature is verbal, dramatized and performed art (Gvanquist 1993) which for purposes of academic study has been written for preservation. It is thus necessary to appreciate the original essence of orature before it finds space in books as an aspect of literature.

It can be argued that since literature is considered as an idea reliant upon the creative text (Okpewho 1992) the other words used for quantifying it are simply meant to emphasize one aspect or another of the subject. That orature is a recent and rarely used

phrase does not diminish the fact that it is actually literature, which is delivered by word of mouth and emphasizes this field of study in an artistic manner (Okpewho 1992). Since orature is based on the handing down of cultural elements engrained in performance from generation to generation, the medium of mouth has fathomed widespread prejudices regarding the rawness of its content and is erroneously thought to be less than dynamic in nature (Okpewho 1992).

The fact that orature comprises material handed down by way of mouth has been used to describe the conveyors of such art as primitive, illiterate, and merely folk who resided in villages. However, when people like myself who have spent their life in the cities, are educated and boast roots tying us to the so called folk indulge in orature, a different understanding of the existence and performance of orature is eschewed.

In my community, storytelling which formed the spine of orature was integral to the life of the people, and it has been asserted that storytelling as a practice and habit permeated every facet of life within the community. There was no iota of life experience that could not be understood through story, just as much as it was the story that illustrated the lifestyle of my people.

In the absence of formal school, the storytelling sessions became what can be referred to as the traditional school system. Many stories were tailored to embody the virtues of the community through the moral anecdotes that came at the end of narrations. Storytelling was so much an integral part of life in the community that it was associated with community ritual practices that were distinct to the people practicing them.

As a participant in storytelling, I have learned that the claim that religious practices of the African people were the dynamo that propelled storytelling is widely misplaced. Many people in my generation and slightly before, profess Christianity but still actively participate in traditional modes of storytelling. This means that there was a distinct line between religious rituals and storytelling.

Of course the relationship between storytelling and African traditional religion was thin enough to support the earlier assertion in the paragraph above, that storytelling permeated every facet of life in the community. If religious practices were part of life in the community, there is no way the stories would avoid embodying religious practices and rituals. They were not one and the same thing and it has been argued that storytelling was part of ritual, even though there could have been very little religion about them (Anderson, Forley 1998).

Instances abound when stories and rituals converged and portrayed similar content and structure, but it has also been argued that the story can lose itself in ritual to the point where ritual dominates what started as a story. In other instances when ritual was thought to have lost itself in the story or the story got lost in ritual, a powerful rendition of either of them was realized and was called a performance, whereby the stories we enacted and the rituals we enacted converged (Anderson, Forley 1998).

My personal knowledge from participating in traditional storytelling reveals that there were storytelling sessions that served specific functions by age, gender and location; and rituals that ran the life of the community by time and place. What the statement above means is that stories were told only in the evening after a hard days

labour. It was in fact taboo to tell stories in the day, because this would be distraction to work going on in the day. In the evening young boys and girls slept on a mat in the grandmother's hut and she told stories dominated by virtues that the community cherished as well as vices that the community abhorred.

There were other storytelling sessions where everyone in the community, irrespective of age and gender sat and stories of a general nature were told. These stories were rich in entertainment and were done in the daytime when everyone saw what happened; and even contributed through call and response, song, dance, questions or helped tell a particular story. Children and adults also had special occasions when they told stories within their age group. These stories were rated in keeping with the context and purpose at the time of storytelling.

The major rituals in my community were those of passage and included birth, naming, initiation, courtship and marriage and death. These rituals have survived in very mild forms today because of the Christian religion. Observance of these rituals was merely in keeping with traditional ethos that link communities to their past. Some of these rituals have been preserved to augment Christian religious practices. For example, as much as I wedded in church, I still had to conform to customary marriage procedures that brought the community into a marriage relationship in the spirit of communalism.

Some African names still dominate our baptisms so much so that everyone I know has a Christian baptismal name and an African name, working as a symbol of identity within a communal group of people. When a person dies they go to church in

keeping with Christian religious practices but the traditional understanding of death requires specific procedures that must be observed and adhered to as well.

It is therefore impossible for me to write this dissertation without drawing a line between storytelling and the African traditional practices of my community. I have always considered myself and the people in my generation as being astride two worlds just like is the traditional practice of storytelling. Whenever stories were told, the rituals of passage were totally absent but the rituals of passage were the subject of stories.

The major aspect of performance that went hand in glove with rituals of passage included songs and dances that augmented as opposed to dominating ritual practices. Songs were composed and sang/danced to during ceremonies that marked major ritual occasions. Thus African storytelling as it existed in my community was a distinct business independent of other practices in the community.

As a young boy living in the city and attending formal school, my mother told stories to us every evening after we had eaten and done our homework. She asked us to spread a mat near her bed and we listened to her play multiple animal roles, imitating their voices, and singing songs in varied voices that left us wondering if the storyteller was our mother or whether there were people joining her in the dark to tell stories. Through the stories mother told us we learned things about our community even though we were miles away from the villages.

We knew about the traditional expectations of us and we went to school armed with her stories/messages to share the experience with other students who themselves had different stories to tell. This way I knew that the life of the story was limitless and that it

could mutate and sustain its power, even in quarters that were unfamiliar to the storytelling sessions of yore. There is absolutely no way that I could avoid being an embodiment of the African storytelling as it existed in my community.

I was a young boy of seven years when my parents went with us to the village on vacation. I was playing around when suddenly there were jingles and drum beats accompanied by songs, dance and ululations from a large group of people mainly young boys of my age. These were mostly village boys so I knew none of them, but in my curiosity, I sneaked from our homestead and went towards the path that I knew the group of what I considered entertainers would pass.

To my chagrin I was sucked in the drama of song, dance and chanting to the point that it was said I could not escape being an initiate. The group of boys was actually prospective initiates and were preparing for circumcision. Custom required that when you joined the group and were uncircumcised, you had to go through what they called the “knife”, for circumcision then was done using a knife and without anesthesia! Young boys were circumcised and interestingly, the boys do not remember if anything else followed this custom. It was so quick and clouded in a lot of activities that I do not remember everything that happened (I have elaborated the ritual of circumcision later in this dissertation).

When I decided that I wanted to marry, I was advised to approach the church to publish notice of marriage; but my father insisted that it would be akin to thievery if I took someone else’s daughter to the pulpit before people from my community approached the people of her community, to negotiate dowry in what is called customary

marriage rituals. Dowry is a central aspect of marriage and carries very symbolic significance in my community. Song, dance and celebration mark the culmination of customary marriage after which we troop to the church for Christian marriage vows.

In my country in general and in my community in particular, names play a very distinct role in defining a person in terms of their tribe, family and history. The names in my community are distinct regarding gender, time of birth, season, family, circumstance of birth and lineage among other factors. I was baptized in church in 1969 and called Lawrence. My middle name was given to me by my father naming me after his mother Akoth, and Chiteri, is a wider family name connecting me to the clan and tribe.

Of great importance is the fact that the naming ceremony was cardinal in my community and although I never participated in any such ceremony, I know there were those moments that song, dance and celebration marked a ritual of passage called the naming ceremony. The elaborateness that came with naming proved that a name was more than just a tag but a cultural element of identity, sacredness and communalism.

After my mother died and was buried in keeping with Christian burial rites, we had to stay at home in the village where she was buried for three days, because customarily when a woman died the mandatory mourning period lasted three days. When a man died the mandatory period was four days. Other than this requirement there were no other ceremonies associated with death, although dirges were sung and eulogies rendered in keeping with tradition both of Christianity and the community customs.

The reason for my elaborating on the rituals of marriage, initiation, naming and death in my community is to share the experiential advantage that I possess in both

traditional and modern worlds, and how this makes me a person astride two distinct worlds. I have therefore the capacity to lay claim to the fact that the African body is actually the space on which cultural production takes place, and at the same time the vehicle for conveying cultural elements. Thus understanding African orature through storytelling echoes the definition of traditional African artistic world as expressed in several genres of literature preserved under the banner of orature.

Since I have benefitted from understanding two different world views both modern and traditional, I have the confidence to sit astride and elucidate the essence surrounding them. Whoever blends the traditional orature with modern artistic expressions in such a unique and resplendent manner stands on the ground from which to lay claim to the thought that, the African carries with them the elemental capacity to embody in their personality, the instruments of artistic expression.

There have been claims that those utterances that constitute orature are mere ritualistic practices and have no artistic power in them. However, there have always been stories, songs and recitations surrounding major rituals of passage. These broad genres are only considered as orature if their expression is executed in an artistic manner through performance.

It has therefore been invariably stated that African performances on orature constitute literature; by dealing with utterances whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance establish an appreciable degree of artistic characteristics, accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression (Okpewho, 1992).

Storytelling was not necessarily an act of artistic performance by its existence, but by the manner in which it was performed. Some performance conventions were in place to help determine whether the story was delivered in a manner befitting an artistic value(s). The same applies to song, dance and other genres of orature.

The Genres/Nature of Orature

In my community there existed two distinct broad genres that constituted orature, namely oral narratives and oral poetry. The African tales were classified under oral narratives, were structurally longer than other genres and were told in prose. The story was told in first person singular by an omnipresent narrator, whose mastery of community ideals and familiarity with the audience, combined to enhance rendition and composition of the story as it unfolded.

A storyteller who knew the audience understood what the audience wanted and knew when the story was losing taste and the audience was not concentrating. The storyteller thus knew when to take turns and detours during the process of storytelling, which motivated them to always create and recreate the story either before or during narration.

The importance of the storyteller in African orature cannot be gainsaid, because this individual was the driver of a whole session of storytelling. The power of the word was embodied in the role of the storyteller in such a manner that glorified not only the personality, but the power of vocal property in its varied forms. The omnipresent narrator worked very hard not only to be heard but to be heard in a multitude of perspectives. The

storyteller was considered successful in their rendition if they could vocalize the myriad characters they mimicked with artistic precision and exactitude.

I still vividly recall how my mother played the voices of every animal character that she had in her story and in the cover of darkness these characters almost came to life, in a manner that sucked us deep into the world of the story she was telling. At some point we would think that our mother took another character, which scared us into thinking she had actually sneaked from us or became possessed to the point of being alien to us.

The whole nightly performance was reminiscent to having a theatre without curtains, where the action took place behind the curtain of the human psyche. We partook in performance by relying on hearing mother's voice and using our mind's eye to perceive the characters as they were presented through vocal changes/variation and mimicry. This could be the only time the concept of the theatre as a seeing place seemed to get lost, but if seeing is something more than perception, then the sum total of the nightly performances constituted theatricality.

The essence of African theatricality in a unique manner traversed the historical period when orature dominated performance. My mother and every traditional storyteller I have known brought the narration into action in various ways (Sirayi, 2012). The storyteller was able to tell the story by playing different roles of different characters which, in essence dramatized the story in a very theatrical manner.

Vocal power was instrumental in dramatization in varied ways. A deep voice expressed the wicked characters, who took to frightening others like monsters, chattering characterized the trait of liars, mumbling expressed stupidity (Sirayi 2012). The narrator

was a powerful conveyor and representation of everything that constituted performance. The storyteller also used vocal changes to create atmosphere (Sirayi, 2002) and I remember how mother whispered while narrating in order to denote danger, it was amazing how she quickened her voice to denote emergency.

Tempo and mood were easily described and denoted through voice variation which did not only enhance narration but also exemplified the storyteller's artistic prowess (Sirayi 2012). In the absence of many scenic elements, the storyteller relied upon mastery of language to theatricalize the story. My mother described scenery using vivid linguistic expressions that lingered in our minds for eternity.

The language used by storytellers helped create atmosphere in a very special and theatric manner (Sirayi, 2012). Linguistic mastery by the storyteller was also gauged by how they used proverbs, and sayings while in the process of storytelling. In many cases stories were punctuated by singing because this helped the narration in a myriad ways; songs broke the monotony of narration and made them lively, when my mother sang I realized that this helped her to create characters who used song to communicate, some songs actually emphasized the theme of the story and invited the participation of the audience who joined in singing familiar songs. Above all, I still remember how some of the songs sung by mother made us emotional and thus created some mood in the storytelling session.

Other useful elements inherent in a narrative included use of monologues and dialogue, which helped in creating variety as well as making the story dramatic. During moments of monologue and dialogue, the storyteller did not only portray the existence of

other characters through vocal play but also broke monotony of narration in a very artistic way.

In my community the structure of a narrative was very important because it highlighted specific traditional beliefs and taboos that tied the community present to their past. The narrative was started using specific opening phrases that have come to be associated with narratives all over Africa. The opening stock phrase as it has come to be known in scholarly circles, differed depending on whether the narrative was being told to a live audience or if it was meant for reading. In the traditional world of orature storytelling sessions were consensual moments between the audience and the storyteller.

The storyteller thus needed the indulgence and permission of the audience before they started narration. Several call and response moments were engaged in and when the storyteller was convinced that the audience was ready for performance, they told their story to an enthusiastic and very active audience that engaged in the story as if they were also telling it. The storyteller used gestures, exclamation marks and facial expressions, (M'Baye, 2009) to establish rapport with an audience that gave as much as they received.

Among the people of Wolof in West Africa, the call and response went something like “leb-on” which meant (there is a story) to which the audience responded with”lup-on” (our legs are crossed) which meant that the audience was ready and waiting (M'Baye, 2009). The result of the storyteller and audience relationship was the reason the African storyteller told the story “to,” as opposed to “at”, the audience.

When the British classical English opening formula “once upon a time” was introduced in our books (M'Baye, 2009) it echoed in many ways the African opening

formula, right after the audience and the storyteller had agreed on the fact that there was a story to be told. In my mother's language the storyteller started the story with the phrase "agan nuye" (Can I tell you a story?), and the audience responded with "Gan nwa" (Tell us). After this camaraderie, the storyteller then went to the actual story with a stock formula ranging from Long, long time ago, in the beginning there was..., Once upon a time... etc. The difference between the opening of a storytelling session and the opening of an actual story, both worked to identify the performance elements and artistic traditions that highlighted performance. A storytelling session was a whole congregation of various people both audience and storytellers, gathered to hear and tell various stories. An actual story was specifically about one particular story.

Through the opening formula of an actual story, the audience understood that the storyteller was indulging their company to the world of fiction and that in this journey; they would be together to the definite end as was played out in the closing formula. Thus, after my mother had sought our permission to tell us a story, the actual story began with her immediately changing her voice. She assumed a different character and whenever she referred to different characters, she imitated them for vividness of impact and for dramatization.

The opening formula was a kind of exposition with a difference in that, it centred on the audience as opposed to the characters in the story. The entire story focused on reaching the audience in order to either entertain or educate through the moral behind the rendition. As a result, the artistic blend between the audience and the storyteller served to cement the elemental value of artistic expression, even when the message could be rendered without all the grandeur.

The opening stock phrases in actual performance bound the storyteller to the audience in a very sacred and unique manner. This means that even in written orature, the opening formulae worked to establish a sense of what would happen in actual performance. The flow of a story was reliant upon the opening and how powerful the exposition was done. Therefore, the storyteller took great care to make an impact at the beginning. As the story progressed to the end, several artistic moments were played to the end where the closing stock phrase served to bring not only closure to the story, but the whole symbolic and sacred “journey” of narration.

The broad genre of narratives was broken into several sub genres namely, the myth, legend, monster, etiological, dilemma and trickster narratives. Through these sub genres, orature was played to move through the rhythm of life (Sirayi 2012). In essence the rhythm of life was such that every facet of African life was understood through one or the other of the various sub genres.

Myths explained the origin of a group of people as expressed in migration histories. Through these myths I learned about how my tribe came to be where we live in Kenya today. The myth also explained phenomena like how a lake was formed etcetera. Legend stories were meant to glorify individuals for exemplary contribution to the community. Exemplary achievements were realized during war or inter-tribal conflict as well as in games like wrestling or in the realm of medicine. A story is told in my community of a warrior who excelled in war because he was all rock, such that every spear aimed at him got bent and did not harm him in any way.

Another legend story is told about a medicine man that used magic to make the community warriors look like a corn plantation, thus encouraging the enemy to take cover among them before killing all of them. Monster stories were told to demonstrate how wicked human beings can become. The monster stories revolved around a monster that was able to transform into both a human and a stinking monster.

The monster characteristically lived in the forest, which means humans who veered from the village were their targets. The monster stories targeted human evil so the human being was the forest and the evil they exhibited whenever they wanted to get their way was the monstrous characteristic. Etiological stories explained were those that explained why things are the way they are. Mother told us a story about how dog became man's best friend among other etiological stories. Trickster stories revolved about the survival of smaller characters in the wake of oppression by bigger and mightier characters.

Trickster narratives were mainly about the struggle between wit and might. Many communities had specific stock trickster characters and in my community, it was the hare, tortoise, or the chameleon. Dilemma stories dealt with daily human struggle with issues related to choices and consequences of the choices they made in life. I remember a story told to us by mother in which the hyena was lured to take a particular path because the smell of delicious food came from the direction he was walking.

Greedily salivating and impatient, the hyena reached a place where the path forked into two and he did not know which one to take. Hyena decided to walk astride both paths and died when he got ripped in the middle. Human greed, indecision and

gullibility are dealt with in dilemma stories. Overall these sub genres were the means through which the rhythm of African life and the morals that held them together were extrapolated.

The narrative constituted the body of orature otherwise known as the long form that was told in prose. On the other hand, there were the so-called short forms like songs (oral poetry) which constituted another broad genre. The song was divided into several sub genres to cover war, love, praise, sacred/religious, topical, courtship/marriage, initiation, dirges/death, political/propaganda and general songs for the myriad occasions that constituted the rhythm of African life.

Song, dance and instrumentation were altogether part of orature that relied on composition and artistry, both at the level of composition and performance. Again, here the power of voice and dramatization was fused with various African instruments; to lead into a journey of performance in which the audience and the storyteller/singer mingled for the duration of the rendition. Under the short forms were proverbs, sayings, riddles and tongue twisters.

Many times before mother started the storytelling session she engaged us in riddles, because these were considered word play by children. Later in between storytelling she used proverbs to heighten her speech and to emphasize her points. Proverbs did not only enhance our expressiveness within the culture, but also emboldened our understanding of foreign and indigenous languages. Linguistic prowess was the means to mark one's place in the culture, as well as distinguish oratorical

achievement. Today while using language as more than a tool for communication, I recognize that it is also a tool for artistic expression in a unique and powerful way.

Orature versus modernity- western Civilization

It is still debatable how much of orature is still existent in my community, even after the interaction between our traditions and the so-called modernity. The heart of this dissertation is to prove that the power of the story has lingered on, even in the wake of colonialism and the resultant mass movements from the villages to the city. The so called civilization meant that many communities witnessed a rural-urban migration which resulted into contact between the indigenous population and a foreign one that was largely European.

The birth of a new hybrid culture became prevalent, and many people became willing consumers of a new way of life, which from the onset promised better and exotic experiences. As indigenous people got drawn to a new lifestyle, their mindset was beginning to experience a clash where values and traditions were concerned. This clash was particularly harsher on the life and survival of storytelling traditions and African theatrical base.

Colonialism carried with it to Kenya a different understanding of artistic expression. The colonial mentality that everything African and cultural was primitive and backward, was visited in the realm of performance and this prejudice has stuck to date in the world of theatre in Kenya. According to the European colonialist, theatre was the domain of the literate who could read and write. Back in Europe the clergy and the ruling class who were considered elites dominated theatrical performances (Sirayi, 2012).

The idea of the elites, clergy or the ruling class was foreign to traditional Africa and therefore in the minds of the colonialist, no meaningful theatre existed in Africa. This assumption was the hammer that pounded the death knell on traditional storytelling as civilization spread in Kenya. Even though many Africans who moved to the city kept their orature and traditions of storytelling, these were considered to be largely primitive art (Sirayi, 2012).

With colonial activity heightening in Nairobi where civilization took centre stage, two worlds of performance began to emerge. On the one hand were the white settlers with their modern theatrical trends and on the other the traditional African performance traditions. Both worlds existed in isolation, with each side tolerating the other's choice to do their thing in their own domains.

Even though theatre was classified as formal (European) and ritual (African) there was no mistaking the fact that they both examined present and past colonial realities, as opposed to exclusively theatrical demands (Chambers, 2002). Colonial or European theatre was seen and classified as formal, literary or modern theatre. The form of performance was dominated by European/classical drama that the colonists used primarily for entertainment among the settler population in Kenya.

The traditional theatre known for storytelling, music and dance was considered as traditional theatre, whose purpose was to enhance cultural expression (Chambers, 2002). As colonial activity proliferated, orature became the means to preserve cultural and traditional values, especially through song and dance. The reason for the need to preserve culture and traditions through orature became more important because, the migration

from the rural to the city by indigenous Africans brought a clash of cultural values from diverse tribes in Kenya. Added to the need to distinguish traditional and cultural values, was the burning desire to preserve the wider African storytelling against the backdrop of foreign theatrical traditions.

The settling of Africans in the city came with the emergence of an African elite, who armed with their formal education, started their own theatre groups that countered colonial amateur theatre groups (Chambers, 2002). When early Africans began to engage in theatre, it was driven by their elitism which brought in a literary dramatic tradition in line with the western education they had consumed.

Many early African elites adhered to western playwriting conventions albeit with outdated dramaturgy and acting styles (Chambers, 2002). The earlier conflict between western theatrical traditions and orature mutated to introduce a third force that struggled for a footing in Kenyan theatre as they negotiated past and present trends in playwriting.

As the emerging African elites engaged in new theatrical trends, they encountered a suppressive governmental force that confined them to a specific audience because of the themes they explored. The Emerging playwrights specialized in themes that tended towards propaganda against colonial rule and were thus exposed to censorship by the ruling class.

This sensitivity by the government against plays written with stark political innuendo was inherited by the independent African leadership and has since stifled artistic freedom to date. While the emerging Kenyan playwrights were struggling against stiff colonial conventions as well as political control, orature was used purely as the

means to entertain, convey cultural identity and comment on social as well as political issues of the day.

The climax of literary dramatic traditions came to a head in Kenya when Ngugi Wa Thiongo, a Kenyan, wrote and staged a play-*The Black Hermit* in 1962, to a purely international audience with non-Kenyan actors in Uganda (Chambers, 2002). This milestone in dramatic literature and theatre, boldly exemplified the story of Kenya's experience both politically and in the literary world, putting a Kenyan story on the stage for the very first time.

Although dramatic literature began to take centre stage in theatrical development in Kenya, the plot of the plays were intrinsically narrative in nature and leaned towards a strong storytelling tradition. Meanwhile, the European colonists went on to assert their authority in the realm of theatre, when they built a theatre in Kenya-The Kenya National Theatre- where only plays of European orientation were staged to be watched exclusively by white settlers. The struggle for African orature and the budding elites became that of finding a foot hold in the performance space, as well as appealing to a diverse audience.

The colonial and post-colonial periods in Kenya posed a gigantic challenge to African theatre/orature. The construction of the Kenya National Theatre was chiefly the result of colonial settler attempt at creating an institution aimed at providing their western brand and form of entertainment. The National theatre was fully funded by the colonial government using grant money, as well as funds from the Nairobi city council (Banham, 2004).

What emerged was that there was every attempt to make the theatre space the property of the public through governmental decree, which was a great departure from traditional orature. African orature was never performed in a building and was done in indigenous languages, making it a far cry from the demands of a national theatre space that was prohibitive in terms of audience appeal, expense, and thematic as well as conventional (Eurocentric) relevance.

The national theatre was constructed following European theatrical conventions, which made it more appropriate for plays requiring specific plots, design, and characterization. It was financially prohibitive for local performances to be staged at the national theatre because the space and the cost of production, meant that the audience needed to pay in order to attend shows. The white settlers were happy to have this space because they were privileged to pay for the shows that mirrored life in Europe.

The colonial period in Kenya was also rife with racial segregation and the national theatre was one such space where this was played. The themes dealt with by plays at the national theatre were obviously for, by and about Europeans. The colonial settlers needed something familiar and reflective of their life back home and the national theatre in Kenya fulfilled that desire.

It is important to note that the settlers in Kenya were not comfortable with traditional modes of performance in Kenya, because quite honestly, many performances would be done in Kiswahili language using elements that were mainly African and therefore alien to European known theatrical styles (Banham, 2004). In many cases the

performances by Africans were thematically aimed at portraying the colonial settlers in negative light and ridiculing their character.

The settlers were uncomfortable with theatrical performances aimed at attacking their presence in Kenya and from a facility they had exclusively located in a predominantly white area, calling itself a “national theatre” (Banham, 2004).

Consequently, the idea of a national theatre that was the domain of white settlers died as the space from which to harmonize national, diverse, cultural, and theatrical traditions.

Three layers of theatrical life emerged in Kenya during the colonial period; these were, the European theatrical traditions, African orature and early African elite torn between playing European styles, while appealing to African needs during the colonial period. Since the national theatre had been “usurped” by the white settlers, traditional orature found refuge in the myriad social halls built across the city, where every form of recreation would take place.

Traditional storytelling was given different approaches from those known in the countryside, so that appeal to the varied tribes could be achieved. One way to make African shows appealing was to use the national language and remodel the traditional story to suit the time and place. Performances were mainly comedy, variety shows, skits and song/dance done either in the open or in the social halls.

The marriage of cultural differences in performance was witnessed in tribal stereotyping that dominated performance, as various tribes accepted the stereotypes in good spirit. The social halls were also reflective of how the city had been blocked into tribal regions, whereby every estate was known to be inhabited by a specific tribe. The

social halls were therefore initially the extensions of rural lifestyle, although being in the city; people began to drift to new ways of doing things including storytelling. The social halls in Kaloleni, Kariakor, Shaurimoyo, Uhuru, Dagoretti etc (Banham 2004) were free to the public for every form of recreation activity.

With African storytelling or the so called orature/informal theatre being happily performed at the social halls and the settlers doing their western performances at the national theatre, the early African elites were hanging without the space to do their thing. The struggle for recognition in their own country led the early Kenyan elites to push so hard that they were disappointed when the settlers started a national drama festival that gave African students a raw deal (Banham, 2004) by making the festival a white and Asian affair.

The plays done at the drama festival were mainly Shakespeare, Miller, Moliere and Ibsen among others (Banham, 2004). The national theatre was still the symbol of white domination of theatre in Kenya and African elites struggled to dismantle the notion that white/European theatre done by whites, and attended exclusively by whites in Kenya, could go on forever.

There was a breakthrough when in 1968, five years after independence; the national theatre was headed by an African, Seth Adagala (Banham, 2004). It can be argued that after the national theatre had been headed by a Kenyan, the need to sustain performances became so overbearing that a theatre school was immediately mooted and started, in order to breed actors to fill the gap left by colonial settlers at the national theatre. The Achilles heel to the idea of a theatre school was that the curriculum was

purely Eurocentric, because the thought of “starting from the known to the unknown” seemed more comforting and viable at that time (Banham, 2004).

It was obviously next to impossible to make Europeans out of Africans even when they were the emerging elite, without posing the danger of recycling colonial ideals of exclusivity in the theatre. The theatre school produced actors performing in English, while adhering to European conventions, in the hope of attracting the same old audience to the national theatre. This was not feasible enough to galvanize the Kenyan audience locked deep in traditions of orature.

There was the urgent desire to Africanize theatre and thus the theatre school closed down in 1975 without ever moving to the “known” (Banham, 2004). There is no denying the fact that the attempt at a theatre school produced a different breed of African performers already armed with both European acting styles, while fully awake to the realities of what constituted Kenyan theatrical needs.

Africanization of theatre in Kenya meant that even though the educated Kenyans were armed with modern/European acting skills, they needed to use them to explore themes and plots relevant to the culture of Kenya. The next step was to decolonize theatre not only at the national theatre level but in schools as well. As Kenyans began to run the national drama festival, Seth Adagala was named the first African adjudicator of the festival (Banham, 2004) which encouraged many Kenyans to begin writing plays reflective of traditional orature. No wonder in 1971, the national festival was won by a play written and performed in indigenous Massai language. This was testimony of the lingering power of orature because as much as new acting methods dominated the

festival, that they adhered to issues indigenous to Kenya and highlighting orature, was huge in decolonizing theatre in Kenya.

The national drama festival was responsible for the growth of emergent indigenous talent both in acting and playwriting. The transformation from orature to written work, as well as performance/acting employing new conventions, became the trend in performance. It will however be noted that while the national drama festival was witnessing a metamorphosis, there was the need to cleanse it from colonial and neo colonial themes and styles.

The main genre at the national festival was the play and this had to be restructured to suit the demands of a new nation. As many African elites ventured into theatrical work both at the National theatre and at the national school's drama festival, theatrical activities were going on in other places as well. The secondary school (high school) syllabus incorporated oral literature as an examinable subject. This development led to the publication of myriad textbooks that translated orature from the "mouth" into print. The motive of the curriculum shapers was to preserve orature, as well as encourage students to research and produce it as an item of scholarship.

At the same time, there arose several community theatre groups whose operations were limited to the rural areas, where every performance was still done in indigenous language in keeping with traditional orature. The community groups were culturally sensitive and became the place where traditional and cultural past were preserved and relived through performance. Later these groups became registered under the ministry of culture and social services.

As university education expanded, the University of Nairobi pioneered university theatre that developed free travelling theatrical performances in the name of taking theatre to the people (Banham, 2004). University theatre was more diverse because, many plays performed reflected dramatic works from all over the world.

In keeping with the purpose of storytelling to comment on social issues, the emergent theatrical activities in Kenya after independence centred around political issues of the day. The budding elites were beginning to write plays and novels whose thematic concerns became too sensitive to be acceptable to the government and a clamp down on playwrights and other artists, led to the so called “dark age” in Kenyan artistic development (Banham, 2004).

Many playwrights and actors were arrested and detained for their thoughts and opinions expressed in plays and novels. A good number of these elicited even sought exile in other countries. Government insensitivity to artistic expression led to the decline in creative writing of plays as well as performances. Many performance spaces were closed or deserted by both performers and patrons. Orature thus took centre stage only if their rendition were not politically explicit.

Overall decolonization of theatre in Kenya gave impetus to traditional elements of performance and ensured that orature clang to the artistic expression in every form. Many novels and plays were structured to reflect traditional storytelling with heavy narrative voice, songs, sayings, proverbs and even dances. The place where these elements featured prominently was the Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festival which this dissertation will discuss in detail.

Chapter Three: The trickster's journey back

As I sit in a class of folklore at University of Missouri in the English department, I am pondering how the folklore class could work for me as a place from where to obtain my dissertation tool. Professor Elaine Lawless suggests that from my discussion style and voice in class, I could write an auto ethnography piece and present it to class as my project for the semester. I ponder this though, as I imagine how my cultural orientation will deal with my telling the world about my life. I however use the sketch suggested by Professor Lawless and begin to see something other than myself as an individual.

I begin to appreciate that as an individual African in my community, I am a product of the whole which cuts across two worlds. The one world in which I grew under modern Kenya, and the world represented by my grandfather and mother through orature. I quickly decide that as an embodiment of traditions as enshrined in orature, I have been partaking in ethnography from the deep inside while living a different life as a city boy/man. Through the window of time I peep and behold! I see several overlapping layers of reality built in my mind and life, by the dual perspective born of one personality living multiple lives.

I reflect upon the numerous moments I spent with my grandfather, whose raw traditional mentality melded with my mother's dual experiences of traditions and urban orientation. Inside my life and time lie a multiplicity of personalities, born of two different worlds and two or more wide apart generations. In a nut shell Professor Lawless was urging me to reflect upon my life and tell a story.

This story would not be complete and meaningful if I did not step out of my world as an ethnographer and indeed appreciate that whatever I did, would be structured to surround my personality in relation to a much wider entity-my culture and traditions. I therefore decided to tell a story of my life as it reflected the wider social and cultural milieu in which I grew up and lived.

To fully appreciate my place in the story, I decided to think about it as a journey; and the most appropriate title became the "journey back". Yes, Professor Lawless gave me the inspiration to journey back on my fifty years of life and pen this down as a story. The story of the journey can only be told through a character typical of my dual world and the trickster, whose survival in two worlds surmise struggles and challenges became the character of choice.

As a whole the story of an individual is the heart of storytelling and orature is the embodiment of this essence. Therefore, appreciating the world of traditional orature through my participation in the concept, helps me reveal how

external forces dictate the destiny of a wider community and its beliefs, practices and heritage.

To effectively embark on the *Journey Back*, I broke the venture into practices that held life together in the two worlds of modernity and tradition. In the case of traditional orature, rituals of passage that gave impetus to performance allow me to tie my traditional mindset as well as modern orientation, to artistic expression. I consequently chose to dwell on rituals of passage that tied me to my traditions particularly circumcision and marriage. As for modernity, I highlight the education system and how this leads to employment.

Orature and Ritual of passage (Circumcision)

The wanga people among whom I am descended are said to have come from a place around Egypt and they were descended from a man named wanga, who had been escaping from pursuers that wanted to diminish him and the royalty that he represented. Wanga had to disguise himself and make sure that his identity was not discovered. Therefore, as he wandered across from Mount Elgon in Uganda to the lower plains of Kenya, he stopped at various places where he worked as a servant. Folklore has it in myth that the origin of the Wanga Kingdom can only be completely explained in terms of Wanga's shrewd concealing of his identity.

According to myth, at the last station where Wanga had been working as a herdsman for three years; he was already becoming very free and a little too

comfortable. Wanga, in keeping with royalty was circumcised and secondly because he held the key to kingship, he had a royal bracelet on his right wrist. These two signifiers of origin and status were things that Wanga ensured his hosts did not know about; lest they killed him for suspicion he was too powerful to live amongst them. Wanga thus bathed when nobody could sneak and see him, so that his circumcision and bracelet would remain concealed.

However, one fateful evening when the moon had lingered on a little longer or Wanga had miscalculated his usual timing or both; one of the village girls ventured at the back of the house where wanga bathed. Wanga knowing he was safe and alone each time he took a bath, would admire the bracelet and his circumcised penis. These were marks of difference between him and his hosts and therefore evoked glee in him every evening.

The little girl was shocked and broke into an eerie wail..." he is King!" which instantly stirred the whole village. "Our herdsman is of kingly descent!" yelled the girl as she ran all over the village. Wanga, knowing the consequences of this took cover and in the disguise of the night stole his way to safety. After a long walk wandering around the expanse of western Kenya; Wanga arrived at the place that is today called Wanga after his name.

This myth of origin is particularly important for me because the motif in the narrative is heavily hinged upon the question of identity and how a part of the human anatomy can be significant in understanding differences between tribes/people. For

purposes of this dissertation, circumcision will be discussed as fetishism because of how this ritual thrust initiates to a covetous apex of power.

My people the Wanga have since time immemorial practiced circumcision as a ritual of passage that in a distinct manner elevates the individual initiate, the society and the long-departed ancestors to a social privilege that only such an elaborate ceremony can engender. In retrospect, circumcision has been rated as fetish exhibition of permissivity among uncivilized African tribes.

The near worshipping of deities while the process of circumcision takes place, lends credibility to the thought that traditional circumcision is an extension of African religious practice. On the other hand, the transfer of power and adulation from one stage of life to the other, which circumcision is all about, lends credibility to the thought that African objectification of a physical and tangible essence can be the reason for bemusement.

The people of Wanga have a long record of association with the underworld, where they believe their ancestors repose. Through rituals that begot blood, the Wanga understood that their association with the supernatural world was complete and alive. Yet even at the level of interpersonal social relationships, the Wanga used the occasion of circumcision to enhance and propagate a holistic and cohesive structure, through performance of specific rites.

It is therefore interesting to understand how the Wanga concept and the practice of circumcision sit within scholarship. Geller (2007) discusses circumcision in

detail in his book - *On Freud's Jewish Body: Mitigating Circumcisions*. Having gone through traditional circumcision and being a Wanga myself, I want to elucidate the detail and meaning of this ceremony and how it lends itself to the concept of performance during a ritual of passage. Among the wanga, a young man of age seven at the oldest had to undergo circumcision. This ritual took place every two even years which was meant to classify boys into one specific age group because of having shared one circumcision knife.

The actual circumcision took place in August, which was specifically chosen because during this time the land was fertile, and people were harvesting. The time of harvest was symbolic because it was meant to allude to the fact that the initiates would eventually be productive in their sex life after they married. The month of August was also appropriate because there were enough food and people did not have to work very much, so they had time to eat and participate in circumcision rituals and performances of songs and dances.

The process of circumcision was long and elaborate. When a boy turned seven and therefore was considered ripe for circumcision, they left their paternal home and went to their maternal home; where they were humoured with a whole cow slaughtered in their name. After the cow had been slaughtered, they had a whole thigh from the cow thrust round their neck, which they then carried all the way to their paternal home. It was an act of maternal respect, recognition, and permission for an initiate to visit and be humoured by their uncles.

After obtaining maternal blessings circumcision candidates participated in three months long of song, dance, and enactment of spirit exorcism; so as to ward off malevolent spirits during actual circumcision. All circumcision candidates roamed the village all day, to announce their candidacy. Having been confirmed as candidates, they were all taken to the river one early dawn at five in the morning. At the river, initiates were stripped naked and had mud from the river smeared all over the bare bodies. This was the means to stop excess bleeding, which was reinforced by the fact that the river water was very cold, owing to the choice of time at dawn.

After the mud on the candidate's bodies had sufficiently dried up, everyone lined up and one person passed by to mark with white chalk the portion of skin that was going to be cut off. This person was followed by the circumciser who used a traditional knife to cut off the foreskin of the male sex organ and the candidates became initiates. Every initiate then left the village for seclusion in the forest, where they stayed for seven days during which time everyone healed completely.

There was no medication on the wound except for a traditional herb that was sprinkled onto the wound four days after circumcision. During seclusion, initiates went through induction on several things regarding the tribe and how circumcision was important to them and the community. Among other things, it was made clear that the ritual of circumcision meant a graduation into sex life, therefore lessons on sexuality were conducted by elders.

This ceremony was important because it marked the ritual of passage from adolescence to adulthood, which also meant that the initiate was free to court a woman and marry. The initiate was also privy to tribal secrets and was expected to fight and breed for the tribe; as in the formative years, incessant intertribal wars were rampant. Proceedings during circumcision lent themselves to the realm of fetishism. That the initiates shed blood highlighted fetishism because blood was considered the link between the initiate and the gods and was also the cleansing agent by the tribe after every two years.

The removal of the foreskin elevated the initiate from an individual to a societal property; by focusing on the male sex organ as the distinguishing element of a person instead of the individual. It was like the male sex organ was the defining symbol of manhood that led him to a level of self-consciousness, triggered by the removal of the fore skin from his male organ. Freud's argument of castration (Geller 2007) works around the Wanga thought, only that in Freud's argument of castration, the whole male sex organ was removed, while among my people the Wanga it was the fore skin. For Wanga, the removal of the foreskin extracts the initiate from his individuality and thrusts him into another entity, that is incumbent upon one part of the anatomy.

Freud ties religious practices like circumcision to castration (Geller 2007) and argues that when small boys are subjected to pain and the removal of the foreskin from their sex organs, they are going through a kind of signification in a customary practice that cuts them from one mode of existence to another. Indeed the Wanga initiate also

goes through the so-called castration complex that elicits honour, when the fetish eventually disavows that very complex and generates pleasure (Geller 2007).

While the power of the concept of castration as espoused by Freud is rather stronger in terms of physical loss, the Wanga boys were happy to lose their boyhood and childishness and graduate into men, which was a cherished and highly pleasurable realization. There were advantages that came with being a new entity in the tribe and nobody wanted to miss out just because the foreskin of their male sex organ was intact. It will be noted that whenever the foreskin was removed, the focus of attention became the organ that was circumcised, making it the radiance of power and privilege.

Both circumcision and fetishism represent absence, in which case the foreskin becomes important more by its absence than by its being intact; that is why it is both formally and substantively considered an inversion of fetishism (Geller 2007). The absence of the foreskin among the Wanga represented graduation and therefore the loss of an insignificant station in life; in fact there was more gain after circumcision than loss. Unlike Freud's assertion that circumcision is a symbolic substitute for castration for what is no longer there, the Wanga "castration" was about something that was no longer needed and in its place another more important symbol was acquired.

Ironically according to Freud, fetish is the substitute symbol of a woman's lack of a male sex organ that by origin has never been there (Geller 2007) while among the Wanga it takes a different perspective. The Wanga considers a man whose sex organ still bears the foreskin as a "woman". Women were therefore separated from men by

circumcision and men were regarded like women until they underwent circumcision. When a boy resisted or cried during circumcision, they were chided for being women like. The loss of the foreskin fetishized the male sex organ as a new symbol of manhood which meant that the foreskin was a castration, by being a factor in consideration for manhood.

There was a very strong link between circumcision and sexuality, especially where moral values were concerned. Far from circumcision affording the Wanga man the license to marry and have sex, the practice of sex was so institutionalized that chastity and faithfulness were attached to the initiation. There was the feeling that a man needed to resist the urge to sexual relations outside the structure of marriage and a specific partner. Fetishizing the male sex organ to the point of thrusting it as the buffer between wanton sexual pleasure and morality became a cardinal principal taught during seclusion.

Freud identifies fetish as not entirely an object of worship or displaced sexual desire, (Olga Matich, 2005) which reflects the Wanga mindset about the relationship between fetish, circumcision, and sexual desire. In many African societies like the Wanga, it has been discovered that the severing of body parts like the foreskin of the male sex organ, worked well to eradicate excessive sexual desires (Olga Matich 2005) that would be considered wasteful and unnatural. The instrument of sexuality is therefore fetishized to assign it malevolent and benevolent potency that are both at the behest of the initiate.

That circumcision is not only a fetish detail means that it cannot operate as a substitute for another essence even among the Wanga (Olga Matich, 2005). This is considered a sharp contrast to psychoanalysis fetish, which displaces the fear of castration. Many initiates in the Wanga circumcision parade did not envision another form of ritual that would carry as much meaning as the actual severing of the foreskin of their sex organs.

The age-old custom relied on nothing but sheer memory of repeated practices and even in this day when modern forms of circumcision abound, the Wanga have pockets of clans that only feel a satisfaction when it is done as raw as it was in the beginning of time; something that lends itself very poignantly to the world of fetishism. The Wanga are not the only people that fetishize circumcision, because in many Bantu tribes and among the Jews, the element of fetishism runs very deep.

In Angola it is considered an act of abomination for anyone to reject or go against the custom of circumcision. Anyone who took circumcision lightly was thought to have disregarded the custom and life blood of the people. Thus, to undergo circumcision in Angola meant the same thing as undergoing an oath (Willoughby, 1928). Since Angola is inhabited by Bantu people, there is a semblance between their idea of circumcision and the Wanga practice.

When a candidate underwent circumcision, they entered an oath to shed off their dirt, because the foreskin represented ritual uncleanness. The circumcision candidates also sought to establish a permanent oath to belong to the Wanga and

partake in every aspect of life, both sacred and secular. In religions where animal sacrifices were the norm, the main ingredient became the blood that was meant to ward off evil spirits (Willoughby, 1928) thus, making the shedding of blood as well as the loss of the foreskin akin to castration of the past; to welcome the new communion with the spirits that guarded the community. That is why the foreskin even among the Wanga was very cardinal in completing religious ritual among the people.

The person who picked the foreskin after it was dropped on the ground was a special priest like character, who had to be certified ritually clean and was feted for this assignment through gifts of animals like the goat, sheep or cow. It was at this point that one realized how the foreskin was an important element in circumcision. That the foreskin would afford exotic and divertive pleasure meant that it's meaning especially during male erection was not a flimsy phenomenon, because it was thought to be the reason for unbridled male sexual perversion.

The Wanga attributed very magical significance to the foreskin as an object capable of eliciting awe, fascination, and vile excitement (Masub & Khan). Whenever a youth was thrust into a world of the symbolizing and the imaginary use into which the foreskin of the male sex organ could be manipulated, the fetish changed essence and inhabited a part of the body that could erase the turmoil caused therein. This is why the Wanga did not allow an uncircumcised person to associate with women beyond some point, because their control level was in high doubt.

However, the eroticism that the foreskin provided together with the oath of circumcision, rendered the initiated chaste and moderated, thus symbolizing the male organ as a control mechanism against sexual perversions. Every society can be said to have a system of carefully developed rituals that help them to process deep seated beliefs pertaining to contact between and among them, to suppress anxiety and deviations (Denilson, Mansfield, Marilyn, 2001).

Circumcision among the Wanga people therefore operated as a cultural tool for the ordering of a social group, because it was tied to cardinal points in social cohesion and values. There seems to be more forms of mutilations that Freud would regard as castrations but like within the Wanga kingdom, apart from circumcision working as a social divider and creator of hierarchies; it sexually worked as a cultural endorsement of fetishism through the removal of the foreskin (Denilson, Mansfield, and Marilyn, 2001). Skipping a circumcision year was unheard of and could herald the proliferation of evil, destruction, and loss of power within and without the social realms. The technique that was used to circumcise accompanied by songs/hymns and dance in praise of manliness, almost inducted the initiates to a secret cult “half cult half custom” (Chidester, Kwenda, Petty, Tobler and Wratten, 1997).

The cultic as well as customary essence of circumcision among the Wanga engendered a seclusion period in the bush, which symbolized the death of one phase of life that had to be reclaimed by getting out of normalcy. When in the bush, initiates were taught not only about their ancestors but also some actual sexual and sex related

mysteries associated with the tribe. The initiated were thus inducted into a kind of phase in their life where like the Sotho Tswana of Angola; they were undergoing a “baptism” into life (Chidester, Kwenda, Petty, Tobler and Wratten, 1977).

The bond of unity that circumcision exhibited was automatic and unique, by the way everyone seemed to recognize a unifying and shared meaning to the ceremony and actual removal of the foreskin. The strange acceptance by the people of a shared public experience transcends what would otherwise be considered artistic constructs that inherently exist in literary plots (Lawrence Hoffman, 1996).

The development of a Wanga circumcision ceremony from the beginning to the end encompasses a group of people held together by a shared fetish understanding of their place in the collective whole. The adhesive nature of the belief in one principle of circumcision as a process through which every male must pass, is unbreakable. Otherwise, there would be no guarantee that the initiates were going to show up for the painful process, let alone accept to publicly go through it (Lawrence Hoffman, 1996).

The understanding was uniquely sacrosanct, even without a syllabus of sorts to prepare the candidates. One can only imagine an adolescent boy yearning to be among the number at the river in the wee hours of the morning, to undergo an operation without anesthesia. Today, I realize that those who engaged in an activity whose performance was not in effect as meaningful at the time, were actually fulfilling the “official” version of what this fetish of circumcision meant to the older and more responsible members of the community/tribe (Lawrence Hoffman, 1996).

The position held above on circumcision perfectly aligns itself to McClintock's assertion about fetishism. This is because the historical practice of circumcision was done so religiously and promptly by the Wanga, that the ambiguities inherent in the practice were diminished by the recurrence (Andrew Jacobs, 2012). In a way, the Wanga circumcision was a means by the community to identify themselves from the paradox of what the candidates understood then, and what the adults derived from the practice in terms of meaning and importance. In any case, the candidates after circumcision transitioned into a position of graduation that made a distinction between them and those who did not understand or go through the initiation; thus breeding a distinct hybrid that according to McClintock reenacts the ritual (Andrew Jacobs, 2012).

The Wanga circumcision fetish is therefore understandable in the context that the whole meaning to the practice is placed in the one very small object—the foreskin of the male sex organ. That the meaning of this element of circumcision was reenacted every two years, was the means to achieve a historical perspective from a repeated deed, for purposes of lending it legitimacy and a central place in the life of the tribe.

The automatic way the circumcision candidates metamorphosed into different entities upon initiation, remarkably distinguished the levels of power from a lower status, to one that was acquired through manipulating a selected part of the body to fetishize and use as the transfer medium, that MacClintock says; is a situation whereby the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities (Andrew Jacobs, 2012). When the initiates stood in public to have the

foreskin cut, the courage to go through the exercise was derived from things that they hardly understood.

The ambiguous manner in which this ceremony was conducted, lay in them knowing that they just had to go through it and be feted with gifts and accolades for being brave boys. It was, however, much later that the initiates realized that this was a societal mark of identification with the living and the dead, as well as the empowering of the mind to the reality of self-control in every matter that dealt with sexuality. The power to recognize the potency of the male sex organ lay in the pain of circumcision and the sacredness with which it was held.

The fetish element in circumcision was complete in lending power to a person through a section of the anatomy. After the seclusion period and during the process of gradual maturity into ways of the tribe, the fetish of circumcision systematically built in each initiate the consciousness of an individual that was remarkably different from the others. There were obviously people within the Wanga tribe and outside, especially in the city, who had not undergone circumcision. The notion that those who were circumcised was different and therefore special ruled their psyche in a very significant manner.

The circumcised had been almost indoctrinated into regarding uncircumcised people as either children or cowards, for fearing the cold naked knife. MacClintock avers this position by stating that through fetishism, the creation and embodiment of that

very moment when the self is formed into a different identification and differentiation transforms them from “I am myself” to “another” (Andrew Jacobs, 2012).

For a long time it did not occur to many people among the Wanga that some communities did not circumcise because they had other forms of initiation. They were occupied more by communal elevation into a status that they ambiguously understood, only because the foreskin of the male sex organs had been cut off; thus the symbol of power lay in the realization that they were different. The Wanga people were therefore answering to McClintock’s argument that social groups strive to locate or identify the paradox of communal identity in fetish objects like the fore skin of the male sex organ (Andrew Jacobs, 2012).

The Wanga identity symbols that distinguished Wanga the “fugitive” from his benefactors/hosts, was a fetish object created by the removal of the foreskin from his male sex organ. The fact that a young girl was the whistle blower signaling that amidst them was a person of a different ilk; became a precursor to the Wanga perpetual use of circumcision as an identity symbol during strife and good. Among the Wanga, only a circumcised man would qualify for marriage, and since the ceremony was conducted in public, there was no doubt that the uncircumcised were known or even considered nearly outcasts.

After it was established that a man was circumcised, he was allowed to date, woo, and propose for marriage and be assured of dowry from the parents. The parents were not in this case merely the biological father and mother but a line of extended

parentage in the tribe. The circumcised man was by virtue of his status allowed to present gifts before his father – in- law and even enter his house on the day he presented his dowry. The people believed that when a person was circumcised, he was a “man”, which was a coveted status indeed. The fabric that held the tribe together was knit through the initiation ceremony of circumcision.

Circumcision among the Wanga was expressed within folklore in several ways. Folklore was part and parcel of the life of the Wanga, who answered to the belief that the African was a notorious storyteller. The fact of the statement above is found in the truth of folklore permeating every facet of the lives of the people. Subsequently, all forms of orature converged in performance of rituals that ran from birth/naming, initiation, courtship/marriage, and death.

Many scholars have dwelt on the notion that African perception of life was tailored to exhibit primitive cultural practices or belief in fetish objects for purposes of worship. The truth is that while understanding the environment was important for relating with the outside world, the Wanga like all Africans understood that appreciating how people related among themselves on the one hand and with the environment on the other was of great significance in life. Most important was how the Wanga African related with and understood the non-physical /metaphysical.

Daily happenings found a fitting folklore genre to go with them and right from day break to sunset, events were punctuated by aspects of performance. The most cardinal means to express daily occurrences was narration; which was done orally and

mostly through song and dance. The fact that a song or any performance was used to augment a ritual ceremony like circumcision, did not qualify them as items of performance. The Wanga performances were artistic in expression, structure, and composition.

The Wanga circumcision was therefore a moment for artistic expression through folklore; and the motif was the enumeration of myth and legend narratives, for reasons of reminding the circumcision candidates about the origin of the tribe and how that origin was tied to circumcision. The candidates were also told legend narratives that helped them associate with heroes of the tribe, who after circumcision undertook various warrior roles to protect and defend the tribe.

The connection between folklore and circumcision was the variety of initiation songs and dances within the genre. Every circumcision year the people composed new songs that were meant to encourage and lure prospective initiates to join the group due for circumcision that year. The songs and dances were not performed at a fixed place but were done on the run. The dancers mingled with the public and ran all over the village stopping at strategic places to recognize the homes from where candidates came. The singing became full of frenzy as the days to circumcision neared and several instruments played a part in making the songs vigorous and appealing.

The main instrument for song and dance was the drum, but there were traditional flutes and lyres together with rattling devices for tunes and melodies, to help capture the mood of the season. The songs, apart from encouraging the candidates

were loaded with messages about the importance of circumcision and the fate of those who chickened out. This section of life was complete only when non-initiates were involved. The fact of a communalistic world came alive during the circumcision season and women, men, and children erased the normal boundaries as they engrossed themselves in these ceremonies.

Folklore and fetishism therefore merged and played out very well within the Wanga circumcision practice. Far from integrating folklore into the actual circumcision; the people also involved items and personalities with some taboo related dos and don'ts. The circumciser was not just an ordinary man; He was supposed to be beyond the reproach of the tribe by word and deed. This person was supposed to scale the highest moral ground otherwise all his initiates would die, be impotent and/ or lose their place in the tribe. The office of the circumciser was said to be sacred and hereditary, so nobody would vie for or usurp that office. The circumciser was not paid in cash, but several gifts were given by the initiates themselves because as they were announcing their candidature, the villagers were showering upon them all sorts of gifts.

Circumcision was done using a knife and this one knife was used on one set of candidates only. That is to say that the circumciser could not use the same knife on candidates of a different circumcision year. The significance of this knife was that the people in one season constituted an age set and shared so many secrets and privileges. They could also marry across their own divides, they could marry sisters or even relate

with the same woman sexually. This age set was respectful of one another and operated in every way to show the unity of purpose that the tribe advocated and cherished.

In a way, the knife of circumcision was a fetish object just as the foreskin that among the Wanga could not be picked from the ground by just anybody. Only ritually clean people picked the foreskin, and that individual would be gifted and praised before the foreskins were discarded in the forest. Knowing that this ceremony engulfed a person in his adolescent stage, blood, knife, and other traditional elements were good for sticking circumcision to a special fetish practice of the Wanga.

Today, because of the scourge of AIDS, the Wanga have been slowed down by advocacy groups wanting circumcision by knife to be halted for purely health reasons to avoid infections. There are Wanga die hard who have insisted on circumcising as was done in the past and they have concessions to have it done with multiple knives. The fetish hold of circumcision on the people is transient because it was unheard of for a Wanga to be circumcised in hospital which was considered an act of cowardice. The hospital anesthesia and the baptizing of the practice as surgery, injure the core of Wanga belief in the sanctity of a customary rite that distinguishes who is who in the tribe. The fetish mindset is thus alive even if modernity is threatening to make this a fizzling phenomenon.

Many children born in the city participated in circumcision by sheer default. Many children born and raised in the cities occasionally visit the village. Most of the time they became drawn into the circumcision bandwagon by the performance element

that clouds the actual ritual. In the years of circumcision time initiates run round the village for a whole month, it is usually fanfare with song, dance, and merriment. Most town bred children did not know that that when they joined the dancing troupes were of circumcision age, they had to be circumcised because per tradition; this indulgence made them automatically candidates for circumcision.

Traditional beer was very central to traditional marriage negotiations and after circumcision; one advantage was that if you were not circumcised in hospital, you could present beer before your father-in-law; which by itself was a very honourable and respectable position. Thus I want to marry the ritual of circumcision with the marriage customs of my people, which was done through a performance of activities that smacked of ritual but in essence had behind the scenes artistic expressiveness. The worlds of traditional Wanga circumcision and Wanga traditional marriage will thrust me in to the impetus that drives these two worlds as only a trickster astride can achieve.

Orature and Marriage

The analysis of marriage in my community will be based on the breakdown provided by Mbiti.J.S (1991). Mbiti breaks down a typical African marriage into; the obligation to get married, marriage customs and the meaning of marriage. I was a young man of nineteen years old doing research on oral traditions in 1987 for my advanced level national examination, when I decided to research on the minute elements of marriage in my community.

Incidentally although I hail from among the Wanga, the customs governing life in my community are influenced by another tribe, the Luo, with whom we share boundaries as well as customs. The cross-cultural orientation I have imbued over a period of time puts me in a position to find the middle ground between two cultural backgrounds. Other than for purposes of research, I wanted to know from a practical level how marriage was conducted, by speaking with a female of advanced age like my step grandmother.

The Wang people believe that marriage is an obligation that is thrust upon every person who has undergone circumcision and therefore qualifies to be married. The idea of fetishism of the male sexual organ was chiefly because this part of the anatomy was considered a central part in sexuality, marriage, procreation, and progeny. Circumcision was the certificate to life and life was deemed to play best through marriage.

The removal of the fore skin from the male organ was connected to the shedding of blood which symbolically stood for the flow of life through connecting the initiate to the ancestors long buried in the grounds that swallowed their blood. The foreskin was also thought to be inhibitive and culturally unclean, during the process of procreation which came with marriage. Traditionally no man was man enough among the Wanga if they did not get circumcised and marriage was not a preserve for boys. If they were not circumcised, they were not qualified to keep girlfriends, woo or engage in courtship. Sex itself was an item preserved for marriage and therefore doing it outside marriage was an abomination.

My step grandmother therefore emphasized that marriage was a duty unto the community and anyone acting in a manner likely to subvert it was considered the enemy of the community. She told me that marriage was cardinal to the community because it was the meeting point between the departed ancestors, the living and the future progeny. Thus, in my community, marriage was considered a special and sacrosanct institution through which human life was assured and preserved.

Owing to the central place and role of marriage, my community had several custom issues surrounding this ritual of passage beginning with how a marriage partner was selected. According to my step grandmother, long before my generation, one way of getting a marriage partner was through parental arrangement. Parents of both the girl and boy agreed either long before the children were born or somewhere during their upbringing that their children would marry. Oaths were conducted to bind such agreements and the couples had traditional and customary obligation to stick with parental arrangement.

Parental pre-arranged marriages in my community were meant to ensure a train of relationships and to keep some specific genetic traits within families. Even today as much as children make their choices, there is an element that still belongs to the parents through approval. The second way of getting a marriage partner among the Wanga according to my step grandmother was that a man identified the woman he wanted to be his wife and went to his father who in turn commissioned the boy's uncles

to take over the matter and after months of espionage, they approached the family of the girl for a proposal.

Espionage was important in marriage customs because through this, both the families of the man and the woman dug into the past of the proposers to avoid getting into a union with community misfits, relatives, and people of jinxed genetic orientation. During espionage, one important element was whether the proposers were related by blood in any way, because among the Wanga, you did not marry from the same place as your father because the ladies there are most likely going to be your aunts. Other considerations of relationships like cousins and step relationships would lead to cancellation of marriage negotiations if discovered.

According to my step grandmother, after the family of the man had established that they would accept marriage between their son and the girl he had identified, the family of the girl took their turn to do espionage and when they were satisfied, they made it known so that the family of the man could start negotiations. The father of the girl also let the uncles of the girl participate in negotiation, which meant that the negotiations were communal as opposed to private family business.

The chief ingredient in marriage negotiations was dowry, which was completed through taking of gifts from the family of the man to that of the lady. The myriad visits by the family of the man to the family of the girl were elaborate, involved very many people in the delegations and were considered very serious business. Since the Wanga were mainly pastoral and agricultural, the gifts were cattle and goats, which were the

measure of wealth then. Every time the family of the man went to that of the girl for negotiations, the family of the girl also received them with elaborate and sumptuous meals.

My step grandmother told me that during such negotiations it was necessary for the family of the man to have in their negotiation entourage three very instrumental persons. The first person needed to be a tough speaker, well versed on issues of culture and an astute negotiator; the second important person needed to be a very good eater who never gets easily satisfied. It was joked that if you did not eat the food presented well enough, you would be charged for that food nonetheless, when marriage failed later and both families sought to have their expenses reimbursed.

The third most important personality was a person who would drink a lot of alcohol without getting drunk and messy; again this was to ensure maximum consumption of everything offered during negotiations. The bottom line though was that marriage negotiations far from ironing relational issues before marriage was the ground upon which a lot of intrigues played. At the same time it was also an excuse for merry making and this was always done through food and drink.

Each time the delegation from the family of the man went for negotiations with the family of the girl, they were accompanied by an even number of cows and goats. The politics surrounding having even numbers was to eliminate bad omen that odd numbers were thought to engender. This practice went on until the family of the girl said they were satisfied with the negotiations and the dowry that they had received.

In many cases the number of cows taken to the family of the girl as dowry was as big as thirty or forty if not more. My step grandmother told me that the cattle were calves and had to be all female. The negotiations settled issues surrounding how the girl's community wanted her to be treated and how disputes arising from the prospective marriage would be handled.

Interestingly, although these negotiations would go on for almost a year, the bride and bridegroom would not have contact whatsoever. The process was all an extended family affair, which marked marriage as a social as opposed to individual or private contract. After the process of negotiations was over, it became the onus of the relatives of the groom to make sure that the bride was brought home. No bride made it easy by walking straight to the home of the groom, they were traditionally very difficult to woo and win.

The family of the groom organized a scheme to "ambush" the bride while she was out in the field on an errand and staged something near a raid, during which time they literally carried the bride on their shoulders and ran with her to her new home. This ambush was not done without counter resistance from the relatives of the bride. The scramble to have the bride join her husband was elaborate and well executed. It was a way of showing the collective desire of a community to have their bride at whatever the cost and the determination of her people to protect/hold onto one of their own.

My step grandmother told me that after the bride arrived in her matrimonial home, she and her husband had sexual intercourse for the first time in a hut where they were joined by the oldest paternal grandmother of the groom. The grandmother's role was to ensure that the newly married girl was a virgin which was a very pricey status then. The grandmother spread a white goat skin on which the bride and groom lay. After they had had their intercourse, the grandmother inspected the goat skin for blood which signified the fact that the bride had been a virgin. The grandmother would then open the door of the hut to meet a whole clan/community who had been keeping vigil out of the hut to know the status of their newly married.

Upon being shown a blood-stained goat skin, the crowd of villagers outside the hut would break into a frenzy of song, dance and chanting in praise of and to celebrate the newly married bride for having been chaste and well governed in her youth. News of the stained white goat skin would reach the village of the bride and there too there would be ululations, song, dance and chanting in praise of, and indicating pride in their daughter. My step grandmother told me that the fact that a girl was proven a virgin earned her community extra dowry, as this was a well-earned bonus in traditional life.

The marriage rituals in my community as enumerated to me by my grandmother are important to my ethnography work because together with the ritual of circumcision, they help thrust me to the position of a trickster astride. Being astride two different worlds through the spectacles of traditional orature makes it compelling for me to appreciate the interplay between tradition and modernity. Many people in my tradition

married in church through a Christian wedding, but this was not considered complete until one went through customary marriage. Granted, the myriad details in the traditional marriage arrangements are all relevant in my time but the concept of dowry in a more modified manner is still mandatory.

To fully merge the two worlds through rituals, I want to put the circumcision and marriage rituals in one block representative of my traditional past through which performance of orature thrived; and the world of modernity that I experienced through the school system and the job market. If circumcision was the certificate to marriage, childbearing and the sustenance of life in the traditional past; then the several layers of academic life were the initiation levels for qualification to life through to the job market.

Western civilization and Formal Education

During my time in school there were four layers of school life, each marked by a rigorous national examination. After going through seven years of primary school education, a national examination called a certificate of primary education was done nationally (C.P.E). After this examination selection was made for placement of students in secondary school based on the merit of C.P.E. The schools were ranked in tiers that absorbed students in a highly academic hierarchical manner.

The cream of C.P.E examination were enrolled in the eight national schools we had in Kenya for a very long time, the next level of performers was enrolled in provincial schools and the last level of students were enrolled in district and private owned schools. This stratification was an elaborate scheme run under the aegis of the ministry of education, for and on behalf of the government. It was a direct replica of the colonial system of segregation which unfortunately, we have refused to acknowledge but instead have perpetuated in disguise.

The so-called national schools were purely for white British students and teachers and when the British left, the schools became the domain of higher elite of Africans born of economic and political advantage in Kenya. Even though the notion of segregation based on political and economic class has whittled down sort of, the stranglehold by this class of Kenyans is still a reality in many perspectives, whether economic or political.

After four years of secondary school education, students went through another national examination called the Kenya Certificate of Education (K.C.E). In the year when I sat my K.C.E, there were one hundred and eight thousand (108.000) candidates out of which eleven thousand qualified for admission into form five (5). Forms one to four were also referred to as the ordinary level ("O" Level) whereas the forms four and five classes were referred to as the advanced level (A Level) which was concluded by an examination-Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education (K.A.C.E).

After the K.A.C.E examination, which in my year qualified only three thousand to the university, several candidates either went to diploma colleges or joined the job market. At university students graduated after three years of course work. It must be said here that today the country has adopted a different system of education called 8-4-4, with eight years at primary school, four years at secondary school and four at university. The education ministry runs education in Kenya and employs teachers under teacher's service commission, while the syllabus is formulated by Kenya institute of education. The Kenya National Examinations Council runs and manages national examinations.

Traditional education, which was done through orature and emphasized through circumcision, led to the building of the walls that held our community together through marriage and child bearing on the one hand. On the other hand the formal education replete with a stringent examinations system, ensured the bulwark of the Kenyan work force and educated elites who drove the country forward. *The Trickster's Journey Back* is a perfect summary of this arrangement through which the journey motif symbolizes a trip down memory lane.

The Trickster's Journey Back

Prologue

Had I not listened with keen ears, I would not have appreciated the calm words of wisdom from my octogenarian grandpa. Through my grandpapa, I learned several sayings of the wise and I appreciate that what an old man sees while seated, a young

person cannot see while atop the tallest tree in the village. Grandpapa told me that when you want to kill ticks, you do not burn the grass that feeds your cattle so; I have preserved the tradition of orature as the grass that feeds my experience and learning about my community. As I feel inspired to write ethnography about my people, I remember my grand papa's saying that a frog does not appear in the day unless there is something chasing after its life. Something is really chasing after traditional lifestyle as enshrined in orature and here we are seeing it in the daylight of modern Kenya, through the eyes of a trickster astride.

I hearkened to my grand papa's wisdom and married them with the counsel of mother, on whose laps we huddled to hear the stories of yore, while we lay on the mat by her bedside to rekindle the spirit of the tales that she permanently planted in our psyche. I appreciate the realization that my life is still a journey, the Safari to a destined place that only a trickster can navigate. With these weapons of orature, I can begin the journey back to what my grandpa called humanity...yes...just good...

A Safari song is sung as drums roll slowly to a soft stop.

Voice I am lying awake in this dimly lit hut that I share with grand pa whenever I am on vacation. I have been hearing him speak to people all night, even. argue and yell at them. I know there are only two of us in this hut but at 91 and a World War II veteran he could be having hallucination or so I think. People have whispered that it could have something to do with

the people he knew and are no longer alive or the ones they...I am not sure...Killed...or died under his charge as a soldier. He once confessed to me that he never killed anybody though. This is a dawn with a difference; grandpa knows that I am not asleep even though we can hardly see each other. He opens the door and in rushes shades of dull light from the retreating moon. He steps out and comes back to stand by the doorway...

Grandpa

As usual I am the first one to stir from the deathly slumber of the night. The first cock crow (2:30am) is the time for men like me to arise and by the second cock crow (3:30am) I am always up and about, yet the whole expanse of this village is still tossing in their beds waiting for the third cock crow (at 5:00am). Of course the utterly lazy will await the learner cockerels that crow at 6:00am. (Song). Come on grandson, walk the grassy path with me and slash the lush grass with your feet as can. Now, bend low and with your right hand scoop the dew on the grass, bring your hand to your face and clean it like it is a face wash, What do you feel? It is a fresh morning, and the birds herald a cool air of serenity, pure breeze and peace, yes, camouflaged peace that this ultimate new day promises to betray (song). Trust me son, I have seen generations upon generations, I know all the departed by name and deed, I know they toss in their other world to imagine the waste, the plunder and sordid life we fathom for ourselves, and I too grieve for them, for the world. This is a topsy-turvy world grandson, I have grieved enough for them (song) Come on over, stand still under this tree, look up, you must have noticed that it is not only tall and huge, it is a monument thirty years old and I have spared it the axe. I promised

myself to stand you here one day and let you know that it is an inheritance, almost a symbolic statue, a gem if you like (Song) I want you to remember this dawn under the magnanimous tree, never cut it down because through it you are connected to many generations, the past, the present and the future, and because of it you are connected to the world past present and forever (Song)

Voice Grandpa, tell me more about this tree that many say harbours the biggest python ever, tell me about this gruel place that never ran dry, and tell me about you...

Grandpa I will tell you about me and about you, as for the tree I have done my part; you will discover with age as the tree will speak for itself. When I was growing I lay on a goat skin spread on the hard floor and I slept and dreamt like a baby, but you? Six inches of mattress on a king size bead and even with sleeping pills you toss and turn all night. I laugh loudly, uproariously cracking laughter full of mirth and my ribs ache, my premolars show; that is me, you muffle the laughter because it is the fashion not to look “indecent “so it always ends in a small grin. I cry out loud when I must, I wail uncontrollably and vent my heart out. You are ashamed of showing tears in public, you argue that it is a sign of weakness: that is what they tell you, but you carry the grief for ages. Do they call it stress in your world. That is about you and me...do you see? And what’s more? I married three women, and they called it polygamy

because it was not a structured relationship as for you grandson, and your generation, you marry everyday as you divorce but you call it monogamy he...he. Nonetheless, keep off multiple women, marry one wife and avoid the heartache, here we will call it avoiding cooking two cocks in one pot-it is taboo, never mind that your time promotes multiple relations without structure. Is it perversion? Call it what you please. I went to the world war, and it was a worldly experience but grandson, avoid all forces like the plague if the ideal is vague, never die to touch a gun if you have done it to champion a cause for the power that eats from that cause, never, never! Lastly grandson, I drank all sorts of liquor, "kill me quick" and all! Avoid wasteful indulgence in alcohol, it dazes young mind; be fresh, and be sober in the head... always (song)

Voice

Two years later I am sitting under this tree in deep reflection. I am pensive as I struggle to understand my grandpa's words; the tree will say things about its self-grandpa had said. I recall what mother had said...she must have shared a class with Aristotle...the life of every human is a five act play...birth, naming, initiation, Courtship/marriage, and death. I had to share my blood with the faded generations under this sacred tree, in order to claim a place in the list of belongings. (Song)

Voice

Mother told me that life is a long road and that we are travelers on that rough long and taxing terrain. She also said something about being a survivor, which to me meant being able to fight and think at the same

time. That is why I believe she told us stories about endurance and how to weave through the mist of this business called life. The myth that negates the essence of life as eternal, I emphasized the staying power of the successful.

Mother Once upon a time when animals and human beings still lived together in the forest, they elected to send chameleon to god, to find out a cure for the phenomena of death. The chameleon was selected because he spoke very slowly and moved in just about the same way. The animals and the people needed a soft speaker who would be patient and wait on god's decree. In order to appease God, chameleon was given the most cherished part of a slaughtered animal to present to God. Chameleon being a clumsy creature did not arrive with the meat intact, as it was soiled and pathetic to look at. The meal was not fitting for their god and being infuriated decreed eternal death on all creation. Since chameleon was slow to speak, he could not quickly explain himself and god dismissed him without a hearing. Animals and people continued to die after the failed petition and to date chameleon must camouflage whenever any animal or human being prowls.

Voice We arrived from Uganda with all the booty of eight years from a foreign country, and it remained to be seen if the myth of consistency, struggle and order would rein our lives; it was a herculean task and the beginning of a long trek into this new world.... (Song) A scene at the bus park...

Loader: Luggage, Luggage, Mine, mine, I will buy the whole...

Tout: Forget it, they may or may not be for sale

Loader: All these? And they are not for sale?

Tout: I said they may or may not... (Looking into the truck) Get out you people, this is as far as we go. To get to "Yajayo" you will have to pay more

Father My ears and eyes are not defective. You said with your own mouth that you would take us to "Yajayo".

Tout Did I? (Silence) Well, maybe I did, but that was then, now we are not... get out I Said

Voice When you are a first-time visitor in Nairobi let someone not tell you to alight at the so called "Machakos Airport". Do not be cheated that this crowded, filthy and smelly mess is an airport of any sort. Brace yourself for unscrupulous public transport cheats, they hunger for and itch to relieve you of your belongings. The touts damp you wherever after they pocket your money...Nairobi, then green city in the sun here we come, this dawn of Sunday August 1970.

Tout Are you people getting out or not? I will count one till...

Man Can we pay you the extra fare to take us to “Yajayo?” Look, we have luggage and Children

Tout Two hundred shillings!

Man Two hundred? Mother of God! That is not even what it cost to reach here, “yajayo” is hardly ten miles from here. Are you insane?

Tout (sarcastic) Hardly ten miles and you won’t walk there, get out and walk!

Voice If you knew Nairobi, and father was a fast learner, you never argued with touts. At best they are school dropouts, are unscrupulous and are blessed with itchy Fingers. What’s more, someone said they are part time touts in the day and part time burglars at night. Father lost this one and meekly turned to his family, he uttered something to the effect that Ugandans are more civil and less bawdy-I still think he was right

Man Ma, children, let’s get out, perhaps this is the place we are meant to begin, after all it is Nairobi...only a stage away from the residential, but now ...

Voice If we children were overly excited by the glitters in the horizon of this

vast city, Mama was the quintessential prototype of the see all says nothing African woman, who never hid her disgust when her opinion was sought. Sometimes this riled father, sometimes it bore heavily upon him.

Mother you said Nairobi was an African London....

Voice And mother would make her point even when it sounded like a firm pessimistic Voice. What I came to remember is that when she cast doubt on anything father wanted, and he went ahead to do it anyway, things did not work very well. This time they had come so far and, there was no going back...

Man We have left a foreign country, this is home...

Voice Mama was more emphatic and with a tinge of frustration...

Wife Other people remained.

Man You do not do things because others are doing them...

Voice Mama was bound to lose this one, the philosophical hard disciplinarian voice was typical of the paternalistic Bantu manhood, the know it all, do it all figure. I must applaud father for the latitude mama enjoyed in this set up, I know that father earned his salary and gave it all to mama for

custody, the two worked as if they were siblings. I used to think in my naïve childish mind that people lived brother and sister and that that was how my father and mother were together. I hated to imagine that one day I would also live with my sister! I did not hate my sister but sibling rivalry and competition rent this bad air of ...how I wish not. That dissipated with time. We had just arrived in Nairobi Kenya and even today I still do not connect a lot of things about me, a lot of other things . I still remember that mother and father did not speak in one voice about this city, which did not mean there was acrimony in the family. Mother emphasized this when she told us... Once upon a time there lived cunning witty hare who was idling away one afternoon when he thought some little mischief could swing the day by. He decided to go to the deep forest where he met elephant and began to chide him. "Look at you long nosed weakling, I can pull you by the trunk to the deep sea if you joke". Elephant was tired from a long morning and could only dare hare to make good his threat. They agreed that hare would come the following day for the mighty tug of war. After securing this appointment hare was lost for what to do now that he had stretched his imagination thus far. He had not grieved for long when he remembered that his friend hippopotamus lived in the river. Hare dashed to the river and found hippo enjoying the warm evening water, he chided him "lazy bone I always feel like pulling you by the nose all the way to the forest". Hippo was least amused and asked him to make good his threat. Hare secured an appointment for the following day when he dully handed each end of

the long rope to hippo and elephant before he hid in the middle of the forest to see the two fools pull at each other in equal measure. After a long battle hare whistled to stop the scuffle and was gleeful to see each giant puffing and panting from exhaustion, not knowing that they had each been duped into pulling hard against each other. Nobody dreamt about taking advantage of the little strife between mother and father in the hope that they would get a leeway and get away with anything untoward.

Song (Ayoo...Ayooo...Ayoo...Ayo...yo...yo...yo...yo. Ayo... Ayo... Ayo...)

Voice I must have been sleeping for so long that when the sun replaced the moon I was far away in the land of dreams. Someone tell me how long I have been lying here? I do not seem to recall how I became me. I mean, there is nothing I remember about me being born and brought up across the borders of Kenya to the west in Uganda. All I recall is that there was this one-day father saddled me on his bicycle- a pricy possession those days- and left me in the company of hitherto unknown people and children like me, noisy chatterboxes hassling for the meager playing items in a large grassy patch. I was looking miserably lost three hours later when other children were collected, and father came just in their trail but late for my comfort. I do not know if I cried but the borders closed and East African community died, so Nairobi stretches her cold hands for a bunch of five. (Safari yeee, hooo, haaa.. safari ya bamba ni

macheoX2 oh safari ya bamba ni macheo). A journey to an unknown destination begins the day before).

Child 1 (Somebody is making away with our luggage) Father! Look at that man, he is stealing our luggage, what is the meaning of all this?

Voice Nairobi thugs do their thing in broad daylight and anyone looking would think they are doing business with you-no violence!

Father (Gives a slight chase) you man! Stop...thief...thief...

Child 2 Another one father! There...what are they doing? We have never seen such...

Voice Everything happened so fast. Mama had expressed these thoughts but father was still sturdy, his spirit unrelenting...

Father Oh no! I was told this Nairobi is actually Nairoberry... but let it not daunt you...

Voice While we were wondering what father meant by his angelic mien, mama was not amused.

Ma You are going to get serious? we have lost our entire luggage and have

no place to call home...

Voice Father had other ideas; he just had to get us out of this mess somehow. I thought he was going to solicit some transport help to wherever we would be living.

Father Sit here for a while; I need to find some means to reach our actual destination, a place to put our heads. I did not expect this city to be half the crazy jumble it has shown this morning. I cannot let this mess go on, I will be back, wait here for me folks....

Narrator Once upon a time, two very good friends were having a nice and friendly chat. Those were days before evil came to the world and therefore people never disagreed. The lord of evil was not happy that man could live for so long without, so he designed a way to drive a wedge between them so that they would begin to disagree. While the friends were chatting, the lord of evil sent his double who wore on his left side of the body a red patch of cloth and on the right a patch of blue. When he passed directly between the arguing men they stopped for a while before they began to argue

Man I Did you just see the person who passed between us?

Man II yes the one who wore a red shirt?

Man I No! He wore a blue shirt,

Voice And they argued for some time before the agent of evil
Passed by again. This time **Man II**, saw the blue patch while **Man I**, saw
the red patch. And **Man I** decided to withdraw his argument.

Man I I am very sorry my friend he was wearing a red patch.

Man II I should be the one apologizing, you were right, he wore a blue patch.

Voice And they argued till they broke into a fight that has been going on among
humanity to date. Mother believed man was born to sin and so the loss
of our luggage was a result of evil and sin. The cool city in the sun (that is
what Nairobi means in Maasai language) welcomed particularly me very
warmly. That is why I failed the interview to join standard one-call it first
grade. I was not well drilled for the test and God's of our people! It was a
test indeed. The mighty crowd of children inside the huge room through
whose large open windows parents shouted encouraging remarks to
forlorn children like me, still linger like it was yesterday. To pass the
"test" you needed to stretch your right arm across your head and touch
your left ear! If you failed, you missed the entrance to first grade. I
missed it; my parents were not amused I could see. Father said I did not
deserve to eat lunch that day but on hindsight, how in all hell was I

supposed to make my arm stretch? Anyway I failed my first test at school.
(Song).

Voice Somebody once said that there is actually no easy way on earth, the pain survival requires a spirit of resilience. Only the cunning trickster knows how to weave their way round the myriad boulders that form in the way of life. Raising children in Nairobi's middle class residential estates required a fist of iron and mother greatly perfected this...

Mother Where have you been? Are you...? Is that you I saw out there? With those rag tag children? Come here... That was Sweet mother at her disciplinary best, God rest her soul in heavenly peace, had I known you would make me what I am today, I would not have imagined life without you. If ears would get out of the sockets I would have none today if the part of the anatomy that we use for sitting were able to erode, I would not have something to sit on... and did she care?

Mother Silence when I speak! or I will kill you! Go out there and come back with a good rod. I will spit on the ground and woe upon you if you get here after it dries up, run...run.

Voice So you went to get the rod that she knew how not to spare because otherwise in the hustle of this hollow city many of my own friends perished under the sparing rods their parents held. And as if the Ten

Commandments were not enough, mother added hers, no eating in other people's houses or you paid for such gluttony with your tears, no serving food before visitors and elders, no listening to conversations of adults, no fighting, no... no ...no...

Song Emama we, Huiranga, mama wee huiranga. Iweya malit na. Emama wee iweya nago, Mama iweya nago iweya malit.. (Mama, I cry for you, do you hear me? you left me in this world alone, why, why mama)

Mother Who gave you this cake? Whose shirt is this? Lie down...

Voice And you decided she would kill you, so you dashed for it but lo! She was not too old to out sprint you and while she did that the whip washed your back, so you lose the race and the whole spanking scene starts afresh...double jeopardy if not more.

Mother I am your mother, did you hear that? I am your...

Voice You decided no more running, perhaps sliding under the bed would do. Then you realize this super lady has the strength of the biblical Samson, she out foxes you. If she did not spray her whip under the bed, she dragged the bed all the way to the centre of the house. But the trickster in you... you held the springs, heaved yourself and flattened yourself against the bed springs...it was a lose... lose situation all the way. The

result? Order, respect, honesty, responsibility

Song Mama wee(Oh my mother)

Voice Who said freedom is just a word in the dictionary till you lose it? School came eventually. I do not remember how my ears eventually kissed my fingers, I was enrolled and day one to the last was baptism of brimstone. Mother and father emphasized the need for wit and education was the way to get that. Education was life they said, and you did not want to be outwitted at anything so a story was told. Once upon a time there were two friends, the monkey and crocodile. Monkey had wanted to know where crocodile lived and crocodile said his house was far away across a very deep and long river. Crocodile for his part wanted to know where monkeys kept their hearts. Monkey promised to show crocodile where they kept their hearts but only after crocodile promised to show him where crocodiles lived. Monkey not being a good swimmer wondered if he would ever visit his friend crocodile but the gracious crocodile offered to carry monkey on his back, which he did by swimming across the river to his house. Monkey was very pleased with the reception crocodile accorded him. When it was time to sleep monkey was assigned the verandah of crocodile where his wife lay and kept their eggs. Deep into the night monkey began to eat the eggs! he was so engrossed in this thievery that he broke into song. Tong onyang, onyang omera, tong onyang onyang omera, loyo tong duto gi mit, ka amwonyo achiel to

mwoch ni pup, ka amwonyo achiel to mwoch ni pup (The eggs of crocodile are sweeter than all eggs, whenever I swallow one there is a resounding pop sound) Crocodile overheard monkey singing in the night but did not understand his words. He thought his guest was uncomfortable, so he asked monkey what the matter was but the treacherous monkey lied, "I was just singing" Agoch onyang, onyang omera, agoch onyang, onyang omera loyo agochni doto gi liet (The veranda of crocodile is warmer than all verandas). This went on all night till daybreak when the visitation ended and monkey jumped on crocodile's back to get across the river to show him where monkeys kept their hearts. While on the way they kept hearing a voice, which happened to be crocodile's wife. She had discovered all her eggs missing and was alerting crocodile whose hearing was not very good. Crocodile asked monkey what his wife was saying, and he lied "she says swim faster" and crocodile took the cue, swimming monkey to safety. When they reached the other side of the river, monkey jumped off crocodile's back on to a tree and plucked a big raw mango which he hurled onto the face of crocodile, claiming that was his heart! This was the kind of trickery and gullibility mother warned against. Be always honest, thankful and gracious but be witty...these were mother's counsel

Teacher

Silence! When you come to school it must be on time, be silent, be clean and run, run everywhere; there is no time to waste anywhere in this world. Hey! come here...your shirt must be tucked in all the time, socks

pulled to the knee and the tie firmly on your neck!

Voice Each subsequent day you went home with loads of homework but you still had to do your laundry, the khaki shorts had to get dry, so you lit the heavy metallic charcoal iron box...this was a box...real box. It took tremendous luck to have it hot but that was before your khaki shorts diminished the power supply. You still had to do the homework and sleep! After all who would let a primary school child sleep after nine?

Mother Go to bed! You need to wake up early in the morning, stop everything you are doing and...

Voice If this was said more than once you were considered disrespectful and did you want to know the consequence? You slide under the bedding and thanks to mighty sleep that knows no bounds. You are fast asleep when...

Mother Did you take a shower? Wake up! How dare you come to bed dirty...?

Voice This was absolute torture, you dash out of bed never forget this was in middle of July in Nairobi, so you get to the bathroom and who said there was the option of hot water? Forget it!... it was below freezing and it was very ungodly hours! Do not forget the homework is incomplete and the uniform is not dry! (Next day at school)

Teacher If you have not finished your homework stand up, those who finished bring your books in front of the class...

Voice You quickly conjure the trickster in you; you wonder how to escape this, The consequences are dire you will lie down and receive six to nil they called it and still attend the lesson standing on your feet all the way. If you did not read for the next class Mr Eri the Geography teacher was out for you, he would begin asking questions long before he entered class. If he called your name and you did not give the correct answer you remained standing and the consequence was scary to say the least...

Mr. Eri Close your books!

Voice And with electric precision every book was closed

Mr. Eri Where are the Fouta Djalon Mountains...? Lawrence

Voice I looked around pretending it was not me. But who would fool Mr. Eri?

Mr. Eri Where are the Fouta Djalon mountains...Lawrence Chiteri?

Voice I pray for magical powers to flip my book without him seeing...

Mr.Eri Peter Owolo?

Voice My case got sealed. This teacher never asked me the questions I knew their answers so I thought. Yet that was the way with Certificate of Primary Education. It was given the acronym common pencil examination. Three hundred thousand of us and only one hundred and fifty would go to form one in secondary school, the process of elimination made animals of my teachers and they perfected it!

Song Chini Ya mwamba ni mwanzi yo na ndondizo, chini ya mwamba ni mwanzi
Yo na ndondizo, akiwa nzuri,samba, leo amekuja samba (Under the rock
is where you find safety, when the lion is happy, he is good)

Voice After primary school examination the dream of secondary school turned into a huge reality. I was still feeling great and expected a princely welcome. I was wrong! it was not to be with my metallic box I arrived at the gate and... these secondary boys can be big I wondered. Mother's story about chameleon the witty trickster and master of adaptation came to mind... One day chameleon challenged hare to a race promising to beat him hands down. Hare laughed so loudly that Chameleon decided that the race begins immediately. Hare had actually suggested that the chameleon begins the race five days earlier after which he would start and eventually beat him. The two decided to begin the race and after about five miles the hare could not see chameleon

Nonetheless he continued to run to the designated end. When arrived at the finish point he turned to face the direction from which he would see chameleon come, but before he sat down chameleon yelled at hi; “stop! Do not sit on me my friend, I came here before you”. Hare was astounded as to how chameleon had reached this place ahead of him. What hare did not know was that when they started the race chameleon jumped onto his tail and had been enjoying the ride from him. When hare turned to face the direction from which the race begun, chameleon stealthily jumped from his tail! Chameleon had technically won the race!

Boy You monocotyledon! Put that box down and stand at attention

Voice Nobody told me this was a military camp but did I have the time to mull over this?

Boy I say things once you idiot, put that box...

Voice I did not wait for him to finish, my instinct was to drop the box and recall my sprinting prowess at primary school. On second thoughts where was I going to run to? This school was in the middle of nowhere; forget the fact of my poor geography and add to it murderous parents, compliance would be better than flight.

Boy Line up here (I obediently Comply) ...no... start marching, left right...

(Anger) Stop...In a straight line you fools? By who were you vomited?

Voice He said something unchristian about our beloved mothers and tears begun dancing on our eyes.

Boy Now open your mouths and move the jaws after the movement of my palms

Voice We religiously complied, and the big ugly axe headed boy laughed derisively. I was about to let him know that I had just passed with flying colours but would he care? Another boy took over

Boy Down on your knees

Voice I have not said that it was late evening and it had rained, not to mention it was all muddy. We complied nonetheless.

Boy Hands above your heads.

Voice We all obediently complied.

Boy Now wail as if your ugly mothers have just died.

Voice My mother was still alive and hell, I had never seen a person wail!

Boy You short fat boy!

Voice I did what others did. All these happened even before we met the teachers and they were going to be seen the following day. The school was in the hands of these monsters doing what in civilized language is called bullying. I remembered mother telling us the story of how there was no actual forest and monsters in them. She said the monster character was inherent in deviant ways, bullying, taunting and molestation. Once upon a time there was a very beautiful girl in a village. She was so beautiful that she refused to get married to any man from the village who sought her hand in marriage. Whenever a man proposed to her she made one excuse or another to avoid marrying the proposer. She would claim a man was too short, too tall, and too dark skinned, too fat or too ugly. Every lady in her age group had married and lived very happy lives. One day a handsome stranger came to the village and the girl fell for him immediately, she agreed to marry him and they went away from the village to the man's home. When they reached the middle of the forest, the man showed the girl a house which he said would be their matrimonial home. At night after they had been sleeping for some time the lady woke up only to find an ugly stinking hyena by her side. She yelled out loudly before the hyena quickly turned into the handsome man, asking her what the matter was. When she said she had seen a hyena the man looked around before announcing that she was probably

dreaming. This happened for so long that the girl began suspecting that this man was the one turning into a hyena. One day the man thought he would be discovered and invited several fellow hyenas to eat the lady but the lady kept waking up all night and they could not eat her. Come the following day, she decided to escape. She walked for so long till she came by a river and begun to sing. She had been singing for a long time when a girl who was out to fetch water offered to lead her to the village where they were all happy to see her again. Mother was emphatic about human propensity to turn into monsters in the forest of life.

Voice The trend was pathetic, you went to the dining hall and your food was either all eaten or only less than half remaining. You went to your bed and you found it all wet from water poured to irk you. You reported to the principal and he was cold as stone.

Headmaster This is secondary school and food here is supposed to keep you going...not satisfy you. If you want to be near your mother, the gate is open...

Voice so you hung on hard. The four years were to culminate in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education; you looked at the previous results and knew it was going to be only eleven thousand, from a pack of one hundred and eight thousand for high school. Food or no food you surged on because this so called Kenya certificate of secondary elimination knew nobody, pampered nobody and respected none. There was only

one way out-pass the stage!

Prefect It is ten minutes to lights out, pack up and go to sleep.

Voice How does one sleep here in the wake of such stringent choices?

Prefect You are only a form one and a monocotyledon should only be seen not heard

Voice Survival, survival, survival. You get up at three in the morning and sat under the security lights, each of you facing vantage positions. If you saw someone you gave a signal and faded. You put a log in your bed so that when they counted people in the dormitories-you were “sleeping”. But darting eyes can do wonders. (The following morning)

Prefect Lawrence, Peter and Luke, come here.

Voice What have we done? That was the only question one asked the prefects

Prefect Lawrence, toilet one, Peter, toilet two, Luke toilet three... for staying out of the dormitory at night

Voice One should know what they called toilets, people deposited human dung all over. Remember that these were pit toilets with very huge holes into

which every soul in this school needed to carefully aim and deposit their waste. Yet many people who were past being asked to clean the toilets deposited their waste all over the floor. Some used the waste as “ink” and wrote using fingers all over the mess we called toilets You had to surely trust your navigation skills to evade the little mounds before you did your thing. Now, how would we clear all the mess? Only renowned village social misfits like Maundu (the wizard) were associated with profane bathroom manners and when they were spoken about it was in very bad light. The story is told about the wizard maundu...Maundu the wizard was a very toxic man indeed; he would wake up in the dead of night when every person was horizontal and proceed to the homes of other people to perform a very huge biological function. Maundu would not just do this profanity; he would choose the center of a homestead and ensured everyone knew he had been around. To add insult to injury maundu would head for the main door in the homestead and then turn his back to it before wiping his back side against it. The result was a smelly mess that the occupants would not fail to see and smell. This practice had gone on for so long that every affected member of the village was dying to catch this maundu wizard. One day a very old woman who had seen it all and for so long quietly devised a means to catch maundu. She did not tell anyone of her plan which was to break into many pieces of old and rusty razor blades. The old woman discreetly planted the myriad pieces of broken razor blades on the wooden door and because they were tiny nobody could see them. These blades were

super sharp and when the unsuspecting maundu the wizard had done his usual biological function, he proceeded to the door to wipe his back side only for him to halt after feeling a chilly sensation followed by a warm flow of a liquid he later discovered was his blood. A horrified maundu the wizard ran all the way to his hut, not knowing that the blood trail would lead the old woman and the villagers to his house! Maundu the wizard was captured and this menace was ended. I knew that after wadding through the wet anthills in the school toilet and after being subjected to cleaning them against our liking, we would certainly lay a similar trap so that our punishment for reading in the woods at night would be less woeful.

Voice The story of elimination could not be diluted by mounds of human waste. The water tank where we hid to read all night, the heart of vast corn fields where we shivered as we read, the stolen diesel from the water engine that lit the lantern lamp we smuggled into school and the sugarcane plantation, all came in handy before four years' worth of work came up to be tested and hurray! I got in the eleven thousand to high school!
(Song)

Voice Somebody once said in my hearing while I was in secondary school, that when you had a form four certificate it only ensured life for one person – that is yourself. When you had a high school certificate it supported you

and your wife but when you had a university degree it was security for the whole village. High school was arduous and knowing that only three thousand out of eleven thousand would join the one university in the country, one had to burn the proverbial mid night oil

Friend Wake me up at 3:00am when you are going to class...

Voice That is after you went to bed at 12:00am

Friend Mr. Tembuzi is the one on duty and you know how he traverses the school all night

Friend II We will find a way

Voice There was no will... it was always- must... and so we sneaked and snaked our way through the young school forest in the dead of night with night birds heralding the long to come morning.

Friend I Shhh...I see a light flickering in the dark behind the dining hall, it is a cigarette light...that is Tembuzi, lie on your belly, he is coming straight here

Voice Tembuzi was probably only looking for his turkeys' eggs that they hid while feeding in the day, but his antenna was so sharp. We escaped this

one. And seventeen months down the line we were battling the Kenya advanced certificate of elimination. Memories abound of classes going untaught for lack of qualified teachers, for many courses. Teachers who could do the job were mostly lazy and hardly came to class, so you were your own teachers. You worked in groups in the day and strived alone in the nightly escapades in the thicket till morning. Do not forget the loathsome junior students who envied and strove to destabilize you in every way. You had the steel after all these to break through!

Friend I want to be a lawyer

Voice You are not alone but how about the subject combination?

Friend The combination aside you must have fourteen out of nineteen points and bag three principals and one subsidiary

Voice Remember the forest? The abandoned toilets and the tobacco farm...?
We just have made it

Friend It will be freedom my friend, no more starving and the adventures of the night

Voice We made it to the prestigious university of Nairobi, that edifice first used by the Asians, as a royal technical institute during colonialism.

Friend I saw your name in the daily Nation newspaper...congrats...you are going to NYS (National youth service) ...

Voice God in heaven! I forgot the national youth service and the saying “when your friend has their hair shaved put water in yours” the rusted pair of scissors cut your hair literally and if you were lucky it did not pinch the scalp. They told us youth service was purgatory in essence

Friend So like a soldier you marched...left right...left right...

Voice Tell that to the birds... but in a way he was right, before you entered university you did an equivalent of the boot camp and you were lucky if you came out alive!

Officer Who invited you here...will you fade if you are not a serviceman...

Voice Father was stunned by this impudent and arrogant officer of the youth service who received us, this young man had the enthusiasm and determination of a hyena. He wore a stony look and rode the air of “I own this place... and what would do?” this was in my judgment an intoxicated and reckless academic dwarf, put in charge of people who had worked extremely hard at school. Was all this supposed to be punishment for not being eliminated by the rigorous examination

system? I recalled a Kiswahili proverb” ukitaka cha mvunguni sharti uinama” which means that whoever wants anything from under the bed must stoop. I wanted a degree and this was the time to bend for it.

Officer Fallen! (Line up) with your suit cases in the right hand. Now left right...left right...all of you must be clean shaven and it will be ten shillings

Voice Even those who already shaved?

Officer Nobody questions things or even has an opinion here...shut up

Voice I did not bargain for this

Officer Tell Moi (Kenyan president at this time)

Voice President Moi wielded almost divine authority and held the country literally by the throat and he still claimed he was not a dictator; this was a cold and expensive exercise but he hangs onto it as a way of breaking the spirit of intelligentsia and those in academia.so we trudged on...left...right...left...

Officer Parade! Odd numbers turn left, even numbers turn right...both ranks

right and left turn...

Voice: It was a crude sense of order. Nobody as far as I remember, had wanted to work in the military or less, become a soldier. It was one whole hell. On this first day we went to the mess (dining hall) for dinner but were indignant about eating since we had stopped by the local shopping center and eaten our dinner but how long was our having eaten going suffice?

Officer Quick...eat your food fast...there is no bone in your bread I am sure...

Voice I looked at the corn bread, it was supposed to be white but there were black spots that I realized were from the tea leaves left from the tea they must have cooked for breakfast...worse than all, I saw what looked like the stripping of a sisal sack...they used these to scrub the boilers...I was not going to eat this...the trick was to wait till they were not looking and ...phew! I stashed my bread under the table. But alas! These people had eyes trained for every mischief...

Officer Did you just throw away government food...? Hey come here all of you someone has thrown away government money...

Voice They swarmed on me like a set of vultures, they did not beat me but they should as well have. They passed their fingers on my face in disdain and

hurled very unspeakable epithets at me...I wish today that I had a... is it a gun?

Officer You will eat all the remaining food plus the ones others have dropped

Voice Everyone was cowed. This was not a place for normal humans to be. We woke up at 1:00am and ran till 5am and they had the face to call it a 5bx...they sent us to bed at 12:00am so one hour was all we slept for. We stood at parade till 9:00am and the aftermath was a lot of few people hitting their heads on the concrete with fatal consequences! You planted flowers in the morning and by mid-day you uprooted them after washing them with detergent! ...Food was dirty, little and half cooked...you hid in the water tank 150ft high in a bid to escape the parade, you took cover from the 5bx and waited to rejoin when the pack came bac,, that is if in the darkness you recognized your barrack members...or you paid for it by mopping the huge barrack using your bottoms! All because you wanted to get cleared to go to university.

Vice Chancellor Welcome to university, you are free to do everything that appertains to your degree when you graduate; so no supplementary, no discontinuation and you will have your honors degree.

Voice The power to read yet you have graduated? It was indeed a

bizarre understanding. This was gladly, not the extension of high school so you were on your own. This freedom to exercise came at no specific cost and many fell by the way...come graduation and the future lay beckoning very cruelly, they posted you to teach at a school without an inclination to your principles when you hoped they could do otherwise...

Teachers service you have worked well for sixteen years so we cannot discharge you from the school just now

Voice It is Muslim sponsored and they...

Teachers service It is a school in Kenya.

Voice They do not like me, they want me to convert...

Teachers service you are at liberty to refuse. About liking, that is mutual...ignore it

Voice They incite children against me

Teachers service you know what to do, discipline them. We will be behind you...after all who is principal?

Voice I take the cue, I recommend the discipline of a few inciters... the

school board rescinds the decision and I decide it is better to be a servant in heaven than a king in hell. I have worked my heart out, improved performance, upgraded the school and that is after sixteen years...give me my pension...I will go to America to upgrade and come back...

Teachers service Retirement age is 45, you are hardly...

Voice There is the option for early retirement

Teacher's service your application is...

Voice I have not even applied...

Teachers service I know, do it now although it will be rejected...

Voice What is there in money and benefits? I will go... and Missouri here I come but who will receive me? I know nobody so I spend my first night at the airport, it is colder than the peak of Mount Kenya and I feel like getting back home... but this must be scaled; there is no turning back...For a moment I recall a dilemma tale mother told me as a child. Once upon a time there was hyena that because of his character was not invited to a party, so he

decided that he would gate crash. He did not know exactly where the party would be so he relied upon his sharp sense of smell. He smelled the delicious food very well until he reached a cross way and did not know which way to go to fulfil his pursuit. Fearing that he would be too late to find food if he took one route and missed the place, he decided to walk astride the path and tore himself to death in the attempt. I decided that I would be better than the hyena and thus thought long and hard

Student When did you learn English? At the airport.

Voice How do you mean?

Student Do you share houses with lions...?

Voice How is that possible?

Student We read it all over...

Voice And the questions abound to date. Who taught you English, how did you arrive here? And then the snow! Never saw this substance before and the food...how do I fit a triple burger in my hands leave alone mouth? The accent, how do I doff it? The

classes, how do I prove my mettle? Sure they say a village cock does not crow in the city. Long hours in the library was the order of my life, a strenuous play performance in my American acting debut and...what a metamorphosis? I have my masters! The balancing act is tempting; it is crushing, 14 months from family and then a great reunion...Now you are student then father, then husband, and then the extended African responsibilities, it is indeed crushing... But when the sun sets we forget there was day and we lament. When it rains and stops we forget it was good and we lament...the terminal degree is more like it and so Illinois here we come...

Illinois you can do well with master's in mass communication

Voice Humm....

Illinois And you are not getting sponsorship, it is not your field

Voice I have a master in...

Voice In theatre!

Illinois Petition

Voice I want a PhD in theatre

Illinois It will be under speech communication.

Voice Theatre belongs under the umbrella of speech communication, do I have a foothold? Can I ask you something...about my...

Speech com your major is in theatre, ask the theatre department...your advisor is...

Voice Thank you, now that I am speaking with a theatre...can I ask...

Theatre Ask speech communication, that is where the diploma will come from...

Voice I have no voice, I have no place to put my head, and this will be tricky.
Missouri is the place they call good in Kiswahili, or so it rhymes and wow!
There is respite and I am home again...it is an awakening, a magical
illumination to things...dad said...this place holds the hope, the
answer...to all of us...it will take a balance, a multi layered existence and
the trickster must ride on. It is a journey...only it may have just begun
.And the trickster is indeed still astride

(Safari Song)

Chapter Four:

Dramatizing the Story: The Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival

The Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival also dubbed the largest single such event in Africa, provided a haven for my artistic value system for a period of over thirty years. That this festival is an elaborate and all-inclusive preservation mechanism for the traditional tale/story, helps me appreciate the lingering power of orature. Like the trickster character, I lived in this festival as a conveyor vessel as well as a creator and sustainer of the concept of the story as the fundamental feature of artistic expression.

This chapter will help me revisit in essence the wider relationship between theatre and traditional orature, by examining the origin of Kenya drama festival and how this illuminated the external influences from the west and how historical notions and practices clashed with, as well as reinvigorated the aesthetic power of orature. As a playwright, director, and actor at this festival, I will expose the making of festival items blending modern as well as traditional storytelling elements.

Introduction

The meeting point between conventional stage performances in theatre and traditional African qualities of a good storyteller have over forty years been expressed in the varied genres of the Kenya Drama Festival. Born of African propensity to tell a story in a vivid and expressive manner, the relationship between the story and the narrator on the one hand, and that of the narrator and the audience on the other, thrust the performer into the pyramidal apex of a unique power. African orature was a venture akin to taking a journey from the known to the unknown. What the storyteller knew was where they were going but they did not comprehend how far they would go; because this depended on just how skillful and manipulative the storyteller was.

For the storyteller to wield a magnetic touch on the audience, they needed to be well endowed with specific performance qualities, prime of which was dramatization. Since many African stories relied on animal characters, characterization was a cardinal aspect of performance and the hub of all this was the capacity to dramatize the roles into which the storytellers entered. The entry and exit into roles/roleplaying was a sacred endeavour and therefore called for exemplary execution by the performer/actor.

The storyteller was the leader of one huge ensemble-the audience- because the call to lead in storytelling was a collective drive that hinged on the responsibility and massive contribution of the body of performers as well as the audience. It is this call to journey, a journey to the unknown, that summoned the courage of every storyteller to

credibly arm themselves with the requisite armour (artistic capacity) to plunge into the theatrical world of dramatization in Africa.

It has been said in this dissertation that the Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival was the brainchild of the British colonizers, whose sole intention was to keep a tradition of performances within the ambit of the white settler schools. The white settler schools were attended by only white students, which meant that the national drama festival that was housed at the Kenya national theatre was the domain of the British colonizer in every conceivable way. The plays were performed in English and reflected the western/Eurocentric conventions, the actors and adjudicators were also exclusively foreign. The festival was not inclusive of indigenous Kenyan Africans at inception.

Any semblance of African indulgence in theatrical activities was christened according to Okpewho (1992) as the “little theatre phenomenon” whose sole aim was to help Africans strive through their performances to escape from the true realities of colonialism and its effects, as well as spread anti colonialism propaganda. At the height of Kenya’s struggle for independence in 1952, the national drama festival was started to solely inspire British soldiers and white colonial administrators. Sadly, according to Okpewho (1992) the drama festival was also aimed at serving the interests of the tiny educated African petty bourgeoisie. The educated African elite were completely either powerless, or at a loss for the spine to articulate African theatrical interest without reference to European conventional approaches.

It is important to observe that in the early 1940s (Ikpewho, 1992) the only notable African theatre initiative was exhibited through the Nairobi dramatic society that was largely a travelling outfit clamouring to take drama to the people. The taking of drama to the people was a travelling theatre organization that eventually also participated in the Kenya drama festival in 1955. Even though indigenous participation had started at the drama festival, the British colonists still regarded African theatre as operating under the tag "junior partner". In the struggle to have their own voice heard in the theatre world, the so called "Little theatre" worked hard to use comedy as the vehicle for their expressiveness in art (Ikpewho, 1992).

The Kenya national theatre was in existence solely to serve the interests of the foreigners (Ikpewho, 1992) and thus remained one of the many areas in which democratization after independence became necessary. Even after Africans began to feature at the drama festival, the plays were mainly by European playwrights. Afterwards though, this situation changed albeit slowly, as Kenyan Africans continued to feature in the drama festivals.

There however remained the question as to what it was that constituted a national theatre in Kenya. Incidentally, since foreigners who controlled political as well as the economic power were the owners of the national theatre that housed the national drama festival, community theatre phenomenon began to take the shape of a national theatre (Okpewho, 1992). The shift from the search for a national theatre to

community theatre saw the mushrooming of community cultural centres, where theatrical activities were conducted even in vernacular.

The diversion of theatrical activities from the centre (Capital city) where the national theatre was housed, invited serious scrutiny from the newly independent government because some of the themes tackled by community theatres were considered as dissent towards the government. Thus, the government clamped down on independent community theatres by refocusing on social centres in the city. The national drama festival started to accept African actors, officials, and adjudicators. At the same time plays written by Africans started to feature in a festival that was held at the National theatre till 1981, when the festival began to rotate in seven of the eight Kenyan provinces.

As the national drama festival became all inclusive, it expanded the scope from only plays; to verses and dances before it included narratives in the list of items for adjudication. The national drama festival also expanded to include primary schools and later colleges and universities. This festival that originated at the national theatre, which was a government facility, is still chiefly owned by the government through the ministry of education. The ministry of education thus set the agenda and has been running the festival to date.

National drama festival management

The Kenya drama festival is run by the ministry of education, which makes the minister in charge of the ministry together with the president of the republic patrons of

the festival. The ministry of education runs the drama festival as a co-curricular activity and therefore gives it the orientation of a competitive activity like sports. The ministry of education has a specific department that runs co-curricular activities and this department has a designated co coordinator of activities under the inspectorate of the ministry.

Today, management of the national drama festival is intrinsically tailored to bear the stamp of authority of the government of Kenya, which means that the regulatory principle is that government has the thermostat with which it measures and controls the essence of theatrical activities of the drama festival.

It will be remembered that this dissertation seeks to highlight the fact that African orature has been astride, riding on the back of several impeding forces first of modernity and then of political hegemony. The drama festival initiated by the colonial authorities was meant specifically for their entertainment and to allow them play Eurocentric conventions that satisfied their quest for enjoyment. That this festival was housed at the national theatre as an imposing symbol of dominance and elitism showed that exclusivity was the glue that held colonial theatre in Kenya.

After independence though, and as Kenyans sought a place in the white dominated world of theatre arts, it was immediately clear that orature was going to vie for space and eminence, thus suing for the position of a trickster astride two distinct theatrical worlds and conventions. Apart from clamouring to Africanize theatre and the eventual administrative as well as physical takeover of the national theatre by budding

Kenyan elite, the post-colonial government took over administrative as well as artistic hegemony that has characterized theatre in Kenya to date.

The fact that the national theatre fell in the hands of government which was followed by stacking the national drama festival firmly within the ministry of education, meant that the state had the theatrical pulse of the country under its thumb. Under these circumstances, it can be safely argued that the art of orature found itself riding on the back of a marauding power that was equivalent to perpetually taking the position of the astride.

It is in recognition of governmental bureaucratic control that I discuss the organization of the national drama festival. Government control has been the bane of free artistic and creative essence, although the development of talent among directors and actors has sustained the nature of Kenya's artistic expression. A few unfortunate instances of political insensitivity to artistic creativity, will summarize the notion of orature existing as the trickster astride even after Kenya became independent. It became ironical that whereas the budding Kenyan elite were struggling to Africanize and by extension decolonize theatre in Kenya, they became faced with monumental political insensitivity, censorship, and reprisals.

The sad state of what I believe to be prescriptive theatre automatically crept into the national drama festival. The national festival had been housed at the national theatre and after every festival; the winners went on a national tour showcasing the tremendous growth of artistic talent to the eight regions of Kenya. However, this was

changed and in its place the national festival winners have to date been visiting state house in what is called a state concert.

The state concert, far from emphasizing state stranglehold on theatre serves to ensure that only items palatable to officialdom are watched by the head of state and precludes a veiled attempt at censorship. Paradoxically, if a winning item is deemed to be of negative political ilk, the organizers of the festival have the authority to substitute them with the so called politically correct ones. This process is and has been inimical to the creative rendition that free theatre is known to thrive in.

When I was a student and had occasion to be part of the state concert, the fun was not only in being part of a party in state house but also in the prospect of cash rewards. The cash rewards to students and directors were enough enticement for being politically correct, thus ensuring a malleable theatrical tradition coiled in government ambit. It has been an open secret that the government of Kenya under whose administration of theatre has rested since independence has both out rightly and by implication suppressed and thwarted artistic freedom and development.

Banham (1995) enumerates the several instances when the national drama festival and other theatrical outfits have been subjected to state suppression of the arts. In 1979, Riara mission school with their play *There are two worlds* was raided by government security operatives. The result was that the schoolteacher faced interdiction for being part of a play considered to be politically “incorrect”.

In 1982, officials of the national drama festival tried to nullify results that had been arrived at by the adjudicators, obviously because the items they had declared winners were not going to sit pretty with government that was ultra-sensitive to free expression of thoughts and opinions. In the same year, it was reported that a play had been declared banned from being performed and this was followed by the banning of an item presented by a teachers training college. The actors and officials of the teachers training college were harassed and their script confiscated.

The result of government intimidation of people of theatrical orientation did succeed in not only stifling thoughts but also the freedom to comment on national issues. The suppression of creativity and free democratic thoughts was systematic and damaging to the essence and growth towards a free theatrical spirit. Banham (1999) continues his lament at the lack of goodwill from the government where theatre is concerned. Ngugi wa Thiongo was detained after he got embroiled with the government functionaries in conflict over the needs and intention of the community theatre group at Kamirithu community, educational and cultural centre in Limuru Kenya.

Other than government action curtailing the inexhaustible flow of creativity among the local population, Ngugi's colleague Ngugi wa Mirii, lost her university job and Ngugi wa Thiongo himself had to spend the rest of his life in exile after release from detention. The government interference and lack of political will hindered prospects by the national theatre to reassert its position as a national institution; which was aggravated by the removal of the national drama festival from the national theatre

space. These were worsened by the continued domination of the national theatre by foreigners and expatriate companies Banham, (1999).

At a very personal level, I still remember how a government functionary overseeing teachers' drama elections blatantly refused to listen to the will of the people and barred a popular candidate from contesting an election he was poised to win. The excuse was that this teacher was already holding a higher position in the teaching fraternity although precedents had proved otherwise. The truth was that an elected drama official whose loyalty would be to those who elected him was dangerous for official stranglehold on how drama was to be run.

At one time in the western region of Kenya, a provincial director of education banned a play that had been declared a winner and was due to represent the province at the national drama festival. The excuse was that the content was too strong for the level and age of the performers, although the obvious reason was that it was openly putting the existing regime to account through its thematic exploration. Never mind that the same performers were handling some literature texts of more mature content that was acceptable because of not being political.

In 1994, St Mary's school Yala had a play "The ticking clock" winning invitation to that year's state concert at the state house. During normal security screening, a student was found with a stage prop that had been used as currency on stage, bearing a scribbled portrait of an opposition leader in the country. The officials harassed the whole school team and the teacher together with the students were subjected to

rigorous grilling that ended in the teacher being interdicted from her employment as a teacher. The unfortunate result was that the teacher left teaching and never participated in any creative activity henceforth.

The national drama festival in my view has since independence been mired in officialdom and this has characterized our theatrical expression in a manner that belies the Kenyan struggle for independence. This has made it appear that after the British left, what remained was sheer change in complexion. The fact of the matter is that the colonial government was not at ease with African performances, first because African genres were supposed to be of a lower cadre and second, because agitation for independence was a challenge to authority. Unfortunately, after the colonist left the government imbued policies that were so repressive that theatre had to be controlled to curtail discussion of existing political ill will.

While thinking about the fact of transition from Eurocentric theatrical conventions and the role of the drama festival as the springboard of a new theatrical dispensation in Kenya, I cannot avoid thinking about theatre as a revolutionary agent. In Kenya we therefore seem to have lost the opportunity to emphasize on the creation of not only the spirit of Africanizing theatre, but also the chance to give birth to a distinct African identity as enshrined in orature.

In his article about Black revolutionary theatre in America, Kaufman (1971) decried the confusion surrounding African creation in their plays of protagonists in the process of discovering and affirming selfhood through their experiences and

confrontations with a segregated society. The interesting shift in situations from a colonized to an independent people may have obliterated the dominance of Eurocentric conventions in the wake of struggle to keep Kenyan orature alive and relevant, without an alternative force inhibiting that realization.

According to Kaufman (1971) When government censorship takes centre stage, the theatre begins to prescribe life as it should be, as opposed to as it is. Since the drama festival bred African elites struggling to create a theatrical experience surrounding African essence, it would have been prudent to encourage the foundational level to take a free dimension as opposed to a government driven agenda.

Kaufman (1971) suggests the existence of a kind of theatre that demands audience participation to shape the outcome of its own terms if the ordered actuality drama's traditional promises are to be achieved. Under the circumstances of the transition from colonial to independent Kenya, it would have been expected that dramatic form as a self-contained holistic artifact could yield to an idea of the theatre that depends firmly on the spectator's act of perception and their integral relationship to the theatrical experience Kaufman (1971).

The absence of an audience based theatrical form immediately belies the traditional orature orientation and answers to what Kaufman (1991) refers to as the alienation and estrangement in western theatre from the common populace as it thrives on a despairing civilization. The political interest in civilizing every facet of the Kenyan

society after independence took centre stage; and made theatrical contribution to the kind of civilization that would encompass theatrical contribution a nullity.

Sadly, the insensitivity of the political class to theatrical activity and existence, robbed the nation of the opportunity to breed an audience audacious enough to put society to rights (Kaufman, 1991). It was hoped that with the attainment of independence, the notion of western drama which Kaufman (1991) calls a hermetically closed system that is closed and destructively conservative would find its exit too.

It is intriguing that whereas traditional orature in form and structure was viewed as the platform for conservatism, the independent government ironically sought to limit indigenous free expression in solidarity with western conservatism. It will be remembered that Eurocentric shows in Kenya reflected lifestyle of the western kind of civilization and was at big variance with the aspirations of the indigenous people.

As Kaufman (1991) aptly summarizes the situation, whenever western theatre performed any political act it was meant to conserve the status quo. And the status quo is in my understanding why the government loves to have the national drama festival and all theatrical activity under their control. It has been widely forgotten that the notion of catharsis, an emotional purgation of the audience's collective energies; means that theatre acts like society's buffer, sponging up all the moral indignities that if translated into action could affect substantial change in the society Kaufman (1991).

A pent up society would naturally yearn to direct their energies to a place that thaws them. These energies were thought to be so homogeneous that the national drama festival could sponge them up without necessarily antagonizing the status quo. The political class are so vigilant that the furthest that the elites could go in Kenya was in dramatic literature and novels. Writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo and Francis Imbuga were mostly barred from being common features on the Kenyan stage, especially with their penchant for literature that was deemed volatile in political tone.

The fact of government versus theatre has however not entirely killed the need for a theatrical experience and the national drama festival has continued to be the place to nurture creative excellence in Kenya. It is like the spirit of orature is enshrined in the drama festival where it flows like one massive river whose course cannot be diverted. The drama festival is still a place of glamour and has found a way of endearing itself to both officialdom and the populace's hunger for theatrical nourishment.

As an activity under the ministry of education, the drama festival has a set of rules and regulations crafted by an overseer - the Kenya institute of education. The drama festival management falls under the inspectorate, where a coordinator of activities is designated to sit in drama committee meetings to report on and direct deliberations by directors who are usually government employed teachers. At the national level, the secretary of the drama festival is an appointee of the ministry and therefore teachers have no say over his or her mandate at the festival.

The rest of the officials are elected by delegates from the eight regions of the country. The national drama committee is an administrative unit that sets the agenda for the festival all over the country. The committee posts adjudicators to the regions and appoints national adjudicators in addition to administering the national drama festival. At the regions, the festival is administered by the regional as well as county ministry officials and run by committees comprising elected teachers.

At the national level the committee was a joint office comprising officials of primary, secondary, college and university institutions. This changes at the regions, county, and Sub County levels, where each level of learning runs their festivals. Other than drama committees there are festival officials who help the drama committee to run festivals at every level. The festival officials are by the ministry of education requirements supposed to be exclusively teachers.

The process of electing drama officials at the county level involved each participating school being represented by two teachers of drama, who form an electoral college of some sort. The chairpersons of the county and the regions are by decree heads of schools and are seconded by the head teachers' association to the drama committees. Other officials are elected in an election overseen by an officer of the ministry of education at the county level.

The school principals are the accounting officers because they are the ones who control the money that funds drama festivals at the sub counties, counties, and regions. The principals operating under the head teachers' associations, are the designated

financers of school activities. The reason for the central role played by school principals is because every school in each area collects activity fees that go to the activity fund run by head teachers' association.

The officials at the county level are the ones who produce three delegates from their elected offices, to form an electoral college that elects officials of regional drama committees. The regional officials in turn are the delegates that form the electoral college that elects national drama officials. A look at the way national drama officials are obtained reflects a tight bureaucracy at the head of which is the government through the ministry of education.

There is an extent to which national drama officials are instrumental in the growth and development of the festival by ensuring that it runs smoothly. Otherwise many officials are neither professional drama personalities nor are they direct producers of the art for which they officiate at festivals. Talking about producing art here refers not to the financial support accorded drama activities, but instead is about the artistic contribution that should nurture and sustain theatricality in academic institutions.

A lot of drama patrons in schools are driven by the glamour that comes with officiating at any level of school activities. The result is that a host of ignorant and unfeeling people, who are mostly insensitive to the demands of theatrical existence, populate official positions that at times frustrate and cripple those with eyes for theatrical expression.

Drama officials are also the best financially remunerated and the lure for enterprise tends to overshadow the inclination to creating art. Festival officiating of drama is lucrative and does not demand extraneous artistic endowment to indulge in. In many cases teachers of drama are at best the intermediaries between the drama students and the school administration on the one hand and the ministry officials on the other. A huge percentage of the drama produced by schools are therefore the direct work of students themselves, someone hired from outside the school set up for the job of writing and directing a script, and very rarely a professional teacher interested in the arts.

The quality of drama produced by schools is generally lopsided because in situations where there are teachers who have mastered the art of artistic production, the result has been tremendous show of quality work. The flipside of this situation has been characterized by less than impressive artistic showing by students themselves or outsiders that are not teachers. The drama festival, being a tightly knit bureaucracy operating under terms that some teachers do not comprehend, sometimes exposes most students to rude shocks during festivals.

The artistic demands as well as actual festival rules of engagement tend to overlap in a manner that shrouds theatricality in ways that can be difficult for many patrons and students to comprehend. Thus, many participants at the festival, at the end of the day, are least concerned with the development of art but are instead clearly conveyor belts of the season for whatever potato it thrusts in their soup.

I was only a sophomore when we were compelled to join a sport and a club in the school and be able to attend a meeting of each. The school had not been represented at the drama festivals, but I had friends who in their schools, drama was a central feature in the first term of the school calendar. I asked a teacher if I could introduce a drama club in the school and was allowed to proceed and do so.

At this time in schools of a boarding nature like the one I was attending, club meetings were dominated by the prospects of outings at which places students cherished the change in diet, the pleasure of riding in a school bus and meeting members of the opposite sex. According to my drama friends in other schools, the business of drama was different and very seriously involving. There was need to have a script of whatever genre one chose to produce and then cast, rehearse and be directed before getting to the festival.

There was no teacher in my school with the background of drama and thus we were going to be on our own. I remember going to the dining hall to announce that there would be a drama meeting in the school hall on a Wednesday (Clubs Day). I followed this announcement by convincing fellow students, particularly those in my cohort and very close friends. I expected a huge turn out when I entered the hall at 4:00pm. I was taken aback when at 5:00pm there was nobody else apart from myself in the school hall. There was only one hour to the end of the time designated for club meetings and frustration engulfed me in a manner that shook me to the core of my emotions.

At 4:35pm came one student who was very enthusiastic about drama. I knew he had come to the school hall after participating in another club activity and therefore I was not amused by his presence. To add to my hopelessness this student stammered, and in my naiveté, youth, and inexperience, did not see the worth of ever having a drama club with two people one of whom stammered.

I was, however, so struck by the bubbling nature of this other student that we started to warm up to each other in a unique and very distinct manner. We extended our talk past the time designated for clubs meeting and at the end of the meeting we agreed I would bring some written lines to the next meeting. I have since cherished the meeting with this boy who stammered because, together we started a long-standing drama tradition in the school.

The interesting thing about all this was that we had a patron whose sole duty it was to bridge the gap between the school administration and the drama committee. Through the teacher we got financed to drama festivals and had an authoritative person to accompany us to those festivals. Through the teacher we also knew the dates and venues of festivals. That is the sad story of drama for and by students. This scenario is also what transpires in many schools to date, even as officials from the schools to the national level get compensated for being drama officials.

The struggle to put drama on stage with little or no help from drama teachers or patrons that I experienced is not an entirely isolated case even today. I worked as a teacher for sixteen years in high school and can attest to the fact that many items that

find their way to the drama festivals are a direct product of the work of former students or freelance directors. Freelance directors trot the drama landscape dangling hurriedly written scripts, some of which are plagiarized patchwork of former festival winners or renowned playwrights.

The dearth of professional scrip writers and directors from within the teaching fraternity is the bane of creative talent at the national drama festival. As a product of a school system where drama patrons need not be direct producers of theatrical work, I understand the pain that students undergo grappling with festivals whose demands and regulations they hardly know or can even comprehend. I worked as a teacher in a county where out of fifty schools only two schools brought a play to the festival that was a direct artistic work of a teacher in the respective schools.

The fact that many drama officials are themselves honestly ignorant of theatrical conventions and practices is responsible for the stranglehold on theatre by the political establishment. The survival of theatre in schools in Kenya can be safely attributed to a strong background arising from the tradition of orature. Every child and adult had a storytelling background and therefore had a story to tell; the difference when it comes to theatricality is how that story is told.

When I wrote my first festival script, I based the dramatization on storytelling which I randomly did by creating dialogue and characters. I still cherish the appearance of a fellow student who stammered because through him, I took the habit of using weakness as strength. I remember using the stammering of my fellow student as the

basis of a story and when he acted his role it looked like he was just acting the role of a person who stammered.

The drama patrons at every level of the drama festival meet at the beginning of the year and based on national festival dates, set dates and venues for sub county, county and regional festivals. The venues are mainly school halls designed with little or absolutely no thought for theatrical production. The schools that are lucky to have a hall of some sort host the festivals perennially. At the sub county level schools are free to participate based on open qualification.

The question of venues and the stages on which drama performances take place differ immensely depending on where these festivals are hosted. The timing, whether during colonial time when they were performed at the national theatre or well after independence when the festival went out of the city has not seen a transformation on the performance spaces. It is obvious that our traditional performance spaces could no longer hold the type of performances we inherited from the British.

We therefore adopted the proscenium stage complete with a cyclorama at the back of the stage to hide actors, an apron to hold dances, side flaps to help with exits and entrances and the frontal curtain to hide scenery before the performances start as well as signal the end of performances. These demands were too extraneous and still remain so for many schools that hardly have the finances to construct such stages leave alone afford to finance a festival production.

The imbalance arising from the rating of schools in terms of whether they are national, regional, county and sub county, influences the standards of performances because the hierarchical structure reflects economic muscle or otherwise. This is not to say that many schools have not in the past upset the form book and performed exceedingly well depending on factors both financial and artistic or both. Again it is worthy to note that the idea of a performance in the African sense of the word and the essence of free flow of theatrical artistry thrived before the British brought in a huge building and called it a theatre.

African traditional performance spaces ranged from the private huts to the public village meeting points where large and general audiences sat in the round in keeping with the communalistic essence of the social set up. The stories were tied specifically to an entertainment value and to a moral lesson/teaching and paid little attention to the idea of a performance space. The performers were thus expected to be themselves people of impeccable moral probity and their rendition was well timed to comment on topical issues and/or challenges.

The audience went to a performance session to carry away something more than they brought into the performance session, which greatly insubordinates the thought of space. This picture was somewhat modified so to speak, as Kenya interacted with the western concept of dramatization/theatre. The idea of theatre as the performance space/building saw a magnificent theatre space constructed and before performances were held here, weeks of rehearsal, advertisement and chunks of money would have

gone down the drain. The theatricality of British performances brought in elaborate lighting, sound, costumes, settings and sitting arena among many others which our meagre funds in schools can hardly sustain.

These new theatrical elements surrounding the idea of a theatre building quickly replaced the simple African sitting in the open to watch free shows that relied on imagination for lighting, costumes and sound devises like the drum, horn and gongs! The conflict in notions as to what constituted theatre and performance of African shows were married by one factor-dramatization and the national drama festival struggled to be the magnifying point of convergence.

The African story was a collection of everything that could be attributed to one lead performer who when they could, engaged the audience in helping them play roles if they themselves were not carrying the full body of roles in one show. This position eliminated the desire for physical scenery, lighting and elaborate costumes, to produce spectacle. This is why many schools in the country have to contend with an audience reliant fully upon the new concept of them versus us, where the actors became “them” and the audience “us”

The African performer was rated as an excellent storyteller if they could step into a role and move it through the end of a performance session. They needed to be well versed with all the previous performances so that they could tell the story with a tinge of freshness each time it was rendered because needless to say, almost all stories were familiar to the audience. Devoid of externals like costumes, make up and special

effects, the performer was almost the space where theatricality reposed. To replace this set up with a Eurocentric arrangement that made the audience passive consumers was a thing the schools and colleges drama festival has had to grapple with.

The storyteller used mimicry to play different character voices and dramatized every action representative of the characters into whose roles they entered. Furthermore, this performer had to listen to and distinguish the varied voices in the story in order to play the dialogue which also helped them play multiple roles making them the centre of theatrical performance. The power of drama was inherently tied to the capacity of the performer to deliver and bring to life the various voices, characters/traits and personalities represented in the story and is why the new concept of space came with new challenges that the drama festival seem to have lost sight of.

The Drama Festival

The idea of the festival in Kenya before the coming of the British is adrift the Greek city Dionysia. The festival in Kenyan societies was described by the occasion and the fact that everyone was called upon by the spirit of communalism to attend. The idea of festival was connected to the five rites of passage namely; the birth of a child, naming of the child, initiation, courtship/ marriage and death. What made these festivals associated with drama is the fact that their climaxes were celebrated through song, dance and recitation/narration.

Even though these festivals were said to be virtually ritualistic acts, it is only fair to acknowledge that the religious significance of every ritual was given impetus by the

dramatization of every stage in every ritual whose climax was the ultimate interpretation that was done through artistic performance. Reveling was also part of the festivals where there was an avalanche of food and drink but these were only side shows that veiled the concept of drama that lay behind the scenes.

Festival Organization

The Kenya drama festival runs for a period of four months from January to April, with all schools and colleges beginning preparations as early as eight months before. This way it is conceivable that the drama festival has a permanent mark on the life of art in Kenya, even though it is just one of the many co-curricular activities in Kenyan schools. There exist several layers of the festival right from the sub counties which are the smallest administrative units, to the highest level-the national festival that runs for eleven straight days.

The festival calendar is set by the national committee which sets the national dates that help the rest of the levels to set their own calendars. The first step every year is usually to have a meeting of drama officials from the sub counties to the regionals, to set dates, decide on venues and assign festival officials. The next business is then to decide on a drama teacher's workshop to train new patrons, refresh the existing ones and discuss festival themes, rules, regulations and emerging trends.

The festival then begins at the sub county levels and depending on the number of sub counties, the drama committee decides how many items by schools, qualify for the county level. I worked in a county where there were three sub counties and each sub county had to for example qualify only five plays, three dances and six verses (three solo and three choral). It therefore meant that the county festival had space, time and money for only fifteen plays, nine dances and eighteen verses. This happened in a county that then had a total of sixty schools.

If every school in the county participated it would mean that far from being ultra-competitive, the festival as it is constituted stifles the growth and development of nascent talent. However, owing to meagre resources, many schools never manage to present an item at the sub counties. Ironically, some counties never even have the requisite number of participants, meaning every item that appears at the sub county qualifies for the county level. Again, this disparity shows the struggle by many institutions to find a forum from where to express their art in a manner that is consistent with existing conventions and standards.

There is thought that whereas some sub counties have to struggle to qualify because of the huge numbers making festivals the place for stiff competition, other sub counties have little or no competition. The result is that the meeting at the counties is never a festival of equals and tends to make pretentious assumptions that everyone is on the same page in terms of contribution, talent and theatrical acumen. This position is

made tricky considering that at the county level only two of the fifteen plays qualify for and proceed to the regional festival.

The fifteen plays in some counties would be of very good quality although there are numerous instances where the disparity between them can be glaringly absurd. In the region where I worked, there were thirteen counties, which meant that at the regional festival there were thirty-nine plays competing for the two slots that every region in the country qualified to the national. When one thinks about these cut offs, it looks like it is smooth and reflective of standards of drama at all levels. So many good items fall by the way while several mediocre items find their way to the national courtesy of the administrative arrangement alone.

The festival has representatives who officiate at every level to organize and run the programmes from the lowest level to the national. Every festival is officiated by a panel of adjudicators who are guided by specific rules and regulations pertaining to various genres, and they are the ones who decide the festival winners. The students who perform at the festivals are awarded certificates of participation, certificates of merit, trophies, cash awards or sponsorship of school fees in recognition of their exemplary performances.

Directors and script writers are recognized through certificates of merit and in some cases cash money. The festival is sponsored by the head teachers association of schools, and there is some corporate sponsorship as well. The adjudicators and officials are paid for their services, with adjudicators being the most paid. The festival is normally

preceded by a series of workshops of drama, where teachers are trained and sensitized on the current thematic factors of the day to be extrapolated at the festivals. There are also numerous adjudicators' workshops to train and polish adjudicators. This is a whole lot of organization to keep the drama and the festival where the African story wanted artistic expression to be- in dramatization.

Festival Adjudication

The position and role of festival adjudicators at the Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival seem to crave a whole lot of discussion, dissecting and reconfiguration. The term adjudication seems to suggest the idea of there being a judge to decide who takes what position in a contest. When I think about festivals and the notion of a contest I cringe to imagine that a theatre festival should leave sour thoughts in the minds of participants at the end of the festival if they win nothing.

Dossey and Walford (2006) state that a festival suggests a deliberation and joyful meeting of drama companies, which in essence means that the festival's original intention is not to establish winners and losers. The festive nature of human beings suggests reveling akin to the city Dionysian festival in Rome but seems to have taken a different character as the drama festival in Kenya reflects today.

It can be safely argued that the annual meeting of various schools to showcase their vibrant talent could be viewed as a celebration of a meeting of like minds to celebrate theatrical expression of new ideas, thoughts, and presentations. There is also the ever arching need to have people well positioned to regulate and guide presenters on the time they need to be on stage, how long they take setting and striking their set. This is why the role of adjudicators has been central to the drama festival.

Dossey and Walford (2006) have described the position of adjudicators in the following terms; they take their position sitting in the audience and take notes on every performance to comment on at the end of the festival, they are normally volunteers but are members of a professional body skilled in adjudication, and in England they are members of a guild of drama adjudicators (GODA). The suggestion is that adjudicators must be people well trained in the theatrical conventions of the day, which they need to understand and be very knowledgeable about beyond reproach.

The adjudicators are people fully accountable to the guild they belong to and are therefore supposed to live by the expectations of their trade and the professional body whose guidelines dictate how they perform at drama festivals. These are supposed to be people beyond reproach in every sense of the word. Their mien ought not to suggest an incapacitation in the understanding of theatrical conventions and styles of the day; and they must be persons reliable enough to explain in eloquent and professional terms the judgments they arrive at.

Dossey and Walford (2006) agree that the expectations bestowed upon adjudicators are not all easily achievable by those who work within the theatre, although there are basic guidelines that could shape the way the expectations are met. One such guideline is the marking scheme that elucidates in minute detail what adjudicators will be looking for and how the marks will be apportioned. It is not foolhardy to expect an adjudicator to fully understand the requirements of lighting, set, costumes, acting other effects and dramatic effects in every performance.

Yet the areas mentioned above are in themselves intricate and are the domain of highly professional acquisition before anybody can profess to know how they play out in a performance. The performers need to have trust and faith in those who adjudicate because at the school's drama festival in Kenya, students and their directors invest so much time, money and emotions in the festival, that anything short of professional adjudication causes much pain and disgruntlement. It is based on this that I want to discuss adjudication at the drama festival in Kenya.

The only reliable background in the theatrical past of most adjudicators at the drama festival in Kenya is the fact that they are persons who have had experience as actors, officials and directors of the drama festival. Those who have long time experience at the drama festival occupy the highest respect and are reliable at least in the eyes of those who know them and their contribution at the festivals. The only time there is an attempt to achieve a unified standard of adjudication is when the drama committees organize an adjudicator's workshop.

The workshops are in themselves merely the forum for theoretical discussion on ethics of adjudication and the marking schemes of festival items (plays, narratives, verses and dances). Granted, the adjudicators' workshop at the national invite renowned practitioners of theatre however, the truth is that their experiences are not based on professional history but longevity at the festivals.

At other levels of the festivals, adjudicators' workshops are tied together to the general drama workshop and in fact adjudication is treated as a topic coming at the end of the workshop for at best twenty minutes. The role of adjudicators at the drama festival, especially following the myriad complaints from directors, calls for professionalization of this part of the festival. If we inherited the festival from the colonialists in its entirety; conventions, organization, and the general spirit, we could as well go for the British style of having a professional guild for adjudicators.

Other than having some well-exposed theatre personalities, the growth of the festival in scope and size requires that adjudication is handled with more urgent professionalism than ever. The scope of the festival has grown from merely being about a one act play festival that it was when it was started by the colonialists, to a host of items. Today there are many items to adjudicate namely, plays, verses, dances, narratives film and the French play.

Because at sub county levels there are usually two adjudicators and at the county as well as the regional festivals there are three, it should be far more difficult to find in the whole country enough persons that could muster all the expertise covering

the festival items. It is therefore foolhardy to imagine that festival results always reflect the artistic mark tied to results given at the end of any such festival.

Cries of foul have rent the air after many drama festivals, mainly because of lack of faith by directors in the adjudication results. The main reason for such cries is that a lot of times adjudicators have little or no expertise whatsoever to govern their decision making. Also, many people who end up occupying adjudication benches are novices in the theatrical world. They are people posted to the adjudication bench on the basis of their proximity to the festival officials, or for lack of alternatives, they are always available.

There is a huge want for theatrical training in general and most urgently in the area of festival adjudication in Kenya. This is because the exposure of the students and teachers to emerging theatrical trends is expanding as globalization takes root in the country. The students and directors are today more exposed to theatrical experiences that require like-minded if not better, to help adjudge festivals for more balanced and credible adjudication in order to consequently polish theatrical acts.

Currently, adjudicators whose position Dossey and Walford (2006) describe as basically voluntary, has been turned into a mini employment albeit of theatre novices and ne'er do wells. Adjudicators of drama festivals in Kenya are the most handsomely paid compared to other co-curricular activities in schools. The amount of money adjudicators earn which is erroneously dubbed honorarium, has led to a big scramble for this position. Festival officials have found a way of trading the position of

adjudicators during posting, in exchange for similar payback for entrepreneurial interests.

There is the rampant habit of an official in one county posting an adjudicator from another county in exchange for being posted in that county, so that the two are well positioned to earn some good money. The only guarantee in such an arrangement is always a compromise in drama results and standards. This arrangement goes beyond mere economic consideration because most festival officials are usually also drama patrons in their schools and therefore have items competing at the festivals.

The swapping of adjudicators also comes with festival result rigging in the favour of schools managed by the officials on the basis of “scratch my back and I will scratch yours”. Ultimately, this attests to the desire for professionalism in the realm of adjudication to instill discipline among participants and officials, and to ensure that growth of talent is not stifled. At the national festival adjudication posting also strives to reflect regional balance to play politics of inclusivity.

In a country riddled by tribal sectarianism, it is hard to post adjudicators without the fear that results may be attributed to one tribe’s dominance due to adjudication imbalance. The result has been the continued proliferation of less professional persons working as adjudicators coupled with squabbling by adjudicators over announcement of results.

Several festivals have ended with adjudicators not agreeing on who won, particularly in the play category, leaving directors and students alike losing faith in the

festival. Sometime in the not-so-distant past, the ministry of education promoted teachers on the basis of merit for exemplary performance of their students in co-curricular activities. These promotions led to a concerted effort both legitimate and illegitimate, to win drama festivals even if it was through compromising adjudicators.

Bribery has also reared its ugly neck at drama festivals due to high stakes surrounding these festivals. A lot of financial reward on individuals and the institutions that win also heighten the pressure on adjudicators and by extension adjudication of festivals. Many private schools endowed with massive resources have made drama the main agent for advertisement and the tool to recruit their prospective students.

Drama as a school activity is one of the biggest crowd pullers and thus comes with elaborate publicity particularly for winners. Here also is a ruse for meddling in adjudication because as they say in Kenya, adjudicators' decisions are final! There are also the so called drama "big names" which refers to the schools and teachers who have won in the past or the schools that are ranked highly due to past examination record and/or traditions. These schools tend to be favoured and adjudicators fall prey by being faithful to the politics surrounding the existence of the so-called giants.

I participated in drama festivals for over twenty years both as a student and a director and can enumerate ways through which festival adjudication has fallen short of the honorary position it should occupy at the festivals. One major incident occurred when a drama official whose school was not even at the festival succumbed to a few

rival school patrons whose desire to have my school disqualified for purportedly having a non-student actor spoke to the adjudicators not to adjudicate my play.

The truth was that these teachers wanted a school that had not qualified for the festival to replace my school because it was supposedly a small school. The adjudicators confessed to not adjudicating the play although students worked very hard knowing they were being adjudicated. In 1994 after my school had in the previous year performed exemplarily well, it became a target of adjudicators who were also rival teachers in another county. The two gentlemen who adjudicated in our county made sure my school did not qualify and were heard to boast in their county that my county was “dead” for not being a threat to their own plays.

The plan was always to use adjudicators to eliminate threats to prominent schools, directors, and officials. I still remember in 2002 when at a regional festival my school scooped all the major awards but ended up not being anywhere near qualification to the national festival. One of the adjudicators later confessed that they were being faithful to demands of festival officials of the region not to let one emerging rich private school down.

In 1996, a play by my school was adjudicated out of the prospects of performing at the national festival ostensibly because the adjudicators who were themselves catholic thought the play had unflattering catholic sentiments. Furthermore, other considerations other than theatricality were at play at the adjudication bench. It is very discouraging and appalling for theatre that adjudication can be chaotic when this should

be the way to harness talent, instill a theatre culture replete with unique conventions, homegrown to reflect our rich orature and traditions.

The western region in Kenya has experimented with huge success, the idea of an adjudicator's guild, which vets all adjudicators before they are posted to the region. The western region has been known to demand from the national committee the posting of specific adjudicators whose records are known and are of impeccable performance. They have in addition had a set of their own adjudicators working parallel to the ones posted by the national office. This vigilance has ensured professionalism and eliminated foul play, favoritism, bribery and collusion.

In the absence of a clear plan for professionalizing adjudication through rigorous training, the only hope is in individual regions working around a guild of adjudicators that would vet, train and discipline those found to be wanting in their role of adjudication. This part of the festival is the fulcrum of theatrical and artistic development in our country; and should shape the direction we take towards nationalizing our theatre, in order to reflect tenets held and espoused by our traditional orature.

Festival workshops

The Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival begins with teachers of drama workshops run at three levels; the county, regional and national. These workshops are run by festival officials from the respective administrative units and are facilitated by selected and experienced drama trainers at various levels. The workshops

are expected to be the place to train prospective directors and choreographers in readiness for the festivals. The drama workshops are run from October to February.

Many drama workshops are facilitated by university instructors and experienced drama directors whose items have performed well and, in many cases, won the national festivals. It is based on this reasoning that workshop facilitators are selected in keeping with their area of interest. The scope of the drama workshops is mostly so wide that considering the number of days most of them run, the impact can be very ineffectual.

It is inconceivable how all the areas of drama can be effectively handled in just a few days, when some participants are usually of very little drama knowledge and experience. I can authoritatively state that a person who goes to the workshop because it is a training point may never use the interaction at the workshops as the means to create their own dramatic work. Many times the facilitators of drama workshops dwell on lecturing on mostly theoretical essence of theatrical expression.

The most challenging part of the drama workshops is that most facilitators are persons of dubious artistic training and therefore lack theatrical authority to train and physically teach festival participants. In the end, teachers of drama carry from the workshop's certificates of attendance/participation instead of certificates of merit for exemplary performance at rigorous and professional workshops. A good example of the crowded scope of the workshops is the fact that it is largely very challenging to handle plays at the workshop because the elements of a play are so wide that they can be taught in a whole course at college.

Scripting of a play, casting, directing, lighting, scenery, costumes and acting are very broad topics that cannot be compressed to fit in a workshop that handles adjudication, dances, narratives, and verses. The result is that drama workshops serve only as the forum where theoretical issues are set for discussion. Also, drama workshops require that those attending are of like minds and attend for purposes of sharing ideas with the view to set standards for future performances.

If we had workshops that take a scholarly character, then the idiosyncrasies of individual directors and other theatre practitioners may be compressed in such a manner as to give birth to acceptable festival trends. The trends would become the standard bearing for the participants by establishing the tone and mood of festivals. As it is today, many participants at drama workshops are at best passive recipients of theoretical speeches by facilitators or joy riders attending to earn the daily allowances.

I have attended drama workshops where many participants attend on day one and pay the workshop fees after which they disappear in the cities only to return to collect their certificates of "attendance". The purpose of drama workshops is defeated if participants do not carry away any tangible theatrical advantage. The workshops must have been intended to be the forum at which to disseminate nascent theatrical conventions in the wake of the choice by indigenous citizens' desire, to obliterate western theatrical conventions.

The concept of a drama workshop is most definitely a western concept and therefore calls for a formal and academic approach to learning and playing drama. The

nearest that oral traditions ran something like a workshop was whenever experienced performers allowed novices and so called apprentices, to try out instruments and perform during curtain raisers before main performance sessions begun. It will also be remembered that in most African communities, orature did not engender any form of training.

In my community, storytellers inherited the art from the mere fact of being observant and participatory members of the community. Every facet of life in the community was in actual sense a performance and everyone had a unique entry behavior in the way they interpreted and shared their oratorical skills. The growth and development in the field of performance in my community came with age and experience. This therefore presupposes the fact that everyday performance was a workshop of sorts; when one considers the thrust upon performers to make one performance as distinct and independent of the previous one as possible.

It is therefore recognizable that as Kenya drifted from tradition to modernity, the notion of training and playing specific conventions called for the need for workshops to help impart new trends. I have memories of drama workshops where strictly formal adherence to set western styles was the order of the day. Since we inherited the drama festival tradition from the colonialists, our efforts were first aimed at coloring the festival black as opposed to artistically inculcating purely traditional elements through integrating our collective traditional approaches to drama.

As a way of dismantling a drama tradition left behind by the colonialist, our drama festival pioneers strived to wrestle from the colonist the administrative as well as infrastructural dominance. Afterwards we quickly structured our performances around Eurocentric conventions and traditions with one such tradition being the drama workshop. However, the true spirit of a drama/theatre workshop has widely eluded us.

The drama festival having fallen in the hands of the government through the ministry of education, it became a curriculum property of the Kenya institute of education that formulated the syllabus. The drama workshop was therefore inevitably going to drum up the requirements of the ministry instead of taking an independent character. The independent character of the drama workshop would enable a spontaneous response to the theatrical needs, growth, and expressions of the students on the basis of experimentations wrought by the national festival of drama.

Once again, the elemental essence of orature found imprisonment in an institution that professed ideals it had no control over. There is absolutely no way that the drama workshops in Kenya will formulate dynamic theatrical conventions and oversee the radical desire to sustain a theatrical tradition indigenous to Kenya. This is exactly why as a community we hunger for shows that take on a deeply cultural dimension even if they are played on the stage of modernity. If the drama workshop is to boast some monumental impact in sustaining and remodeling traditional orature, there needs to be an academic and liberal twist.

We are richly able to converge at workshops with varied ideas, experiments, encouraging their competition and synthesizing the shared views into a body of thought that can propel a sustainable theatrical tradition. Regrettably, this is remotely possible as long as drama is still going to exist in the ambit of government and be the co-curricular activity instead of a serious pedagogical and artistic field of engagement. Nonetheless, this dissertation still finds the overriding nature of traditional orature creeping in between officialdom and walking the tight rope astride. This is glaring in the way various items at the drama festival enumerated below are played.

The drama festival is therefore a confluence of sorts, marrying the malignant oral traditions as enshrined in orature to the western concepts of theatre. This binary plays very mischievously in all the items of the drama festival as will be revealed shortly. This festival has since evolved to imbue several new forms of theatricalities, but the spine of every genre is very much reflective and respectful of the African power of performance—the story and its dramatization

The Dramatized Solo and Choral verse

Discussing the element of verse calls to mind two distinct factors that Albert Lord (2000) clearly defines as either the literary poem; written in a particular manner, and the form of an oral poem that is composed on the performance platform. He proceeds to advise against focusing on the moment a poem or verse is read or recited and emphasizes the moment when the verse or poem was written. In summary, this is a suggestion to the effect that the moment of composition is the most important. Herein

is the gist of performing an oral poem because by its very nature, it should be based on creation during performance and not prior arrangement or creation.

Albert Lord (2000) emphasizes the fact that the moment of composition of a verse or poem is the most important, which suggests that in the case of a literary poem there is always a gap between the moment of composition and the moment of performance. Therefore, there is always something lost or missing between the time of composing or creating a literary verse and the moment of performance which an oral poem does not get subjected to. This is why Albert Lord (2000) concludes that in the case of an oral poem there exists no gap between the moment of composition and performance because they are two aspects of the same moment.

I am interested in the critical features of poetry because through the elemental nature of poetry, I can appreciate the state of the verse as a performance item at the national drama festival in Kenya. According to William Raymond (1954) the English verse in drama exposes the writers of poetry as struggling with the difficulties posed by the existence of their verses in text and as performance pieces. This suggestion of conflict seems to contend that when composed for readership, the written verse takes a different character from that which eventually ends up as a performance item.

Raymond (1954) goes on to reveal that the written verse when subjected to performance does not conform to, nor does it function as a dramatic rhythm at all. He goes on to aver that in performance, not only does speech not stand alone but all the elements of movement, sound, design and costume affect the total experience of a

dramatic performance. The verse ends up therefore as a vehicle without the wheels to propel it if dramatic elements are excluded from its form and content.

It does not get lost to me that a recitation of the verse without the elements of drama is a possibility. But for a verse to survive a drama festival the two distinct features that connect the text and actual performance are cardinal. I am in full agreement with Raymond (1954) when he argues that a dramatic verse can only be fully subjected to performance if the dramatic movements and the scene are in the same dimension. According to him, the actor would otherwise have to follow several rhythms at once or move uneasily from one kind of representation and from one kind of reality to another. This situation would obviously lead to a lack of sync between the written verse and the performance on stage.

Raymond (1954) therefore suggests that two forces drive the verse as a performance piece; the writer and the performer. He also believes that the setting of rhythm of a verse performance is the sole responsibility of the dramatist who reintegrates dramatic elements into verse. This is why Raymond (1954) summarizes his argument by stating that as the actors speak the verse with their voices, everything else they do come not from the process of the verse but from the product. My understanding of this position is that the verse writer is submerged by the performer who inculcates elements that lead to a product whose epitome is performance.

As a proponent of orature, I take it from Raymond that the worlds of composition and performance are not necessarily complementary, because the verse

takes a different dimension when it is performed from what it technically looks like in the written text. The elemental aspects of performance can only be a product of a process of a written verse, after it takes a new shape and character embodied in a performer's ability to breathe life into it. There is a subsuming influence on the verse by the dramatization of the written text and the drama festival allows for this new nature of the verse by emphasizing the rhythms connected to performance.

There are ways in which the verse performed at the drama festival exhibits form and structure of orature without losing the academic poetry in its stylistic essence. In order to appreciate the differences between orature and the so called academic poetry, the argument by Susan Willett (2009) shades some light. According to her, a black face minstrel in America was the stage on which popular verse was performed in contrast to academic poetry, which informed and enhanced the understanding of more contemporary performance poetry. The national drama festival verse marries academic and performance poetry in a manner that highlights traditional orature.

Willett (2000) says that the tradition of blackface minstrels used song, dance and rhyme which did so much in aiding understanding performance poetry and its appeal to popular audiences. This appeal did not arise from the academic nature of poetry but the variety of performance elements that helped make poetic messages vivid and alive in the eyes and minds of audiences. That is why the visual and audio are the driving forces in delivery of a drama verse. The drama festival does not use published works and therefore chances of working on rigid scripts of verses are highly eliminated.

The works by students and their teachers are so homegrown that the composition of the verse already takes care of the moments of creation and eventual performance in an artistic and very deliberate manner. The festival verse is divided into solo and choral. The verse performer has five minutes to deliver the verse whose baseline is dramatization. The performer therefore relies on a strong voice and the ability to play vocal inflection. The performer is allowed to carry props and have scenery that is functional and less inhibiting to delivery.

The solo verse is the sole responsibility of the performer who must be the only voice unless they use imitation and play multiple voices. The solo performer does everything including singing and dancing and plays instruments. This performer has no kind of back-up at all and even draws the curtains without any assistance. This solo performer renders the verse in a manner that is reminiscent to a story with the beginning, middle and an end. The form and structure conform so much to orature that when singing and dancing are added to the verse, they rob it of the academic and written elements that the verse had at the composition level.

Since the verse is composed with performance in mind, the academic and poetic style gets subsumed in the eventual performance, and this is what marks a festival verse from an academic one meant only for analysis. The choral verse also runs for five minutes and comprises at least two and a maximum of twelve performers. The rule is that there must always be at least two voices at any one time and anytime one voice is

heard the team gets disqualified for breaching a choral requirement for the verse. The choral verse is a dramatized verse in performance and not a drama cum verse.

Therefore, all dramatizations are done during the flow of the story carrying the verse and must be echoed by all the performers in unison. Creative performers can use more than one narrative voice which must be delivered by at least two performers. The performers can divide themselves into distinct groups to play the dramatic elements that must flow with the pace and tempo of the verse. A look at the marking scheme for the verse indicated emphasis on performance and very minimal on the composition. It is notable that the elements of traditional orature dominate verse in terms of composition and structure.

Twenty points go to choice of the poem and hinges more on the subject matter, poetic structure, theme and language use. Here the idea is to see how the composition of the poem handles issues of a contemporary nature and how the thematic factors of the verses are clothed in poetic language as well as good grammar. Thirty points go to interpretation and performance, which entails stage presence, poise, relaxation, stage movement, pace, pauses, intensity, mood, expression and gestures. All these elements are cognizant of the performers' ability to deliver and are not exclusively based on the composition of verse.

Twenty points are allocated to delivery, whereby enunciation, pitch, intonation, projection, tempo and confidence are essential to the successful rendition of a dramatized verse. It will again be noted that here as well emphasis is on the performer's

ability to give life to verse through drama. Twenty points go to production and here appropriate and meaningful costumes, use of functional props, set, and back up by the choral performers are the backbone of performance. A look at the arithmetic in the verse section of the drama festival reveals that up to seventy points are dedicated to the role and prowess of the performer.

The verse is given life by the performer who like in traditional orature had the responsibility to deliver through expert personality in storytelling. A good performer of orature was expected to muster all the performance elements that helped in delivery using body, voice and strong psychological ability to manipulate everything around the performance space, including the audience. In the drama festival situation the audience appeal replaces audience participation which thrusts upon the verse performer the task of drawing them into the rhythm of the verse through preparation and internalization of the story.

The verse at the Kenya drama festival is a direct product of the broad genre in African orature called oral poetry. Even though today the festival like the school curriculum emphasizes on the formal concepts of poetry, the dramatization of this genre at the festival clings heavily on the African capacity to play vocal inflections as a means of exemplifying multiple characters in the solo verse, and shared voices to represent one narrative voice in the choral verse.

The rules of performance are challenging for a genre that has to be delivered in five minutes; calling on pace, rhythm and fast action, all of which are properties of the

orature from which this elemental genre is derived. That the backbone of the solo and choral verse at the festival is the element of dramatization is a departure from the mere recital that relied more on style as opposed to performance of the styles through sound, movement and pace to tell a story.

The Dramatized Narrative

The narrative genre at the drama festival is fairly recent, perhaps because it was thought that the lingering power of the story captured almost every genre already at the festival. In fact, looking at all the genres, it is fair to conclude that when everything else is taken out of a production - including the western theatrical performances - the net product is usually the story. Yet the drama festival in Kenya probably saw it fit to dedicate a separate genre to narratives which in my view is a tribute to the “mother” of all performances! As a separate entity at the drama festival, the narrative which also is an elevation of the African tale allows for the exploration of all those qualities carried by the African storyteller.

The chief ingredient in this genre is the dramatization of the story through both symbolic human as well as animal characters by socially tying them to contemporary life situations through the medium of orature. Since western theatre brought the concept of the walled stage (African performances were in the open) the narrative genre has suffered for not being able to evoke audience participation. Today, the one or multiple

narrators strive to reach the audience through call and response in a festival time of ten minutes, which demands other elements of performance as well.

In support of storytelling as a dramatized genre E.T Kirby(1974) defends the fact that the content of storytelling approximates dramatic form because it is developed as a narrative. He goes on to say that the performance of a story as a dramatized piece is theatricalized using music and song together with active audience participation. The world of orature was traditionally held together by storytelling and the innate dramatization of the same. Kirby (1974) goes on to state that the storyteller is obliged to employ gestures, expression and voice of the characters involved in the dialogue in order to successfully render the presentation.

The drama festival narrative is born of the art of orature and therefore storytelling together with its various elements takes centre stage. Kirby (1974) goes on to affirm the prominence of performance in storytelling by stating that storytellers live and act their tales rather than just telling them. The storyteller is thus deeply engaged in the art of dramatization as the narrative is rendered to the audience. Hugo Bowles and John Benjamins (2010) for their part, dwell on the art of narration and argue that a narrative is a narrative because, the story it tells is reportable and has been interpreted by the experiencing “I”, the first person storyteller.

The drama festival story is indeed always an interpretation of sorts, based on the application to the contemporary world, of an indigenous oral tale. Bowles and Benjamins (2010) continue to state that reportability of a story together with the teller

are more important than structure and plot because according to them, the telling comes first as plot is already part of the telling. The sequence of events in a narrative is actually the responsibility of the storyteller, and the telling handles this aspect as a matter of course. It is important to understand what a narrative is, given the complex thoughts surrounding its dramatization and relationship with the traditional orature.

Tore Boeckmann (2000) defines a narrative from the standpoint of form and suggests that it is that which is not dialogue but is said by the performer as opposed to characters. He also suggests that from the standpoint of structure, the narrative is that which is not dramatized and defines dramatization as the act of showing something as it is happening before the eyes of the audience. It is therefore implied that both the form and structure of a narrative combine to engender what the drama festival aptly calls the dramatized narrative. That is why Boeckmann (2000) says that to narrate is to synopsisize, which means telling the audience what has happened without letting them be witnesses to the happenings. Therefore, the dramatized narrative marries all the elements of narration, narrative, and dramatization in one body of performance.

There are varied thoughts regarding the relationship between the narrator and the narrative they tell as the story at the festival. The traditional modes of performance dominate the dramatized narrative but other elemental issues creep in the contextualization of the dramatized narrative. Luc Herman and Bert Vervaeck (2001) say that the traditional narrator does not function as a character because they hover over the narrative and become visible through the first-person narration. The storyteller, like

the writer of text is considered a dramatized personality and plays the role of a narrator not a character in narration.

It is inconceivable how the narrator functions as either one or the other, because traditional orature blended the two positions distinctly and creatively. The narrator, who is obviously not a writer or a composer of the narrative, relies upon an existing template of the story to play the narrator and the character interchangeably as and when it suits the narration. The narrator knows when to play imitation of voice and assume characterization, while also maintaining the position of a visible narrator. This is why Herman and Vervaeck (2001) note that sometimes the dramatized narrator appears like a character in the story.

It is based on the dual role and responsibility of the narrator in the story, that Bert and Vervaeck (2001) distinguish the dramatized narrator as that person who takes part in the story, they narrate either as observers or as agents. They proceed to define the undramatized narrator as that narrator who tells the story without being seen, by showing the action through the eyes of characters while remaining out of sight. This narrator does not use the first person which distinguishes them from the dramatized narrator.

The drama festival dramatized narrative fits the arguments proffered above and places the narrator at the apex of this genre. The inclusion of the dramatized narrative in the festival came very recently and has been the subject of debate all through. At the initial stages the dramatized narrative performers grossly misunderstood the concept of

the relationship between the audience and the narrator and therefore brought a huge crowd on stage. It was ridiculous how a prepared audience that had rehearsed how to respond to the narrator appeared on stage. The narrative genre ended up being one of the most boring genres at the festival when ironically it was supposed to reflect traditional orature.

The performance space must have been a contributory factor to the initial flop in performance of the dramatized narrative. The proscenium stage was a little intimidating as the narrators were forced to interact with an alien, so to speak audience. All narrative sessions in traditional orature had audiences knowledgeable about the stories told and participated accordingly. Today as social integration takes place in Kenya; the elusive search for a national artistic front still makes it difficult for a story set in one cultural milieu to appeal to an audience foreign to it.

The dramatized narrative has struggled to take a shape representative of a traditional past because of modernity and urbanization. Most teachers and students, far from reading about traditional orature have no real contact or experience with traditional modes of performance. The attempt at playing in the world of orature ends up a big mockery as stereotyping becomes the yardstick for understanding the essence of an otherwise rich past.

Students have come on stage wearing tatters as a way of representing people living in the traditional past. They have represented the past characters as donning skins, hides and dirty attire. It is sorry that the students' depiction of the past is

shrouded in age and most characters are depicted as old men and women walking with while stooping using walking sticks.

As the drama festival navigates through misconceptions surrounding the dramatized narratives, storytellers have struggled with the delivery of their message on stage. Traditional orature required only one main narrator who knew how to incorporate the audience into a performance. Today the dramatized narrative has struggled with presentations that experimentally put two or more narrators on stage. Unless the multiple narrators are creative enough, their rendition strips the narrative genre of the original flavor orature built into narration. Many dramatized narratives have continued to struggle to capture the attention of and participation of the audience.

As the dramatized narrative keeps appearing at the drama festival, it is nonetheless making headway and tremendous improvements. The one-person narrator is beginning to make an impact and many performers are making the creative mark known of narratives. So long as two or more narrators are there to complement each other as multiple personalities of the same person, the narrative is headed in the original traditional orature mode. In order not to be tempted to have a choral verse in a dramatized narration, the two or more narrators who appear on stage ought to echo the story based on one narrative voice. Otherwise the temptation to have a narrative generated into a mini play can be very frustrating for the performers and the audience.

Another challenging aspect of the dramatized narrative at the drama festival is the existence of a script. When performers of narratives get tied to and become

imprisoned by a script, the narrative ceases to take a fluid life and gets very mechanical. The dramatized narrator requires freedom to maneuver the story based on the mood and attitude of the audience. The art of orature and storytelling survived on creation and recreation of the story at every stage of performance. Improvisation is cardinal if the narrator knows the milestones of the story only to bridge the gaps while on stage. This way, fidelity to traditional orature which glues the narration together will reign prominently.

Understanding the place and role of both the narration and the narrator is very important for the dramatized narrative. Many performers have come on stage with backup to sing and play instrumentation for them. Notably, because of modernity, the audience seems to want to be drawn into a performance through the existence of spectacle which a sole performer may not pull through alone. The backup and other stage effects tend to overshadow the narrative in a way that relegates the narrative and the narrator to a world dominated by stage effects and devices. A lot of responsibility needs to be thrust on the narrator in order to keep the spirit of orature alive in narration.

The themes explored by dramatized narratives have varied over the years. Many performers are beginning to appreciate the use of animal characters to propel thematic factors in their narration. As time goes by, the animal characters are also beginning to fade off, but the replacement of these by personalized humans is still making narration shaky. The shift ought to be from animal character to human characters that address

issues and not personalities, because otherwise this would narrow the scope of the themes in narratives. The result of personalization of characters is making the narratives somewhat washy in that the entertainment essence is mistaken for outright hilarious comedy empty of substance.

Narration was serious business and audiences always wanted to carry away something from the narrative session. The struggle to win the audience has in many cases ended up being a superfluous rendition full of mirth without the meat that held orature together. Since other genres of the festival are dominated by elements of orature, the dramatized narrative ought to be the place to reenact orature by maintaining traditional modes albeit through modern spectacles. The result should be a creative blend that keeps orature alive at least in structure and composition. The content of narration may reflect modernity but to me the vehicle that drives narration must be original. Otherwise the dramatized narrative will be dwarfed and sandwiched at the festival by the dramatized verse and the play!

A critical look at the marking scheme of the dramatized narrative at the drama festival strongly reveals the intention to sustain the qualities and role of the dramatic performer. The emphasis is on the storyteller and the story that they tell using various stage properties and effects. The narrative/story is allocated twenty points and adjudicators look for the theme of the narrative, treatment, storyline, relevance, entertainment, use of language and originality. A critical appreciation of this marking

scheme reveals a concerted effort to elevate the story and how it is clothed in language to reach the audience with the desired impact of a good story.

The second section in the making scheme is under the heading narrator; and adjudicators are keen on the elements of confidence of the narrator, credibility, stage presence, poise, eloquence, voice projection/audibility (inflection), and the storyteller's ability to hold the attention of the audience. There is no doubt that up to this stage in the grading scheme, the story and the narrator are the central features of the dramatized narrative. The narrator is expected to possess qualities that distinguish them from the audience in terms of ability to manipulate the physical body, voice and psychological strength to help with narration.

The next section in the grading scheme is entitled presentation; and carries thirty-five points. In this section the adjudicators look for the ability of the narrator to bring the story and the characters to life by using paralinguistic features, facial expressions, gestures, and mimicry. In this section is seen how manipulation of the body which enables the narrator to dramatize the narration carries the most points in the grading scheme. The traditional narrator is expected to emerge at this stage of the festival, as this is what gives life to the story. Once again, the dramatized narrative reflects the lingering nature and power of orature even as circumstances influenced by dynamic forces of change and time fathom different challenges.

The last section of the grading scheme is overall achievement, which evaluates how the narrator and the story have been received by the audience. It is also during this

time that the adjudicators can ascertain the comfort of the narrator in the role they are playing as well as if the audience appeal is equal to the successful rendition of the narrative. A look at the grading scheme shows that a whopping eighty points surround the story, the storyteller and the audience! A glaring testimony that traditional orature is still very influential even in the wake of modernity.

The Creative Cultural Dramatized Dance

This is a more vibrant, fast moving and entertaining genre replete with songs, several dance patterns/formations and drama! The dramatized dance is designed to reflect the creative and cultural values of the community from which it is derived, and the story is expected to emerge in the power of choreography to reveal dramatization. Care has been taken by festival rules to avoid a situation where we have drama- cum- dance as opposed to a dramatized dance, which means that the dancing is carried by dramatization from the beginning to the end. The dance must tell a story and what better way to do so than through dramatization as the various songs are rendered with myriad instruments, the most prominent being the drum.

The African call and response is clearly the driving force in the dramatized dance, as the soloists lead a backup of forty people all dancing to the tunes of culturally relevant songs. The dramatized dance is also a much later inclusion at the drama festival and so much is still happening to properly define the true meaning and essence of what constitutes a creative, culturally dramatized dance. First, I would like to dwell on the genre of dance as it was known in traditional African performances. The drama festival

describes the dance category succinctly by mentioning the creative, cultural and dramatic elements that complete this genre at the festival.

How then would we fuse creativity and cultural elements into a dramatized dance at the festival? Why is it necessary to demand such stringent qualities of dances at the festival? The answers have been hard to explicitly come by but there is agreement that the rich cultural diversity in Kenya has played a significant role in defining the dramatized creative cultural dance at the festival. Karlamu Welsh (2010) has plainly defined dance as a collection of dances imbued with meaning infused properly with rhythm connected to ritual events, occasions, and mythology of a specific people. This definition responds to the nature of African dance to be a conglomeration of varied and myriad dances replete with rhythmic movements accompanied by rapid and elaborate instrumentation.

These dances are occasioned by ritual functions, social gatherings, and the need for entertainment. According to Welsh (2010) the African dance is a theatre that involves song, drama, masquerade, traditions and music. The compact and very loaded nature of the African dance reveals the traditional orature that is the vehicle through which various social entertainment elements converge. The drama festival dance captures this spirit by specifically demanding that the dance not only be creative but that it must have a cultural orientation and be dramatized.

In addition to the dramatized dance carrying various cultural components Welsh (2010) categorizes it into three distinct types: traditional, non-traditional and stylized.

He states that the traditional dance embodies cultural values and rituals while the non-traditional which likewise carries the spirit and likeness of a traditional dance may not necessarily come from the society. The stylized dance which he regards as classical represents the best aesthetic ideas of a particular community.

There is a sense in which the creative cultural dance at the drama festival is a combination of the three categories because every dance seeks to define its origin in the manner it is delivered and does pay tribute to the culture together with every traditional element tied to them. It is not difficult to judge a traditional dance without placing it in the very tribal or cultural milieu in which it belongs. As a result of diversity, the dramatized dance has broken cultural borders and has been performed by people not necessarily from the traditional cultural orientation. However, the dancers who borrow some or all traditional elements from one community tend to be so well researched that they faithfully adhere to and succeed in doing non-traditional dances.

Even though the categories mentioned above suggest that persons from outside a cultural group may still do a dance fitting that culture, there is the question of authenticity which Alphonse Tierou(1992) emphasizes as the glue that lends credibility to the dance. He says that the African dance ought to be traced right into the culture because according to him since there is no single African dance, it is always about specific movements or gestures that represent specific ideas, expressions or emotions. There are as many African tribal groups as are their histories and if the dance is a

representation of individual people as well as their history, then authenticity is a key plank in the dramatized dance.

Tierou (1992) makes a strong point regarding authenticity and goes on to state that African dances possess very precise rules and codified movements. This is because the dance is a very essential element of African cultural heritage. Africans he says express their philosophy of life through dance and therefore suggests that there is a unique aspect in every dance. I hail from a multi-cultural community and appreciate that dance is a powerful tool of identification because dance steps are as distinct as the cultural background they seek to represent. This is not to say that dance steps alone define the culture, traditions, and history of a people because every society has a huge array of distinguishing factors in their dances. Dance is a symbol of identity and helps in the communalization process of every culture.

It is in support of the assertion by Tierou (1992) that Rodreguez King-Dorset (2008) elaborately identifies various African communities by their unique and distinct dance styles. According to Dorset (2008) Ghanaians emphasize the sharp upper torso movement, specific rotation of the shoulders and the upper movement of shoulders. The Ga, still of Ghana, emphasize the shuffling foot movement derived partly from the flow of the hip movement. Still in Ghana Tierou (1992) explains that the Asanti emphasize arm and hand gestures that come with soft shoulder movements while the Daghani emphasize rippled lower torso movement using stomach muscles.

Tierou (1992) proceeds to look at other parts of Africa and states that the Maasai men of Kenya punctuate their pacing with jumps while the Zulu of South Africa make very agile leaps. The Nuer he observes, make high jumps as the Kikuyu of Kenya make runs and leaps. All these are a manifestation of the variety of dance styles that strengthen the fact that dance is not as homogeneous as the genre suggests but is a cultural distinctive indulgence expressive of the multitude of cultures in Africa. In Kenya alone, the national drama festival brings together a country that is as diverse in culture as are the more than forty tribes.

The songs, the message and the dance steps are so varied that although there are cross cultural presentations, the distinctions are very glaring. It is easy to know that a dance is from central Kenya first because of the type of songs they sing and the dance steps. The kikuyu are very vigorous and agile while the dancers from western Kenya are very energetic with footwork and play with invigorated shoulder movements. The Luo from Nyanza region for their part are very gracious and centre their dancing on the waist. These dance styles can be more distinct depending on gender and age as well! Sometimes people from one cultural orientation have elected to dance to depict another culture and made it, even though the aspects of authenticity have been found to be compromised.

Other than the cultural aspect of dance, the drama festival requires that a dance be dramatized and therefore the role of the story is very important to revisit. There is absolutely no way that a dance would involve so many conventional requirements and

not relevantly tell a story. The story holding the dance together must be dramatized as an integral part of the dance encompassing songs, music, movements, and instrumentation. The dramatized dance ought not to be a drama cum dance. In many instances dancers have come on stage and separated some persons who did the drama while others danced.

The emphasis is on dramatized not drama cum dance. It therefore means that the choreographers are expected to blend the story within the flow of the dance by either using different costumes in the dance, dividing the cast into protagonists and antagonists or by simply playing with levels on stage. There is a dance I once watched that explains how dramatization of the dance need not be the presentation of a mini play. The dance story was about how mosquito menace was affecting the people of a village until a fund raising was held to collect funds to buy mosquito nets for all the people in the village.

The more than thirty dancers were divided into two with those on one side acting as the mosquitoes complete with sharp pointed props on their mouths to represent mosquitoes. The other half comprised the people being stung by mosquitoes. The mosquitoes were biting their opposite numbers in the middle of very elaborate dance steps and movements while appropriate songs were being sung. The enactment of biting and being bitten were infused in movement in a very dramatic way showing antagonists who in this case were mosquitoes and the protagonists who were represented by human beings.

The lamentations from those bitten and the buzz from mosquitoes were done through sound that was infused into song and became danced as highly dramatized. The story had a beginning, middle and end. We saw the dance troupe play sickness of patients from mosquito bites as other dancers played nurses and doctors treating sick patients. In the end the dancers were divided into two groups with one receiving cash donations and the other giving. The resolution of the dance came after nets were brought and the dancers merged into one group to celebrate their conquest of mosquitoes. This dance was a perfect example of how to tell a story and dramatize it through dance.

The important thing not to miss is that all action is done through dance because as we say at the festival, if it is not danceable then it does not belong to the dance category. The aspect of dramatization has made it possible for anyone not from the culture from which a dance is derived to understand and follow the story. Adjudicators are not necessarily well versed with all languages of Kenya but are equipped with the requisite knowledge of which dance steps come from where and the meaning of each. They are also greatly helped by the action done through dramatization which infused with dance patterns and formations help tell a story from which judgment can be made.

A look at the dramatized dance grading scheme reveals a host of other considerations for the dance and how the place of traditional orature is still cherished through the stories that dances tell. The first section of the grading scheme is on choice of the dance and is allocated twenty points. In this section the adjudicators will look for

relevance of the dance to the message it intends to deliver, how entertaining it is, and if it has a cultural source, as well as whether it is entertaining. In this section the cultural element comes out strongly and is supported by how entertaining the dance can be.

The second section is broadly categorized as choreography and comprises music which carries twenty points. Here the adjudicators look for the appropriateness of the songs used and how they blend with the cultural base of the story. Harmony of the various songs is very important, as is the versatility of the soloist in whose hands the wheel that drives the dance rests. There also needs to be harmony in the various vocal responses in order to ensure quality of the choral work.

The choice of music is important because this also helps to tell the story and propels the dramatized dance. The next section is the dance, which has a total of twenty points and adjudicators look for quality and appropriate dance steps, decency in dance styles, uniformity, variety of formations and patterns. Also important in this section is the nature of involvement by every dancer as well as originality of all dance steps and patterns. This section is the heart of the dance and helps the dancers tell their story with a tinge of authenticity. The dance steps and patterns are surely the identification tag of the cultural origin of the dramatized dance.

The next section is drama, which also carries twenty points. The adjudicators look for the infusion of drama into the dance and whether the dance tells a complete story through credible characterization. Here also, the traditional orature based storytelling takes precedence and becomes the basis upon which to ascertain that a

dramatized dance has met its pedigree as a creative and cultural rendition. Costume and décor is allocated ten points and requires appropriateness in setting, back drops, functional ornaments, appropriate and decent costumes, body make up, decorations and props.

A dance troupe is known more by how the dancers are dressed. Dressing has a way of distinguishing a cultural orientation as well as showing the mood and theme of the dance. Most communities in Kenya believe in the practice of decoration of the body through painting of the face, arms, and legs to heighten the mood and story of the dance. Also significant is the scenery which in traditional dances was established by the language and use of imagery in performance. Today, dance scenery is more visual and decoration as well as costumes aid in creation of visual pictures. There is still the dramatization of the dance which together with dance formations and patterns blended with different costumes helps create mini sceneries that speak the message of the dance.

The introduction of the dramatized dance at the drama festival can be hailed as the height of fidelity to traditional performance and the sustenance of orature. The fact that the dance is the epitome of traditional African performance and theatricality along with storytelling that the dance embodies, means that the festival had actually started on a foreign note. The dramatized dance in an item that draws audiences from across racial and tribal divides by the dramatic moments, movements, patterns, and song. The

concept of song and dance as a universal language highlights the dramatized dance even more.

The dramatized dance is therefore one other back on which orature and traditional storytelling has ridden against all odds related to modernity and urbanization wrought by western conventional mentality of theatre. It is curious therefore that the drama festival management committee has recently introduced the modern dance category in recognition of the need to preserve and protect traditional dances. It is increasingly necessary to draw a distinct line between tradition and modernity and with the introduction of a new dance category, the lingering power of orature and traditional theatrical modes like storytelling are still sitting astride our artistic world.

The Play

The play is arguably the mother of the national drama festival in Kenya. The fact that the play was the only item of the festival for a very long time means that it entrenched itself in the minds and character of the festival to the point of being the mark of it. The play is almost synonymous with the festival and all the other items work as if they are curtain raisers to the point that it is more prestigious to win the play category than to do so with all the others combined. Although pride of winning any item at the festival carries so much glamour with it, winning the play seems to get etched in the minds of participants much longer than with the other items.

The play as it is performed at the drama festival is however the most controversial when it comes to placing African performances in the traditional context.

This is so because all the other items seem to have a direct semblance with, and origin in orature and traditional performance conventions. The theatre places including the national theatre in Nairobi Kenya is built as if to suggest that the proscenium structure is to the play as the play is to it. In a way the understanding of theatre in my country seems to be that it is a huge building where complex plays from the west are to be performed.

Originally, Kenyans were kept from even participating at the festival and when they began they strived to put a mark on the festival as Africans. In earlier pages of this dissertation I have explained how this journey has played out through use of indigenous languages. The festival today has been exclusively made the domain of teachers and students, which eliminates the prospects of importing ideas and thoughts of those who would want to use this festival as the springboard to lay a base for the African indigenous play.

The fact that the festival play must be in one act and run for a minimum of fifteen minutes and a maximum of forty five minutes eliminates the performance of published works. Also, there is absolutely no attempt to translate a play designed for the stage into a dramatic text for the shelves after the festival. This is why the creative fire born in the festival fizzles out as soon as it is lit. Shifra Schonmann (2015), reports that in 2003, the ministry of education banned the practice of *using* scripts not written by students and teachers from the festival. This being a policy directive carries the force of law and is government decree still throttling theatrical latitude in the country.

The main effect of this directive was to widen the gap of published material by laying emphasis on performance as a means of cultural expression in a world that has narrowed the space between performance and publication. Schonmann (2015) summarizes the ministry of education ban as the beginning of conflict between preservation of culture and nurturing artistic creativity. The sad story behind this ban is that many so called non teachers and students are former students wanting to further their artistic talents through the only known medium-the drama festival.

The play category at the drama festival is still the hope for sustaining the spirit of orature, which has been done by adopting traditional storytelling mode to explore contemporary themes in Kenya. There has been a remarkable effort to Africanize the plot and structure of the play even as the western well - made play conventions are the guiding principle of doing the play. It will be appreciated that even as early Kenyan elites struggled to Africanize theatre, they met hitches because the universal language – English, was the standard mode of communication.

Doing plays in the indigenous languages as Mukotani Rugyendo (1985) says, limits the audience and thus is problematic considering that even among Kenyans there are myriad tribal inclinations. To make a universal mark one needs to master English as a language of communication. This is why writing and performing plays with general principles unique to Africa like the storytelling mood, African symbolic characters, African locale, and themes indigenous to Africa, would succeed at exhibiting a truly African essence.

Incorporating elements of traditional orature in the plays at the drama festival has to a significant extent blended western concepts of a well – made play and African storytelling modes. Martin Banham (2004) acknowledges the fact that as the western type of education took root in Kenya, the early elites were a product of both the western theatrical traditions and tradition. The early elites inherited the dual heritage of dramaturgy and the language of expression-English. It therefore means that as the festival play took shape in Kenya, it was struggling with the medium, and true meaning of its reason for existence.

The drama festival allows entries for plays in English, Kiswahili (the national language) and any other language. Plays in Kiswahili have made a strong mark at the festival because of the language factor and the reflection of a distinct Swahili culture in rendition. Yet considering that English is a dominant language within academia, plays in English have dominated the festival. Some plays done in indigenous languages have also made appearance at the festival; although far from limiting the audience, these plays have no big stakes as students themselves have undergone a metamorphosis that has seen the shift from tribal culture to a more universal outlook.

The festival play has evolved from the earlier generation characterized by a conspicuous metaphysical presence, conscious individualism, and a reformist perspective Banham (2004). African content and structure has been dominant in the plays presented at the drama festival even though modernity and exposure to mass media (television and film) is instructing a different state of affairs reflective of a new

world order. The response to a vibrant social media and new forms of theatricality is becoming the standard playwriting and performance tradition although the baseline is still the story.

A look at the marking scheme of the play category of the national drama festival reveals the fact of the central place storytelling and orature occupies in plays at the festival. It is obvious that the play as a separate entity of performance is a new concept in African communities. The embodiment of a play using dialogue as replayed in narratives which the narrators acted out reveals the semblance of a play within every African narrative, where action and reaction was employed. Furthermore, the structure of the modern play; exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution, mirror the African story plot of; the beginning, middle and end.

The parts played by conflict, protagonist and antagonist in modern plays are very much alive in African narratives as well. The play at the Kenya drama festival is thus the most popular for being the amalgamation of two distinct worlds played on the same pedestal-the modern stage. The one act play at the festival is dominated by one factor-acting, which carries almost half of the total points in the festival grading scheme. Thus, dramatization that comes with role playing and role entry/ exit is the spice for the play at the drama festival. That is why the grading scheme is a direct reflection of the sum total of all that constitutes dramatization from the point of view of a narrative.

The first part of the grading scheme is on the choice of the play and carries a total of twenty points. In this section the adjudicator looks for content of the play in

terms of the story, suitability of the language used, dramatic structure and plot. Perhaps this is where the idea of a written and well-made play comes in. The storyline needs to be compact and flowing in the conventional sense of drama. The second section is acting, and here the adjudicators look for characterization, credibility of every character, delivery in dialogue, monologue, mime, and soliloquy, use of silence, language use, improvisation, and stage presence. This section carries thirty points and is largely about all the properties of performance which centre on the actor and how they deliver on stage. Here also is the chance for the actors to compete based on who is a better interpreter of the script story and how they deliver it.

The next section is on production and adjudicators look for the efforts of a director, imagination of both the director and the actors, novelty on the part of both the director and the actor, pace, variety in terms of scenery, and stage movements by actors, teamwork by actors and the unified production elements like sets, costumes, sound, lights and sound effects, discipline of the cast and how this is exemplified in the choices made by the director. This section carries thirty points and is the heart of the festival because herein lies the opportunity to be creative with acting and the use of various stage elements.

Costume and décor has fifteen points and here the adjudicators look at the make-up, costumes, lighting, sound infusion, audio visual material and instrumentation. This section is a huge inheritance from the western theatrical traditions and although many stages that host the drama festival are below the pedigree of stages that can

sustain the demands required by this section, efforts have been made to see it function. Many institutions have not done very well in this area mainly because of the expenses involved in production of lighting, costumes, décor and make-up. Nonetheless, as the country improves facilities in schools, and as the festival gains prominence, a lot of investment is being made to facilitate this area of the festival.

The last section in the play grading scheme is the overall achievement part where the adjudicators look for the overall artistic composition, the communicative value of the play, the connectedness between speech and movement and feedback. This section carries ten points and is basically a test for the actor on the one hand and the script on the other. The traditional orature performers were required to be artistic in every sense of the word, especially with delivery which encompassed their voice and body. The communicative essence at the festival echoes the moral lesson at the end of every narrative told to the audience. Once again, the lingering nature of the story takes prominence in the play at the festival because over seventy points out of a hundred go to areas that require oral skills and storytelling tradition.

The drama festival has taken a huge chunk of orature, and this plays out at the festival through a kind of integration, because there is no specific line that divides traditional performance modes from the modern ones. The striving to create an indigenous theatre tradition in Kenya is high but the myriad cultural energies tend to pull apart, just because we are bereft of a national cultural orientation. It is however

sorry that a drama festival that draws together a huge chunk of Kenyan youth can dissipate as soon as the national level is over.

The limitations placed upon the drama festival by official government policy guidelines stifle the vibrancy that bubbles as the festival begins. The result of a very minutely guided festival is the dearth of a lasting impact on the artistic identity that we need to address from a rather radical position. Radicalization is the recourse because the drama festival stage is locked to the very students who scale it, as soon as they are out of school. A new approach and avenue needs to emerge in order to help navigate, identify and consolidate a national cultural artistic frame into which to fit our creativity, talent and theatrical development.

The making of a festival play

Modern playwriting emphasizes the existence of a script as the epitome of a play. The script is also a very important requirement at the drama festival in Kenya. The question by many people who have performed at the drama festival has been what really is the script at the festival? Is it the piece of paper written and typed so neatly that it competes as if it is a traditional classroom composition, or is it the happenings on stage that tells a complete story? If not, is it a blend of both the piece of paper and the flow of the story on stage? These questions have divided theatre practitioners at the drama festival even as new perspectives emerge daily.

After several years of participation at the drama festival, I have concluded that the written script is considered the basis for play performance at the drama festival. Many

directors first seek or develop a script before they proceed to cast and then direct their plays. Other directors have sought scripts from inter class or dormitory drama competitions within the school.

These scripts are sometimes mere guidelines because what ends up appearing on stage are mostly abridged versions of what is on paper. Thus, many plays written for the festival are devoid of the flavor that the audience sees on stage. The festival directors tend to keep the major theatrical elements from the script and although there are points designated for the script, many best scripted plays are judged based on what actors have said on stage. Many adjudicators hardly read the script presented before them.

It should be remembered that the festivals have more limited performance time than the reading and watching of plays can fit into. The adjudicators therefore merely assume that if the theatricalities on stage are apt, then it should follow that they are a product of a good script. Likewise, this falls in the realm of traditional orature where the happenings on the performance space are of a more impactful essence than the written piece. Owing to the position postulated in this writing it can be safely assumed that the reason dramatic literature is a dying art at the festival is the fact that the script is basically a mechanical conveyor of what happens on the festival stage.

The making of a festival play is possibly as varied as there are directors and script writers at the festival. At the beginning of the festival, every institution will ultimately come with a written script as well as the play directed for the stage. What goes on behind the scenes that makes the festival play what it ends up being may be as intriguing as the end product. From a personal point of view and based on actual experience, the making

of a festival play is a combination of both modern theatrical conventions as well as traditional elements of orature.

As a teacher of language I must admit that I capitalized on the voices and eloquence of those whom I lured into acting for the stage. The culture of asking students to read comprehension passages aloud or their participation in impromptu speeches revealed vocal strengths that I found applicable for the stage. The attribute of vocal power and delivery was to me the mark of a good speaker, especially considering the traditional story that depended on oral prowess. After identifying students by their vocal property, they were invited to the drama room where up to fifty of them would converge for what would be termed an audition. If this was an audition at all then it was one with a difference-there was absolutely no script!

The students having converged, I proceeded to classify them in various groups fitting height, body size, complexion, and vocal capacity. From this categorization I was able to identify who would suit the role of parents/adults, children, masters, servants and children. With a wide array of people emerging in different groups, I then asked them to sing a set piece song as well as a traditional song to ascertain their musical voices for the stage songs. I went home in the evening and started thinking about a story surrounding the people I had put in various groups. I knew whether I wanted to play with husband and wife, children and adults, masters or servants and then fit the students into a story plot.

In the drama room I started to create words for the students selected based on their categories. They would be tested with the lines until everyone in each category was tried. I would then decide on the people I needed for the play but maintained every other

student in the categories in which they were tried as double casted. The lines I gave to the students were framed as if I was telling a story only that this time it was given in dialogue form. The students came every subsequent day and the story plot continued. I developed the story and the dialogue not outside the drama room but while I was looking at and working with the students. While this was going on, the students wrote their individual lines on a piece of paper to help them with memorization.

As the story was being told through dialogue; experimentation with scenery, costume and songs or sound devices went on. This process went on till the story came to an end and the students had lines that they were acting on the stage. When this was completed, I asked one student to collect the several pieces of paper on which their colleagues had written on and asked that student to put them together into one piece. At the end of this process the student will have produced a script which I then took away and began to edit, clean, and recreate. Towards the festival date, I would have shaped the written script from the words students wrote for themselves.

With a written script in hand we knew we had satisfied a festival requirement after which we proceeded to make our own props and scenery from available material. Students made suggestions and participated in stage building. It will be noted that the stage was built using mobile set and scenery using boards for backdrop and cloth for both cyclorama and backdrop. We ordered paint and did the paintwork by ourselves and then asked student to bring in appropriate costumes; other costumes were made using home science students who took instructions on how to tailor what we need. As a professional tailor, I knew what I wanted for the stage and tailored them myself.

For sound we had a key board for stage sound effects and sang various songs to begin and end the play as well as to help with scene changes. My own students worked on foot light which was the farthest we could go with lights till the national festival where lighting was more elaborately provided for. The play was rehearsed and when we got ready for the festival, there was a play with a script by the same person who worked on the scenery, backdrops, costumes, light and sound. The play that went to the festival was a complete blend of traditional and modern modes of performance.

Chapter Five: Recreations

The play *Recreations* is a confluence of two distinct performance worlds: the western and the traditional/orature. In this play I chose to be faithful to the so-called well-made play while considering the power and influence of storytelling. The overlying strength of this play is in the delivery of a story using the narrative omniscient and omnipresent narrative voice of the character Grand Pa (sage). As a piece of ethnography this play belongs to what Denzin and Lincoln (1988) refer to as ethnotheatre /ethno drama through which the playwright employs traditional techniques of formal theatre production to make a performance. As a product of orature blended with formal playwriting techniques, *Recreations* is a piece of ethnography with drama making it an ethno drama.

The idea of ethno drama is so prevalent in the works of eminent playwrights that I am emboldened by the story around *Recreations* as a play. A good example of ethno drama for me is the so called “Pittsburg cycle” by August Wilson through which his plays depict cultural and historical challenges of the African Americans. In examining the life of African Americans Wilson no doubt plays the role of an anthropologist reliving the past through the lens of the present using realities of the challenges of the African Americans.

Neil Simmons plays come out as mainly autobiographical portrayal of his childhood that was riddled with so many personal troubles. Other examples of ethno drama that I have encountered include *An Enemy of the people* by Henrik Ibsen and *The Government Inspector* by Nicholai Gogol. The two plays depict a stage in the socio-political life of the population as presented by the playwrights. It is therefore encouraging to understand and appreciate the role of the playwright in revealing the socio-political as well as cultural pulse of the people represented in their plots.

The play *Recreations* revolves around an old man Grand Pa, whose occupation is to tell stories in a village where he has erected statues that help him depict the life of modernity/urbanization. Grand Pa is a typical symbol of the old order and laments the vices that have gripped the new generation that he believes are blinded by modernity. Characteristic of the setting in many traditional homesteads, Grand Pa has a private reception area where he presides over traditional rituals. In this private exclusive place is an ageless tree under which many sacrifices were offered to the ancestors. The exclusive reception place is also known by outsiders to house a gruel place replete with calabashes.

A traditional gruel place was a very important aspect of hospitality and provision, which symbolized acceptance as well as generosity. Everyone who occasioned to visit the gruel place was assured of Eveready and hot gruel as they conferred with Grand Pa the wise man. The calabash was usually made from the dried pumpkin structured plant which having been split in the middle became a container from which traditional drinks was served. The constant supply of gruel in Wosia's reception place was the responsibility of a grandmother, the oldest and closest contemporary of Grand Pa..

The ageless tree that many people thought hid the biggest python ever known did not only provide foliage and coverage that shielded the gruel place from both the sun and intruding eyes of passersby, nor was it only the sacred tree under which important rituals were conducted; but was also the link between the mystic and supernatural on the one hand and the symbol of generational gap between not only the old and the young, but also tradition and modernity. Sacrifices offered under the tree as well as rituals like circumcision rendered the tree the role of a witness to generations upon generations. The sacrifices also provided the opportunity for the new generation to partake in ceremonies already undertaken by the departed.

The rumoured existence of a mystic snake under the tree emphasized the obsession of my people and the traditional past with the macabre and the fantastic. Snake stories abound on how the spirits of the departed ancestors visited the living through such rarely beheld creatures like the snake. The rumours were never confirmed but happenings around the tree lent credence to the existence of such wildlife as the snake. The gruel place was a meeting point not only of the departed and the living but the realization that transition gave forth forces that were unable to obliterate the meaning and importance of traditional life.

The gruel place was also unique because here Grand Pa erected some statues of human beings that he used as the reference to his stories. Therefore as children and other visitors converged at the gruel place, Grand Pa used the metaphor hidden in the statues to look into the traditional past as he navigated challenges of modernity. The statues were so treasured that Grand Pa woke up as everyone else was still asleep so that he could polish them and ready them for the moral anecdotes that surrounded their existence in his

stories. These statues represented a man named *Macho* whose life reflected the ideals of the past, his *wifi* who embodied a woman torn between two cultural orientations and their children who had virtually slid into modernity.

As the play begins curious children interrupt Grand Pa's incantations of the morning and after a series of exchanges in speech and song, Grand Pa admits the children into the gruel place. The children have heard about the gruel place and want to know a host of things they have been told about it. Grand Pa obliges and begins to tell them stories. In keeping with traditional orature, Grand Pa tells two short stories which traditionally acted as curtain raisers to emphasize the main story. Grand Pa talks about the relationship between children and their parents while touching in a veiled manner the discipline of the young. A small boy has stolen money from his father who runs after him and when he catches up with the son, he begins to spank him.

The adage, spare the rod and spoil the child is revisited through the interplay of two world orders. The modern world considers discipline beyond certain levels as molestation and assault and that is why the father of the boy is astounded by the action of law officials to arrest him. On the other hand the small boy is gleeful at escaping punishment even after he had stolen money that his father had meant to use for his upkeep. The child escapes unpunished, which Grand Pa's generation decries as the genesis of myriad social ills related to leniency towards children. The line between discipline and overreaction among parents is also the subject of conversation in many African homes today.

The second short story Grand Pa tells his audience is about a young urban bred lady who enters a pit latrine (toilet) with an infant but when she comes out the audience notices that she has left the infant in the toilet. The innocent children to whom Grand Pa tells the story do not understand that the lady had dumped the infant into a bottomless pit to die. It is uncustomary and untraditional for anybody to dump a child leave alone kill them! The traditional stand when it comes to childcare and human life come to question as the children thinking the lady forgot the baby by chance run after her. Their obliviousness to the reality of two cultural orientations, the modern and the traditional, drives them to the frenzy with which they bring down the toilet structure.

Sadly for the children, Grand Pa declares that there will always be another toilet, meaning this habit is here to stay. Grand Pa, whose presence in this scene is a constant reminder of the clash between tradition and modernity subtly insinuates that the children to whom he is telling stories are part of the world that he is investigating through his stories. He mischievously asks them if they are beginning to see or understand themselves from his short stories. These children are still in the land between the modern and traditional and therefore innocently say they do not understand anything Grand Pa is talking about. This is reason enough for Grand Pa to tell them the main story using his statutes.

The story within a story technique in African traditional orature is exemplified by the two short stories told by Grand Pa before he begins to tell the main story. The story within a story is easily identifiable with the play within a play technique. The difference between the two levels of performance is that whereas in the play within a play the characters signal the distinct division that is unified through the signal of the beginning

and the end, the story within a story is played through difference in narrative voices. The play *Recreations* though, erases the overly traditional by providing one narrator Grand Pa, who seems to signal the beginning and end to both levels of the story in the play.

Grand Pa does not rely on the vocal ability to perform a story within a story; instead he uses different characters and different episodes to paste two short stories onto another by thematic strengthening of the short stories. Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner (2007) describe a play within a play as a second internal performance in which actors appear as actors who play additional roles. They qualify this definition by stating that the play within a play is the depiction of a theatrical reality which is often reinforced by the presence on stage of an internal audience, which acts as a double to the actual audience.

Grand Pa in *Recreations* is presented as having his audience in the children who visit him for storytelling, but he uses other characters to tell the short story as well as the main story. Grand Pa has both the small audience on stage, and the audience that watches him tell his small audience the stories. At the same time, Grand Pa is aided in the telling of the story when the children who listen to him shift from passive to active audience, by participating in the action that completes his story. This happens when they intone by asking questions, expressing surprise, waking up to follow a character and through response to Grand Pa's questions.

Gerhard and Bernhard (2007), reinforce their understanding of the play within a play by explaining that this device presents a dual reality in which the actor who is on stage in his or her reality and another in which she or he is playing another role which

adds a third identity construed in a third level of time, space, characterization, and action. This argument augments the story within a story technique in which the narrator assumes a different voice to play another character, which the narrator abandons by assuming the original narrative voice represented by the character depicted by that voice.

The role of Grand Pa in *Recreations* is similar to what Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittia (1975), describe as the introductory episode that is not related to the action itself but into which the short story appears to be inserted. The two episodes that open the play *Recreations* are independent of the main story because they are insertions that serve to help the main story only by thematic relevance and not as a sequence of the main plot. Valentina and Susan (1975), aptly define the arrangement in a story within a story as an attempt at constructing the framework in the form of another complementary work, that encloses it by a context which often uses an external point of view.

Grand Pa is out to tell a major story but prepares ground for it by saying complementary stories to act as the groundwork for him to sit outside the framework of a narrator and become an external person viewing things from a perspective that supports his moral. The fact that Grand Pa has a story to tell means that he must have an audience, and in this play the audience sitting with him on stage help him draw the audience in the auditorium into a story told through characters represented by the statues. The statues are the metaphor that drives Grand Pa's story by coming to life to play a different kind of role.

As is traditionally tenable, the characters represented by *Macho*, his wife *Wifi* and his children take over the story and at the end of it *Macho* himself appears to have been

telling a story to his children *Anuani* and *Ulowa*. The lingering nature of orature creeps into a story told by Grand Pa and converges in his sliding out of the scene, so that the story is developed by others, who in themselves tell a story relevant to the one begun by Grand Pa. Through the representation of symbolic characters, the play *Recreations* captures the moral fiber of the traditional society. Grand Pa laments the erosion of mores that held society together and points a finger towards modernity or city life. He feels that humanity has changed and become debased, beastly and has been wasted by their embracing of modern values.

The story told through Grand Pa's statues is meant to open the eyes of the traditional minded, and to warn those engulfed in modern ways that drive them towards being errant in matters traditional. *Macho* represents the old order, and his name symbolizes just that. He believes in the traditional role of a husband and father which calls upon him to be faithful to a customary marriage, which gives him authority both over his wife and children. He almost feels entitled to his wife as if she was property and is beholden to the community to lead the family. *Macho* is so protective of his pregnant wife that when the ferry capsizes, he offers to save mother and child even if he drowns to death. He is thus astounded by *Wifi's* attitude after she thinks *Macho* met his demise in the ferry accident.

Wifi is the quintessential woman torn between two worlds. She slides into another life far removed from the world of her husband *Macho* and is in a second marriage to a modern-day tycoon. There she wallows in the temporal waste and plunder that characterizes *Jifu's* life. She is taken in by affluence and credulously falls into the trap of the corrupt *Jifu* who after ripping *Wifi* of her inheritance both from her father and the supposedly

dead *Macho* doffs her at a convenient time to pick on the house nurse in a characteristic licentious fashion. *Jifu* is a town/modern minded person who indulges in amassing property/wealth with incessant abandon. He exploits the poor and thrives on both thievery and greed. He is corrupt and callous to the point of arranging to swindle those he purports to love, like *Wifi*.

Jifu conspires to sink his ferry on the eve of the day its insurance expires so that he can be paid some money. Never mind that hundreds of people die in this dastardly act. The *Jifus* of this world are said to be a new creation born of modernity. Traditional challenges to human life are replaced by new order found in cities. The story of *Recreations* is a suggestion that as traditional order vanishes and is replaced by modern values, these are recreation on a daily basis of a world order that the Grand Pa of this world will perpetually lament about.

Traditional storytelling was characterized by one strong moral lesson and the play *Recreations* lives up to this billing by exploring myriad thematic factors bordering on moral issues. The play addresses corruption, which is an entirely new phenomenon as far as traditional life was concerned. The play also addresses marriage, faithfulness among couples, child rearing, affluence, greed, and personal sacrifices. Social decadence is the one word that summarizes the concerns of the old as represented by Grand Pa and *Macho*. The story of *Recreations* is told through strong narrative techniques which are exemplified in the elaborate stage directions and long dialogues. Also significant in *Recreations* is the use of opening and closing songs as well as others in between. These elements serve to reinforce the play as the product of orature that embodies modern playwriting.

The conflict in the play surrounds two world orders but is merged by the fact of the need to tell a narrative/ story in a manner befitting traditional orature. It is in this framework that the drama festival is seen as the confluence of two distinct historical periods. The traditional as well as the modern do not just meet, but they also clash in a fashion reminiscent of a full-scale war. Violence against women and even men is touched although nobody is remorseful about the happenings in the play. Surely Grand Pa wants his audience to use their eyes to see and their ears to hear, so that through his statues they may be human again.

Recreations-The Play

Grand Pa bends his frame to exit the round grass thatched house. He casts a glance at the rising sun and then looks to his left and then right before he uses a fly whisk to dust the four statues around his hut. As he does his daily chores, he mutters to himself.

Grand Pa I am up and about, almost striking six. Yet the city, this massive

land slumbers, yes! Sighing God's magical recreation of another new day

(Creation song). It is placid, with a cool chilly breeze. I have lived to see

generations beget generations, I have seen their untainted eyes turn red

and blood shot, I have seen brother set against brother and sister against

sister (Song) and so I created these statutes to recreate the life we have.

lived and continue to live, they are monuments, inheritances and treasures that carry invaluable meaning (Song). Every waking day I brush them, clean them and tend to them knowing that you all will see them because through them I not only hope to reach the world but to also touch humanity in a special way. I tend to them so that through them those with eyes can see a reflection of their lives, and that through them we may be human again (Song)

(A group of six boys dance their way on stage singing praises of Grand Pa)

Chorus Tuna kuimbia, babu wetu tunakuimbia ewee X2(We sing for you, we sing for our grandpa. Tnaku tafuta, babu wetu tuna kutafuta ewee (we seek you out, our grandpa we seek you.Tuna kuabudu, babu wetu tunaku abudu ewee (we adore you, grandpa we adore you)

(They stop singing and stand around Grand Pa

Chorus Grand Pa, the wise one, we have come from far, far, far

Boy To see you.

Boy To listen to your tales.

Child Your words of wisdom

Child Your teachings-everything!

Grand Pa Me?

Child Yes Grand Pa

Grand Pa There must be a mistake...are you sure it is me you are looking for

Child you Grand Pa

Child We have come to listen to learn from your wonderful tales

Child Tell us about this ancient gruel place.

Child That people say flows with warm, sweet and original traditional gruel

Child Tell us about this ageless tree.

Child That many say harbours the biggest python ever.

Child Tell us about these statues.

Child That people say you created.

Child And that you clean them every morning.

Child Tell us about us.

Child All of us

Child And tell us about you.

Grand Pa Oh my God! All that?

Chorus Yes Grand Pa!

Grand Pa In one day? An instance? Alright children get seated, be comfortable (they sit on wooden stumps). Here, (he serves them hot gruel in calabashes) drink this traditional breakfast, starts you on a good and fruitful day...our forefathers sat round this gruel place and drunk as they conferred. I will tell you about me, about this tree, this land and about you. And after I have told you what you must hear and what you must see, you will understand about yourselves-all of us. Now look at this (a small boy comes on stage running. Behind him is his father holding a short cane. His father spansks him several times as the boy writhes in pain screaming)

Boy I did not do it; it was not me, please, please!

Man Produce the money you are thieving imp (hits him amid screams)

Produce the money or I kill you (Two policemen walk in)

Police I Stop it you man, you have had your fun, get your hands off that boy and stand away from him (He goes on spanking him for a while)

Police II Stop it won't you? (The police moves towards man and holds him back)

Man What is this? What do you want?

Police I Listen man, you are under arrest

Man Under arrest? Whatever for?

Police II Assault! You assaulted this small boy

Man You must be crazy, this little devil here is my son, do you hear? My son! Stole the last money I had for his own upkeep and then twists the knife in the wound by trying to burn our house...it is this boy here (tries to reach him with the cane) you should be arresting.

Police I Will you come to the station with us (he is handcuffed and they walk him away)

Man (Protesting loudly as he walks away) this is a huge mistake...where is we headed with our youth...where? (Meanwhile the boy rises from the ground and dusts himself; glee written all over his face.

Boy And I am not even hurt...he, he, he, and I have the money yippee... (He runs off the stage)

Grand Pa What do you see children? Are you seeing yourselves?

Children (In unison) We do not understand Grand Pa...

Grand Pa We have already eaten our past and are busy devouring our future-the children. It will be either child molestation on his head or child

destruction. Spare the rod and spoil the child they say (He breaks into song) Gone are the days, when the heart was full of hope. Gone are the days, when the heart was full of grace) Children have you seen us right here? (Just then a smartly dressed woman walks on stage carrying a baby and a hand bag. She walks straight to the toilet nearby and stays there for a brief moment before coming out)

Child I She left the baby

Grand Pa Did she?

Children Yes, she did

Child II Stop her!

Children (They arise) stop that woman; (They run in her direction) stop her...stop That woman! (She Disappears. The children bewildered head for the toilet)

Child II Bring the toilet down.

Child III Yes, let's break the door, the locks.

Grand Pa T's a waste of time children

Child III We may still save the child.

Grand Pa T's useless I said...I know that toilet, one hundred fifty feet down
it's no easy assignment for anyone.

Child, I Bring it down regardless, we may save another child.

Grand Pa will always be another toilet; we see them here every day.

(Children walk towards Grand Pa and sit on the stumps dejected.

Grand Pa Are you beginning to see yourselves?

Children We do not understand.

Grand Pa Perhaps the little boy and his father, or the woman and the child

Do not illustrate my point well. Now come with me this way (They follow
him to four statues) this one here is *Macho*, he is the exemplification of
the old order, he symbolizes like the eyes that reflect the past and
present, Maho is the glue that holds the old and new ways together. Gofu
He is the husband of *Wifi* here... look at him (*Macho* stirs and walks off
the stage)

Children A strong man

Grand Pa That's right (He goes towards another statue) this here is *Wifi*, a cross
road between tradition and modernity, affectionate but very undecided.

In her days, she was a prime woman Look at her

Children She is beautiful

Grand Pa Very beautiful (Wifi stirs and walks with a glide as she leaves the stage)
here now are their children, *Anuwani* and *Uluwa*, recreations off two
opposing worlds. Let's see them in their youth.

Child II They are not like us?

Grand Pa More than that my children, they are you and they are us ...all us

Children We don't understand...

Grand Pa Let's sit back and watch them and after you have seen what I know you
must, and heard what I know you will, you shall understand why we are
recreations - all of us (Amid a song the children exit the as and
Uluwa remain. *Uluwa* is dancing before a huge hi-fi transmitter.
with huge earphones covering her ears while Rolly is reclining behind a
massive television screen watching wrestling. The aura is carnival when
Nurse arrives after setting the table for breakfast.

Nurse: (Moving towards Uluwa) Children...breakfast is served

Anuani (Gesturing) tell him... (Nurse goes to Uluwa)

Uluwa: Tell her...

Nurse: (Standing between them) please... (Enter mother. Anuani and Uluwa do not notice her)

Uluwa: wow! That is Wire Kali the rock wizard coming live on KBC breakfast club...(she notices mother) there mum! There mum! I am enjoying it!
(She dances freely and innocently)

Anuani: (There are checked grants of approval with every action form the television set as Au cuddles deep in the couch) There is a thirty minutes review of wrestling activity last year I must...

Wifi: (Picks up the remote and turns off the television) No such hopes ...sorry...it is a school day remember...

Au: (He laments angrily) that's unfair ma...that's unfair...you didn't turn Ulowa's transmitter!

Uluwa: There! There! This is exhilarating...I am enjoying it... (Mother turns off the transmitter) What's all this? You can...

Wifi: It is a school day I said!... look up there, it is approaching seven, will you eat your breakfast, wear your uniform and get to school (They are reluctant) Come on children, you know how hard I have struggled with that good for nothing schoolteacher of yours for special concession to be in school at eight and not seven like the other children. (They soften) Now eat your breakfast (They head for the table)

Ulouwa: (She looks around the set table with open disgust) There is no wheat bran and Chocó!

Aunuani (Inspecting the table) And plum jam is ever there, I won't touch it...I won't!

Wifi: Nurse! There is wheat bran and Chocó in the house...

Nurse: (Stepping in defensively) But madam, today's menu...

Wifi: Hell with today's menu! Or any menu at that...Give the children what they want...nothing is rigid here...get their clothes!...if they get late for school you will be to blame...(Nurse runs off) Now children ,go on ,eat your breakfast...tomorrow- (There is a sudden loud bang on the main

door. Mother and children pause for a while scared. After a minute's silence there is a longer and louder bang) Nurse! (Silence)...Nurse! (Silence)...God knows what the slow footed fool does when you call her... (There is another more urgent and purposeful bang on the door)...Nurse!

Nurse: (Enter Nurse) Yes Maam!

Wifi: (Angrily) someone is at the door...find out...

Nurse: (She opens the door and peeps briefly before coming back in) There is no one ma'am... (Mother and children look at one other surprised)

Wifi: Someone knocked very persistently ...dear nurse...look well... (Nurse dutifully goes back and this time fully goes out before coming back in)

Nurse: There is no one ma'am...only some kind of man (Pause) a mad man I think...third time I have seen him hovering around since you were away...but I have learned to ignore him...

Wifi : (Alarmed) a mad man...! Here...! In this storied neighborhood...Nurse are you cockeyed?

Ulowa: I always told you mom...see how confused...

Anuani Never gets anything right...

Nurse: (Disgusted and frustrated) There is no one I said... (She notices the harsh look Wifi's eyes and quickly runs to the door again...)

Nurse: There is no one else (Pause) the mad man has stopped (Pause) he is back tracking (She runs into the house scared) Madam...the mad man is coming straight here!

Wifi: (Therea, Anuani and Ulouwa surge towards the door) May I see...May I see...May I see? (Wifi who is first at the door comes back alarmed and screams) No! No!...it is not you! (Enter a ruffled Macho behind Wifi)

Macho (Calmly as he looks around the house) It is Therea...I am back... and what a home coming? (He walks into the house as Wifi, Nurse and the children huddle further into a corner) A neon light ...modernity is it? (He is taken in by the exotic house furnishing) This is what you folks crave for...? this is not what we taught subtle Wifi...

Wifi: (Still alarmed) Macho you died...

Macho: Did I...?

Wifi: You died upon the Tuone Ferry... the great tragedy...the National tragedy that killed four hundred seventy-seven!

Macho: (Ignoring her on noticing Ulowa) this must be Uluwa... What are you? A child woman...? This is what your mother has turned you into...? (To himself) Won't this crazy world ever let children be children...? (To Ulowa) Get a long decent dress now! (Turns to Anuani) Anu ...? Come here! (Anu clutches onto Therea's dress) You are not a flea market...a target range to practice on...(Pointing) get rid of all this...Mach reaches for the music system and crushes it to the ground)

Wifi (More agitated) Macho Stop it you man! (He has pulled the television from the rack and smashed it to the ground) Macho! I bought all these items...money! Money! (Another item is smashed as Macho moves mechanically heightening his furry with every motion) I will call the police on you...Nurse...Call the police now!

Nurse: (Still scared) who is he ma'am...? Do you know this man...?

Wifi Do as you are told you fool ...! (Just then another haul of items come down under Macho's strong hands) You man! (Wifi decides to walk

behind Macho hurling insults as Macho's orgy of destruction leaves a huge mess on the floor of the house) Beast, skunk, yellow! You will pay for these all these...you will pay ...very heavily ... (Macho turns round and smacks her hard on the face) Ouch! (She falls to her knees)

Macho: (Looking down at her) Seven years...! Eight may be...! And you stink...rotten to the core...!

Wifi: (Tearfully) you hit me...? You...? A vagabond...! You will pay...you must pay for this (She holds her cheek) ...!

Macho: This is not the subtle, humble woman that I married...Paid sixty heifers in dowry...did everything in the world to make happy... ingrate...mother to Anu...to Ulowa...sit there...! Sit there I said... (Wifi slowly heaves herself from the squatting position and sits on a stool) Tell them... tell the children who I am...

Wifi: (Mollified but hesitant and sobbing) Chi... chil...Children...this is-

Macho: Call them by their names our Wifi...!

Wifi (Facing Anu) Anu... (Facing) Ulouwa... thi...this...is yo...your father!
(Breaks into a deeper sob)

Anu: No... mother! No... this man...? Deranged and disproportional up hear
(points to his head) ...You call him my father...? It cannot be... and I am
not Aunu I am Rolly...

Macho: (He looks at Jifu long and hard) God...! It is not you...!

Jifu: (Shocked) My...! It is not you...!

Nurse: (Running ahead of Jifu) Sir...! Do not attend to him... he has jumped the
queue and has been very rude...he has told everybody how this hospital is
inefficient and dirty... how we mistreat patients ...how we overcharge
them...he-

Macho: They are also corrupt...sack these people...sack them good sir...my wife
is in high labour but they joke...they joke...sack them... All of
them...look... (He looks back and notices Therea is not in the room. He
runs out and leads her in. She is stooping in total pain) here sir...this is my
wife...can you help...? (Just then one of the guards hits him hard with a
club) What was that...? Was it necessary...? Sir...! See what I mean...?
Sack these people!

Jifu: Lesson number one... talk only when talked to...lesson number two...this is my hospital...my staff...my medicine you are talking about (He looks at Therea) Is this your wife...?

Macho: (Straightening up) yes sir...

Jifu: (He moves towards Therea who is lying on the rug) Therea... this is the man you married...? This balm... this village door mat... this dolt... (To his guards) Get them out of here...quick...

Macho: Good sir...! The baby will be-

Jifu: (Pointing to the door) Out I said... (The nurse comes back as the guards are struggling to push a struggling Macho out and whispers in his ear)...No...! Let it not happen here...! Or else someone will be sacked...!

(Everybody exits as Macho and Wifi remain in a corner. Jifu delivers outside on the pavement with the help of Macho who covers her with a strap of clothing. They carry their baby and approach a ferry to cross over to the other side of the Island where they live. The ferry has just arrived and excited passengers scramble to get themselves space in it. They shout..." the ferry has come...the ferry has come...the ferry has come" as they carry their loads into the small but now definitely full vessel-the last

one this day. The coxswain and the attendants are visibly drunk and careless. They are about to close the sails when they hear Gofu's distant voice)

Macho: Stop...! Stop...!

Attendant: (lowering the rails to let Macho and Wifi in) Come on quick...it's you we've been waiting for...run will you (he and his mate are obviously drunk)

Macho: (Peering through the ferry) we have a newborn... do you have space...?
(Noticing the vessel is packed) Is this the way you carry...?

Attendant II: (Drunkenly) There is enough room to sleep...come on in...I notice God has remembered you (Laughter) you have a newborn...we'll always have room for you...

Macho: This is nameless overloading...do you people ever get serious...this is a death trap if you ask me...(The impatient passengers get irked and hurl obscenities "whom do you think you are...must be carrying a future queen or king...ha ha ha...thinks we are foolish because we are in here...this is the last ferry today...does not look like he will afford lodging in this Island...had better take the risk like us...let him be...we are getting

late...when will I prepare my dinner...I have a sick child etc”) I can’t take it... this is obscene...

Wifi (Tired and forlorn) let’s take it Macho... this is the way it is here remember...and where will we sleep after we let it go...? There will be more trouble in the night... (They begin to mount the ferry)

Attendants: (Mockingly) The queen steps...the King follows...The queen steps...the King follows... (Macho and Therea are finally in. The ferry entrance is sealed, and they remain standing as the trip to the other side of the Island begins)

(There is general excitement as people sitting in convenient groups engage in varied conversations. The attendants are half asleep near the entrance to the ferry and many others doze off during the one-hour trip. Less than a mile before anchor there is a sudden loud bang, and the ferry loses control. People are shocked and there are screams and wails. The ferry begins to dance from side to side and the drunken coxswain has no control over it anymore...)

Macho (Moving towards the coxswain) Hard right...! Hard right you fool...! You’ll kill us all...Come on hard right...bear the water out...the ferry is sinking! (People shuffle and fall over each other in desperation. The

coxswain loses it and one side of the ferry is already consumed by water. Many people are struggling to swim but eventually drown. There are no floaters or any safety devices) Where are the floaters...? You people planned to kill us all...! (Macho realizes the futility of shouting at the coxswain. He holds onto a wooden plank, pushes it onto water and loads Therea and the baby onto it) There...! Therea...not all of us will make it...hold tight onto it (The wooden plank seems to work and Wifi still clutching onto the baby heads ashore. Many people drown and lose the fight...someone holds onto Macho's legs from under the water and he realizes he will never make it. He begins to drown in the water, but his head is still above it) Therea...! Hold on tight...! do not let go...!we'll name him Anu...short for Anuani...the support...the lintel on which we all must rely...call him Anu...! (His voice is drowned by the shouts of confusion) ...Take care of Anu for me... Take care of Anu for me... (As the voice of Gofu drowns the scene shifts to a public place. Enter Jifu, his aides and a small crowd)

Aide: Ladies and gentlemen...this is a great and auspicious occasion...what with the gracious presence of one of our own tycoons... a generous and considerate personality...join me in welcoming Jifu...(People ululate and clap as Jifu mounts a rostrum)

Jifu: I will be brief for want of time... you all know how busy we are...but in our tight schedule we always find time for philanthropic activities... today I have an offer...a gift from Jifu holdings... I will donate thirty thousand pounds worth of tinned beef to you all... (Cheers) I expect this to feed you for a while as we explore other avenues of ensuring food for all...(Cheers) The amount of money we are talking about here is well over five million Kenya shilling...!(Wild cheers) I will leave you with the short gesture ...remember I will be back with much more serious business. I will ask you if you find me fit for the legislative assembly... (Cheers of approval). Amid this cacophony Jifu and his aides move over to another scene. It is the city water plant and a number of workers, and the public have been awaiting his arrival)

Aide: Ladies and gentlemen...I must apologize on behalf of the honourable Zake for keeping you waiting...like usual we had other pressing public needs to attend to...now may you put hands together and welcome his honour to address us...(Excited cheers and claps heave Zake to the rostrum)

Jifu: (Proudly assessing the crowd for a while)...I am excited at your reception...As is our custom, we go straight to business...Jifu and Jifu holdings have a special offer to this city...we will supply high quality chlorine at a very subsidized rate for two straight years...!(Elongated cheers and claps)...The subsidy will come at a cost to Jifu holdings of a

cool forty million shilling...!(Excited cheers) This will ensure clean supply of chlorinated water to our city...thus ensuring good health and prosperity...At an opportune time we'll be back to discuss more serious business...you know our country is soon setting us to ask you if anyone of us could legislate on your behalf...(Calls of "you are ours!...we'll want you to lead us" rent the air as Jifu and his entourage leave the scene. The scene is vacated by everybody except the workers of the water plant who have begun unloading and storing the donated chlorine)

Loader I: (Enthusiastic) Come on... let's get to it...the rains are almost here...lest the chlorine gets destroyed...hand over hand.

Loader II: Hand over hand...gentlemen don't we too deserve to be paid more...now that philanthropists are all over with donations?

Loader III: You'll wait an eternity longer...come on stop dreaming...hand over hand... (They work on off-loading and packing the bags of chlorine till one drops and spill over. Loader one examines the contents keenly and then announces)

Loader I: (Carrying some sample to the others) Chalk...bloody chalk...how beastly...how inhuman...this is all chalk...

- All:** (Astounded) Bloody chalk...(Just then Loader III who has decided to dress up and leave for the day notices something from one of the open water pipes leading up from the Ocean)
- Loader III:** Three strange things today... (He is peeping into the open pipe leading upto the manhole)
- Loader I:** Three strange things indeed...first the auspicious occasion...then the donation... and now the discovery...!
- Loader I:** What do you mean...?
- Loader III:** Three strange things I said... (He is sullen and looks hard down into the open pipe. Others run over) that over there is a man...the body of a man...dead...! (Others are taken aback)
- Loader I:** I have always said that these pipes be sealed off so that things coming from the Ocean don't come straight here...I quit this job... (He runs to change from his uniform when Loader II calls)...
- Loader II:** Come on guy...do not run from a fellow human being...dead or alive... (He changes his mind and they begin to retrieve the body from the deep trench. They take a long time but they manage to get the body out)

Loader I: (Excited) He is breathing...he is alive...quick...get the first aid kit...call the ambulance...let's resuscitate him... (They quickly resuscitate the man who comes back to, just before the ambulance arrives and carries him away)

Loader III: Today we've done some work...some reasonable work...we saved a life...let's call it a day... (They get off their uniforms and exit).

(The scene reverts to the entry of Zake into the house where Therea, Au, Uluwa and Nurse are)

Jifu: (In utter surprise) this man died...

Macho: This is his ghost...Time for the piper to be paid...I have come for my wife and children... (He gestures at them but they shrug their shoulders in denial)...I have a duty like I was taught to defend and care for them...

Wifi: (Emboldened by Jifu's's presence) Jifue, drive this beast out of here...I do not know him...

Jifu: And how the hell did he get here? There are the guards out there, the searchlights and all...

Wifi: Just came in as if from nowhere and did all this (She shows Jifu the mess all over the floor) he also fogged me up ... (she retrieves the whip lash from the debris and dangles it in Jifu's face)...this is a beast...

Anu: He threatened to beat me up too...please get him out of here...I don't like the sight of this man...

Ulowa: Man? This is no man...he is a beast...He tore off the dress you bought me and slapped me here (Touching her cheek) ...I am scared...

Jifu: (On his phone) Come on in...red alert...there is a mad man here...

Macho: Wifi...I am your husband... you will regret all this...

Wifi I don't know you...I hate you...I hate you...did you just slap me? You'll pay...you will pay very heavily. (The guards walk in briskly and coldly)

Jifu: Bring him in... (They quickly but cautiously go round Macho, put his hands together and tie him up) Come on here Shena (He hands to her the whip lash) Give him back his medicine...

Wifi: (She is excited) Do you mean it dear?

Jifu: Give him back his medicine... (Therea is hesitant the children noticing this try to take the whip from her)

Anu: (To Jifu) Father...I can do it...mother, give me the whip... Jifu restrains him)

Ulowa: (Jumping up and down in excitement) Come on mother...Let me do it for you I can... (Jifu manages to shove them off)

Jifu: Now! (He gestures at Wifi who begins to swing her whip as she approaches Jifu. Just as she is about to lash it on Macho)

Macho: Wifi! (Therea hesitates but Jifu and the children urge her on. She prepares another onslaught but...) WifiI am your husband...

Wifi: You are not... (It is as if Wifi was waiting for this cue for she begins to land several lashes on every part of Macho's body. She has been doing this for over ten minutes till she is sweating and breathing heavily. The children have been restrained by Jifu almost thrice from taking over the whip from her. All this time Macho has taken the lashing without a single motion or emotion. He has remained studiously firm and absorbent. Wifi is tired and stops the lashing)

Macho: (Very calmly as if nothing has happened) May I now go?

Jifu: (Irrked by this sarcasm) what cheek? I am not yet done with you...by the time I am through with you...you'd wish you were never born...

Macho: I wish that everyday...every time I have had to deal with people like you...our hands are tied... all the time we deal with irresponsible carefree recreations of stones and metals like you...why don't you untie me...then dare touch me...

Jifu: (Points menacingly at Macho) Look at this fellow...do you really know who I am?

Macho Who you are is not important...slight pause) I know what you are... (Sarcastically) Great Jifu I've been told... (Jifu smiles proudly) ...Great rubbish! (Jifu is suddenly more offended than before).

Jifu: You know I can have you killed?

Macho: I am dead you'd be told... one does only once...

Jifu: This man is mad...

Macho: Wifi is this the man you now call your husband? The man who would arrange to sink a whole ferry on the eve of the day he knew his insurance would expire...so as to reap from the disaster...this man? The man who donates pounds upon pounds of beef because he knows they have expired to gain cheap popularity...the man who sold out chalk in the name of chlorine pretending it was subsidized...you call this a husband...Therea...you are lost (All this time Wifi has been agape as Jifu paces up and down. The children are merely starring)

Jifu: (To his guards) Untie him and get him out of here...let me hear he lives no more...(The guards finish untying Gofu in time for him to put his hand into his pocket to remove a rounded white substance which he hurls right at the feet of Jifu and Wifi. Everybody is scared by this move during which lapse Macho holds Anu and Ulouwa by the hands and slips out of the house. When Jifu recovers he orders the guards to pick up the white substance. They think it is an explosive-a bomb of some kind and are very cautious approaching it. Jifu's's ordering urges the guards who pick the substance up)

Guard: Paper! Only a roll of paper...

Jifu: What are you waiting for? Get the man...he has two children with him
(Macho took the chance to get away with the children and only Wifi and
Jifu remain in the rubble of a house)

Wifi (Heaving a sigh of relief) hopefully the guards intercept him and get the
children back...Nurse! Get this mess out of here and a noon cup for the
master (The Nurse dutifully runs off as usual till Jifu calls her back)

Jifu: Slyly) Mudge! Get out of that filthy apron...the game is over... (Wifi is
startled)

Wifi: (Confused)mudge? Mudge did I hear? Since when did you address nurse
by her first name?

Nurse: Phew! (She takes off the apron and hurls it away) I was wondering how
much longer the wait would go on

Jifu: (Taken in by Nurse's metamorphosis) and what a doll you are! Wow! I am
through transferring all names. The estate at the coast was not easy
coming... however all the eight holdings are transferred and safely in our
names...can we get out of here now!

Wifi: (Steps between them) Wait a minute...will someone tell me what is happening here?

Nurse: (Very confidently) Everything my fair lady...everything...don't you have eyes?

Wifi: I am not talking to you... you are a hand in this house...that's your station! (She by passes her, holds Jifu by the hand and shakes him violently) Jifu...tell me what is happening...

Nurse: Fortunately not anymore...my dear ...

Jifu: I hate people you have to explain to every space and letter in a word...Wifi ...it is exactly as you see it...(Jifu moves very majestically towards Mudge and kisses her passionately)

Wifi: (Incensed) someone tell me I am not seeing right. You played...parts?

Nurse: (Playfully as she swings round the house) don't people play parts these days? Did you imagine that a man of class...style and so auspicious like ZJifu would cling to you forever? Open your eyes...mother of two (She glides across the room) just see...take a keen look... do you compare?

Wifi: (Enraged as she approaches Jifu violently) Jifu say something... what is this? What is this?

Jifu: Wifi This house is paid up for two months... you have enough time to arrange your belongings and leave...that is even more than you can bargain for...everything was good while it lasted...

Wifi : Therea? Oh! Now you call me Therea? Has it come to all that? No... not me... you have raked all my fortunes... you have cheated me of everything I ever owned...the three-hundred-acre land by the coast that I inherited from my father...the ferry accident claims and a lot others...I will not let go...I must sort it out with you...

Jifu: Everything is on paper...black on white... and you know it...you signed off every...

Wifi: Thief! Thief...that's what you are...

Nurse: Dense stupid girl...ha... ha... ha...

Wifi: Open your filthy mouth again and I will shut it up for you... (She menacingly charges at her)

Jifu: Dare touch Mudge and you will regret it all your life...in fact Mudge alone is enough to crook you round her little finger...(pause) now I change my mind...you have twenty four hours to vacate this house...I have been overly generous (To Nurse) come on Mudge we do not have time to waste let's be gone (They exit leaving Therea in a trance)

(Wifi paces up and down the deserted house not knowing what to do. She breaks down and sobs for long. Wakes up and unconsciously begins to call...)

Wifi: Macho come back...come back now...Great Jifue...great rubbish (She pauses) Where is Macho...my Macho...Macho come back...Macho...Jifu Macho...No...Rubbish...Jifuuu...(She repeats these names as she leaves the scene and breaks into a run... tearing clothes from her body as she does so)

(Enter Jifu with his guards in the search for Macho and the children)

Jifu: Two children and a man can't just disappear...how in the first place did he get in and out of the compound? Now, he must still be in the neighbourhood...

(They comb the nearby shopping centre turning everything upside down. They then enter a small chapel where mass is going on. Jifu and his guards disrupt the service walking all over the place searching for Macho and the children. They are out in the open yard checking every suspicious character and building. Meanwhile in one of the alleys Macho is hiding with Anu and Ulouwa who are very resistant)

Macho: You can't break the grip Au... they are sailor's hands...you must listen to me, I am your father...

Anu: You are not...I will scream...

Macho: I will bash your moth before you do...Come on Uluwa...sit still

Uluwa: I do not know who you are...I will run back home...leave us alone...

Macho: There is no home where you want to run...trust me...you have no friend there (He hears some rapid steps and hides the children under some barrage of garbage...he disguises himself as a scavenger and begins to sing a tuneless song)

Guard: (To the others who have not appeared on the scene yet) Here... I have found him. Come on quick here he is... (He realizes this is not the figure

of the person they were looking for) No sorry...it is only a scavenger...such people are lunatic and abound around here...

Jifu: (Arrives eager to end the game for Macho) We are looking for a man and two children...not a scavenger...I hate people who only just yap...let's get going...(They are about to leave when the children on hearing Jifu's voice run out of hiding towards Jifu

Anu /Ulouwa: Father! Here we are...

Jifu: (Firmly) Hey! I am not your father... (he staves them off) There stands your father in another grand play (Macho unveils the disguise) you are too good...too ... too clever live in this world...this is your last date.....

Macho I am not afraid of you...let us use our hands and see how far you go...one on one...these are sailor's hands (he raises his hands but Jifu orders his men who pounce on him with every manner of violent punches. They hit him in very delicate areas, all his joints, the arms, knees, and all over his body. They flee leaving him for dead in full glare of Anu and Ulowa)

(The desolate children help Macho to his feet. He crumbles back down. He is badly hurt. They quickly rummage the garbage heap and cobble some

makeshift crutches. Macho uses them to raise himself. He coughs and blood flows freely from the mouth)

Anu: Can we call the police...an ambulance...or something?

Macho: There is no need Au...let it be...by the time they come...it will be done... it is already too late...the pain is enormous (He beckons to them, and they hold him from either side to his feet although with a weak stoop) So that is the story...take care of the Jifu's of this world...they are everywhere...look there (A schoolgirl in uniform is crossing the road when she is struck by a hit and run vehicle) that girl was going to school...bang! Bang! Bang! Irresponsible carefree bangs!.

(The picture of a building brought down by the winds) there was once a nice huge looking house there...what happened? Some contractors did not do his job...bang! Bang! .and it is a heap of waste. Strive for the best my children ...Always

Anu: But how can we father?

Ulowa: The Jifu's are everywhere...there are recreations all over...

Macho Start at the beginning...it will be a long journey back...to humanity. Hope...Godliness...just good...

nu/Ulowa: (Perplexed) we don't understand...

Macho It can be done children...we can all fit in this world...we can all get back to the wonderful creatures we once were...not the hapless recreations we all are today...on the day I rode the sea last...on the day Auni was born...I saw us all... This whole world is a nutshell, we sure can fit in it...just make the journey back...do not fall victim to worldly recreations...stick with what you once were ...you will get there... (He coughs long and lets the crutches fall. The children are too late they cannot hold him back as he falls into a helpless heap. He raises himself up painfully without the crutches and begins to stagger ahead of the children. He staggers away for a while and then stops to look back at them) It can be done children...you can do it...start at the beginning (He staggers away amid a dirge. the children watch tearfully as Gofu slowly vanishes from sight.)

Ulowa: Come on Au...no need to grieve... do not drop a tear...father left us a weapon...we are not alone...he said that in the long journey back, we'll encounter recreations...

Anu: And we must navigate. We must beware...sister, let's get started... (They hold hands, turn their backs on the audience and walk straight upstage as curtains close amid a fast Safari song)

The End

Chapter six: Introspection

It would be foolhardy for this dissertation to base its relevance on merging two distinct worlds of performance and baptizing them as being in conflict, without projecting a possible consequence of the confluence born of their interaction. This chapter far from being a conclusion of the lingering nature of orature, sets out to suggest the way forward for the survival of both orature and modern drama in my community and country. Oral traditions dominate our theatrical style in Kenya even as many of our people still hunger for the elusive cultural unity that could define our artistic badge as a people.

The proof of the assertion I have just made is evidenced in the volume of foreign drama consumed by many Kenyans today. The love for modern art is evidenced in the indulgence in television soap operas and the so-called western films, which does not necessarily translate into a total migration from tradition into the western modern world. In fact, many Kenyans have embraced diversity in the arts with an amazing zeal. On the one hand there is the search for a distinct cultural ethos, which snowballs into the craze for Nigerian movies while on the other hand western movies get an almost equal footing on television entertainment.

The picture portraying Kenyans as chiefly entrenched in foreign drama reveals a host of issues already hinted in earlier literature in this dissertation. First, it will be noticed that both Nigerian moves as well as western films revolve around television and the movies (the screen), which begs the question-where is stage drama and/or theatre? And what happened to theatre? Second and most intriguing is the question as to why

there is the craze for Nigerian art, which does espouse elements discoverable in Kenya as well. And finally, if we are so engrossed in tradition and therefore find semblance to the same in Nigerian art, how does western film bridge the resultant gap?

The overriding answer to the questions above and many others, is in the fact that we hunger for something in the theatrical bowl and can only get satiation by casting our sights beyond our borders. It is important to note here that both western drama consumed in Kenya as movies are a product of high level and strong foundational theatrical conventions arising from several layers of artistic styles evolving through the years.

Other than recognizing that our orature could be the basis for our theatrical style, we have sacrificed the essence of orature at the altar of modern theatrical traditions. The lingering nature of orature has not had the overarching strength to obliterate the external/foreign influences and/or dictate their subsuming authority on the Kenyan stage.

Most western theatrical conventions and styles rode roughly on the wings of political and social revolutions in Europe. Theatre then helped shape or was shaped by the societies in which it was made. There is therefore always the uncanny relationship between theatre and the political class. The situation in Kenya was most likely aggravated by the fact that two distinct worlds were coming into contact and at the apex of the so called orature on the one hand and modernity on the other stood the government of the day.

The colonial government in Kenya while funding the construction of the national theatre was determined to heed the citizenry's call for a symbol of colonial control of the

arts. The need for entertainment was overshadowed by the urge to import an alien theatrical culture both deliberately and inadvertently.

The imposing edifice called the Kenya national theatre lived up to its political ancestry; and extended political hegemony to the realm of culture and the artistic world. Obviously, the national theatre was erected in a plush colonist's only neighbourhood and apart from an exclusive clientele based on the location; the exorbitant and prohibitive cost of production and gate charges, put the final nail in the theatrical coffin of indigenous art and artists. The choice of plays that were exclusively Eurocentric, as well as the performance styles surrounding a new proscenium approach to production, opened the west up via the stage production of western dramatic literature as well as film.

On the other hand, the subsuming influence of modern drama on traditional orature plunged the populace into a deep quagmire, from which it has been a nightmare to emerge with a distinct cultural unity and identity strong enough to sustain artistic traditions of yore. It is this situation that explains the craving for Nigerian drama, which far from being a result of a strong cultural history and unity, expresses African themes in a magnetic and irresistible manner. It should not be forgotten that Nigeria like Kenya was colonized by the British and thus underwent similar experiences in the world of art/theatre.

As we in Kenya decry the colonial as well as governmental insensitivity to the arts, it cannot be lost on us that theatre has the world over been affected by political dynamism. Philip Zarrili (2010), talks about the inevitable marriage between theatre and major political events in Europe. He observes that government power has been used

perpetually to both support and limit theatrical activity. In recognition of this kind of situation, Zarrili posits that the relationship between government and theatre has been less than rosy because of theatre's indulgence in ethical and political performances broadly understood by the political class as overlapping in the spheres of control thus breeding conflict.

Theatrical activities are aimed at the citizenry and mostly influence both the political and social understanding of the people in a manner that touches on morality. Philip Zarrili (2010) observes that in many instances theatrical performances are basically uncontroversial, but their propensity to present human relationship on stage lead the political class to interpret performances as the means to questioning their authority or undermining their influence and power.

There is no doubt that the position of government is always cemented by the desire to influence the views, actions and general life of their subjects; and since theatre works around reflecting the existing moral energy as well as cultural challenges, the government smells conflicting interests that they always want to control.

Philip Zarrili (2010) in recognition of the fact that no theatre world wide has never escaped government control, enumerates vivid examples to elucidate state power and control over the arts. He observes that in Asia around the 1800s, theatre accepted exclusive government control in exchange for economic assistance. He states that during the American Revolution, the continental congress outlawed theatrical activities between 1776 and 1783. While back in France, Cardinal Richelieu realizing that theatre could centralize French absolutist regime, worked in dalliance with theatre makers. Philip

Zarrili (2010) however, also reveals that in Japan in the 1600s moving to the 1860s, the warlords sought to control the popular Kabuki as though it was a plague.

In England Philip Zarrili (2010) reveals a diversity of sorts whereby between 1600 and 1900, theatre was banned during the civil war and then after the restoration, government provided subsidies as a means of using theatre for the political purposes of the state. The reason for my looking at various state versus theatre relations is to suggest that even though the theatre has been pitted against the state in various parts of the world, the theatrical traditions of the same places have emerged stronger and resilient to date. Today, French, Japanese, English and American theatres are so strong that they are influencing theatrical histories of the world irrespective of earlier governmental control.

There is evidence all over the world that theatre does not die even when subjected to state control. Theatre has a way of recoiling into different media and forms, even in the wake of government stringent legislation against theatrical personalities and organizations. I look at circumstances under which Nicolai Gogol managed to write a play *The Government Inspector*, had top government officials attend a production of the play, and still escape scrutiny and threat from government. Another play-*An Enemy of the people* by Henrick Ibsen, that lay bare the rot in government, survived together with the theatrical tradition that bred it.

The major concern in this writing is how strong theatrical traditions withstand stringent tests of time and governmental control. In this light, I wish to decry the loss of that tradition to a reasonable extent in my own country, even though underneath, so much talent and expressiveness permeates our artistic world. As the drift from tradition to

modernity took place, there is evidence already discussed earlier in this dissertation that elements of orature have lingered on to date. However, the solidification of a theatrical tradition is lacking owing to foundational issues intrinsically tied to the politics of the day.

As I look to the west and how theatrical traditions gave birth to conventions and styles that have supported both tradition and pedagogy, I keep seeking the link to our past and how this has shaped the theatrical world view we hold today. Philip Hill (1991) says that the history of 20th century Europe was a history of one theatrical movement after another, directed against what was perceived as the result of limited vision of surface reality.

The determination to interlock theatre with happenings in Europe both political and social led to the search for a relevant theatrical vehicle with which to espouse reality of the world viewed from the pin hole of theatre. Hill (1991), explains that the theatre movements were in no way organized efforts of outright conspiracy to overthrow the status quo, but represented individual thinking of playwrights who influenced by common factors, arrived at similar methods of work.

Perhaps this explains why most western approaches to theatre are time tested, and are the product of serious experimentation as a result of which strong theatrical foundations were set. The experimentation with various movements had the result of creating stable, aesthetical and lasting theatrical practices and conventions. It is this kind of background that the theatre landscape lacks in many countries in Africa and for the sake of this writing, Kenya. We seem to be flowing in a distorted direction searching for

that which should hold theatrical conventions together, while starving of high aesthetic standards unique to our land.

The movements from realism, romanticism, symbolism, surrealism, absurdist theatre among others, were a direct reflection of dynamism which occurred in the world; and to which theatre not only reacted, but also reflected in very artistic and distinct ways on the stage. These movements are a huge bulwark to theatre scholarship and pedagogy to this day. In the same spirit, there is the hollow void left by our orature whose assimilation into various western/foreign theatrical modes, suffocate the base upon which these traditions would constitute a movement. This situation is not helped by political insensitivity and the arbitrary manner in which power and politics play in our nations.

There exist good examples about the entrenchment into a national culture of strong and lasting theatrical traditions. Nick Worrall (1996) says that due to European communal and artistic movements which brought new drama to new audiences, serious and prominent theatres emerged, like the theatre libre in France, theatre Buhne in Germany, the Abbey theatre in Dublin, independent theatres in England and the Moscow arts theatre in Russia. Nick Worrall (1996), is quick to note that the rise of these theatres lay in the uncompromising pursuit of truth.

These theatre movements defied all forms of challenges and entrenched their theatricality in the adherence to distinct styles and conventions of the day. I am particularly thrilled by the idea of the Moscow art theatre and its ideals, because this theatre was chiefly concerned with the real life situations of everyday and ordinary people (Worrall 1996). The ideals of the Moscow art theatre summarize the role and place

of orature in my community, because through orature, the daily life of people was surmised in song, dance and storytelling. In fact, Worrall (1996) says that through the Moscow art theatre, Nimerovich Danchenko and Constantine Stanislavski sought to create a theatre both “public” and accessible.

There is the constant fear that theatre can play the high road of elitism and by this extricate the core of society-the masses. The parallel of the ideals of the Moscow art theatre to orature diverges at the subject matter and functions, and not on the basis of the notion of class. Therefore, the fact that the Moscow art theatre advocated accessibility to a public so called utility, helps me to challenge the desire by government to limit the manner and dosage that theatre should reach the public, as well as how and who engages in this so called public business. The Moscow art theatre according to Morral (1996) was serious business and thus was devoid of idling as well as incidental pastime for the few.

According to Danchenko and Stanislavsky, Greek and Elizabethan theatres were part of spiritual life and health of the community. Theatre is therefore a profession worthy of dedicating a lifetime. It is in this assertion that I wish to hinge my parting thoughts for theatre in Kenya. Theatre is no past time for idlers, it is not a hobby of sorts and this is why the manner in which it has staggered in growth in Kenya cries the hand of change, to revert to traditional orature as the place to lay the foundation for a lasting serious business. It has been said in this dissertation that storytelling which was the body of theatrical expression among our people, permeated the very core of existence of everybody in the community. The notion of performance as a hobby or past time was unheard of.

It therefore means that performance as an aspect of theatre was all inclusive and serious. In fact, African culture abhors idleness and stories abound that symbolically speak against the vice of idleness. It was indeed a taboo to spend the whole day idling somewhere in the name of storytelling. It must be appreciated that the nature of orature is very tempting and can be addictive to the point of inviting overindulgence.

This is why stories and performance were designated for specific times and places/occasions. The daily life chores that got fuelled by orature were so appropriate, that they augmented the business at hand as opposed to being a hindrance. A good example is the singing during work; with work appropriate songs that helped ease the occupation.

The Moscow art theatre also described theatre as being about the spiritual life of the people, which was also duly embodied in orature. The spirituality of any group of people is the defining essence of that very group, and theatre as a response is the reflection of that life. It has been said that African orature derives its base in ritualistic elements of life, which make nonsense of the idea of performance as an artistic expression. The spirituality surrounding performance in my community as said earlier in this dissertation was a behind the scene phenomenon and the performances were chiefly the conveyors of that type of life, not the other way round.

Today in my community and country Kenya, we still need theatre to catapult our spirituality as the means to help define our cultural diversity and meld this into a national ethos. We are in dire need of a kind of ethos that would indigenize our theatre to the point of distinguishing what we believe in as a community, so that we are not defined as the

consumers or the market for theatrical productions of other communities. We are abundantly rich in traditional values that no doubt can be packaged into what we are able to theatricalize as a commodity fit for export, and still be the glue that holds out realization of theatrical experience in tow.

The spiritual essence of our theatre and the ethos that permeates African life was enshrined in orature; because orature was the medium for commenting on social issues just as it has been said that theatre reflects the society in which it is produced. The hegemonic nature of orature that elevates it above every other station as a commodity, was the base upon which we ought to have started when modernity knocked at our doors.

Nonetheless, even as thematic factors metamorphosed into new challenges wrought of modernity, technical as well as the spiritual level of orature are still intact. The Moscow art theatre is influencing the world today, not due to the issues that it addressed in the days it was mooted, but because of the conventional approaches to acting that are the lasting mark of this theatre.

It will be remembered that as modernity crept into and dominated the Kenyan society, new modes of life sprang up. The so called ritual acts took different forms and meanings, but the performance culture remained intact. The style of orature infiltrated not only drama festivals but also instructed the writings both of dramatic literature and novels.

The lament I have is why we still hanker for theatre from elsewhere while ours is still struggling to be attractive and impactful. If what Worrall Nick(1996) says about theatre as a profession worth the dedication of a lifetime is viable, then it is cardinal to

observe that our theatricality is hampered among other things by the failure to recognize theatre as the pulse of the nation.

We have witnessed the shift from themes of a traditional nature highlighting morals, to new issues like corruption, bad governance and tribalism; and our orature has had to grapple with the challenges of how to package these for the stage without inviting reprisal from the ruling class. This is why this section of the dissertation aims to try and make suggestions regarding how to nationalize and ground our theatricality around traditional orature, through its lingering capacity. The need to remodel orature in order to make it the vehicle for modern themes is driven by the desire to recognize its essence as the barometer to gauge the health of the country (Worrall 1996).

If theatre and performance are the cardinal tools for expressing the important issues of the day, then it is pretentious to keep it in the fringes while at the same time embracing art that is tailored to suit status quo. With the national drama festival producing and nurturing creative artists and then at the same time acting as the dead end to that artistic journey, the need to view theatre as a profession, enterprise and as pedagogy is more urgent now more than ever. Many questions arise after the drama festival and the most prime is-after the festival what next?

The fact that theatre is studied in a few universities in Kenya today is not enough to ground this field of study in the realm of academia. There is need for a reservoir for the university type of theatre, because this way the nurturing of talent can be effectively realized through a progression behavior among artists to fathom excellence. As it is

today, many people who take theatre courses at university may not be theatre practitioners both before and after they attain the degree.

The university level ought to be the pinnacle and not the place for elemental theatrical base. The university ought to be the epitome of the realization that theatre can take the nature of a profession for serious business in academia, a self-sustaining enterprise and the catalyst for pedagogical expressions.

There is now a belated need for an academic approach to theatre in Kenya, running from elementary to university level. The need for theatre scholarship is now more urgent than ever. We have witnessed the strides taken by music after it was enshrined in the teaching curriculum from elementary school and became examinable at the national examination level.

The explosion in the realm of music is transient in the ability of music scholars to venture into a field because they are apt in the technical demands that constitute the artistic expression called music. Young Kenyans can read music notes, create music and perform at various levels. We have well trained and expert music scholars in Kenya and this has translated into a professional field opening space for pedagogical outpourings, enterprise and a fluid nay diverse artistic field.

Music departments in universities in Kenya are vibrant and well grounded, in fact, in some universities the music departments' house theatre courses which relegate theatre to the periphery for reasons that are very intriguing. Music festivals at the school level have combined with the academic music at the school curriculum level to establish deep roots in our academia.

The irony is that the national drama festival has been let to hang in the limbo of the dearth of an academic approach that music is privileged to have. The political angle to this convenient omission has been discussed at length in this dissertation. This dissertation is therefore a strong indictment on the formulators of policy in the ministry of education to ground our theatre on a sounder educational base.

Theatre craves a more rigorous approach than currently exists in our society. The expansion of theatre from the sheer artistic endeavour left in the hands of unskilled and part timers, is a must now more than later. The propensity to hold massive conferences and workshops mainly dominated by theoretical approaches, does not atone for the lack of a system of training that ought to be embedded in the education system. It is only through a deliberate syllabus that we can extoll real theatrical issues; and eventually create a national theatrical base, that should automatically breed a theatrical culture based on conventions tried and subjected to study.

Theatre studies are deep and rich in style, conventions and traditions, that evolve from traditional performance modes to a diversification born of global interactions; either by research or actual consumption through text, screen or cross cultural experiences. Our orature is rich and lingers very profoundly in our artistic expressions today, which is fertile ground for establishing a strong academic approach; through comparative studies, to boost professional approaches spurred by tacit pedagogy, which only a substantive curriculum can engender.

As things stand today, we have a more amorphous and slippery theatrical base. This situation is made worse by our running to the world of film which has triggered a

massive exodus from stage theatre to the film, which for all intents and purposes is bereft of a foundational approach that a strong theatre base should provide. It is a little premature for our country to claim to be creators of film whose real spine is regurgitation of western styles at all levels; from acting, scripting, and production. Mostly, the film industry is dominated by sporadic, sparse and superfluous elements that lamentably fail to reflect ideals and traditions of our society; elements that should be instructive at the creation and delivery of artistic expressions.

Without a well-grounded theatrical tradition cemented by a deliberate pedagogical base, whatever else we engage in is to say the truth merely top down as opposed to time tested vertical progression. The result of the present arrangement is that we have a more elitist composition of who creates and gets involved in film. These films are dominated by individuals well connected and politically correct enough to obtain funding for prescribed scripts and plots. Ultimately, the pretentious feeling of theatrical development into the world of film is shallow and has fathomed a false contentment that there is something happening in our theatrical and film world.

The absence of a systematized approach to creating a concrete theatrical tradition cannot be replaced by structures of temporal consequence. Primary in the need to lay a lasting system of theatre is embedded in the professionalization of this art. We need a trained body of theatre experts at the university and college levels who can only be fed by a revolving cadre from school graduates literate and tested in theatre topics and courses. This means that based on our oral traditions, we can through integration and diversity create elaborate courses in script analysis, playwriting, acting, scene design, sound

design, costume design, and light design. These fields constitute huge scholarship and are deeper than a one week workshop will ever purport to achieve.

If we could venture to introduce theatre courses in schools, we will definitely have students opting for specialized training in theatre studies as areas of academic venture for eventual professional pursuit of artistic work. The good news is that we are bound to witness a barrage of people emerging as practitioners, scholars and/or teachers of the theatre. When a situation of scholarly orientation obtains, we will then begin to grapple with entrenching a sound and lasting academic theatrical tradition.

I still remember though that eight years ago, after I decided that I wanted to pursue a master in theatre course, I approached my alma mater and went to the literature department where the chairman astounded me by suggesting that I could enroll for a master in linguistics and then write my thesis on a play. What I was hearing was that the chairman of the literature department thought that writing a thesis on a play would assuage my desire for a degree in theatre. I have since discovered that the works by renowned theatre practitioners at this university were done under the aegis of the literature department and were overshadowed by scholarship in dramatic literature.

The irony in the stalled enthusiasm for creating and doing theatre, whittled down after the literature department became indigenized. As I was recounting Kenyan crave for foreign art, it was not lost in me the fact that it required Joe De Graft, a Ghanaian, and John Ruganda from Uganda(Erven, 2001), to fuel and light the way to Africanizing and eventually entrenching African traditions in the study of literature at the University of Nairobi. Both De Graft and Ruganda worked relentlessly to inspire student theatre

companies in Kenya as a response to the expatriate dominated national theatre. The result was the birth of new graduates with the mind to reclaim the cultural space and practice of theatre in Kenya (Erven, 2001).

The university was becoming the champion of theatrical experience because with the increasing African voices within academia, literary work inspired by traditional orature and African culture became born. As a response to the exclusive space at the national theatre, the education building at the University of Nairobi was turned into a theatre from where the free travelling theatre was born through the midwifery of Ugandan born John Ruganda. It would seem that the idea of the free travelling theatre was a great way to circumvent the film and stages act of parliament 1963, which required government license before public performances that engendered admission charges (Erven, 2001). This was obviously a subtle way of ensuring government censorship.

The idea of free travelling theatre was an extension of African orature and performance traditions whereby performances were largely free to the public. The difference here was that an elitist set up namely the university was the hub of this expression. Consequently, the initiative of a free travelling theatre succeeded in recognizing and giving impetus to the common citizen wallowing in the periphery of social strata. The newly educated were already reveling in the middle class status resulting from their academic and consequent social elevation; and their affinity to foreign art was definitely alienating of traditional orature and modes of theatrical expression.

The free travelling theatre rekindled the traditional public performances and in various indigenous languages. These performances meant travelling into the depth of villages and were staged in halls, fields and open market centres! The free travelling theatre was credited with the compelling discovery of the interplay between form and style (Erven, 2001) which is unfortunately where we are today after the botched foundational experience built by the free travelling theatre. It was interesting to experience the blend between traditional forms of performance with new styles born of academia; and it was thought that this was going to filtrate into the discovery of a theatrical convention unique to Kenya.

The free travelling theatre worked very diligently to blend and integrate the written art with the traditional orature of our people; and also catalyzed the rekindling of community based theatre that began to infuse intelligentsia into theatrical activity in the country. Since the players around the free travelling theatre were in the highest echelons of academia, one would have expected that today that initiative would be the basis for a strong and solid theatrical experience at the academic level, harnessing traditional orature into investigative research activity. This idea was initiated in such a manner that it became possible for the literature department to use the contact the free travelling theatre had with the communities; to conduct research on various oral traditions of the communities in Kenya, with the view to integrate and translate them into academic theatrical work (Erven,2001).

However, the free travelling theatre was nipped in the bud by government under the guise of cracking down on dissidents, most of who were purportedly in academia and in the liberal arts department of University of Nairobi. The crackdown on people

professing divergent views that were expressed through art was a direct consequence of the colonial as well as independence leaders' insensitivity to expressive art forms. The 1982 coup attempt in Kenya emboldened governmental clamp down on perceived "enemies", mostly the vocal professors of the literature department, leading to mass exiles. Consequently, the free travelling theatre initiative died.

It will be appreciated that the spirit of the free travelling theatre never got buried especially as the graduates of the literature department spread all over the country either as teachers in colleges or employees in other arms of government. These products of the free travelling theatre found other means of doing their art; but since they were mainly employees of the government, they were compelled to recoil into theatre units not directly considered combative by the establishment. The rise of theatre for development and what can be termed theatre for "money" came to replace, if not masquerade as the "ghost" of the free travelling theatre.

The notion of community theatre that the free travelling theatre had sought to harmonize with traditional orature became infiltrated by non-governmental organizations' funding of projects whose agenda the purse holders set and dictated. This way, the body of academic theatre was hijacked both by political insensitivity and the non-governmental organs' urge to set themes through the power of money! Ervin, 2001 laments the resultant situation as that whereby organizations that funded theatre units determined policy, artistry and content of the art. The conflict between artistic policy and reality with funding is still a monumental hindrance to the realization of a firm and aesthetic artistic reality to date.

The final nail in the coffin of academia based theatre was driven by the ministry of education when they integrated English as a subject with literature (Erven, 2001). The effect of this merger was to limit the scope of study of literature that dwelt mainly on the written texts; both the novel and the play. This was impactful in that even set books studied for literature were selected based on whether they were of “friendly” content to the government. Other than stifling creative development through academics, the result was an attempt at brainwashing, which has had far reaching repercussions in the realm of theatre in Kenya today.

Universities having lost the initiative to lay a foundational approach through the free travelling theatre, now participate in the Kenya schools and colleges national drama festival where they are the latest inclusion. It is regrettable that the place of universities at this festival degrades the echelons hitherto established by the free travelling theatre. The involvement of universities at the national drama festival subordinates the role and place of universities as the place from where to spread not only theatrical development, but also the harnessing of traditional theatrical values embodied in orature, into research based theatre.

This assertion does not in any way aim to demean the National drama festival, because while this dissertation has already appreciated the place of the festival in Kenya, it is a co-curricular activity and the universities ought to engage at a more academic and research motivated manner akin to the foundational approach built by the free travelling theatre. Channeling theatrical talent through the drama festival which in itself is almost a close circuit, does not answer the question raised earlier in this chapter-after the festival what next?

Granted, the universities do not have the capacity to influence secondary school curriculum, but the theatre departments in the universities today can make some demands as to who qualifies to take theatre courses. The result will be a systematic cross curriculum understanding between the formulators of secondary school curriculum and university course formulators. The result is bound to structure the leaning, research and creation of a solid theatrical system, deliberate artistic policy and a sturdy professional outlook to our theatre.

Strengthening our existing theatre structures is all that is required for a distinct conventional approach that will define who we are theatrically and enable an entrepreneurial benefit among the stakeholders. We sure need theatre instructors, theatre practitioners and theatre scholars born of the courage to structurally embed our theatre in schools as a curriculum as opposed to extra-curricular activity.

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