

African Theatre And The Colonial Legacy: Review Of The East African Scene

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Generally speaking, the young African's first intimation of theatre was at the mission school where simple Christian religious stories were dramatised and European folksongs and nursery rhymes recited in what were called, 'concerts' ...in secondary schools we staged plays which were set books for languages and literature studies... It should be noted that the African child knew nothing of the current trends in Western theatre, so his idea of the theatre was that of medieval and Elizabethan Europe.¹

Most African countries have, since independence, adopted a critical stand towards the cultural legacies left behind by the former colonisers. This stand has resulted from the political and cultural nationalism that ushered in flag independence in Africa, a development that constitutes a revolutionary force not only in the politics of liberation but also in the realm of art.²

In the theatre the growth of cultural nationalism within the womb of an anti-colonial political nationalism has inspired attempts to displace the theatre imported with colonialism and encouraged, through colonial policies and ideology, a theatre that consisted of a dramatic mishmash from Victorian England, an alien importation that could only be "...accepted by those who have passed through the western-oriented educational system,... by as little a minority as five percent of our population". Tossed to the colonised like crumbs to a beggar who had no choice, these theatrical importations featured themes and values from a remote European tradition.

However, in their struggle to create a modern African theatre to replace this colonial legacy they reject most African artists and critics recognise a dilemma they seem to be caught up in: how can authentically African drama and theatre be made from the imported colonial theatre that was intended, first of all, to entertain colonial agents resident in Africa and, secondly, to alienate Africans being trained to run their countries on behalf of the colonialists? Many progressive individuals are of the view that African cultural and artistic traditions hold the key to this pressing question. "In a movement towards an authentic African theatre, attempts to throw off the colonial straitjacket have started with a close inside study of pre-colonial modes of theatre, and cultural forms embodying theatrically relevant phenomena such as ritual, ceremony, dance, song, storytelling, dramatic enactment, etc.³ and have culminated in creative works that aim at social and cultural relevance.⁴ All such attempts have had one aim: to create a future for modern African theatre, to retrieve African theatre from the misconception, usually Eurocentric, that there is no significant basis in traditional culture for modern theatre in Africa, implying thereby that the only theatrical experience worth speaking about in Africa is the one inherited from Europe, that African theatre is a distant child of Europe, an imperialistic assumption of Africa's subservience to the Western World.⁵

Such a misconception could only have come out of an imposition on the colonies of Eurocentric theatre aesthetics that the colonial theatre pioneers thought were universal.

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Thus up to now we still have, for instance, the wrong but strongly held belief (in the schools especially) that theatre is only that which is based on the 'well-written' play or that theatre is only possible on an indoor stage, under a picture-frame proscenium arch and fancy footlights, and we still believe that there ought to be for any theatre performance a rigid demarcation between the audience and the performers, the performers on a **lighted** stage, raised **above** the audience who sit in a **darkened** auditorium **below**, to all appearances non-existent.

This review focuses on the struggle that is today occurring between the legacy of colonial theatre and emerging national theatre, a struggle that paves the way for a modern African theatre that aspires to base itself on the life and the experiences of the masses. Such a review necessarily involves a critical evaluation of efforts undertaken by progressive practitioners of the theatre to effect the transition from an imported to an independent tradition of the theatre. But the question might be asked: why wait this long for a review of a cultural movement two decades old? If the wait has been long it can only be for one reason. The road to a modern African theatre has, since the beginning of the journey been marked by false starts, superficial experimentalism, romantic mystifications and a lack of complex understanding of African culture, obstacles that have stood in the way of objective analysis. But now perhaps the time is ripe enough to take stock of things, after all the dust has settled and we have been freed from the idealisations and romanticism of the earlier pioneers.

So much has happened, indeed continues to happen, and it is because of the impossibility in a short review like this of covering all that is taking place across Africa, that we confine ourselves to the East African scene, which compared to, say, West Africa, where scholars have tended to overconcentrate their efforts, has received less coverage than is due. We focus our attention on Tanzania and Kenya. Uganda is left out, not out of any consideration that it has less to offer in terms of theatre but solely due to technical reasons. Of the East African countries, Tanzania and Kenya have provided the most steady conditions for notable developments in the theatre. Their political and economic ideologies have had a marked and clear impact on the theatrical scene, as opposed to Uganda where theatrical developments have been shrouded in political turmoil, a fact that renders difficult a clearcut view of what has been taking place there. The Idi Amin era, for example, has especially prevented much from being known outside Uganda about its theatre, although before the advent of Amin in 1972 Uganda was the centre of intellectual artistic culture in East Africa, for it was there that the British established the first University, Makerere. In Tanzania, the Arusha Declaration has been an inspiration for important theatrical developments, and in Kenya, domination of national life by foreign economic and cultural interests and the preponderance of the colonial legacy in the theatre has sparked off in opposition, new interesting theatrical trends. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's rural theatre being the most noteworthy. (See p. 26).

Our review will also include Zambia. Though the country does not belong in East Africa in the strict geopolitical sense of the term, it is strongly related to the experiences of the East African countries and its theatre has also undergone such important developments, indirectly influenced by Zambia's nebulous ideology of 'Humanism', that it cannot be overlooked in any review of the East Africa theatrical scene. We start with Zambia.

One of the most interesting theatre experiments to come out of Zambia has been the Chikwakwa Theatre. Formed in 1969 as an experiment in popular theatre, Chikwakwa was based on the aspiration to create a truly Zambia theatre, out of Zambia's indigenous cultures and local resources, a theatre that would treat topics and issues from Zambian life, history and politics. Michael Etherton,⁷ an expatriate and one of the principle founders of the theatre, describes the nature of its popular basis:

The idea of Chikwakwa Theatre was to develop, through self-help, a theatre place that would allow an expansion of the traditional performing arts... The intention was to stay as close as possible to the function of the traditional performing arts, i.e. to tell the history of the tribe, to keep society intact... Since these functions invariably involved the whole community either as performers or as audience, or at least were accessible to every one in the community, it follows that the work of Chikwakwa should also be accessible to all and not just on the level of admission charges.⁸

Chikwakwa was formed as an alternative to the expatriate colonial theatre that was mainly based in the towns of the Zambian copperbelt, to serve the European industrial mining population. This expatriate theatre consisted of plays of the Elizabethan era put on for the white mine workers to help them forget their hard day's labour. It dominated the theatre scene until the 1960's, propagating itself in the minds of the Zambian elite as the theatre worth emulating.⁹ However, the inadequacy and irrelevancy of colonial theatre forced many inventive minds to search for a basis on which to build an alternative theatre. This basis they found in a number of touring companies that criss-crossed Zambia providing plays, skits, dance, dramas and musical routines, performing them among the people. Leading an independent existence, this type of theatre did not enjoy favour with the patrons of the colonial theatre who derided it as being of a low cultural standard, and who saw in its popular appeal reason to discredit it. Frequently this theatre became political, mounting anticolonial criticism, a further kick at the colonial theatre which considered treatment of political themes and issues taboo.

Michael Etherton's play adaptation of *Houseboy*, the novel by Cameroon's Ferdinand Oyono, was the first direct effort to breach one of the preserves of the colonial theatre in Zambia. The play, which was produced by the University of Zambia Dramatic Society (Unzamdrams), the main contributor to Chikwakwa, was entered for the 1969 annual Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ) festival, sponsored by the predominantly white theatre clubs. Because of its sharp criticism of white colonials, both French and British, and of the present neo-colonial Black bourgeoisie in Africa, *Houseboy* aroused some controversy when it was performed during the festival. The most significant development stemming out of the whole undertaking, however, was the fact that the production, which integrated popular elements of music and dance, eventually toured the Lusaka townships making contact with the township masses. It was this event that led to, and inspired, the formation of Chikwakwa.

Judging from the aims that guided the Chikwakwa Theatre one could conclude that the theatre and those behind it were undisputably progressive. Judging too from the writings, meagre as they are, that we have on theatre in Zambia, particularly on the transition from an imported to an indigenously-based theatre tradition, one could say that efforts like those behind Chikwakwa represent a genuine drive to link up culturally with the masses, the creating force that can ensure the growth of a relevant modern African theatre. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that it was a university-based expatriate effort that was the main force behind Chikwakwa, an irony when one considers the fact that it was an expatriate colonial theatre that Chikwakwa was seeking to unseat. This is not to say however that there cannot be a place in modern African Theatre for expatriate talent, initiative or output. But it should be stressed that theatre is a strongly cultural phenomenon; every culture spawns its own specific brand of theatre with a specific content expressed through specific forms, artistic traditions, and aesthetics. Each culture therefore requires that its own people be the central force in the creation of a relevant, popular indigenous theatre tradition. There exists then, a real danger that any cultural undertaking that relies on

point of view of the indigenous culture. Also, we should not lose sight of the fact that most of the personnel running Chikwakwa were based at the University of Zambia, a fact that would present no problem were the role of the university in Africa different from what is it today. As it is, the university is still very much an ivory tower placed above the masses, and it cannot be denied that all efforts, however noble, coming down from this 'ivory tower' necessarily carry with them certain elitist notions that end up divorcing the people behind them from the initiative of the masses.

In Tanzania, it was only after the Arusha Declaration¹⁰ in 1967 that a serious re-examination of the colonial legacy brought forth a more progressive conception of theatre. The realisation that theatre was not all Shakespeare could be said to have come about through the introduction in the same year to the concept of 'Education for Self-reliance' as part of the Arusha Declaration policies. 'Education for Self-reliance' aimed at making educational institutions strong outposts of **Ujamaa**, by encouraging them to engage in productive education that incorporated the ethic of practical work and self-reliance. The concept, soon converted into a policy, had some influence on Tanzanian cultural life including the theatre; it consolidated and reinforced the spirit of cultural nationalism that had started with independence, a spirit calling for the promotion of values with roots in the soil of Tanzanian culture. As a result of such a policy,

Schools started to practice self-reliance, not only in their lessons and in economic production, but also in culture. Tanzanian culture grew in value as the masses realised that they should stop emphasizing foreign values, and start concentrating more on promoting their traditional cultures.¹¹

Traditionally, schools had been centres for the propagation of a colonial intellectual culture that assumed an absence of any cultural ingenuity or initiative on the part of the colonised. Schools operated on strange cultural menus consisting, for example, of the maypole dance, 'country' dance, scottish and square dancing, all claiming superiority over 'native' dances and artistic performances. In the area of written drama, there were productions of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, *Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello*, and dramatisations of *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. Such drama was introduced into the schools not because of any social relevance perceived in them, but because the colonial theatre 'pioneers' who introduced it "...were looking for something with which to pass time during their leisure moments (and) they picked on drama as the thing to do".¹² However, it was this colonial-inspired drama, especially the Shakespearian, that even after independence was presented as the only valid theatrical experience for schools.

Colonial theatre was introduced into Tanzania in the 1920's when Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania prior to 1964) became a mandate territory of the British, who constructed schools and colleges in which they acquainted the elite with this kind of theatre. As early as 1922, Hussein writes, "a school in Dar es Salaam was already performing one-act plays like Gow's *The Sheriff's Kitchen*, Milner's *The Ugly Duckling*, McKinnel's *The Bishop's Candlesticks* and Francis' *The Birds of a Feather*".¹³ Using expensive costumes and promoting the proscenium arch as the ideal setting for theatre performances, this theatre took on themes and subject matter concerned with the "typical middle class family and its problems, which has for milieu, a drawing room and which artistically respects unity of time, place and character".¹⁴ The schools and colleges, being the major outposts of colonial theatre, were influential in creating the view that the imported theatre tradition provided a 'universal' model.

The emergence of a non-colonial theatre in the wake of the Arusha Declaration could be said to have been spearheaded by the Department of Theatre Arts (now renamed Department of Art, Music and Theatre) established in 1967, a year after the Declaration.

Under the new winds of change, the Department, for instance, mounted two landmark productions, one of Hussein's *Kinjeketile*,¹⁵ and the other, of Muhando's *Hatia*.¹⁶ Both plays were considered good theatrical models because of their strong social and historical relevance and consequently their popular appeal which saw the plays performed widely, and one of them, *Hatia*, was taken on an extensive national tour. Since its establishment, the Department has instituted a spirit for experimental work and innovation in the search for an alternative tradition to the inherited colonial theatre. To strike roots for a new theatre tradition, the Department engineered research programmes into traditional cultures, one of the principal sources for creative material. The first student research reports were compiled in 1975 to form part of the Departmental archives. So far, much of the research undertaken has consisted mainly of recordings of traditional cultural forms, of rituals, customs, ceremonies, dances, music, etc. However, confusion has emerged, and still remains, as to whether the above items constitute theatre in the African context. There is also a lack of precision in assessing the relevance of the observations made from research findings, to the development of modern African theatre. At the moment, the view, entertained quite widely, seems to be that since these items contain theatrically relevant elements, they necessarily constitute theatre in the African context. It is a view that we feel betrays a serious limitation in the interpretation of traditional cultural phenomena as they relate to the building of an African theatre. It is true that most artistic performances in traditional rituals and ceremonies do contain certain theatrical and dramatic ingredients for good theatre, but one cannot equate these sources with theatre per se. There are many traditional performances that are better regarded as mere sources of creating material for the theatre, rather than ripe theatrical fruits ready for picking.

Encouraging staff and student research into the indigenous cultural heritage was not the only way the Department extended its scope of activity beyond the University; the Department also encouraged and organised students to involve themselves practically in theatre with groups outside the University, in the correct belief that the growth of a new theatre can only be guaranteed, not through grand theoretical and academic pronouncements, but through actual practical work that embraces as large a segment of the masses as possible. Such extension of the art and practice of theatre into the cultural and social experiences of the masses represented an attempt to link up with the people, a pious sentiment inspired by the Declaration, which assumed that an elitist university education was incomplete without the process of learning from the masses. Nevertheless, the positive achievements notwithstanding, it must be said that the Department has not been entirely successful in striking deep and broad-based roots for a new theatre tradition. For instance, much research has admittedly been done, but this has not always been backed up by follow-up efforts to make sure that the findings are consolidated into deep and concrete creative sources. The Department also has not fully succeeded in breaking out of the confines of the enclave that the University is, something that it needs to do if a broadbased tradition is to take root. One of the ways the Department has attempted to reach out to the people has been through production tours. Most of the productions taken on tour, however, have not been of a nature flexible enough that they can escape the elitist conditions which nurtured them and tailored them to the cultural and intellectual demands of a narrow, captive University-based audience. These weaknesses should definitely be attributed to the stultifying strictures of an academic environment and to the constraints imposed by an artistically insensitive bureaucracy at the University which has to make crucial decisions affecting the operations of the Department.

Although in his search for a genuine African theatre, the Tanzanian University-based artist has not, unlike his Zambian counterpart, produced an experimental centre comparable

to Chikwakwa, his influence and contribution beyond the University is not something to be ignored. Besides influencing positively theatre lovers in schools and colleges, through its graduates, the Department of Theatre has also inspired the growth of semi-professional theatrical groups, the most significant and professional being the Paukwa Theatre Group.

Founded in 1976 with a modest membership, mainly from the University and the Tanzania Film Company, Paukwa is an attempt to break from bureaucratic fetters so as to operate on a basis more favourable to artistic growth. The group aims to promote African works of drama and to provide room for a fuller play of indigenous cultural resources through production of original creations. So far its most outstanding effort has been the production of *Chuano*, a Swahili adaptation of Mukotani Rugendo's *The Contest* (Heinemann, 1977), the group's entry for an international festival in West Germany in May, 1980. A symbolic theatricalisation of a 'developing' nation's struggle for development and true independence, the play is based on the traditional theatrical form of heroic recitations indigenous to North Western Tanzania and South Western Uganda, the use of which represents a departure from the conventional conception of drama in the Western sense; an innovation into new theatrical possibilities, song, dance, improvisation, and heroic dialogue and spectacle, contributing to a new form of theatrical language.

The Department has also contributed in a major way to the increasing general awareness that we have in Tanzania and in Africa; a cultural heritage that can support an alternative theatre wholly independent of the imported tradition. In his search for possibilities that the new theatre can benefit from, the artist has connected himself, albeit insufficiently, with a wealth of popular theatrical material beyond the University: *vichekesho* (comic skits) with their raw energy, mime and dance-dramas, by professional and semi-professional groups; and *ngonjera* (poetic 'drama') with their direct didacticism, praise and satirical songs, etc. These constitute theatre in schools, in town and village community halls and in factories. They form part of an indigenous-based cultural expression of the everyday life and problems of the masses. However, although more and more efforts are being devoted to getting in touch with and recording these activities, the University-based artist has hardly gone beyond taking note of them. He has yet to make use of them as creative theatrical sources, bearing in mind that it is by feeding upon the local theatrical variety that a popular indigenous theatre tradition can take root and flourish.

Of the East African countries it is Kenya, perhaps, that best exemplifies the struggle against the colonial legacy, summed up by Ngugi as "the struggle between the cultural forces representing foreign interests and those representing patriotic national interests."¹⁸ It is interesting to note that, unlike Tanzania, Kenya is still very much beset by the colonial legacy, and cultural expression, including the theatre, is at the mercy of foreign interests in alliance with an indigenous neo-colonial elite, whose domination of national life can be seen in the cinema, music, news media, in publishing and education. In the theatre, preference is given to foreign cultural tastes catered for by theatre companies reproducing the West End and Broadway type of theatre. The level of foreign domination of the theatre can best be seen in the fact that even the Kenya National Theatre, ostensibly there to promote national cultural expression and encourage local artistic talent, gives priority to foreign-based groups like City Players and Theatre Ltd. which import "directors, costumes, orchestral pieces and actors from England and Canada, giving the impression that there are no Kenyan directors, no Kenyan costumes, no Kenyan actors and no Kenyan musical instruments."¹⁹

The neo-colonial type of theatre being sponsored by the Kenya National Theatre is not the only one of its kind in Africa. A survey around most of the Anglophone African countries would no doubt reveal versions of this type of theatre planted in the centres of their capitals. For example, even in Tanzania where neo-colonial culture has not found as favourable a

climate as in Kenya, second-rate imitations of the West End and Broadway type of theatre can still be seen in the productions put out by the Little Theatre of Dar es Salaam, which caters mainly for the expatriate community and is significantly located in Oyster Bay, a residential area formerly reserved for Europeans during the colonial period but now taken over by the local petty bourgeoisie. It was formed in 1947, firstly under the name The Dar es Salaam Players Club. From the Ministerial Archives File, No. S^o 524 (Registry of Societies. Home Affairs), Hussein quotes that:

The Little Theatre set out 'to promote and to foster knowledge and appreciation of the arts' and 'in particular the dramatic and musical arts' and 'in furtherance of this to provide facilities for instructions and education in the above arts.'¹⁹

Between the Kenya National Theatre and the Little Theatre there is a similarity in the way they both perceive their function in cultural 'upliftment'. The aims behind the Kenya National Theatre are: 'to create dramatists of international standing; to create actors who can claim a high level of proficiency in their art; and to cultivate a national audience able to understand and appreciate the theatre.'²⁰ Both the Little Theatre and the Kenya National Theatre masquerade as cultural benefactors and promoters of art in society. Purporting to be an inspiring force in the growth of theatre, they mask their true role, which is that of trying to legitimise second-rate irrelevant theatrical importations.

This colonial legacy is, however, being challenged. The struggle for a truly national theatre in Kenya is being carried out by groups like the Festac 77 Drama group, that produced Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*; the University of Nairobi Free Travelling Theatre, which conducts annual national tours with plays in both Kiswahili and English; the *Tamaduni Players*; and the Kenyan Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals. These groups, however, do not yet constitute an effective challenge to the foreign establishment, despite the fact that they have generated an awareness of the need for a truly Kenyan National culture, and have "...unleashed a torrent of Kenyan talents...that puts to shame the foreign productions."²¹ According to Ngugi, their ineffectiveness stems partly from the fact, that,

writers, directors and actors often operate within the same tradition as the foreign theatre they are setting out to challenge. First, their theatre has mostly been in a foreign language, i.e. English, and therefore, despite any radical innovations in content and method, their main target audience can only be the foreign, English speaking audience or the urban, Kenyan English speaking bourgeoisie.²²

And, even despite the fact that these groups have at times attempted to incorporate into their search for an alternative theatre exploitation of the resources of the Kenyan national languages, i.e. Kiswahili, Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba, etc. and the cultural heritage borne in them, they have not managed to appeal to more than a small minority.

In the struggle to throw off the legacy of the colonial theatre in Kenya, it is Ngugi wa Thiong'o who represents the most advanced and meaningful position to-date, in his involvement with the peasants of Kamiriithu in Limuru, Kenya, in their production of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I will marry when I choose). Written in Kikuyu, one of the major Kenyan national languages, the play deals with one of the key national issues in present day neo-colonial Kenya: the contradiction between the local Kenyan middle class in collaboration with the metropolitan capitalists and the downtrodden and deprived peasantry.

The play was produced in a rural context and was based entirely on the human, cultural and material resources of the Kamiriithu peasants. The play was directed exclusively at the rural masses and not at the city-based elite who make up the audience for the foreign dominated theatre. The peasants participated democratically in the improvisation, in the

evolution of the script, in the choreography of the dances, the composition of the songs, and in the acting and directing of the play. An example of the popular democratic character of the venture is given by Ngugi in his report of the production:

...the initial reading and discussion of the play was done in the open. The selection of actors was done in the open with the village audience helping in the selection, and all the rehearsals for four months were in the open with an ever increasing crowd of commentators and directors. The dress rehearsal was done to an audience of over one thousand peasants and workers. When finally the show opened to a fee-paying audience, the group performed to thousands of peasants and workers who often would hire buses or trek on foot in order to come and see the play. For the first time, the rural people could see themselves and their lives and their history portrayed in a positive manner.²³

The type that **Ngaahika Ndeenda** foreshadows is perhaps the best antidote so far to the colonial legacy in East African theatre. It is only a popular type of theatre, a type that is at one with the people, that can form the basis for a truly African Theatre. Ngugi, we feel, provides such a model for other East African artists, who, because of close geographical proximity and occasional personal contacts, have opportunities to learn from each other about progressive trends of theatre obtaining in each other's countries.

Notes

1 Demas Nwoko, 'The Search for a New African Theatre', in *Presence Africaine*, No. 75, 1970, p. 59.

2 For further discussion on the nature and growth of cultural nationalism and its influence on African theatre in particular, see Joel Adedeji's 'Theatre and Ideology: An African Experience', *Joliso: East African Journal of Literature and Society*, 2, i, 1974, pp. 72—82. Adedeji discusses cultural nationalism in both francophone and anglophone theatre. He sees francophone theatre as being greatly influenced by 'Negritude', a philosophy started by French-educated black intellectuals, which embraced traditionalism and the aesthetics of blackness as a weapon against French colonialism and cultural chauvinism. The theatre inspired by Negritude integrated African traditional elements of song, dance, music and oral literature, in an attempt to capture 'lost' cultural identity. The Anglophone theatre in West Africa, where Adedeji concentrates, was, according to him, only marginally influenced by a similar political-artistic ideology under the slogan 'African Personality' that called for the reassertion of the African 'shattered' image.

3 Mukotani Rugyendo, 'Towards a Truly African Theatre', in *UMMA*, 4, ii, 1972, p. 66.

4 In this connection Mukotani Rugyendo argues that the correct direction for a truly African Theatre lies in basing it almost exclusively on traditional theatrical forms. He champions, for example, a kind of drama "...whose total form is based on the traditional forms with all the incidents in the drama existing within the confines of that form. If the play is based on a ritual, let the rhythm of the ritual pervade the play from beginning to end and not just have a ritual as a simple part of something (that is) totally alien." 'Towards a Truly African Theatre' p. 70. This is obviously an overreaction on the part of Rugyendo which has led him, in the same article, to launch a rash attack on major African dramatists like Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark and Obotunde Ijimere, charging that their efforts to incorporate into their dramas theatrical material from traditional cultures, are superficial and have only resulted in putting African masks over essentially European forms which, according to Rugyendo, their works represent. However, despite Rugyendo's lack of sophisticated understanding of the European theatrical traditions he is rejecting in his article, his passionate attack on the legacy of colonial theatre exemplifies the impatience that is felt by more progressive African artists, in regard to the search for a truly African theatre. Demas Nwoko, though not the extremist that Rugyendo is, also places weight on traditional culture in the creation of a thriving African theatre. "The young African artists", he feels, "should be taught the classic art forms of Africa". 'The Search for a New African Theatre', p. 57. While the study of the cultural heritage of traditional Africa is obviously important in the creation of a modern theatre for

Africa, to base such a theatre on a so-called 'classical' heritage presents a somewhat tricky situation, for what constitutes 'classical art forms' in Africa is still problematic. While Rugendo and Nwoko limit themselves to a statement of the significance of traditional culture in African theatre, Wole Soyinka actually employs the world view of traditional culture as basis for an Afrocentric re-definition of theatre. Through Yoruba mythology he sees theatre as "...a symbolic arena for metaphysical contests", **Myth, Literature and the African World**, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 39. This function is represented particularly by ritual drama whose aim he sees as a reflection through physical and symbolic means of "the archetypal struggle of the moral being against exterior forces", p. 40. Like Soyinka, J.C. de Graft employs a spiritual outlook from traditional culture for an Afrocentric re-definition of theatre. **The substance of theatre, he asserts, "...is the terror that we seek to master, the inimical forces we seek to propitiate, the spiritual barrenness we seek to turn into fertility, the mind's wounds we seek to heal, the cosmic joy we seek to share in, the empathy we seek to establish with the world of animate and inanimate things around us: this is what people who are devoted to drama go to the theatre to experience. The seeking is akin to an act of worship, and for an act of worship to have any efficacy the worshippers must bring to it belief in the goddess of the shrine, understanding and sympathy for the rituals, and a readiness to surrender himself wholly to the rhythm of the service".** 'Roots of African Drama and Theatre', in **African Literature Today**, 8, 1976, p. 21. Although there is much to benefit from in the theoretical efforts of Soyinka and de Graft, one must question whether it is really necessary or beneficial to base the essence and the role of modern African theatre wholly on a mystical spirituality borrowed from the traditional world view.

5 A good example of diligent research work on the various aspects of traditional theatrical culture is Penina Muhando's **Music in Traditional African Theatre: Kaguru as a case study**, M.A. Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, 1973 (unpublished); Godwin Kaduma's **A Theatrical Description of Five Tanzanian Dances**, M.A. Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, 1972 (unpublished); and Mukasa Balikuddembe's **Indigenous Elements of Theatre in Bunyoro and Toro**, M.A. Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, 1973 (unpublished).

6 The best use of traditional cultural forms can be found in Soyinka's **Dance of the Forests**. Here traditional background has been effectively wedded to contemporary content. Other artists who have creatively made effective use of traditional heritage are J.P. Clark and Ola Rotimi of Nigeria, and Penina Muhando of Tanzania in **Hatia**.

7 He was expelled from Zambia in 1971 following student unrest at the University of Zambia. He was suspected of having supportive links with militant elements in the students body.

8 Michael Etherton, 'Zambia — Popular Theatre', in **New Theatre Magazine**, 12, ii, 1972, p. 20. For more information on and further analysis of Chikwakwa Theatre and theatre in Zambia in general see Etherton's other article 'Indigenous Performances in Zambia', **Theatre Quarterly** London, 3, x, 1973, pp. 44-46.

9 Details on the form, content and style of the expatriate colonial theatre can be found in David Pownall's 'European and African Influences in Zambian Theatre', in **Theatre Quarterly**, London, 3, x, 1973, pp. 49 — 53.

10 The Arusha Declaration gave birth to Ujamaa (Tanzanian 'Socialism') which employs an idealist approach in perceiving and transforming social reality; its idealism can be summarised by Nyerere's statement, 'Socialism is an attitude of mind'. Advocating social and political reforms, Ujamaa is meant to change consciousness, to change individual moral attitudes as a means of changing society.

11 Penina Muhando, interview conducted by the author in August, 1978.

12 Penina Muhando na Ndyanao Balisidya, **Fasihi na Sanaa za Maonyesho**, Tanzania Publishing House, 1976, p. 22.

13 Ebrahim Hussein, 'The Beginnings of Imported Theatre in Tanzanian Urban Centres', in **Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe**, 23, 1974, p. 405. See also his Doctoral Dissertation, **The Development of Theatre and Drama in East Africa**, University of Humboldt, 1974, which contains a full history of imported theatre in the whole of East Africa.

14. Ibid. p. 405.

15 Ebrahim Hussein, **Kinjeketile**, Oxford University Press, 1969. The play deals with the Maji Maji Resistance against the German colonialists, which united a number of ethnic groups in Southern Tanzania in a common cause. It was the first time that resistance against colonialism was waged on an

inter-ethnic level. The term Maji Maji (literally meaning 'water water'), refers to medicinal water by Kinjeketile, a seer who claimed that the water would provide protection against German bullets. Belief in the water proved to be disastrous. The play was first performed in 1970 in Dar es Salaam.

16 Penina Muhando, **Hatia**, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974. **Hatia** is based on the problems of unwed mothers. It centres on a village girl who goes to the city to work. She gets pregnant by a man who denies responsibility for the pregnancy and rejects her. She attempts to commit suicide out of disgrace, but is saved in the nick of time and rehabilitated. **Hatia** was first performed in 1971 in Dar es Salaam.

17 Ngugi wa Thiong'o **Writers in Politics**, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981, p. 42.

18 **Ibid.**, p. 44.

19 'The Beginnings of Imported Theatre in Tanzanian Urban Centres', **op. cit.** p. 405

20 M.N. Ruchoya, 'Drama in East Africa', in **Busara**, 3, i, 1970, p. 47.

21 Ngugi, **op. cit.**, p. 45.

22 **Ibid.**, p. 46.

23 **Ibid.**, p. 47.