PERFORMANCES THAT BIND

A PRELIMINARY READING OF DRAMATURGIC ELEMENTS IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *I WILL MARRY WHEN I WANT*, DEREK WALCOTT'S *DREAM ON MONKEY MOUNTAIN*, AUGUST WILSON'S *THE PIANO LESSON* AND AIMÉ CÉSAIRE'S *AND THE DOGS WERE SILENT*[3]

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In his keynote address to the second Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in Rome in 1959, the late president of Guinea, Ahmed Sekou Toure, grandson of Samori Toure, revolutionary and resistance leader to the French occupation of West Africa, had this to say:

> To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song, you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves.
> In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress, and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity.

Even though Sekou Toure was addressing his concerns to continental African writers and artists, his words are nonetheless pertinent to any project of cultural, racial and historical recuperation and reconstruction among peoples of African descent. Hence, in spite of the fact that the situations confronting each group may differ according to geophysical and political locations, yet there are strains of historical experience that connect them and this mangrove-like connectivity becomes articulated performance through radical drama. Consequently, to better understand the radicalization process it

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is important to examine the performance elements in the plays of dramatists from the three major geographical regions that are connected by the Atlantic Ocean and by recent historical narratives. For my purpose then, I have chosen four universally acclaimed Africana playwrights: Ngugi wa Thiong'O of Kenya, Derek Walcott of St. Lucia, the late August Wilson of the United States of America, and Aimé Césaire of Martinique.

In selecting these writers, I am also aware of the plethora of other writers who compete for my attention. Therefore, the selection of these four does not in any way suggest any hierarchization, nor a diminishment of the contributions of so many others to the eternal project of African peoples to redefine themselves against centuries of Eurocentric Negrophobia. These four plays share what Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1998) calls a unifying strain of longing and belonging in which "Africa as an image and as an ideal is actualized through cultural; and historical performance" (p. 57).

A more thorough comparative reading of the elements of connective dramatic tissues that bind the three continents can be found in books such as *Black Theatre: Ritual performance in the African Diaspora*. When I talk of elements of dramatic performance that link these plays, I mean theatrical elements that include the engagement of performance elements often associated with the cultural and performance worlds of African peoples such as music, dance, spirituality, masquerade, panegyric, historical narratives, storytelling, audience participation, and the politics of resistance among others. Thus, my reading of these plays will engage some of these elements and situate them in the historical narratives of resistance to slavery, colonialism, racism, and sexism. But to do so I want to foreground my interpretation of these plays within Fanon's theoretical observations on the progression within anti-colonial resistance toward the development of national cultures in the Africana world.

Frantz Fanon's theoretical postulations set out in *The Wretched of the Earth* evolved out of his experience both in France and in Algeria during the latter's war of independence against the former.

Fanon's chapter on national culture, when read with Sekou Toure's prescription, complicates the two ideological positionings by expanding the argumentative implications of each. He argues that, for people in the colonized societies of Africa, the Caribbean and the United States, to fulfill Toure's call to action by writers and artists toward the liberation of people of African descent, each generation and community of African people, be they on the continent of Africa or in Diaspora, must "discover its own mission or betray it" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, pp. 206-207). Those of us, born in these times, Fanon asserts, must therefore embrace the historic mission which "is to sanction all revolts, all desperate actions, all those abortive attempts drowned in the rivers of blood" of our ancestors, be it in the slave plantations in the new world or forced labor camps in Africa (pp. 206-207). Though Fanon does not speak kindly about African intellectual leaders who speak of African

culture as if it were some monolithically uniform entity, he instead advocates national culture. He proceeds to give concrete reasons for his rejection of the talk of African culture. He stresses the differences of needs and struggles among people of African descent, noting the differences between what people on the continent want, those in the USA want and those in the Caribbean want. In these desires, Fanon then articulates three stages of struggle undertaken by the writers who also double as the intellectuals from these communities in the fight for African people's redemption.

The first stage is the assimilation phase. The literature from this stage is very derivative, and merely mimics the colonial master's heritage to show that the African descended writer too has mastered the master's culture and hence craves assimilation or better still absorption into that culture, in an attempt to move away from one's own African or African diasporic culture.

At the second stage these attempts to assimilate are summarily rejected by the master and the African-descended writer feels angry. Consequently, he/she begins to recollect and seeks to reconnect with his/her origins and to produce literary work that reflects the culture of his/her people. This sort of reactionary art is seen merely as a strategy of diversion as Fanon would frame it in his theory of natural and forced poetics in *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 120-130). For the African descended writer at this moment is still not totally committed to and immersed in the real struggles of the people. His/her art is still produced from the ivory towers of a Europhonic imagination even if at this time the artist begins to experience an epiphanic awakening; he or she now begins a cautious engagement of the cultural elements that his/her European education had taught him/her to deny and disparage.

At the third stage, the writer finally assumes the role of herald for revolutionary action rousing the people from their lethargy to engage in struggle. This is what Fanon calls 'fighting literature'. It is literature that stokes and feeds previously dormant fires of resistance and charts the path to eventual political victory. It is the type of literature the *griots* performed in ancient days in the Africa of epic heroes such as Sundiata, Shaka, Sunni Ali, Askia Mohammed, Amina of Zaria, Nzingha of Ngola, etc.

What has all this got to do with drama among Caribbean, African American and African peoples? Everything, for drama is a powerful creative genre that creates an illusory but powerful set of realities on the stage. It can be a great and effective subversive instrument in the hands of cultural retrievers and historical re-visonaries. I am not interested at this stage to go into the whole debate about whether African and African Diaspora cultures had drama, a notion questioned by Ruth Finnegan in her foundational text, *Oral Literature in Africa*. Notable theorists such Isidore Okpewho, Biodun Jeiyifo, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong'O, among others, have proven Finnegan wrong. These scholars and others who acknowledge the existence of drama as a genre in African cultures have drawn our attention to elements of theatrical performances found in festivals, rituals, and other cultural celebrations, that include

dance, music, etc., which as Soyinka puts it, though connected to everyday living, when performed at the festival grounds become move to a more "intense, symbolic and expressive level of reality" (p. 137).

If Soyinka's argument is based on the interruption of the colonial mindset of African descended people by uprising cultural textualities, Ngugi wa Thiong'O's argument in "Enactments of Power: the Politics of Performance Space," in his book *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*, describes how the performance of Itiuka, an Agikuyu festival that predated British colonization of East Africa suddenly was interpreted as a threat to British colonial rule. Thus, theatrical elements of the festival challenged directly the cultural imperialism that Britain was imposing on the people. But as Ngugi wa Thing'O later says in the book, "there is no performance without a goal," thus, all drama in the African world is socially committed. Amiri Baraka expresses this much more forcefully when he advocates for a:

> …Revolutionary Theatre [that] must EXPOSE! . . . It should stagger through our universe correcting, insulting, preaching. . . . [It] must Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked. . . . [It] must cause the blood to rush, so that pre-revolutionary temperaments will be bathed in this blood, and it will cause their deepest souls to move, and they will find themselves tensed and clenched, even ready to die, at what the soul has been taught. We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved.

Social commitment in this case is tied to the type of theatre that dramatists of the African world have created from symbiotic adaptations that blend non African dramatic elements with African and African derived theatrical elements. But before I plunge precipitously into a discussion of what some of these elements are, it is important to discuss other elements that deal with issues of theme: history, land, race, religion, and culture and how to retrieve these from the falsehoods of Eurocentric propagandist rhetoric. Allow me then to, at this point, trajectorize my initial proposition from the pinnacle of history as theme and performance.

To initiate a discussion on the importance of history as theme and performance, I appeal to critic Greg Dening in *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language.* Dening argues that "history is not so much fact as performance" (p. 292). Thus, for African, African Caribbean and African American playwrights, an immediate and effective way of deconstructing the lie of the non-existence of African historical contribution to world civilization must be through theatre and performance. Similarly, Hayden White in

Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe, encourages us to revision history from new angles and to reject the jaundiced representation of Africa by European anti-Africa historiographers. History is no longer "the past; it is the consciousness of the past used for present purposes" (Dening, 1992: 170).

Understandably, therefore, I read Ngugi wa Thiong'O's play, *I will Marry When I Want*, Derek Walcott's play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and Aimé Césaire's *And the Dogs Were Silent* as radical departures in a reactive project of cultural substitution toward the nurturing of "authentic" African and African Diaspora voices in the artificially racialized and tribalized spaces in the cultural, historical, and educational industries of Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. These plays differ remarkably from other plays purporting to reflect and represent African, African Caribbean and African American concerns and histories of struggle in authorship, theme, and performance.

But as Carter Woodson (1936), an eminent historian argued, non-blacks cannot sensibly "dramatize Negro life because they misunderstand the Negro because they cannot think black." In order for African and African Diaspora life to be truly represented on stage therefore, African descended people have to write their own historical and cultural dramas. And this is what these four dramatists do so well. Through these plays, Africans, African Americans and African Caribbean people interrogate, and condemn traditional Eurocentric imperialist historiography, which has relentlessly and unabashedly sought to erase African peoples' contributions to world history. The history taught in American, African and Caribbean schools has merely sought and still seeks to validate that Eurocentric historiography which defines the world through historical foreclosure sealed by the written word. As Willis Richardson argued:

> There is little effort to set forth what the [African] race has thought and felt and done as a contribution to the world's accumulation of knowledge and the welfare of mankind. . . . The general reader does not have much insight as to what the Negro was, how the Negro developed from period to period, and the reaction of the race to what was going on around it. (2008: 275)

These sentiments were echoed by William E. B. Du Bois in "A Negro Art Renaissance" when he argued that the world is beginning to recognize albeit grudgingly, and in spite of Hegel, "that the history of the man in Africa has paralleled the history of the man in Europe and Asia" (p. 27). In the early 1900s, several other African Diaspora writers and political leaders including Marcus Garvey and Alan Locke echoed and promoted these sentiments and argued that drama was the best way

for the re-education not only of Africans in the diasporas but also of whites in the Americas.

From a postcolonial perspective therefore, and as Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins have ably argued, in *Post-colonial Drama, theory, practice, politics*, "history [through these playwrights] is re-evaluated and redeployed" not through "historicizing theater productions" but through an examination of how "plays and playwrights construct the discursive contexts for an artistic, social, and political present by enacting other versions of the pre- [modern European] contact period" (p. 107). Gilbert and Tompkins further their argument by stressing that, in such cases, African, Afro-Caribbean, African American, and other colonized people, seek through fragments of historical references that could and cannot be erased in Eurocentric historiography, to reconstruct and tell the other side of their stories. Consequently, reconstructing the past necessarily entails re-visionary historicism through uprising textualities and voices that challenge ideologically, racially, and culturally biased historical narratives by European missionaries, anthropologists, historians, and archaeologist, among others, whose views and interpretations of the histories of Africans have corroborated and contributed to the European imperial project of global domination.

Granted this is so, it is logical to agree with Stephen Slemon in "Reading for Resistance," that "post-colonial *texts* [are pivotal] in the sphere of cultural work and in the promulgation of anti-colonial resistance", and to concur with his insistence on acknowledging the way in which "this social emplacement of the literary text thus affords post-colonial criticism a material reference in social struggle" (p. 103). Positioned this way, I want to maintain that *Dream on Monkey Mountain, I will Marry When I Want*, *The Piano Lesson* and *And the Dogs Were Silent* all functionally and ideologically rise above being mere anti-colonial, antiracist resistance texts toward becoming brazen interrogations of Eurocentric representation of the history of African peoples. These plays are to be seen as purposefully designed as tools for the undermining and dismantling of that anti-Africa history. These plays also create early mental clearings to provide intellectual culture escapes within which a remapping and renaming of African achievements for the enlightenment of African Americans can be envisioned and attained.

My choice of these plays, as I have indicated above, is not for lack of other alternatives. I selected these, however, because they fall in line with what students are dealing with in their world literature classes. I want, then, to recognize the undeniable parallels between the treatment of Africans and the consequences of that treatment everywhere. I would like to hope that after this students will begin to see the similarities of rhetorical and ideological vein that can be interpreted as cultural, historical, economic, social, spiritual, geographical, and racial passwords for logging into African peoples' genealogies of resistance.

Having gone to this length to show the importance of drama in historical recuperation, I pause to refocus my attention on the plays themselves, lest I lose track of my rhetorical journey. How is history performed in the four plays you may ask in the silence of your gazes? I want us to begin with the history of the home turf: the Caribbean. In Césaire's *And the Dogs Were Silent*, Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, history is inextricably intertwined with the construction of economic, class, and racial hierarchies. First, the image of the jail that dominates the narrative background of these texts becomes the symbolic performance and the allegory of territorial deprivations that people of African descent in the New World suffer from. Having been forcefully translocated to the Americas and deprived of land and, hence, of any concrete sense of connectivity to selfhood and origins, they are in every sense of the word imprisoned in a void surrounded by a misty fog of memory. To enhance this imprisonment, their histories had to be denied through a racialization of historical achievement.

But even in their liminal uncertainty and location, the prison space of their unstable existence, as wa Thiong'O says, becomes a performance and performative space for the enacting of resistance. It is only in the prison space that the colonized such as Makak, Rebel, and Willie Boy develop a liminal articulation of their dreams with which to contest European racist, colonial, and neo-colonial power games. Nonetheless, because imprisonment in these plays transcends somatic enchainment to include psychological and spiritual containment, the danger lies in the phenomenon whereby the mind of colonized peoples develops auto-racism and consequently becomes deluded in self-denial and self-deprecation while glorifying the agents of their enslavement. I would like at this point to look at the performance of self in the plays.

How is self denial represented by the yobbos or yahoos of Eurocentricity in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *And the Dogs Were Silent*? Turn with me to the first long tirade by the deracinated Corporal Lestrade: "In the beginning was the ape, and the ape had no name . . . What is your name?" (p. 217). Similarly, Jailer in *And the Dogs Were Silent* berates Rebel: "Look at him, a caricature . . ., his bearing unstable, his face overripe, his hands clammy, the hypocritical and sly leader of a nation of savages, a pathetic guide of a demonic race . . ." (p. 43). Likewise Makak's gobbledygook of self-defense echoes the delusions of a terrified mind: "My noble judges . . , or .. or …what?" (pp. 224-225). His speech which contrasts sharply with Rebel's speech of eternal defiance in *And the Dogs Were Silent* shows the way the indoctrinated racist discourse has permeated and flummoxed his psyche.

He dreams whiteness, a destructive force to people of African descent that Walcott in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* calls the Devil or white master, but here represented as a mask of white femininity. The history of his race is only history when it is validated by the white Queen. His notion of himself is to self-loathe and to swallow the

negrophobic representations of beauty on television, tabloid newspapers, fashion magazines, novels, poetry, drama, etc. However, Makak's dis-ease with his Black self, his history, his culture, is not unique to him, but a general malaise of internalized racism, the cancer of hurting African people everywhere.

The power of the Eurocentric performance of beauty as conceptualized in the emaciated light-skinned woman with preferably blond hair and blue eyes, is so invasive of the psyches of those who do not possess these physiognomic attributes that they become self conscious of their difference, and subsequently embarrassingly insecure in a world dominated by these images. Makak thus becomes the allegory of the disrupted sense of self among Afrisporic people. In order to counter this mental conditioning the playwrights create drama of conscious self-re-presentation in a positive way.

It is not only Makak who suffers from this historical damage to his soul and mind, Lestrade suffers even more severely. He initially fails to recognize that he is a tool used against himself and his own people. His case is pathetically horrendous as his mulatto status makes him believe he is placed closer on the hierarchical pedestal to the white Creole rulers of his island. Thus, he is the most vicious of the attackers against his African race in the Americas. The issue of colorism is what even at this early stage, Walcott is staging. It becomes an exercise in self-exorcism. Lestrade's case is synonymous with the story of the protagonist in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. How many of us believe that because we have a naturally lighter or red skin we are to be considered closer to the base of power - whiteness and are hence drafted as the most vicious gendarmes of the peripheries of the circles of power? Walcott is telling us that we had better disabuse our minds of that, for our aspirations are mere illusions in the dungeons of oppression.

Though in *The Piano Lesson* we do not have any character with such illusions as Lestrade or Makak, nonetheless, the prison as the garrisoned headquarters constructed by European conquistadors, to intimidate, punish, humiliate, and subdue Africans everywhere, is undeniably present here as well. Interestingly, in *I will Mary When I Want*, we have characters such as the members of the Ndugire family whose slavish mimicry of obnoxious European settler behavior echoes Lestrade in the early part of the *Dream*. (p. 406). It may seem that in August Wilson's play, the African American characters are more conscious of their roots, but that is hardly the case. When we listen to Willie Boy go on about the uselessness of preserving family history through the piano which he argues he could sell to get money to buy himself out of the prison of poverty, we understand where he is coming from. To Boy Willie, the history of his people is irrelevant to his quest to be invited to be an observer at the Euro-American feast, if only he too could own land and property (pp. 10-12). Thus, Boy Willie would part with his patrimony in order to buy social respectability.

The issue of material poverty brings me to an examination of how land and life have been appropriated and coerced into the production of European and Euro- American wealth during both the period of slavery in the Americas and the subsequent colonization of African lands and the Caribbean in the post-emancipation period. A people without land are a people without hope or even the illusion of power. A people without land are a people without economic self sustainability. Thus, in colonial environments the struggle of the colonized for liberation is not about freedom of speech or freedom to be employed or to travel or to sit at the same table with the colonizer. It is singularly about land reclamation.

It from this angle that I look at the struggle of the people in wa Thiong'O's *I Will Marry When I Want*, as the historical foundation of anti-colonial and anti-neocolonial struggles on which to read Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. In all four plays, there is a cry for land repossession or reclamation by those who have been dispossessed of their land, while in *The Piano Lesson* (pp. 10-11), there is a deep desire to buy the land on which Boy Willie's grandparents had toiled and died as slaves. If Willie Boy buys Sutter's land, he believes he will recover a sense of self; he will re-masculinize his personality; he will buy social respectability according to the dominating ideology and achieve an illusion of equality with white men. It is an equality based on a patriarchal ideology that equates manhood with ownership of material goods.

Nonetheless, land ownership also entails a certain liberty, something the four plays all hint at. Thus, Boy Willie is willing to sell his family heirloom in order to realize this illusion of power and social equality. He does not care about the history of his grandfather's and father's strategic resistance narrated through the carvings on the Piano (p. 10). The carvings are artistic representations of history that traces back to Africa, thus providing Willie Boy's family the evidence to counter the narratives of ownership propagated by the Sutter family. These carvings on the piano also become allegories of African American peoples' subtle resistance to slavery. Willie's obsession with gaining social respectability through land acquisition is undeniably in the eyes of Lestrade, the rage for whiteness (p. 228) that black people suffer from because of mental colonization.

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the dream of land ownership is conflated and/or is synonymous with political power. Here, Makak dreams of kingship with the power over the lives of people in his hands. In this dream vision of his, Makak considers himself the king of those same African empires (Ashanti, Dahomey, Guinea) (p. 228), whose power and notoriety ironically originated in their untold histories of involvement in the sale of other Africans that they captured to white people to enslave in the new world. But Makak's mental confusion derives from the Eurocentric narratives about these kingdoms in which their feudal systems, because they were organized and operated at the same predatory levels as European national political

organizations, were then written into the annals of European historiography as great nations. Had Makak been aware like Willie Boy that perhaps he is miserable not because he is ugly, not because he is black, but instead because of repressed memories that his own people in Africa colluded with Europeans to enslave his ancestors, he would not be delusional about his royal descent. To avoid confronting this evil, Makak and Lestrade, metaphors of unreflecting Afrocentricity in the Americas, engage in the self-delusion that they descended from kings and dream of returning to Africa as kings.

It may be understandable that Diaspora Africans suffer more from the rage of whiteness because of the centuries of negrophobic indoctrination they have had to endure. What then of Africans on the continent? What is their reason for also dreaming whiteness? After all, as we may contend, they may have been colonized, their lands taken away, but they still have their languages, cultures, religions, political systems, etc. under the European systems of both assimilationist and indirect policies. While this is true, it nonetheless is also true that the same indirect rule became the nurturing ground for the spawning of neocolonial mentality, a more debilitating malaise that cripples Africans. With neocolonialism, the native becomes an auto-colonizing person, who acts on behalf of the absentee master, the big multilateral and global corporations. These companies now hire Africans as front desk managers as a way of camouflaging their business with an African face (pp. 294, 296).

Dreaming whiteness sometimes is equated with dreaming of the Whiteman's heaven through an unreflecting adoption of his religion: Christianity. Christian religion has been one of the tools utilized to defuse the passion of resistance among African peoples worldwide. To the family of Ndugire, and Wangeci, and Njoori (pp. 318-319) Jesus is the solution to every problem they have. Through the slavish following of the Christian god, they are promised paradise on earth and in heaven, and yes indeed in the play, *I Will Marry When I Want,* they do achieve that. The issue of being sell-outs is focused on throughout the play. The nationalist may win the battle for independence, but the flag of independence does not guarantee economic and cultural independence. Thus, Gicaamba who is struggling to counter the message of self and cultural hate preached by the Christians is overwhelmed because he has no support. He tries to teach the history of the missionary role in Africa's dispossession, but there are no willing ears (pp. 316-317). The similarity between what Gicaamba says about religion's role in the subjugation of African people is borne out by what Boy Willie says about Avery.

Wa Thiong'O's play reveals the way missionaries were often sent to ease the suspicions of the revolutionary leaders. Thus, Christianity became the main tool of pacification before total colonization. As Basil Davison, the renowned African historian, puts it in *Africa, History of a Continent*, the Whiteman came to Africa with the sword in his right hand and the Bible in the other. Need we go to African history

to verify this, since we know how Christianity was employed on the plantations of the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas to stem slave rebellion?

However, in the case *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Makak's take on religion seems to reflect a more positive attitude. He becomes the new prophet of healing, raising Josephus from the dead. His action provides what we may call a temporary relief for the family, and this makes him a hero. This feat is achieved while he is on his way to Africa to claim his royal throne. Makak's role then becomes a challenge to organized religion. He appears to be a kind of prophet king. Scene two of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is the dramatized mockery and /or questioning of how religion has become the opium of the masses.

But is it really very strange that in the Caribbean and the USA, Christianity became an attractive alternative to African religions, at least at the superficial level? As Walcott argues in "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," the African phase in the emergence of Caribbean poets, carvers, and dramatists is pathetically hollow, for what they produce lacks the spirit and passion of the real. He states that for Afro-Christians, African gods are no longer a force."We could pretend to enter [their] power but [they] would never possess us, for our invocations [are] not prayer but devices. The actor's approach could not be catatonic but rational, expository, not receptive . . . all we could successfully enact [is] a dance of doubt" (pp. 8-9). Rebel takes this lamentation up in Act II of *And the Dogs* W*ere Silent* (pp. 26-28).

Thus far I have touched briefly on themes of history, land, poverty, political power, and religion. But these are not the most important dramaturgic elements that make these plays speak to each other in the same language. When I talk of dramaturgic elements, I mean the performative maneuvers adapted by the four playwrights to give their plays performative tensions and resolutions that go beyond what is popularly known as word dramas. These elements, though not unique to African and African Diaspora dramas nonetheless are more reflective of the type of drama that African, African Americans and African Caribbean people want. Some of these elements include: storytelling, dance, music, performance within performance, and choruses, among others. These elements, together with some of the thematic concerns I have enumerated above, create dramas in which there is what is often referred to as the performance of a politics of power. One may have to go back in time to Greek drama to reconnect Europe with this kind of drama. However, African drama and the drama of African Diaspora have never abandoned their cultural dynamic through which they contest the negativities that have been dominating their lives since Europe first invented their notion of Africa.

I would like to look at some scenes in which these elements function, not as what would probably be interpreted in European drama as tension releasers, but which instead function in these dramas as center pieces on which the plays depend. Dance, mime, and song not only enhance the narrative potency of the play, they also enrich

and electrify it toward the ultimate goal of articulating a political statement against injustice. Thus, in all four plays, the role of dance, song, mime, and movement are pivotal to the construction of meaning.

For instance, in *The Piano Lesson*, it is the love of music by Mrs. Sutter that enables her to continually imprison her African slaves. But when she dies, and the Piano is claimed by papa Charles, for which he also dies, his wife Berniece plays music on the piano until she dies as well. In the ultimate scene of the play, it is the music of prayer to her ancestors that helps liberate the house from Sutter's ghost, while simultaneously helping to open Boy Willie's eyes to the reality that the piano represents a greater force that a mere piece of wood (pp. 107-108). Through song, Wining Boy is able to tell stories of his sojourn through many places. Song in this case is the music of Blues, a song type that links African Diaspora to Africa, as the recent research, *From Mali to Memphis* testifies (pp. 39, 47, 55, 101). Music thus does not play the comic relief role that we find so often in European type drama. Similarly, in *I Will Marry When I Want*, the dramatic elements of song and dance and mime are very developed and elevated to the same level as speech. In one way, the songs and the dances perform the role of a voice of mockery of the religious and political and economic pretences engaged by the new black middle class to amass more wealth. In another way, they reinforce cultural ways of resistance through theater.

We now turn to storytelling as a more intricate dramaturgic element. I say intricate on account of the ability of narrative to draw the characters in the play and the audience into a conspirational intimacy, that creates an alienation effect that draws the audience into the act. In all four plays, the role of storytelling fulfils a role different from narrative summary often used to depict events off-stage in European drama. Here storytelling is part of the drama. For instance, in *And the Dogs Were Silent,* there are multiple narrators at different stages of the action. The drama starts with Echo, a reflective and critical introduction of the main issues that are performed in the history of the evolution of the Antillean African. Following Echo's introductory warning to the blue-eyed architect of a pestilential world into which the African has been flung in the Caribbean, are the voices of Narrator, Narratress, First Madwoman and Second Madwoman. The narrative presence of these characters gives the events a verisimilitude that borders on a prophetic representation of history. In African storytelling traditions narrative is enhanced and rendered immediate in its effectiveness through dramatic representation of the events narrated. This then enables both the story and the action to create an atmosphere of total drama.

The Madwomen, Narrator and Narratress, Chorus and Semichorus become the observers yet also the silent participants in rebellion through a constancy in their subversive lamentations in which they utter prophecies of rebellion, resistance and survival of Afro-Caribbean peoples. Thus, their roles are similar yet different from their counterparts in European drama. For instance, the two Madwomen are not comic

characters. They are seers, a role that is sometimes credited to madness in African culture. Thus their language is that of prophecy. Through them the mysteries of nature and the coming Armageddon in the valley of false peace created by Europe are unraveled through symbolic language (p. 10). They also prophesize regeneration of the spirit of rebellion in the ashes of destruction (p. 14), thus indicating that the desire for freedom by the African in the Antilles cannot be suppressed forever, even if rebellion after rebellion is crushed by the European machines of war.

Storytelling is central to *The Piano Lesson*. Indeed without the rounds of stories told by Boy Willie, Dorca, Wining Boy, and Avery among others, there is no drama. Without these stories, which form the central pieces of the puzzle about the origins and importance of the piano to this family, the audience/reader would be left in the dark as to the reason for the drama. Each character in *The Piano Lesson* has a personal story to tell, but each personal story is a patch on the quilt of the family saga which translates finally into the saga of African American experience in the USA. Storytelling also forms the core narrative of both *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *I will Marry when I Want*. In that work, Makak, Lestrade, and Moustique all tell stories not of events already over, but of events that are happening even as they narrate them. Here they are also participants in the narrative actions. Similarly Gicaamba uses story as history. The struggle for independence is the struggle for a reclamation of land and the subsequent freedom and power that that entails. Once again, we see how storytelling performs the role not just of cultural narrative and performance, but also of narratives of power in which the history of colonization and resistance become the central argument.

Afrocentric dramaturgy is often governed by the performance of narrative through dance and mime. The dances performed in all four plays help consolidate the oral narratives of song and storytelling. While he performance of dance is not used as a dramaturgical device in *The Piano Lesson*, nonetheless, the presence of Wining Boy who sings the blues and of Berniece who plays the piano while invoking the help of her African ancestors as she tackles Sutter's ghost testify to the submerged presence of the rhythms of dance movements. In the other plays, dance does play a great role. Dance becomes the movement from a position of physical stasis to one of somatic fluidity, a kinetic release that frees the spirit from the constraints of space, and helps the dancer transcend physicality to enter into the territory of rebelliousness against control. In these dance performances also, we see history reenacted and stories told toward energizing the people/audience into action. Thus in *I will Marry*, the movement to revolt is choreographed through dance. Dance also enables the oppressed populations in Africa, the Caribbean and the USA to exorcize the demons of doubt, self-hate and also creates fear on the part the oppressor. For dance has the benefit of multiple interpretations.

If song, storytelling, and dance are powerful dramaturgic elements, the role of religion, especially African-derived styles of worship is also central to the spirit of dramatic representation of African and African diasporic struggles. It is without doubt that European representation of Christianity enabled them to colonize Africans not in the least because it became the spiritual and moral justification for slavery and oppression. The Bible always preceded the gun in the modern history of the European ruled world.

To mount a successful rebellion, the writers of these plays had several choices available to them, including taking the side of the oppressor and his interpretation of what Christ preached. We find this in wa Thiong'O's satirized lamentation of the way in which Christianity becomes an effective tool of neo-colonialism. For those who become born-again Christians, limited access is granted to the corridors of power through land grants and shares in the exploitative factories in Kenya. Thus, Christianity which was a tool of colonization now becomes a tool of neo-colonial oppression. In *All the Dogs*, Christianity is represented by the corrupt, pornographic and morally bankrupt bishop who cohorts with the agents of colonization (p. 9). While these Christians sip from the fountains of the illusion of power, the illusion is so corrosive and pervasive because of its mirage of trappings of material wealth, that it attracts and confuses even the most passionate revolutionaries. Religion is a very seductive and sedating pill in the face of what seems to be hopelessness.

But in *Dream* and *The Piano Lesson*, religion is turned to a good cause. The religion here is not mere ritual performance, but a deeper African derived spirituality that is tapped into to fight off the demons of European temptations. In *The Piano Lesson*, Avery, an African American pastor joins hands with Berniece to fight the ghost of Sutter. While he is praying with the Bible and invoking the name of Jesus, Berniece is glued to the piano and plays on, calling the names of her African progenitors to help her. It is this combination of African derived spirituality that helps African Diaspora peoples survive in the wilderness of slavery and racism. We also need to go to *Dream on Monkey Mountain* to find how Walcott engages Spiritual Baptists' rituals to give hope to a broken people. Walcott's position may not be to present this African derived spirituality in any positive light, but he inadvertently shows how the people's strength and hope lies in their faith, and Makak acting as a faith healer restores them to that hope by resurrecting Josephus from the dead. In this act, Makak, in spite of Walcott's mocking intentions reflected through Moustique, becomes the provider of an illusion of hope. And that illusion, promised through Africanized Christianity, constitutes part of a spiritual practice that has provided African Antilleans the courage to rebel.

We must remember the role of religion or African derived spirituality in the Haitian revolution, the Morant Bay rebellion led by Paul Bogle, etc. In *All the Dogs*, Rebel rejects all religion. He laments that he has called on the gods of Africa and they do not answer him, so he aligns himself to another European ideological invention, Marxism,

which uses European scientific rationalism as a discourse on freedom. Likewise Gicaamba in *I will Marry* also adopts a Marxist ideology and an ideological positioning that has its own perils in its betrayal by the workers, or other slaves, persuaded by the false benevolence of the neo-colonialists and their lackeys.

The Rebel learns this lesson in a bitter manner. Thus, the difference between *I will Marry* and *All the Dogs* on the one hand, and *Dream* and *The Piano Lesson* on the other hand, lies in the former's unreflecting adoption of Marxist discourse and strategy as the only solution to the problems of colonialism and neo-colonial oppression. In this, African cultural practices become erased for they are replaced by yet another Eurocentric ideology, which goes against the African's spiritualized world view. They misrepresent African communalism with imposed communism/socialism without considering the historical roots of Marxist ideology. After all even in wa Thiong'O's alluring representation of socialism as the next best solution to political and economic corruption in Kenya may be, it nonetheless leaves undeveloped and unanswered the question of how a socialist system in Kenya can still hope to participate in the global market place dominated by both capitalist and socialist greed.

Nonetheless, wa Thiong'O's rhetoric hope, uncertain as it may be at the end of the play, still evokes a program of hope that we do not see in *Césaire's* play. Césaire's play ends with defeat, defeat of the rebel, defeat of revolution because *Césaire*, like his compatriots did not truly believe in a cultural revolution that promotes Africa over Europe. Thus, here *Césaire* also shows he has no belief even in socialism, and that violence as a tool to overthrow the oppressor's violent rule will ultimately end in futile sacrifice as the people abandon Rebel. Here, we see Césaire's initial and perpetual disagreement with Fanon who holds that it is necessary sometimes for violence to become the best strategy to overthrow violence.

In the end all these plays show uncertain futures. The plays continue the debates and enliven the views and voices articulated from the African Diasporas in the 1890s which became more pronounced in the Black Power, Negritude and Independence movements in the African world of the1950s. They continue the call for cultural and political and historical and aesthetic action against the colonizer externally and internally. Thus in *All the Dogs Were Silent*, we are confronted with failed revolution as an answer to the Fanons and Amiri Barakas. The response to *Césaire* comes from wa Thiong'O's *I will Marry When I Want* in which we see a greater potential for real liberation in post-independent Africa. Meanwhile, in *The Piano Lesson* we see a post-emancipation initiation into a gradual recognition of the importance of the history of artistic resistance among the slavers of African descent and how that impacts on the younger generations' sense of self. Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* raises the problem of mental colonization of the Antillean which Fanon in *Black Skin White Mask* so ably analyzes as the bane of the Black Antillean's liberation. Like *Césaire's*

failed revolution, Walcott's characters are also failed revolutionaries as their attempts to return to Africa are presented as mere illusions of dis-eased minds.

In the final analysis, these plays share certain attitudes toward Africa: Africa as a European invention and hence a figment of the Diasporic imagination; revolution as mere futile rebellion sans sustainability because it is not grass-roots generated; African Gods and spirituality as relics of a defeated people; Christianity as a neo-colonial tool for the furtherance of European domination; progress as a hoax and a hex put on colonized peoples by Europe and defined through the ideological filters of capitalism and socialism. The plays' positives lie in their combined reinforcement of their African theatrical roots: song, dance, storytelling, narrators, mime, ritual, history, audience participation, and other performance elements that unite them in both purpose and style.

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