

INTERCULTURAL THEATRE: 'EAST' MEETS 'WEST',
Number 3

RITUALS AND CEREMONIES IN SUDAN
FROM CULTURAL HERITAGE TO THEATRE

Mieke KOLK (editor) :

Martin ADRICHEM (copy-editor)

Proceedings of the International Conference on:
RITUALS AND CEREMONIES AS THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE
Khartoum, Sudan, December 18-23, 2005

Organized by:

Sudan University of Science and Technology: College of Music and Drama,
Khartoum, Sudan

University of Amsterdam: Institute for Theatre Studies, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

With the gracious support of:

Sudan:

The President of Khartoum, Capital of Arabic Culture

The Vice-Chancellor of Sudan University

The President of ITI Sudan, Centre

The Netherlands:

University of Amsterdam: The Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis

University of Amsterdam; Institute of Theatre Studies

Organizing Committee:

Khartoum:

Ali Mahdi

Shams El Din Younis

Saad Yousef Obeid

Adel Harbi

Nasser El Shaikh

Amsterdam

Mieke Kolk

This publication is sponsored by:

Haella Foundation, The Hague, The Netherlands

With special thanks to:

Khalid Mustafa Mubarak

Antje von Graevenitz

Lieke Van Hoopenhuyze

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

| | |
|--|---|
| Rituals and/as Theatre in Sudan | 5 |
| From Cultural Heritage as Living Practice towards Syncretic Theatre-forms | |
| Introduction by Mieke KOLK | |

I. Rites, Ceremonies and the Social Spaces in-between

| | |
|--|----|
| Shams EL DIN YOUNIS (College of Music and Drama, University of Sudan): The Coronation-rites in the Kingdom of Meroe as Dramatic Scenarios..... | 15 |
| Intisar S. ELZAIN (Department of Archeology, University of Khartoum): Archaeology in Performance: The Retrieval of Rituals | 48 |
| Khalid Al-MUBARAK (Department of English, University of Khartoum): Zar: A Theatrical Healing Cult in Transition..... | 54 |
| Eman KARMOUTY (Alexandria University): Al-Zar in Performance; A late 19th Century Introduction In Egypt. | 77 |
| Imtithal EL TAYIB ABDEL RAHMAN (Faculty of Education, Blue Nile University): Waza Rituals as Crucial Social Practices..... | 86 |

II. From Rituality to Theatricality: Cultural Heritage from Past into Present

| | |
|---|-----|
| Khalid Al-MUBARAK (Department of English, University of Khartoum): Theatre in Sudan: From Pre-islamic Ritual and Islamic Sufi Ritual until Modern Drama and a National Theatre..... | 90 |
| Saad Yousef OBEID (College of Music and Drama, University of Sudan): Towards a Sudanese Theatre | 109 |
| Adil HARBI NASSER AL SHAIKH (College of Music and Drama, University of Sudan): Sudanese Folk Rituals; A Key to Solve the Cultural Dilemma | 115 |

III. Ritual and Theatre in its social function:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Ali MAHDI NOURI: (ITI Khartoum Centre, Buqaa-Tjeatre): | |
| Theatre in Conflict Zones; | 120 |
| Abuelgassim GOR and The Peace | |
| Culture Project, College of Music and Drama | 123 |

IV. A Post/colonial Dialogue: Cruelties of Migration

| | |
|--|-----|
| Mieke KOLK, Sha'za MUSTAFA (Khartoum, Asharqa Law sat): | |
| East/West differences as War between the Sexes: | |
| an introduction | 126 |
| Mieke KOLK (Institute for Theatre Studies, University of Amsterdam): | |
| Re-inventing Identities; Season of Migration travels to Theatre | |
| in the North..... | 130 |

RITUAL AND THEATRE IN SUDAN FROM CULTURAL HERITAGE INTO SYNCRETIC THEATRE FORMS

Mieke KOLK

“Many of us think of rituals and ceremonies as highly codified performative forms that have been handed down through successive generations in an unbroken line. But age alone is not enough, for ritualistic formulae are not simply a legacy from the past, they still inform our discourses on theatrical performance today. Rites, ceremonies, and oral traditions are crucial in any enumeration of what counts as theatre. It also goes without saying that the field of Theatre Studies is rapidly being re-shaped by the concept of ‘performance’, abetted by cultural analysis, interculturality, interdisciplinarity and the development of Performance Studies. In this context rituals and ceremonies are, as religious and social performances, closely connected with artistic practices or even considered as such. Their aesthetic qualities are one way of setting them apart from everyday life; they may involve poetic language, stylized gestures and other artistic elements. Taking place in front of an audience that shares a cultural and spiritual repertory of knowledge, such performances tend to bridge the gap between the observer and the observed, creating a ‘habitus’ that encompasses performers and audiences within the same space.”¹

It is exactly for these reasons that ancient rites and ceremonies are studied as part of the specific cultural heritage, and considered as formative for both a national identity and a further development of a national theatre. And although Sudan is committed to pluriformity of cultures and peoples there is a strong expectation that the ancient but still existing ritualism and dance-ceremonies will form the base for an autonomous, non-Western theatre that will enrich the international theatre-scene.

Umbrella

It is clear that the term ‘performance’ in Performance Studies has a broader meaning than it has in Theatre Studies, where we used to talk about the performance of a drama, a text. In the second edition (2006) of his book *Performance Studies*, Richard Schechner describes carefully the different perspectives and nuances of the term. Performances within the frame of

Performance Studies are actions studied in four ways: 1. as behavior, what people do in their activity of doing it; 2. as artistic practices; 3. as participating in anthropological phenomena; and 4. as social practices. Performance ranges from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainment, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music) and everyday life performances, to social roles, the media and internet.

Performance Studies synthesizes approaches of its object from a wide variety of disciplines including among others the performing arts, social sciences, feminist studies, gender studies, history, psychoanalysis, semiotics, media studies and cultural studies. A performance studies scholar examines texts, architecture, visual arts or any other item and artifact of art or culture, not in themselves, but as ‘players’ in ongoing relationships, as action, interaction and relation, not *in* but *between*...

In this sense ritual and theatre are to be described in a continuum of performances of art, rituals, and ordinary life that are ‘restored behaviors’; they are ‘twice-behaved behaviors’, (28) performed actions for which people train and rehearse. Separating art and ritual, then, seems difficult. Deciding what is art varies historically and culturally. The difference is based on the *function*, the event and the *expected behavior* of players and spectators.

- Rituals are collective memories encoded into actions. Rituals help people deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies and desires that trouble the norms of daily life. Play/theatre gives people a chance to temporarily experience the taboo, the risky: you may never be Oedipus but you can ‘perform’ him in play. Both ritual and play lead people into a ‘second reality’ separate from ordinary life.
- Although both ritual and play show comparable functions, one is inclined to see play/role-playing as an essential part of theatre: today we consider the enactment, the playing of drama or another form of scenario, as a theatrical performance. But what we call theatre, people in other times did not. It is still an open question whether the ancient Greeks considered their ‘theatre’ not more as mere ritual that took place during the religious festivals. Only later drama and theatre were codified (Aristotle) in their aesthetic dimensions while ritual elements receded. And only in the 15th century did the rebirth of Western theatre take place. (39)

Drama and/as Theatre

Theatre as a form of art was well accepted in (Western) Europe when 19th century colonialism imported the notion of 'theatre as enacted drama' into their colonies. The English invaders even introduced the slippage between the terms *drama* and *theatre*, that is a *text* and the *performance* of that text. Drama became the term for everything theatrical, one studied the art of making theatre at a Drama-school. This drama, in its generally accepted Western mode as realistic text-based actor's theatre, set the norm for all non-Western theatre.

The effect of this terminology seems devastating. In a recent article in TDR, John Bell² signals the absence in most of the Western and Eastern theatre publications of already long existing theatrical practices in Arabic and Islamic cultures in the Middle East, such as *Al-hakawati* (solo-storytelling), *khayal al zhil* (Shadow theatre), various pictorial performance techniques (*tamathil* in Egypt, *sandug al-aja ib* in Arabia, *pada-zan* in Iran) and numerous versions of puppet theatre (*Aragoz* in Egypt, *Abderrazak*, a marionette theatre in Tunisia). Bell puts the blame of that absence on the influence of books like Jacob Landau's 1958 *Studies in the Arab Theatre and Cinema*, where drama and theatre were considered historically as 'wholly foreign and implanted' and traces his influence till 2003, in the introduction of *Short Arabic Plays* by Salam Khadra Jayyusi. The same slippage between drama and theatre leads her to a denial of a strong and rich tradition of Arabic (written) drama since the end of the 19th century while centering on: Arabic drama (that is theatre) "little attempted and remaining in darkness (...) and only developing as a major genre in the latter 20th century."³

Studies on Arabic Theatre mostly focus on Egypt where European theatre was literally imported by Napoleon when the French armies entered the country at the end of the 18th century. When the English marched into Sudan, some hundred years later, the Egyptian army came with them, again, as colonizers. But the Egyptians were also instrumental in bringing the new form of western theatre to the Sudanese community. In the long article of Khalid Mubarak about theatre in Sudan, we find a description of developments of 'modern drama' after 1880 through School Theatre and the birth of a tradition of playwriting in the late 1930s. Four strong and gifted writers took up the challenge that the political, colonial, situation posed on them, criticized it, and started to use in their work Sudanese literary forms and popular wisdom. After Independence in 1956, the search for new forms began by returning to the rich historical past and cultural heritage, both in content and form. Old rituals like the Zar-ceremonies and a traditional Shaiqiyyah wedding ceremony were put on stage. The National

Folklore Troupe, founded in 1968, presented performances of traditional dances from all over Sudan. The search for cultural identity started at the roots.

Rites and Ceremonies

One of the main advantages of the paradigmatic change of theatre to performance is the new continuum that is shaped between ritual and theatre. Rituals, ancient texts and images can all be read as performances when we concentrate on their performative dimension, that is: to do, to make happen... Performative means working like a performance, striving to an effect between the 'doer' and the public. Like its sister-term performativity it deals with constructions of social reality that point to the repetition in behaviour.

Divided from the theatre by the aesthetic/ not real/ dimension of the last, the struggle for origins between the two seems uncertain. Fact is that at any given point in time, in every part of the world and in every culture, people are making dances, music and theatre. The search for origins is a typical feature of Western scholars at the end of the 19th century.⁴

In his study on the Sudanese Rituals through the Ages, Shams El Din Younis deals with the Coronation Rites in the Central Nile Valley Civilization, the Kingdom of Nabata/Meroe (300 BC-1500 AC) that are read as performances, 'in a theatrical way'. Texts and images of these Coronation rituals, center on the 'birth', the crowning of the new King and the 'death', funeral rites, which are read in their narrative, 'dramatic' dimensions as ancient stories. His material for the King's two Journeys comes from archaeological findings that in a process of retrieving, reconstituting and re-contextualization produce in the end a couple of scenarios for three different Kings from the Sudanese past. Comparing these developments with the 'origins' of Greek theatre, the rites of Dionysus, El Din Younis concludes that where the Greek rituals developed into theatre, the Meroetic rituals stayed as social practices in present-day coronation-rituals.

His pioneering approach, he received a master grade in Archaeology in 1999, was stimulated and protected by Intisar ElZein, a driven archaeologist herself who developed new ties with other disciplines, making archaeology into a mixture of arts, anthropology and sciences like physics, chemistry, ancient medicine, geography and by now also an object of performance studies. She supervised both this study and that of Nuha Abd el-Hafiz who combined her archaeological findings with practical research. She participated in a ceremonial

hunting-party in the White Nile region, together with the Sheik of a religious Sufi sect and found out that objects and gestures had not changed. In this way she could explain a couple of questions about the ancient material.

A comparable interdisciplinary approach is found in the study of the Zar both in its universal and regional dimensions. Origins of the 'Zar as a theatrical Healing Cult in Transition' are to be found in Africa, the Middle East and especially in Sudan. As a healing cult it is a universal phenomenon and much is already written about it as Khalid El-Mubarak's article shows. He concentrates on its Northern Sudanese form and describes the ceremony in all its theatrical aspects. Central in the ceremony is the impersonation-strategy of the possessing spirit by the patient that shows strong performative features. A woman may play a man, be dressed like an 'Englishman', may smoke a pipe and drink whiskey under the protection of the Sheika. Engaged in a taboo-breaking exercise its social function offers clearly a form of "religion of the oppressed", a sort of safety-valve in its discharge of repressed emotions and wishes.

Recent changes in the Sudanese version of the Zar mark the beginning of its shifting ground from ritual to theatrical performance that is put on stage. Frowned upon by Islamic and Christian authorities who condemn the practice as demagoguery, it is prohibited in Egypt that took over the Zar only at the end of the 19th century. But it still thrives, explains Egyptian scholar Eman Karmouty, striving to reconnect the Zar with Pharaonic times. In her lively and evocative description of the ceremony she reaches a cathartic end both for the patient and the public: "Along with the music, chants, commotion, wild dance, incantations and final trance, the spattering of blood of the killed animal at the finale of the al-Zar ritual produces the desired cure and release from the djinn or demon".

Describing the Waza rituals along the Blue Nile Imthital El Tayib Abdel Rahman deals with the crucial question of what the Barta tribe thinks that will happen to them when they no longer will be practicing the rituals. She mentions that the power of the ritual is still that strong that people believe when they do not perform, their society would collapse, that they will face draught so that there will be no harvest at all and that they will lose their heritage and social structures and value-systems. Waza rituals, she states, are considered a form of friendship, an expression of relationships and intimacy between members of a social group. That is what really is expressed in their dancing, their music and singing. And, ending with a practical note: it also keeps them fit, building their bodies up to carry the burden of work in agriculture.

From rituality to theatricality

“The study of Sudanese rituals and ceremonies is the first step towards a theory and a practice that is derived from Sudanese heritage and that can enrich both national and international theatre. Some of these elements have already been introduced in Sudanese theatre-performances but nobody encouraged the artists to carry on the experiment. From this place I want to call for establishing a studio to work in an experimental way with these ritualisms, in order to coin a new theatre”. This is the last paragraph of the paper of Saad Yousef Obeid. His reason to take dramatic and theatrical elements from the ritual heritage is twofold: to develop these elements into a theatrical form, and in selecting these shared elements for theatre, to bring together the different parts of Sudanese culture. Foreign influences will not help to develop a real Sudanese theatre, and besides that, also international theatre will not profit from the Sudanese research. For the time being Saad Obeid describes as specific elements in Sudanese theatre: the setting, a theatre in the round; multi mediality, acting, singing, dancing, audience-participation and a position for the director as master of the show. It is difficult to find all these factors in one production, he says, but there are examples in a performance of *Apadmak*, played in front of the presidential palace in the sixties and street theaters in the seventies of the last century, and some recent experiences. In the meantime, he is waiting for a process of transformation of the rituals from an everyday practice into art, that is, to put them on a stage.

His colleague Adil Harbi supports him in this line of thinking in ‘Sudanese Folk Rituals: a Key to solving the Cultural Dilemma of Sudanese Theatre’. Folk rituals, he writes, are a social phenomenon, growing and renewing themselves in response to changes in social conditions. Rituals are the instruments that enable people to achieve a kind of equilibrium between self and society. But, and there he takes the next step, there is a wide gap between rituals and art in their relative ability to bring solutions to problems in the Sudanese society. Rituals cannot address tribal conflicts and they cannot create a kind of unity within the different groups and are unable to achieve development and social progress.

The function of theatre relies on the process of overlapping social and artistic fields. Theatre makers and scholars are aware of the revolutionary trends that happen in the theatre worldwide. What the author then proposes, is a combination of European methodological developments in the area of rituals and theatre with the Sudanese diversity of rituals. Examples of these usable Western methods are those developed by Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Artaud, Brook and Grotowski, in short, the European theatrical Avant-garde of the 20th century that worked and is still working in cultural cross-overs.

Ritual and Theatre in its social function

‘The function of theatre as a humanitarian and educational instrument is there to express problems and put solutions in a positive, exciting and beautiful way’, writes Adil Harbi. But to make a strong theatre in Sudan that can deal with both ethnical and cultural diversity and the life in the big cities, we need to update the theatre and develop theatre experts who are aware of its social role and duties. Again. Pleading for a strong combination between imported theatrical techniques in a combination with Sudanese popular acting and developments of well know ritualism into theatre, he describes not only a strong new art/Theatre but also forms of social, ‘applied’ theatre that function in different contexts in different areas.

In both domains cultural heritage is a key-concept.

In a country like Sudan where war waged for decades between North and South and still wages between different rebel groups and the government, it seems for many people hard to think about theatre as entertainment or even as a serious power in creating some form of unity. Nevertheless, it is there: both the *desire* to make theatre (a National Theatre) a place for cultural and political negotiations and, in *reality*, an already existing broad scale in forms of community theatre.

Theatre for Development seems the only sensible way to address refugees, migrant social groups, orphans, teenagers in Darfur and other desperate people trying to survive as victims of war. In the middle of many smaller initiatives to work on communal building by way of making music, dancing and acting, I met two bigger projects that were supported by professionals, and staff and students of the College of Music and Drama in Khartoum: *the Peace Culture Project*, until last year under the direction of AbuelGassim Gor, and the *Centre for Theatre in Conflict Zones*, organized by Ali Mahdi Nouri and his Al-Bugaa Theatre-group.

The Theatre in Conflict-zones is a three year project based in post-war Sudan. It grew from a series of workshops organized by the German Center of the International Theatre Institute in Berlin. It already had organized workshops specialized in dealing with cultural conflicts in Egypt and Bangladesh before arriving in Sudan. The methods used in those workshop were a fusion of the ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ of Augusto Boal, and ‘Image Theatre’ and a series of improvisation techniques developed by Alexander Stillmark, director and former actor of the Berliner Ensemble. These methods appeared compatible with the

work in Sudan of the Bugaa theatre of Ali Mahdi that had presented similar experiences in the field of post-war Sudan, while using devices from popular culture and improvisation techniques. In 2004 a joint project was decided upon.

Both the Boal method and the Image Theatre technique are suitable for non-performers from all age groups and cultural and social backgrounds. Special attention was given to the cultural heritage of the groups it worked with by using traditional forms of theatre, dance, songs and story-telling. Workshops are directed to train groups of people to promote a dialogue between them. The method was enriched by the 'Composition theatre', a style of theatre developed by Ali Mahdi during his theatrical career, which consists of creating a visual image of an idea, transposing thinking and words into visual language: "Any idea from which no image results, cannot be dependable" the director says. His 'compositons' are rooted in the Sudanese tradition of festivities, celebrations as is represented in rituals since ancient Sudanese time.

Less internationally directed but also institutional well embedded, is the Peace Culture Project run by the Center of Theatre Research of the University of Sudan. The project aims at using theatre as a way to communicate unity in difference and peaceful negotiations in rural communities. It directs its activities in the first place to schoolchildren. The project uses elements of folklore, songs, music, dance from the local communities it works with. Making the participants more aware of their roots could lead to a change in ideas and behaviour. Fundamental for the project is its strategy to connect with the people. They have discovered that a project should be build up in the following stages:

- a. A short play to attract the attention
- b. A longer play on the subject to be discussed
- c. This longer play should develop into a larger event involving a larger part of the community.

Students and their teachers traveled to West Kordofan and visited the tribes of the Myssria and the Dinka. In difficult conditions they did their work in a well organised manner. It is a hopeful initiative that is to be continued.

Seasons of Migration

East/West differences as a ritual War between the Sexes

The post/colonial diaspora has forced a further exploration of Sudanese identity, in the process of confrontation with the Western countries.

Where cultural heritage and tradition as living practice still functions as unifying frame within social groupings, political and economic migrants have been confronted with the difficult task to find a new living far from home, to adapt to a non-Islamic and non-Sudanese social surrounding where nothing what is said and done can be taken for granted. This being cut off, 'half of their emotional life is missing', is reflected in art and literature in the traumatized experiences of the artists, that return in the art-form. In Sudanese literature the best-selling novel of Tayeb Salih *Season of Migration to the North* published in the late 1960ties, functions not only as topic for international studies and conferences but also as pilot for theatre-adaptations in Sudan and new novels about recent migrations. Sha'za Mustafa counted four new books on the experiences of the lonely male hero far from home. They are apparently part of the tradition of immigrant fiction often moving within the archaic model of the biblical 'Lost Son'.

And, for the first time, a Western theatre company has started to produce the novel for the stage; the *National Theatre in London* gave its first performance last year.

Where the 'Empire wrote back' in the terms of Salman Rushdie, now the Motherland was reacting. Starting with a workshop about the novel in Khartoum, Mieke Kolk got into contact with director William Galinsky and his artistic problems, which she tried to explain later in an article.

Cruelties of Migration, dealing with recent stories of the Sudanese migrants, serves as a short introduction to this article about the famous novel that is migrating to the Theatre of the North.

'I pray in Arabic and dance in Africa', explained the new director of the National Theatre in Khartoum, Fatlallah Ahmed Abdallah. Mediated through language, Arabic culture is a long and deeprooted factor in Sudan, long before the country became Islamic in the 15th Century. Arabic culture is not the same as Islamic culture in Sudan and that makes a problem. From a cultural description

Arabic has turned into a mark of ethnicity, and ethnicity as culture is a dangerous combination. “I looked in my studies for an open combination of religion and Sudanese identity and focused on the Sufi movements. The Sufi has its roots in pre-Islam, it respects the celebration of holy places and burial spaces and its ceremonies. From Sufi and from the more ancient history of Sudan we will take our cultural heritage and bring it into the theatre. This is part of our cultural identity, even in the experience of our Islamic culture now”.

Thanks

I am grateful to all the authors and other participants who were crucial for both the Conference in Khartoum last year and the content of this publication.

I thank again the Haella foundation in The Hague and Mrs Marianne van der Steen for their financial support.

The publication has greatly profited from the assistance in Khartoum of Mrs Sha’za Mustafa, Dr Shams El Din Younis and Prof Khalid Mustafa Mubarak, and the creative power of designer Kees de Graaff from Holland.

But the book would not be here, now, without the continuing energy and dedication of Martin Adrichem, who wanted in this way to return the hospitality that the Khartoum Conference showed him last year.

December, 2006

NOTES

- ¹ I am slightly paraphrasing the Call for papers by Khalid Amine for the Conference on Rituals, Ceremonies and/as Theatrical Performance, that took place in December 2005 in Khartoum, Sudan.
- ² John Bell ‘Islamic Performance and the Problem of Drama’ in *The Drama Review* 49,4 (T188), Winter 2005, p.5-20
- ³ Salam Khadra Jayyusi *Short Arabic Plays*, an Anthology, New York, Interlink Books 2003, 8.
See for this discussion also Mieke Kolk (ed.) *The Performance of the Comic in Arabic Theatre*, Gent, 2005
- ⁴ Richard Schechner *Performance Studies, an Introduction*, New York Routledge, 2, 2006, p.80,81

THE CORONATION-RITES IN THE KINGDOM OF MEROE AS DRAMATIC SCENARIOS

Shams EL-DIN YOUNIS

This paper presents a proposal for a new interdisciplinary approach of archaeology and theatre studies. It puts forwards a particular kind of reading of archeological remains and it reflects upon the stories of the past as performances of a culture that no longer exists. This study also offers a possible reconstruction of the rituals and ceremonies that organized the life of the people, based upon archaeological reports and material remains (architecture, sculptures, drawings). These rites and ceremonies are not simply a legacy of the past but are crucial in any enumeration of what counts as theatre, not only in the cultures that are studied here, but also in the field of Theatre Studies itself.

The methods used can be divided into two main categories:

1. Going from archaeology to performance theory involves a re-contextualization of past events. It is not simply a reconstruction, but it is a retrieving of the rituals and ceremonies of the King and putting them into a scenario. In making use of archeological records and viewing them through the eyes of a theatre analyst means that they can be treated as theatre texts.
2. The continuity of the rituals and ceremonies from the Meroetic period until now makes it possible that we can formulate hypotheses based upon analogy and make use of ethnographical material in analysing them. Thus, our interpretations are based upon a combination of a synchronic and diachronic approach: we can say something about the functions – past and present - of these rituals using modern day terminology.

How to connect archaeology and theatre?

When we want to construct a relation between theatre and archaeology, we must start with appropriate and logical definitions of these two disciplines and then try to find possible connections between them. The question is how the field of theatre and drama can profit from that of archaeology, and vice-versa, by using each others methods when interpreting findings and records?

In giving a precise definition of the term archaeology, we first have to look at the history of the term archaeology. It is deeply rooted in ancient Greece where it means: the history of ancient eras and history in general. The Greek word ‘*archaio-logeo*’ translates literally as ‘to write about old things, to tell about the past’. As the second half of the term *logeollogos* has connections with the terms utterance, dialogue and presentation, we can connect the term with *enactment of old stories, myths*; that means there is a connection with the stage. So the original Greek term archaeology (‘*archaio-logon*’) stood for acting and actors, even before the term ‘theatre’ was formulated, and this leads to the conclusion that acting in its technical sense was not known until the fifth century B.C. As for definitions of the ancient Greek terms ‘*theatron*’ and ‘*drama*’: ‘*theatron*’ stands for theatre, stage, auditorium and spectacle, in short everything that belongs to the visible part of the performance. The word drama can be translated by action, event and by “that what is performed.”¹

Drama/theatre can be considered as a relic of the past, that deals with a story represented by people *while acting* - not by narrating or one person telling a story. The basic story of the Greek drama was the (story of the) celebration of the birthday of Dionysus during the rituals of the harvest-time when the grapes were ripe and ready to be used for winemaking.² The Unison Hymn (or *dithyrambe*) was sung by a chorus of fifty men. When the chorusleader Thespis detached himself from the chorus he introduced dialogue into the ceremony, and thus introduced the actor. The great Greek writers of the 5th century B.C. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides developed this dialogue into actual plays, in which the amount of actors was expanded to at least three. All this would enable the 4th century B.C. philosopher Aristotle to describe, in his *Poetics*, a rich practice of dramatic structures, values and morals and to formulate as the goal of Greek dramatic art the process of *catharsis*.

In defining the meaning of archaeology and the nature of its practices, mostly the search for and excavation of history and its subsequent interpretation is stressed. But the question is: is archaeology only the process of retrieving the past? Or is it also a creative imagining of the past that allows it to come to life? Can archaeology also offer an interpretation of the changes that have taken place in human communities in order to understand the reasons and motives that stood behind these changes? Recent development in the field of archaeology have lead to a widespread belief that archaeology, besides collecting material and antiquities from ancient civilizations of which only ruins are left, aims now to reconstruct ways of life that have been dominant in lost communities in order to produce the rules that work on the dynamics of that culture - and perhaps culture in general.

Archaeology has thus developed, and changed into what is now called New Archaeology - which led to a widening range in archeological excavations and research, dealing with topics and problems that have never been in the minds of the traditional scholars who were only searching for material remains of ancient civilization so that they could be put in a museum. The new archeologists started to give more attention to the frame of rules, relations, ideas and values to be traced in ruins. The new archaeology developed into ethno-archaeology and created an adequate methodology that opened new spectrums of traditional life of existing communities and retrieved the ancient life-forms that had once existed and have now perished. Archaeology hence has opened to an interdisciplinary approach to give a more profound, complete understanding of the nature of ancient man and its significance for contemporary society. The big step that this new approach took was to consider archaeological findings as 'performances' of history and culture. The new archaeologist tries to know the past through the study of its findings, material and texts - religious or literary - that contain drama, and epics and philosophy and are being read for archaeological information. This is different from philology that studies records and documents as messages in language, although the correct interpretation of meaning of the texts is of course utmost necessary and enriching. The following example may illustrate this. Archaeologists tried to interpret the remains of monuments of all sorts in very fruitful ways, but in doing so they have disregarded the fact that the Greek tragedian Aeschylus also gives instructions about the theatrical architecture in his plays and the dramas of Euripides seem to give adequate descriptions of ancient Greek life. In *The Iliad* Homer has given descriptions of Troy. These texts together present a lively model of the ritualistic structure of Dionysian worship. In the comprehensive approach of archaeology and Theatre Studies that is proposed here these facts are taken into consideration.

In the reconstruction of the historical way of life, ethno-archaeology not only deals with the concepts of performance and theatre that can provide models to portray non-material, ritualistic and imagined social experiments, but ethno-archaeology also stretches out to agriculture, chemistry and physics. In conducting an experiment the American scholar Jack R. Harlan wanted to know more of the way of life that prevailed in at Neolithic times, a period in which agricultural discoveries took place.³ Harlan made a wooden hand scythe with a granite edge similar to the harvest knives used during that time (as findings in the Egyptian Alfayoum district show) and used it to harvest wild wheat that grew in the dry valleys in South-East Turkey in the same way as was depicted of Neolithic man. After an hour of work Harlan had harvested about one kilogram of wheat. Harlan then started to evaluate how much wheat a family needed to live a stable

life and how much work would have required it with the tools that were used. By imitating, by performing, the ancient act of ancient men, Harlan came to know the normal consumption of wheat by a small family; that is without being exhausted by workload. This experiment provided him with an answer to all sorts of questions and Harlan was able to comment on different issues and topics.

In the same way Heinrich Schliemann carried out an experiment in which he ran around a hill-rock, running and timing it in order to discover how long it would have taken Achilles to run three times around the city-wall of Troy when he was chasing Hector and in the end succeeded in stabbing him to death, in front of his father Priamus and mother Hecuba. Schliemann wanted to know how long Achilles, and therefore ancient man, could have possibly run. The aim of this experiment was to establish the real space of the city of Troy as mentioned in *The Iliad*.

We have already given some examples of the rich sources that new archaeology can find in the history of drama, in the plays, the criticism and philosophical ideas. This process functions also the other way round. The theatre historian gets his knowledge from archaeological records, which will provide him/her with drawings, wall-paintings and descriptions of burial places. All this provides the historian with a full lay-out of, for example, a building and provides him with insight of the ways rituals were performed there. The same material offers the theatremaker the possibility to build up his perception about the space where the event happened, the *mise-en-scène*, movements, costumes, lighting, sound effects and musical instruments that were used.

In this sense we can speak of a twofold process:

1. A description and analysis of the resources, the archaeological findings and old texts.
2. Using these same resources but now for the history of literature and philosophy, and the arts.

This process would involve firstly the archaeologist who has found those records and data. Secondly, the historian will use them for his history of civilization and art history. And finally, the theatre-maker builds up his knowledge of these data in order to create an imagined world ‘as it happened’ because that is one of the essentials of the art of theatre: the act of performing an event or action that already happened in the past.

To make a distinction between archaeology, the history of the arts in general and the history of theatre in particular seems, therefore, to be nonsensical. The origin of art history depends mainly on archaeological findings. One cannot, for instance, describe the '*scena-frons*' of Roman theatre buildings without knowledge of more details from the archaeology and history of the architecture of this civilization. And the archaeologist will know nothing about the Greek '*skene*' (the stage) described by Aeschylus unless he reads about the organization of time in Greek performances and the fact that repulsive scenes were played off-stage. In order to give a full picture of a reconstructed building, the study of art-history, literature and drama is fundamental for the archaeologist because this whole artistic theatrical and philosophic domain belongs to this discipline as well. Funeral ceremonies and architecture, as part of the archaeological specialization, seems also to be closely connected with the theatre architecture in its religious aspects, when we bear in mind that theatre comes from religious rituals held in the temples. This reciprocal process becomes enlightened by the perspective of cultural anthropology in its search for the networks within cultures supporting religious, ethical and political systems.

Such connections between previously unconnected fields of study can provide us with more certain knowledge about past civilizations that still have its impact on contemporary socio-cultural life. Maybe both archaeology and theatre studies have to consider the Greek Homer as their Godfather. As a talented poet he could be considered as the real creator of Greek drama that has taken all its narrative material from his epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Not only did he present the mythological material for the tragedy-writers, he also offers us archaeological information about the old city of Troy, its buildings and enclosure and other data about architecture, costumes and funeral masques, even about sailing. The recording of these data that returns in the Greek plays provides more knowledge about the social, economic, political and religious contexts of Greek society and of Athens during the time of Pericles (460-429 BC). Examples such as the ones given above also make it clear that both fields and disciplines can profit from each other in adopting each other's methods and ways of thinking to get to better results.⁴

Rituals, Drama and Theatre

The rituals we are studying at this junction as "collective memories encoded into actions" are religious performances which contain dramatic elements.⁵ The term 'performance' is used here as consisting of "ritualized gestures and sounds",

whether in a social or aesthetical context: “Performances of art, rituals or ordinary life, are ‘restored behaviors’, twice-behaved behaviors, performed actions that people train for and rehearse.”⁶ The close connection between ritual and (theatrical) performance became already clear in earlier examples.

When we want to use the terms drama or dramatic art we have to consider the problem that they do not exist in the Arabic language. They do not mean anything in this context and it is impossible to find a fitting general definition for them. For the use in this study we have to find a couple of characteristics of drama and dramatic art considering the different points of view about its purpose.

Some define the term as “any situation that contains conflict and incorporates an analysis of this conflict.”⁷ Or is it simply an “act of imitation of human conduct and its representation”? Or is it a description of human activities that aims at a new arrangement of our lives, through recalling the awareness of an experiment done, or through creating a tangible symbolic composition? Does it support existing experiments or can it develop possibilities for new experiments that could happen in this enlightened context of new perspectives? This is all the realm of ideas and the different opinions do not raise an argument *per se*. But an argument is raised when we bring the role of drama into society and consider its relation with reality.

When the Greek philosopher Aristotle defines drama *as an imitation of a serious action but not the action itself*, he does not speak about real life but about an imitation of it that must answer to the conditions of necessity and probability, as in real life. He also speaks about fictional characters and their ethical standards of behaviour. Drama, therefore, does not deal with (stereo-)types or good/bad manners, but makes us think about human beings and life and makes us contemplate the human condition. In other words, drama should be considered as a medium of knowledge while thinking and meditating on society and the purpose of its being.

Considering all these different perspectives, is it still possible to formulate a complete definition of theatre and drama and its role in society? When we approach this question from an anthropological viewpoint we are confronted with the presence of rituals as socio-religious and symbolic performances, known in all human gatherings throughout the world and its practice to achieve man’s better being and a resolution of his problems. On the other hand, there is the history of drama and/or theatre with its own dimensions of functioning in human life. What is this relation, if any, between ritual and theatre?

It is clear that this question is related to a wider spectrum of theatre and its functions in different cultures. It depends also on the extension of our knowledge of theatre in these different societies and communities.

Considering the difficulties in confining a possible beginning of theatre and drama, the historical approach sends us back to the early religious rituals and rites that have taken place throughout the Sudanese history, with traces of songs and dancing, prayers to the Gods, presented by the priests or by worshippers (who often wore animal-skins) and telling us about the birth of God, or his death and resurrection. So there are two approaches: firstly, the theoretical, anthropological approach about the roots of rituality in Sudan in particular and, secondly, the historical approach that considers the beginnings of theatre.

This study prefers to take “drama and theatre” within an *epistemological* context, and leave the *historical* one, the development of Greek theatre in the 5th century BC, aside. This epistemological approach tries to connect theatre with ancient times and the festivals of Dionysus, tying it with the rituals and religious rites, that contain dramatic elements. Before the art of the theatre was founded, after developing over a long period of time out of the religious festival for Dionysus, the rites already contained theatrical elements that represented the *pre-theatre* stage. In this transformative phase, we can find a possible analogous model that can be applied, for instance on the *Coronation Rituals* in the Middle Nile civilization of Nabata Meroe. These consisted of a series of ceremonies that aimed, in my view, to a dissemination of stability and tranquility within the Meroetic community that had chosen the God Amun as a strong and powerful God to guard over the development of their homeland and safeguard it from enemies and wayward men.

So most rituals and rites contain theatrical elements and can be called ‘dramatic’ and ‘performative’ in its essential overlap of imitation, representation and repeated behaviour. They share the ‘imitation’ of events that continuously happened in the past. For the Gods, worshipped in such rituals are in a powerful position in ancient civilizations and interfere in several ways in everyday life of social, economic and political activities.

In the *Coronation Rituals* of Meroe the King was the main character. He represented the Gods and was the person who was appointed to take care of the Kingdom and he had to show a form of leadership, as most communities considered the King as God himself. This is known in anthropology as the ‘divine kingship’. In this way all creative, social and political activities were centered

upon the King or God and thus religiously tintured, it bore a religious stamp that prevailed in festivals and feasts in which people addressed their prayers and invocations to the God.

Although these rites were mixed with theatrical elements we cannot speak of some form of theater and drama because the constituting elements are absent. Phyllis Hartnoll mentions for example, that ancient Egyptian coronation texts are not really dramatic texts, because they do not concentrate on the act of imitation.⁸ In Aristotelian theory at least, a dramatic text has to concentrate on the act of imitation and not on the action itself. When he refuses to call the old Egyptian Coronation services 'plays' we can conclude that Sudanese civilization, dating back more than three thousand year B.C. did not produce theatre either. Its ceremonies were firmly rooted in reality itself and not in the fictional and aesthetic character of the theatre that was removed from reality.

Coronation Rituals of the Meroe

If we accept that rituals are not the same as theatre, one cannot yet deny the theatricality and the sense of drama that are present in these rituals. In this context we take the Coronation Rituals in the Meroetic civilization as a case study, not only because it is one of the oldest civilizations known by men and have witnessed all kinds of developments on a social and political level, but also because documents, steles and texts of the coronation rituals are proof of some sort of ritualistic performance containing most of the theatrical elements like dialogue, movements, dance, singing, and other musical and sound effects. Although these rituals were religious and related to the temple, they have a political significance and an ideological dimension too. They were practiced in order to confirm the theocratic ruling, while texts make it clear that this religious dimension justified the political impact of the rituals. A good example of this is the story on the coronation stela of King Aspelta. After his brothers were presented to Amun Ra, the God refused them all.

When Aspelta presented himself Amun said:

He is your King, he is Master of Kush, who will safeguard you
 He is the Son of Ra, blessed, his Father was Ra
 His Mother is the King's sister,
 Mother of the King is the Mistress of Kush and sister of Ra
 Nestala, blessed he will be
 He is your Lord

The fact that the King was chosen by God and made his son, and that the whole holy power and authority depends on the King, consolidates the fact that the Meroetic King had his absolute power from the Gods who offer spirit, life and means of living. The power of the King comes directly from Amun because it is he who blesses the King and the King will do nothing without his knowledge, awareness, control and support. Like Pia, the King-emperor of Egypt stated: "There is no power without Amun. It is He who makes the debilitated strong."

It is of great interest here that the Coronation Rituals could be performed for any of the King's brothers who intended to become King of Meroe, because the Meroetics did not adopt a certain lineage for crowning and bequeathing. Different roads could lead to kingship varying from one king to another. To give an example: the later King Amini Nouti Yarki undertook his coronation journey in spite of the enemy surrounding the capital in large numbers; and Har-Sutif postponed his visit to Amun of Tara in order to complete the temple and prepare it for the rituals within five months.

Although expert opinion about these coronation texts vary, they are treated as performance texts whatever the shortage of data and insufficient exact knowledge about the origins and rise of these rituals and how the Meroetic community came to them. The rituals were practiced in a dramatic way and were aimed at persuading the society of the truth that was prepared by the priests to control the perception of the divine kingship and stamp legitimacy on the ruling system and its embodiment by the leaders. This practice is comparable to the working of theatre that shows what might happen as a source of inspiration for the audience. Connecting the Coronation Rituals thematically with the accidents of life and attempting to prove the omnipotence of the elected King, forming the future rules, these rituals became hereditary. Its notions and perceptions within its intellectual matrix lasted from the rise of the Meroetic state in the 8th Century B.C. until its collapse in the middle of the 4th Century A.C. There were some changes in the manner of electing and crowning kings, mostly due to the impact of circumstances in the time of the coronation itself that delayed the practicing of the rituals. Reading them as performance we can consider them as medium of expression of the Meroetic society and the socio-political system forecasting a future. In its function in society the ritual practices are counted as cultural performances, as humanistic phenomena existing in all societies as a general way to harmonize the differences in a culture, its worldviews and perceptions. As a performance of culture they also express thoughts, ideas, hopes, values and beliefs in a sublime dramatic way.

The Necessity of Ritual and Drama in human life

When we study rituals and interpret them as a 'text', considering them as rituals with dramatic elements, we get a clear image of Meroetic culture and its social systems because these dramatic elements interact with other social and cultural components and create with them a more general overview of other parts of social life.

To get a clear understanding of the role that rituals play in society, we have to investigate the necessity of ritual and drama in human life in general and of Meroetic man in particular. What we know about the Coronation Rituals in the Middle Nile Valley civilization of Nabata, Meroe, comes from the drawings on the royal steles. That this practice of performing rituals is repeated can be concluded from the descriptions of the events on these steles. In performing these rituals the society tried to maintain its religious and political convictions. We see that these rituals and their artistic structure and style are depicted on coronation steles for more than a thousand years. This depicting on the steles was a cult and artistic practice aiming to secure the divine throne and giving it a stamp of sanctity.

Meroetic kings did not write their steles unless they were forced to do so. We can conclude that from the fact that we do not find such royal steles in the early period of the Kingdom of Kushite that tell the history of the state, the rules of choosing the King and the power system up until the Kings Kasta and Pia. Frequently the purpose of the stele is the confirmation of the status of immortality, and the divine legitimacy for the kings to lead the Kingdom.

And this system, designed to fix the sanctity of the kingship, engaged Amun as its official God. Although the Amun worship was already the result of the influence of ancient Egyptian civilization on the Kushite civilization, archaeologists have not yet found any proof that tells us about the political system in Kush, where a tribal system reigned during the Third Dynasty. There is also no indication of any social class although Kushite religion was subjected to a large influential group of priests with special tasks. Moreover, there was no sign of the role of temples in the ritual practices, and daily life in Meroe seemed simple with no complicated political social and economic system.

When in the 8th century BC, the Kushites conquered Egypt and embraced the Amun cult that take had taken over from the Egyptian priests, their King Kasta started to use religion in order to realize his political aims. He also appointed his

daughter as leader of the priests of Amun and thus grasped the spiritual power of Amun's divine kingship. Only later he dealt with the military side, a victory that was completed by King Pia (751-716 B.C.) and, justified by the religious call that the Kushites are prophets and sent by God to rescue the divine kingship, they raised their flag to the face of the libyan King which bore the text: "Know that Amun Ra is the God who sent us."

In doing so, Amun became the official God of the Kingdom of the Meroe and he was given the head of a sheep as totem, a practice that was already in use in the Nuba since the New Empire (1575-1090 B.C.), the colonial reign of Egypt over Kush. Now temples were built for Amun in different areas such as Sanam, Brackel, Meroe and Naqa. Under his patronage the Kings were able to govern and rule their land, taking their justification to rule from Amun.

The rituals were, however, not directed to the same God Amun as that of of Pharaonic Egypt. The Coronation rituals were specialized Meroetic rituals that were used to fix and secure the mundane power by emphasizing its holiness. This aspect distinguishes the Meroetic rituals from the Egyptian rituals. The Meroetic rituals were linking the religious and the artistic practices and were aimed to monitor daily practices. The repetition of the ritual is connected to the notion of immortality. That immortality is, in its turn, connected with the worship of Amun, which is distinguished by symbolic actions. The worship of Amun produced some kind of ritual and rites that used symbols, signifying ideas and meanings that were an abstraction from the Amun services themselves. These symbols became visualized in embodiments, in a frame of gestures, movements, music, and in dancing and singing. In this way all ritual practices became symbolic expressions of abstract values and this religious symbolism finds its echo in the different daily practices of the Meroetic civilization, including cultural and artistic practices.

The creation of art, as a natural human tendency, we find in pottery-painting and decoration, in engraving on ivory and in wood, in relief-sculpture and wallpainting.

Pottery was the most important handicraft in the Meroe culture. It is characterized by its particular form of handles, its decorations and colourings. There are two basic characteristics in the Meroe pottery:

1. Hand-shaped pottery, manufactured by women, that show a continuity in shape and type and reflect African traditions.

2. Wheel-shaped pottery, made by men, characterized by its variety in shapes and decorative styles.

Meroetic society was famous as well for other types of handicrafts, such as engraving on ivory, decorated with symbolic signs and animal shapes such as giraffes, ostriches and hippos, and objects from the wood industry such as jewellery boxes and musical instruments. This industry offers a good idea about the Meroetic style and its aesthetic values that are dependent on the surrounding natural environment and have the ability to depict natural phenomena as a reflection upon the artistic possibilities that the observed objects have created. This forms the inspiration for the artistic work. These signs and shapes can also be found in the high and low reliefs that are used as architectural ornaments on temple walls, and which depict the holy king as guardian of the people. Next to a number of statues of the King, there are also quite a number of pictures of the King on the temple walls and on the pyramids where the rituals were practiced. In this way the artistic production serves as an expression of the general philosophy about the hereditary and divine kingship and the artists yield to this religious and political dictates that prescribed a specific style and a way of looking at the world.

The main theme of rituals and all forms of cultural expression was the King. He is often depicted sitting on his throne or as military victor. In all his splendour he stood for authority and elegance. A good example is the memorial relief of King Sharkariar that is sculptured in a granite rock at the edge of the Geilly Mountain, made in memory of his military victory. On the stele the King is standing, dressed in all his royal attire and carrying his arms. The face of the sun shines from above with a right hand holding a bundle of durra (corn) outstretching towards the King, as if during an offering. The sun's outstretched left hand holds a bundle of ropes onto which a number of captives are tied. Under the feet of the King we see four enemies, bound by their hands and feet, and, at a lower level of the drawing there are seven naked, or half-naked, captives as if they are falling from above. At the top of the drawing there are two cartouches, the left with the name of the King and on the other his second name as an attribute. This portrait represents the realistic style of the Meroetic art in service of the King. It is rare to find a picture of him in any situation but a festive one. Gods were depicted as safeguards of the King, supporting his political position. On the other hand the Kings were depicted during an offering of sacrifices to the gods. It is clear that both powers were closely linked: political and religious, Kings and God.

It is also clear that where the rituals are concerned, the Coronation Ceremonies and the Journey of the King just heighten the experience of divine holiness in the collective experience. Rituals as symbolic actions serve to encode the truth and make man feel that he is under control of the priesthood. It is due to this effect that the rule of the Kings in the state of Meroe continued from the 11th Century B.C. until the 4th Century A.D.

Conclusions/summing up.

1. Ritual practices like the Coronation Ritual were not known in the Middle Nile Valley civilization in connection with the Sudanese Gods such as Babwi Apedamak and Demak, who were depicted as a duplicate of Amun Ra, under the twin crown.
2. The earliest pictures of these rituals can be seen on Coronation steles of the Kings where they describe the way a Meroe King is selected.
3. When the Meroes adopted the Amunic religion after they had conquered Egypt during the reign of King Kastha, they constructed ritualistic practices aimed at satisfying the God by offering sacrifices and building temples.
4. Considering the Kings as God's sons, who were sent to keep guard over their system of values, and who provided peace, security and stability of the homeland, the Meroes created these rituals on the level of the ruling power in its two parts: the ruling family and the class of priests.

From this we can conclude that in Meroetic society rituals had the following functions:

- To maintain the communication within society concerning its beliefs, behaviour, its world of symbols, ideas and values to keep the religious spirits rising.
- To keep society safe and fixed. Linked with the Coronation Rituals were the ritualistic killings of the King when, for instance, he became too weak to rule. Because his election was a ritual, his death should be ritualistic as well. These practices were maintained from one generation to the next.
- Since they believe in the other life and in immortality they see it as a necessity to practice rituals concerning the transposition of the King to the after-life. Therefore pyramids were built.

From a drama-theoretical point of view these rituals in ancient society serve the following functions:

- Celebrating incidents and circumstances while dividing the symbolic world from reality.
- Presenting the structure of the Rites of Passage from one stage to another as a journey of man and community.
- Showing some of the positive and negative characteristics of society.

Here we consider rituals as one of the social structuring forces and as part of an overall structure of society. In anthropology this ‘social drama’ can not be separated and distinguished from real life. Ritual practices therefore serve as a medium to express social issues of daily life, but also address more existential and general human values.

Rituals accompanied the life of men from ancient times through all their daily activities. They offered an enlightened knowledge that is collective, moving and active in the sense of recalling passed experiences. In acting man characterized an imagined story in a tangible way, by showing conflicts or antagonistic powers that had to go through a crisis towards a solution.

All ‘forms of theatre’ (in its broadest sense) in different societies work to tie society together within an existing socio-political system. It also, mostly, serves the ideology of the ruling classes. But theatre is also the road to awareness, it invites to think about society and the human existence while keeping us people also together as a community.

Coronation Rituals in Nepata and Meroetic Ages

There is no better proof of the link between an artistic style and the way human life was documented, than the way the Coronation ceremonies and rituals were transposed from living events to pictures. That, indeed, was an ideological as well as an artistic activity which aimed at securing the Throne against its enemies and casting a divine spell on it. At the same time it documented the life of the King and his achievements. The continuing purpose was to show in an artistic way the ideal of immortality by turning the Kings into a God and thereby ensuring the allegiance of the people, who worshipped him as their protector. The sculptures, engravings and exercised rituals and ceremonies express this eternity of the King in conformity with the general philosophy of the country. From sacred images and ceremonies they are turned into art, both secular and ideological. Up until the fall of the kingdom of Meroe in the 4th Century A.D., with the rise of the worship of the Sudanese god Apedamek, local culture pictured the God in human form

with the head of a lion, sometimes with three lion-heads and four arms (as in the case of King Netak-Ameni and his wife Queen Amani Teri in the 1st century A.D.). Portraying the profile with two heads enabled the artist to show a third dimension, a perspective, while the movement of the four arms gave an early impression of cinematography and movement. This was a change from earlier times when Apedamek was appearing with both a ram's and a lion's head. Meroeans worshipped two gods. One, Amun, was imported from Egypt, and the other, Apadamek, was indigenous and local. Amun is usually portrayed as a young man with a ram's head and face, a symbol of fertility. Together with his wife and son Amun forms a holy trinity. When the god Ra was added to Amun, he bore the name Amun Ra.

These changes had of course a new and deep religious impact on the people. Such was the case when King Spelta denied the priests of Amun in Nepata their traditional right to kill the King, he had them punished and eventually got rid of them all. This enhanced his image among his followers a great deal. He also erected a large statue of King Pia praying to the gods Osiris and Ra. He was famous for his ardent religious feelings and attitude. Next to their religious function, the rituals also fulfilled their social function as: creating social integrity, relaxation of psychic stress, communal security and enhancement of stability.

The Function of Place and Space

The core of a ritual is the performance and its main aspect is the action, not the text. Therefore, place (or space) is the most important element which resembles both a medium of participation in important events and one of activating the more earthly aspects in the face of the Unknown Powers against Man. The underlying principle, then, is the reconciliation of these two parties. The architecture and decoration of the sacred places of the Meroeans quite clearly reflects this principle:

1. There is no wall as fence around the temple complex.
2. There are two towers in front of the temple with a gate between them, each with a flag on top.
3. There are two other gates in front of the main hall.
4. The large hall measures 42 x 29 metres, without a roof but with pillars and a kiosk in the centre where the throne was situated.
5. The holy rooms contains an altar where the king could worship in private.
6. A path with ram's statues on each side leads through a tower gate to the main temple.

Later on the alterations which took place in the temples of Apedamek also affected the rituals that were performed in that area.⁹ The Nepata and Meroe temples as religious places of worship were huge and reflected eternity and immortality, while the openings for doors and windows conveyed the smallness of mortal man.

The Coronation Ceremonies

When we look at the Coronation-rites as a scenario, the King is the main character: in the sense of Aristotle's theory he is the hero or protagonist. Drama 'as a noble and complete act' would take place when the King tells of every event at various places on his way to Nepata. The action is tied to persons as well as to places, especially when the King talks about the vision he had in his dream of building a certain temple.

The Coronation service goes as follows:

- The King enters along the ram's path through the main gate.
- He crosses the inner hall and sits during the interval in preparation.
- The music-ensemble and the chorus enter from the side gates.
- The King enters in the holy room, accompanied only by the priests.
- The King enters the coronation room at the far end of the holy room, and stays there for four days.
- He comes out as a royal and is met by his followers, who start a merry celebration.

After, or in connection with, the Coronation rituals the King could undertake a pilgrimage. As King Nistaseen did, who went from Meroe-Al Bajrawia to the Barkal Mountains, and King Amun-Noteyerike, who made the same journey, thus emphasizing the duty and holiness of the trip.

Departure and Funeral

The power of the priests even went as far as the decision when the life of the King had to come to an end. They decided about his life-span and about his end, they could sentence the King to death. The deceased King was portrayed as Osiris sitting on a carved lion-seat, in full royal attire, embroidered with hieroglyphics resembling those in the Book of Death. Behind him stood the Goddess Isis and the King's mother, who was dressed in the earlier Coronation-attire and with the King's sister playing music. The Funeral rites resemble another kind of theatrical form exercised by the Meroeans. It is a real pre-theatrical creation that resembles

the one that has been discussed earlier: it lies between aesthetics and life itself. In this way rituals seem to link social life with drama and theatre.

The new King

The Coronation ritual is a performance in a number of distinctive stages. When the throne is vacant because the King is dead, his eldest son will become the new King.

Stage one: in order to be purified and made holy, the future King has to walk all the way from Meroe to Amun's temple in the sacred mountain in Nepata in a ceremonial traditional procession. On his way he visits several places and temples of worship. His vision in a dream will be engraved in Kushite language on the temple walls. The dream serves as a medium for a direct contact with God as the father and the King as son.

Stage two is the celebration procession, a meeting with the people who are happy with the new King.

The third stage is when he reaches the Amun Temple and is received by the priests and while riding a horse.

In the fourth stage the King is seated on the throne and receives the royal sceptre and the royal robe.

In the fifth stage the King's mother enters and is seated next to him, she gives him her blessing and adopts his wife.

During the sixth stage the King goes into solitary confinement, only with God. He is invested now with the holy powers.

During stage seven the King leaves the temple carrying inside him the spirit of Amun Ra.

In stage eight the new King meets the happy crowd.

In stage nine the celebrations will begin.

In some cases the new King was elected by twenty-four chosen people: six from the military officers and high ranking civil servants, six princes, six from the seal keepers and six commoners. But also this process had to be approved by God in accepting the new King as holy.

Performance Scenario of the Coronation Rituals

Drama and theatre have been part of human existence since ancient times. They were either part of the ritual worshipping of the Gods, or they express a transformation from one stage to another through a complex series of activities carried out by the high-priest in a temple. In both ways they are a series of actions

done in a defined and fixed way, at a particular moment by specially appointed people who possessed the knowledge to do them in the required way.¹⁰ All this would take place in a course of events that would represent ‘real life’. But still the question remains when drama/theatre was detached from rituals and became a set of well-defined actions that were directed at achieving a social well-being while controlling the social dialogue that surrounds human existence? What were the steps taken to make this happen? What, in other words, were the conditions for rituals to become theatre?

Our word ‘drama’ derived from the ancient Greek word *dran*, which means literally “things done” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 48b1.) It is a term we can connect with religious rituals and the origin of rituals lies in the performing of them. But rituals did not consist only of actions but also of narrating and reciting charms. They form an essential part of rituals in the same way as they do in written plays that represented Gods, divine heroes or supernatural powers.

When we take the Dionysus rituals in Greek civilization as an example, we find that the Greek offered a model where drama and everyday life became distinguished. Drama and theatre developed from rituals when actors started speaking mythic, artistic and literary texts.

This historical transformation from ritual to theatre was a complex process. It was accompanied by all kinds of social and cultural developments that lead to the formation of new artistic shapes, reflecting these specific social and cultural factors in Greek society. The changes that took place in the Dionysian rituals allowed for a separation between real life and a reflection on that life on stage. The aim of the new theatre was to show the social shortcomings in the structure of society. The Greeks used to present new values and new concepts in their drama by putting the ritual activities and mythic stories in their plays where we can consider both the religious and the social rituals. What theatre shares with the ritual is the re-presentation of the action and they have the same aesthetic principle of presenting. In that sense both ritual and theatre are performances, assigned to establish a world of imitation, imagination and similarity and offer a representation of the truth, following either the principles of the socio-political existing regime or aiming at changes in the cultural system.

The Coronation rituals in the Meroetic civilization did not transform to drama/theatre like the Dionysus rituals, because the conditions for such a transformation were not present.¹¹ The origins of the Coronation rituals are related to the system of power-transformation and the handing of the kingship

from one to another in a hereditary system. This system regulates the transfer of power from the eldest brother down to the younger brother and continues until no more brothers are available. The next in line then to be King will be the son of the first King's eldest brother. This particular system leads to the hypothesis that these Coronation rituals are in fact a ritual scenario the origin of which goes back to the rituals of Amun Ra. The system might have been devised by priests who would benefit by keeping the power in the hands of a particular aristocratic class. The Coronation rituals, then, have a meaning beyond that of a ritualistic act, for they created a strong bond between the 'actors' - the king, the priests - and the audience, the people. They created and maintained a collective awareness of the existing system of social values that was the basis of their society.

NOTES

- 1 Nehad Selaiha, *Theater between Thought and Arts*, Bagdad, 1985, p. 16 (in Egyptian Arabic).
- 2 Fiker wa Fun, p. 8.
- 3 Ahmed Abu Zeid, *Civilization between Anthropologist and Archeologist*, 1984, p. 9 (in Arabic).
- 4 Ahmed Abu Zeid, *Before theater*, Kuwait, 1987, World of Thoughts, Magazine (in Arabic).
- 5 E.A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Sudan: The Coronation of Spelta*, 1907, p. 335 ff.
- 6 Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 2nd ed., New York, 2006, p. 28.
- 7 Selaiha, 1985, p. 18.
- 8 Phyllis Hartnoll, *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theater*, Oxford, 1977, p. 143.
- 9 W.Y. Adams, *Nubia, Corridor to Africa*, Princeton, 1977, p. 129.
- 10 B. Trigger, *Nubian Upper the Pharaohs*, London, 1976, p. 33.
- 11 Modified from Phyllis Hartnoll in his speech about Drama in Egyptian Rituals.

SCENARIOS OF THE RITUALS

Ritual coronation scenario of the King Aspelta (593 – 568 BC)

The King is Dying
Stage-directions

Scene 1: inside the palace at daytime

King Anlamani is sitting on the throne, a chair of lion-skin, in full dress. **Isis** (played by a female priest) is standing behind him, she embraces him with her wings, holding holy water in her hand (1).

The King's mother and sister, standing behind the King's throne and behind Isis, are fully dressed when they appear in the coronation rituals. Fear and anxiety are on their faces. (Music from sistrum instrument (2) and drums is played, the music causes fear.)

The high priest enters, holding the incense burner. Behind the King stands a chorus to bid him farewell which consists of women, and men holding palm leaves and some sacrifices that will be offered to the king during his last journey. The chorus walks in rows, reciting.

The high priest puts the incense burner in front of the King.

Dialogue

The chorus: Amen Ra. You are the helpful mother of both Gods and the people. You are the creator, the good God that stands for his creatures. Your son, the holy King passed away. Embrace him with your mercy.

The High priest: After the King will rest, oh, the home land Safeguard ... You our saviour give us a strong King... Support us with your lighten and power.[3]

Scene 2: In the palace yard at daytime. The high priest is standing, beside him six senior administrators who are responsible for the palace treasury. The future King Aspelta is pacing up and down, while the others are murmuring.

The caretaker enters , shouting.

Six leaders enter, fully armed. Their faces show a state of confusion, and they are talking Among each other. One of them addresses his speech to the high priest.

Addressing his speech to the high priest.

First man: Our saviour went to his father.

Second man: The homeland will suffer if we will not have a strong King.

Third man: Oh, living Amun, in his glorious processions. Oh, strong Amun, people guard sheep and gazelles and trees that grow in the wild. All will live when you shine upon them, give them your protection.[4]

The caretaker: The leaders of the King's soldiers have come.

First leader: Let us crown our King.

Second leader: Right now we are as cattle without a shepherd.

High priest: We have to choose a strong King from between us.

First leader: Who is that King?

Second leader: No-one knows.

Third leader: May we get to know him, Oh senior leader, and offer him the products of the Two Lands and obey him.[5]

First leader: And to thank him.

Third leader: No-one knows who is the King but Ra himself, because he knows all that happens.[6]

Ask Amun to choose the King from Among us.

First leader: It is truth for Ra since he created the heavens, and the royalty, to make his beloved son the excellent King.

High priest: Since the King is the soul of god through the ages, Ra who crowns him on his land to construct it.

Fourth leader: God will not ascend to the heaven and leave his throne without a leader.

All in one voice and kneeling, stretching their arms to the heaven.

High priest gets up.

All go out, drums and music are heard.

*Scene 3: Inside the temple at daytime.
We see wall drawing, and the throne of the high priest. The followers practice some ceremonies in front Amun in the temple. The high priest moves between the rows and steps in front of the throne.*

First leader: His power comes from his father the God who settles him under good laws in his throne.

All: Our god, our King is with us here, and we don't know him, really here is the King of the two lands, living on the holy mountain. Our God, present your son, supply him with your power.[7]

Junior priest: Let us go to the God. We can't do anything without knowing our king. Nothing will happen without our King.

Priest I: The right choice is in your hand Amun. He is the God of Kings since the beginning of creation. He is our guide, our leader, our King The brothers are our nearest sons, they are in his hand.

Priest 2: Let us go to him and supplicate to him on our knees.

High priest: We came to you, our God Amun and ask you to preserve our land and give us mercy and a good life, and give us a strong King.

Priest 2: Let us live, and build a temple for you and all Egyptian Gods, and offer you alms.

Priest 3: We can't do anything without consulting you for you are our guide, nothing happens without your knowledge and contentment.

Priest 4: Well done, you give us mercy. And a King strong enough to safeguard us

Drums are heard, the high priest gets up. Leaders of the soldiers and officials enter the temple yard, get on their knees and prostrate themselves in front of the throne, reciting.

All get up, drums are heard, the King's brothers come and stand in front of the throne begging to enter the holy room in the temple one after another and come out without saying anything.

*High priest goes ahead, to **Aspelta** who is standing alone.*

Aspelta goes ahead to the holy room, followed by the High priest. They enter, drums and music are heard. The high priest comes out.

Voices, murmuring from all those present. The applaud and start cheering.

At this moment, Aspelta comes out, with decided steps... standing in front of the holy room, drums are beaten and music sounds.

All :We came to you, master of the two lands in the holy mountains, to give us a King to construct temples and offer alms. You, the enlightened, with the power in your hand, give your son the power and the guidance. [8]

High priest: Go ahead, son of the lord of two lands to your father the god, to give you a long life.

High priest: Good Amun, he is your King... He will safeguard and secure you; he who will build the temple in Upper and Lower Egypt and bestow you with gifts. Son of Ra blessed be his father; his mother is the sister of the master of Kush.

Officer 1: Mercy, blessing upon you, our god. You secure our land. You give us a shepherd, from you, strong ... with your power.

Scene 4: Inside the temple at daytime.

In front of the throne. All are dressed in the robes of coronation. Scepters are put in front of Amun. Aspelta stands with his hands outstretched.

High priest advances, loud sound in front is heard, near to Aspelta. A loud boom is heard.

Scene 5: Inside the temple at daytime.

Aspelta wears all the royal robes and puts the crown on his head and carries the scepter, takes some steps towards the god.

Drums are heard, incense smelled. The high priest goes out from the holy room and stands behind the king who is kneeling. Puts his hand on his head .

A numbers of priests enter, carrying an incense burner. They are blessing, dancing, and reciting.

Aspelta: Come to me Amun Ra. You the master of two lands give me the power and the position that I look for under your patronage. Cover my head with the royal cover and give me the scepters.

The voice: The head cover is yours. The head cover of your brother Anlamni will be on your head whenever Amun is our master, keep it and the scepter will be yours to defeat your enemy.[10]

Aspelta: Come to me Amun Ra. You, the master of the two lands that lives in the holy mountain. Come you, the God of ancient, the taste of love...You alone who will accept my wishes whenever I announce them, offer me the calmness, life, happiness, eternity and beloved in the land of Kush.

High priest: The God gave you the power, sovereignty and prestige.

The priests: Come peacefully, your years should be the Same as Hours, be everlasting King as your brother, he gave you the crown, in your glorify, and exalt.[11]

Scene 6: Outside the temple a large crowd are waiting for the arrival of the king. They seem to be anxious. After a moment drums are heard. Sistrum instruments are played inside the temple. The priests come out and stand next to the sheep statues. Aspelta comes out in a solemn way. People begin to applaud, and there is hailing, they start dancing and singing.[12]

Ritual coronation scenario of the King Haru-su-tif (404 – 369 BC)

Stage directions

Scene 1: Outside at daytime. Haru – su – tif lies tossing about in his bed during his sleep. He wakes up frightened.

His mother enters running

The two go out.

Dialogue

Haru-su-tif: Oh, my father. Amun, give me the power, help me, oh, my master.

Kandaka: What is wrong, my son?

Haru-su-tif: I don't know. I saw in a dream our God the master of the two lands, Amun Ra, I had to visit him in Napata, and to get inside the holy house.

Kandaka: What did that mean?

Haru-su-tif: I don't know.

Kandaka: Go and narrate your dream to the high priest so that he can interpret the significance of the dream.

Haru-su-tif : Yes. Oh, our king Amun Ra give me the power, and the sovereignty. Oh master of Kush, and owner of the Two Lands.[13]

Scene 2: Inside the temple in Meroe during daytime. A high priest offers some sacrifices while reciting in front of the Amun throne.

Haru-su-tif enters, stands for a while, then addresses his speech to Amun.

High priest goes to Haru-su-tif.

Astounded.

Scene 3: Inside the temple at night. We see the king standing in front of the throne, on both sides of him some priests do some dances as if they are worshipping and reciting on the, rhythm of a harp, sistrum music and drums.

High priest: Our God Amun. Our safeguard, who give us life, give our King the power to rule the state, help him to defeat the enemies with your power, you, our guardian who gives the Spirit and happiness.[14]

Haru-su-tif: Praise the lord, Amun, the guardian of the two lands and patron of the foreign powerfull lands.

High priest : You have come, Oh, preacher.

Haru-su-tif: I had a dream.

High priest: Well – What have you seen?

Haru-su-tif: I saw my father Amun, and he was calling me to visit him in Napata.[15]

High priest: Believe the truth. You will inherit your brother's throne and safeguard the land with the power of your father.

Haru-su-tif: My father Amun, help me and give me your blessing. Give your power to me. So I can defeat the enemy and save the land. Give me the rain for the land's well being.[16]

The priest: He came and took care of the homeland.

He came and put the crown on his head.

He came and unified the lands and defeated the enemies.

Help him, our God.

Save him, our God.

He came and conquered all foreign and enemy land.

He doesn't know fear.[17]

High priest advances and stands in front of the King.

The King advances to the holy room, enters, to see Amun.

Scene 4: Inside at daytime in Amun temple. Haru-su-tif standing in front of Amun altar.

*Scene 5: Indoors at night.
Haru-su-tif is standing in front of God Piety altar*

*Scene 6 : Indoors at daytime.
Haru-su-tif is standing inside the palace in Royal appartement. In front of him senior Leaders of the army, a high priest, and some officials.*

Scene 7: Indoors, at day time at the main temple at Amun in Nabata. The king stands in front of the Amun altar, giving the presents and sacrifices, music plays and drums are heard, priests move around holding incense burners.

High priest: Come in, honest king, come in to see your father and have the power from him.

Haru-su-tif: Oh my King Amun Ra, I have received your words to come and visit you and receive your blessing.[18]

Haru-su-tif: Amun blessed me as a King, and asked me to visit you and receive your blessing

Haru-su-tif: As you know, the God has crowned me as King and ordered me to visit Amun Tara, and I know that the temple hasn't been constructed yet.

High priest : We ordered to build it my King.

Haru-su-tif: That should have been done as quickly as possible. In no more than five months,[19]

Scene 8 : Indoors at daytime in Amun temple, the king sitting in the royal compartment that is decorated for coronation festival. The high priest gives him the crown, puts it on his head , gives him the scepter, the king's mother and, the sister stand, playing the harp and drumming, the king stands then kneels.

Haru-su-tif: Thanks to the God Amun who defeated his enemy. Your wisdom of giving me the power is great. I will make our people sleep peacefully under your power, give me heavy rain and the power to defeat your enemy.[20]

Coronation Scenario of King Nestasen (335 – 310 BC)

Stage directions

Scene 1: In Meroe inside the royal place, at daytime.

*Nestasen in his bed tossing wakes up frightened sits up, his **mother** comes in.*

Dialogue

Kandaka: What happened? I saw you frightened in your sleep.

Nestasen: I had a dream of Amun calling me to visit him in the holy mountain to bless me king.

Kandaka: Rejoice at this, my son. Get up, stand up, take your trip to Napata to have your father Amun's blessing. [21]

*Scene 2: Indoors at daytime in the royal palace in Meroe. Nestasen is sitting on the dais, his mother is sitting next to him. A **caretaker** enters calling.*

The caretaker: All the royal brothers have come, as you ordered.

Nestasen, stands up, points to the caretaker to go out. The royal brothers enter one after the other in their full dress.

Nestasen: Welcome, welcome my royal brothers.

One of the brothers: You sent for us?

Nestasen: Yes, I did.

Brother (2): What is the matter?

Nestasen: I want to tell you about my nightmare last night [22]

Brother (3): What nightmare?

Nestasen: I saw our father Amun in my sleep last night, calling for me to visit him at the holy mountain. So I sent for you to go with me, so one of us can be chosen.

Brother 1: You, who is meant with this matter!

Brother 2: Go alone and receive the blessing from our father.

Brother 3: Yes, be cheerful. Go ahead, request power from our father to offer you the crown and scepter to safeguard the land from our enemies.

Nestasen: You have to go with me, to support me, and be my good companions.[23]

Brother 1: No, we will replace you here in the palace.

Brother 3: Go ahead under the protection of your master.

Scene 3: Outdoors at daytime. Near the river Nile, we see Nestasen standing, near him a boat fastened on the bank of the river.

Nestasen: Oh, people. Our God Amun has endowed me with the kingship and protection.

Scene 4 : Outdoors at daytime. The boat approaches the other bank of the river. Nestasen gets off the boat. A servant has a horse ready. Nestasen rides the horse and starts moving in procession.

Scene 5 : Outdoors at daytime.

Nestasen approaches the Amun temple with senior officials and Amun priests. They are kneeling and cheering. Nestasen gets in as the big door opens. People start performing rituals and ceremonies, while approaching Nestasen [24]

Scene 6: Indoors at daytime. Nestasen sits on the throne. His mother stands behind him. Nestasen is wearing the signs, a crown, and carries the scepter, wearing all the royal robes of coronation. The high priest stands in front of the throne, and calls Nestasen to come in.

High priest : Welcome, our holy King.

Nestasen, moves forward and enters the holy room.

Scene 7: Outdoors at daytime. Outside the temple in Napata people are gathering, the priests are attending, the king comes out. People start cheering, dancing, a drums rhythm is heard, music sounds, the king stands waving with scepter.

Nestasen: Amun gave me the crown of Nehsity, and the crown of Haru-su-tif.[25]

Scene 8: Indoors at daytime. The King appears walking in a convoy holding his scepter, he is wearing special shoes, and festive robes. People offer sacrifices. The king reaches the compartment and sits on the throne.

Scene 9: Indoors at day time. Priests enter, headed by the high priest who is holding a fan and is wearing a tiger skin. He is followed by seven priests carrying the statue of a god in a coach. Their heads are shaven, and they are wearing linen clothes. Servants are walking behind them, dancing and reciting, accompanied by music. Horsemen and some people are kneeling in front of the King.[26]

TIMETABLE OF THE HISTORY OF SUDAN MIGHT (BOE = before our era)

Around 17,000 years BOE “Singaman” (proto-khoisanid)

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Until 7000 BOE | Paleolithicum |
| Until 5000 BOE | Mesolithicum (hunting, fishing, gathering) |
| Until 3500 BOE | Neolithicum (wheatgrowing, cattle-keeping) |

Nubia

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 3500-2600 BOE | Culture A: settlements, pottery Destroyed by Pharaoh Jer (1 st dynasty). Beginning of slavetrade to the north and gold manufacture |
|---------------|---|

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 2000-1500 BOE | Culture B: First states of Wawat, Irjet, Zetjan, Yam; beginning of claytile building. Colonised to the 2 nd cataract by Pharaohs of the XI th and XII th dynasties (Middle Kingdom) |
|---------------|---|

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 1900-1575 BOE | Kerma: terracotta pottery with handles and nozzle; deathmasks of gypsum, ram’s cult, expansion to the 1 st cataract. Pharaohs of the XVIII th dynasty (New Kingdom) conquer Nubia to the 4 th cataract |
|---------------|--|

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 1575-1090 BOE | Colony of the New Kingdom (Egypt): stone temples |
|---------------|---|

Nile Valley

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1090 BOE-350 CE | Kush: The kingdom in Napata (temple of Amun) |
| 750-656 BOE | Conquest of Egypt: Kings of Napata form the XXV th dynasty; driven out of Egypt by the Assyrians |

| | |
|---------|--|
| 590 BOE | Psammetich II (XXVI th dynasty) destroys Napata |
| 300 BOE | Capital moved to Meroe |
| 23 BOE | Gaius Petronius, Roman prefect of Syene (Asuan), destroys Napata and annexes Lower Nubia |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 300 BOE-350 CE | Roman-Hellenistic influences. Isis-worship, also Nubian gods such as Apedemak. Water-wheel is introduced. King Ezana of the Christian kingdom of Aksum destroys Meroe |
| 350-550 CE | X-culture: small realms of the Nobads (Ballana, Kustul) |
| 543-1317 | Christian Nubia: conversion of the Kings of Nobatia (Faras), Makuria (Dongola) and Alwa (Soba) by Byzantine missionaries. Greek is the official language |
| 641 | The Arabic conquest of the Nile Valley is halted by Nubians |
| 652 | Treaty (<i>baqt</i>) between Christian Nubia and Islamic Egypt |
| 1300-1500 | Growing presence of Islam. Arabian nomads settle. Establishment of Koran schools and Sufi Orders. |
| 1504-1820 | Funj: Amara Dunqa conquers Soba, the last Christian town and establishes a new Islamic realm with Sunnar as capital |
| 1820/1821 | Troops of Mehmed Ali conquer Nubia, Sennar, Kordofan and Taka |
| 1820-1885 | Turkiyya: Ottoman-Egyptian colony. Establishment of a modern administration |
| 1879- | Under the Khedive Ismail the Nile Valley, the Gazelle River and Darfur are conquered. European military and administrative experts participate in the Ottoman colony |
| 1885- | Religious movement of Mohammed Ahmed al Mahdi conquers Khartoum |
| 1898- | Mahdiyya: Islamic state with Omdurman as capital. English-Egyptian (General Kitchener) troops conquer the Mahdi State |

Sudan

1955- **Hakuma:** English-Egyptian colony. First railroad built, cotton plantations, river dams built

1916 Darfur is annexed as province

From 1956 **Jamhuriyya:** Independent Republic

ARCHAEOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE: THE RETRIEVAL OF RITUALS

Intisar S. ELZAIN

1. Prelude

Theatrical Archaeology is a recent development of the last three decades, when new approaches have acquired more importance. Among them is the use of op archaeological remains to retrieve stories of the ancient remote past and thus representing a new source of stimulation for performance.

2. Archaeology is partly the discovery of the treasures of the past, partly the meticulous work of the scientific analyst, partly the exercise of the creative imagination. It involves carrying out excavations in different climates, living with primitive groups, diving under water for ship's wrecks or for lost continents or cities. This work is followed by interpretation, so that we come to understand what these things mean for human history. Archaeology, then, is both a physical activity in the field and an intellectual pursuit in the study or laboratory. The rich mixture of danger and detective work has also made it a perfect vehicle for fiction writers and film makers, from Agatha Christie with *Murder in Mesopotamia* to Steven Spielberg with his Indiana Jones films.¹

Archaeology has always been thought of as a romantic subject. In reality it is an everlasting endless search journey where everything is tentative and nothing is conclusive. It is the reconstruction of the past from its surviving material culture. It not only involves excavation and accumulation of data, but also synthesizing, i.e. reconstruction, representation and simulation. Archaeology is all about absence, writing about what is not there, and also attending to things in an intimate way, finding ways for the otherness of the other to shine through.² It created uninterrupted ties with other disciplines, making itself a mixture of arts and sciences like physics, chemistry, ancient medicine, geography, and, most recently, performance theory.

The site is any place where objects, features, or ecofacts manufactured or modified by human beings is found. It can range from a living site to a quarry, and it can be defined in functional and other ways: killing site, industrial site or ceremonial site.³ Realizing that many sites are inhabited over a long period where local traditions persist, we can conclude that a site represents an aggregation of narratives: historical (local knowledge, folklore), environmental (climate, topography, natural history) and archaeological (data, experience of excavators).

Any archaeological work must start with a systematic research design. It usually includes the formulation of a strategy to resolve certain questions, the collection of data, the processing and analysis of these data and the publication of the results. And, since most archaeological work destroys the original site, it also requires a thorough site report. This can be a daily, fortnightly or seasonal report. It is an exposition of evidence with an hypothesis, interpretation and conclusion. It includes: 1) a description of the site, of the geology, the soil, ecosystem, previous work, purpose and extent of excavation; 2) a summary of principal structures and phases (the stratigraphy), dimensions, material dating; 3) interpretation (reconstruction); 4) discussion (comparison with other sites); 5) description of the finds (forms, techniques, decoration); 6) specialist's records (maps, plans and sections).

The context is important: an artifact without context is meaningless. An artifact context usually consists of its immediate matrix (whether the material around it is gravel, clay or sand), its position vertically or horizontally, and its association with other artifacts.

3. Performance is an ephemeral event which shares characteristics with a series of activities including play, game, sport, and ritual.⁴ Its unique feature is that it must be watched and witnessed and justified: there are the watched and the watcher.

4. Theatre archaeology is the retrieval and reconstruction of performances. At first glance you see a paradox: application of archaeological techniques to an ephemeral event. However, while a performance may leave behind limited material traces, it does generate a narrative of the watcher and the watched.⁵ The archaeological excavation is a performance in itself. In this paper I shall focus on using archaeological standing sites and their archive to build a scenario.

5. Approaches to retrieval. We excavate to retrieve evidence which is presented to us in the present but which is also a witness of a past existence. The world in which they had a meaning has gone forever, and the past is the context in which these things had any significance. We give them meaning, through an activity which is productive and interpretative, to produce the past in the present. In archaeology, especially in the absence of written records, we use the Middle Range Theory, Experimental Archaeology and Ethno-archaeology as approaches to bridge the gap between the static present and the once living past. Thus, when we move from archaeology to performance we have to regard the site as the locus of a narrative and identify two basic types of site in performance: the once perfect

space, and the space we have found. Context is our theatre, action is always facilitated or constrained by this context. We could state that it is the context that constructs the performer, a performer who is able to act and has acts registered. This requires the presence of witnesses (watchers and performers). Archaeology can present sites and space with drawings and engravings, waiting to be dramatized. These drawings and engravings give a relative description of the ancient practices. They enable the performance group to recontextualize past events and to approach the so-called cognitive archaeology. Cognitive archaeology is one of the recent developments in archaeology, it studies past ways of thinking and past symbolic structures from the remaining material artifacts.

6. The case of Sudan. Sudan is gifted as being the largest country in Africa. The country has had a great variety of climates, environments and ethnic groups from its earliest history on. It has been inhabited continuously with the same diversity of people. Archaeological work has revealed the richness of the country with its ancient buried and standing monuments. The two monuments in the plate above give an idea of how retrieval of rituals can start. The Lion temple (at the Naga site in the Butana area between the Blue Nile and the Atbara river, about 150 km north of Khartoum) itself bears inscriptions and engravings that are to be retrieved and added to our understanding of the rituals that once were practiced in this area. The site includes other monuments like the Amun temple and the Queen Shanekedkhetu temple and the remains of a city. The diagram below is from a tomb at El Kurru, the first burial place for the Napatan dynasty (the 25th dynasty). The tomb's superstructure, substructure, paintings and writings afford a good opportunity for performance retrieval.

7. Pioneer attempts. In the following pages there are two examples of how rituals have been retrieved from an archaeological site and can serve as documents towards a reconstruction of a performance (the first example) and through ethno-archaeological study towards an archaeological interpretation (the second example).

Shams El-Din Younis has managed in his masker in archaeology to retrieve the rituals carried out at the Amun temple at the Barkal Mountain (about 420 km north of Khartoum). He has subsequently devised a scenario that is waiting for a producer and director to present it to an audience.

He made use of the archaeological reports with its drawings and of the remaining stele to retrieve the events that once took place there. The stele has presented him with the type of dialogue, the invocations and the costume, while

the temple with its different sections, extending longitudinally, has presented him with the ceremonial procession. He has prepared scenarios for the three kings Aspelta (whose stele is pictured below), Haru-sutif and Nestasen, with all the theatrical elements such as dialogue, dancing, singing and costumes, thus treating an archaeological topic by using theatrical methods and perceptions. He succeeded in projecting the continuity of such rituals from the Medieval period through to the present time by using analogy and ethnographical information.⁶

A very stimulating study was carried out by the MA student Nuha Abd el-Hafiz using ethno-archaeological approach. (She is a lecturer at the Department of Archaeology at the University of Shendi and Nile State.) She has been attracted by the scratches and reliefs at the walls of the Lion temple in the so-called Great Enclosure at Musawarat el Sufra (in the Butana area, about 180 km north of Khartoum). It is a big site that includes three temples, whose function is still heavily debated, but generally thought to be associated with seasonal religious activities.

In these scratches appears the god Aresnophis wearing sandals – not customary in representations of a God, they are normally pictured with bare feet - and throwing sticks at dogs. The throwing stick is known locally as *Mijda'* or *Safarouk*. It can be found in drawings and in tombs of the Kushite rulers from 700 B.C. The study involved the use of ethnographic information and an ethno-archaeological approach whereby she accompanied a leader of a Sufi sect in a ceremonial hunt in the White Nile region. She discovered that apart from the *Mijda'* and the presence of the hunting dogs, the Sheikh wore a leather sandal during the hunting party, which, according to her informants, is part of the hunting costume. One of the conclusions of the study is that Aresnophis, the God that is represented on the walls also carrying a throwing stick, and wearing sandals of the type worn today by the leader of the hunting group, was a Hunting God (see picture below.) So this site with its large water reservoir (or hafir) was the hunting resort of the Meroites (dated from 400 BC-350 AD).⁷ A performance group could make use of such a study and dramatize the ancient Meroite's hunting trips with their traditions. Many other useful observations are made in this study, such as the return to the village of the hunting group with the rabbits they caught, which are redistributed by the Sheikh in a similar fashion as sacrificing the food to the God, and the absence of women during the hunting trip.

Conclusion

1. Archaeology and performance study are modes of cultural production involving the recontextualisation of the material, rather than its reconstruction.⁸ It is the relationship we maintain with the past: it consists of work of mediation with the past. The artifacts used by archaeologists are present as static phenomena, but other disciplines can also tell us something about the society living in the past. The modest aim is to piece together our picture of human development and history.

2. We can employ empirical observations and performance theory to make a reasoned speculation on the prehistoric embodiment of such ceremonial places. It involves the reconstruction of past performances by archaeologists.

3. We begin to see the concept of 'performance' as a contemporary experimental practice in understanding processes of cultural transformation as an 'experimental archaeology of events'. The use of the word 'experiment' suggests a test, a means of judging a theory or an idea. In that sense, experimental archaeology provides a way of examining archaeological ideas about human behaviour in the past.⁹ This means that archaeology now has a new type of experiment to help reconstructing the past. We propose here an interdisciplinary combination of theatre and archaeology in a mutual relationship.

5. The use of ethno-archaeological parallels to explain historic and even prehistoric processes.

6. Can an archaeological site be like a written text? Can archaeology/theatre together help in presenting the past to the public? Can this be done through mutual experiments with techniques of documentation that integrate text and image (the conceptualisation of performance for archaeological sites as forms of recontextualisation)? Can this be accomplished with prehistoric societies, i.e. without written records?

While recent studies refer to progress in this field, there is nevertheless a lot of work to be done in refining and developing this interdisciplinary approach.

NOTES

- ¹ P. Bahn and C. Renfrew, *Archaeology: Methods, Theories and Practices*, London, 2000, p. 11.
- ² M. Pearson, "Theatre/Archaeology", in: *The Drama Review*, 38, 4 (T 44), New York, 1994, p. 134.
- ³ B. Fagan, *In the Beginning. Introduction to Archaeology*, 1988, p. 582.
- ⁴ M. Pearson, op.cit., p. 134.
- ⁵ M. Pearson, op.cit.
- ⁶ Shams El-Din Younis, Khartoum, 2003.
- ⁷ Nuha Abd el-Afiz, 2004.
- ⁸ M. Pearson and M. Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, London, 2001, p. ix.
- ⁹ J. Cole, *Archaeology by Experiment*, New York, 1973, p. 13.

THE ZAR: A THEATRICAL HEALING CULT IN TRANSITION

Khalid AL-MUBARAK

This paper will explore the wider historical, universal, as well as regional and cultural contexts of the Northern Sudanese ritual of Zar. The ritual will be viewed as part of a World-wide phenomenon, while the two-way influences that are relevant to its practice on the regional level are probed. Regional, for the Zar encompasses both Africa and the Middle East. Given the vast literature on the subject, emphasis will be laid primarily on those trance possessions cults which, like the Zar, highlight theatricality, impersonation, role-playing and healing.

Only a brief description of what happens in the Zar ritual is given, because long and detailed records have already been adequately provided by researchers whose contribution is duly acknowledged. Only a brief outline of the Zar, necessary for the argument of this paper, is needed. After a review of the scientific (mainly medical) evidence about the Zar phenomenon, the paper goes on to handle the most significant recent changes in the Zar which have not so far been recorded, namely the *transition from ritual to performance*. These changes, too, can only be properly understood within the range of wider issues i.e., the origins of drama and theatre. The meeting point between the recent changes in the Zar and modern pioneering research and theatrical practice is then cited (Artaud, Stanislavski, Ionesco, Grotowski, Brook, Kirby, Schechner, Turner.) Suggestions for future monitoring are part of the concluding paragraphs of the paper.

The historical perspective

The Zar was one of the cults discussed by I. M. Lewis in 1971¹, under the umbrella title "Ecstatic Religion". If we remember J. Frazer's definition of religion as consisting of two elements: "a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them,"² we shall have no reservations about Lewis's classification or choice of words. As a possession healing cult the Zar covers the same area as religion, because it deals with the relationship of human beings to supernatural forces and uses music and dancing to placate the spirits and treat those possessed by them.

Humanity's quest in this respect is age old. In their attempt to communicate with the supernatural and appease it, the Greeks had Aesculapius, the God of medicine and saviour. He "ordered not a few to have *odes* written as well as to compose *comical mimes* and certain *songs* (for the emotions of their passions having become more vehement, have made the temperature of the body warmer than it should be)...".³ Moreover, Orpheus was to the Greeks a musician who could work magic by his music and help calm quarrellers. He had supernatural powers and close kinship to the gods.⁴

To the ancient Jews, music was a means of overpowering evil spirits and making them abandon their victims. David played the harp to chase away Saul's melancholy and to cure him through the power of music.⁵

In the ancient Caucasus, the long sustained (non-rythmical) drone was believed to have mystical power and was associated with a melody used in healing the sick.⁶

In Christianity, a passage written in Latin in 1100 by Honorius of Autun clearly proclaims that "in the Mass the celebrant as genuinely impersonates Christ as the tragic actor does the persons represented in the profane theatre".⁷ The assumption is that the worshipper is then at one with god and at peace with himself and his environment. The principle of demonic possession was accepted in Catholicism. That made it necessary to standardize exorcism procedures which involved, as Oesterreich words it, "the priests communicating directly with indwelling demons. Exorcists made a clear distinction between questioning indwelling demons and talking with the person possessed by those demons".⁸ The priest was a healer who played the role of restoring the body and soul to a balanced and healthy equilibrium, through contact with the supernatural.

Glossolalia (or speaking in tongues) is an important age-old indication of conversing with "supernatural forces." "For one who speaks in tongues", the Bible says, "speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the spirit." (Cor. 14:2.) The written equivalents of glossolalia are the unintelligible lists of symbols, names and letters used in magical papyri for the invoking of Gods and Spirits.⁹ The same can be said about amulets which are full of symbols assumed to provide power or protection because of their link to the supernatural. In the Sudan, Sufis use the word "tarjama" (translation) to describe the speaking in tongues in which some of them indulge. Though obscure, their glossolalia is actually "an explanation" of something else which needs to be illuminated for others.

The Qur'an devotes a whole sura to the djinn (spirits) in which some of them are quoted saying: "There are among us some that are righteous. And some the contrary: We follow divergent paths" (Sura 72:10.) Hence, if somebody is said to be *majnun*, it means he is in contact with - or possessed by - an evil djinn; if however he is *mjdhub* he is in contact with - or possessed by - a benevolent djinn.¹⁰ The Sufi Alhallj (857-922) took the idea of link with the "higher world" to the extreme when he declared that he had reached a state of unity with the creator and proclaimed "Ana Al Haq" (I am God). He paid his life for that.¹¹ On the other hand, Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) tells us that "some Jewish references recorded the attempts of prophets to induce heavenly revelation by listening to good music and singing, and that some Sufis were reported to have induced ecstatic trance by listening to singing or gazing persistently at certain lines and shapes."¹²

All this is an attempt to establish a connection with what is beyond conscious and rational explanation. Faust's pact with the devil has inspired both Christopher Marlowe and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe and Shakespeare's *Tempest* is also an example of contact with the supernatural. And it goes without saying that we are considering an area of serious and legitimate pursuit, where human beings do not and did not have all the answers to questions related to their existence on earth. Religion, the arts and magic are the tools employed to explore the unknown and search for answers, and the mystic according to Underhill¹³, "is a creative artist" in that he employs the tools of the creative artist.

In cults like the Zar, three strands are interwoven: religion, creative arts and healing. This combination, with its powerful effects, has been with humanity- in different forms- for a long time. It survives today. Its aims, like those of psychiatry and psychotherapy are to achieve mental harmony, and treat or prevent disorders. A religious parallel is the rise of the 'Megachurch' in the United States. Apart from facilities for prayer the church employs teams of psychologists and therapists who tend to the mental well-being of the flock inside the church.¹⁴ The functions overlap and the similarities are evident; "Hence we can, if we wish, group shamanism and psychoanalysis (if not the whole of psychiatry) together under the genus of one religion."¹⁵

The universal context

The Zar is part of a universal phenomenon now known as "Altered States of Consciousness", which was defined by A. Ludwig as "any mental state (s),

induced by various physiological, psychological or pharmacological manoeuvres or agents, which can be recognized subjectively by the individual (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during alert, waking consciousness. This sufficient deviation may be represented by a greater pre-occupation than usual with internal sensations or mental processes, changes in the formal characteristics of thought, and impairment of reality testing to various degrees.”¹⁶ The ability to achieve an altered state of consciousness is a universal property of the human central nervous system.¹⁷ This was verified by the pioneering research of E. Bourguignon who found that 90% of the societies studied in all parts of the world were reported to have one or more forms of altered states of consciousness (437 out of a total of 488). “It must be stressed,” he states, “that although the capacity to experience altered states of consciousness is a psychological capacity of the species, and universal, its utilization, institutionalization and patterning are, indeed, features of culture and thus variable.”¹⁸ That is why it should come as no surprise to find cases of possession trance, similar- though not identical to the Zar- in South East Asia, among American Indians, in the Philippines, and in Siberia, all areas with no direct contact with the heart of Africa. Here are a few examples to illustrate this matter.

In the case of Taiwanese shamans, theatricality, possession trance and “treatment” go hand in hand. Kleinmann and Sung reported of a Mr. Chen, who with the help of music, incense massage and ‘forced jumping’, “... copied the actions of the shrine’s many trancers, who themselves copy the stylized movements of characters in Taiwanese folk opera.” Mr. Chen’s illness is healed, because “we now know that all forms of psychotherapy seem to work for a wide range of mental disorders.”¹⁹

Robin Fox gives an equally striking example from the Kalentanes Malay Spirit séances in which the “patient”, after going into a trance, takes part in the re-enactment of selections from the Mak Young folk opera. At a certain point, she retires to don the special Mak Young royal garb in preparation for playing the leading role. The music used to induce the possession trance is derived “from the musical repertoire of the Kelantanes puppet shadow play”. The patient repeats the therapy at regular intervals to restore his emotional balance.²⁰

Among the Salishan-speaking Indians of the pacific coast of North America, the “winter spirit dances” provide an occasion on which a spirit dancer re-enters an altered state of consciousness to feel and display the power of his guardian

spirit by dramatized emotional expression in dance steps, tempo, miens and gestures. The cathartic and therapeutic effectiveness of indigenous treatment methods compares favourably with current Western therapies as far as such conditions are concerned. The conditions are those of “spirit illness.”²¹

In the Philippines there is likewise a fusion between possession, theatricality and treatment. In Northern Luzon, a Shaman induces a trance in a patient. When the spirit afflicting the patient is brought under control, he demands a dance and a song from the spirit. The Shaman ends the trance and asks the patient to perform the dance and sing the song. This is repeated by other patients who are encouraged by applause and support. In this way “A large slice of the total culture - the aesthetic and recreational - is involved, indeed is derived from the therapy.”²²

Yet another example comes from Siberia, from the Tungus who gave the world the word Shaman. The shaman in their society cures and exorcizes demons. Whenever a misfortune is threatening the clan, the shaman should come forward to help. He invokes spirits and enlists their help. He induces a possession trance in himself by beating a drum. In a trance, he falls to the floor. He then begins to behave like the spirit possessing him. On one occasion, a shaman trying to cure a sick child told his assistants (while under possession) that he (the spirit) required a small temple to be built and sacrifices offered to him regularly. Such conditions have to be met before the child is cured.²³ Thus, similar phenomena as the Zar can be found in many different cultures, they indeed have been with humanity throughout its history and are still universally known and practiced.

The regional and cultural context

A closer look at the immediate area around Sudan, in Africa and the Middle East, reveals a number of ritual cults that are not very different from those in other parts of the world. In 1988 a conference on the Zar was held in Khartoum at which researchers from Sudan, Jibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Iran and West-Africa were present and talked about Zar-like rituals in their respective countries.²⁴ Not all Sub-Saharan African tribes, however, have possession trance rituals similar to the Zar. The Ashanti of Ghana, the Ganda of Uganda, the Mende of Sierra Leone, the Nyoro of Northern Uganda and the Hehe of Tanzania have no possession trance. The same is true of the Amba (East Africa) and the Tallensi (West Africa), the Kikuyu (Kenya), the Kung of South-west Africa and the Turkama of Kenya.²⁵

Among those African rituals similar to the Zar is a very theatrical ritual in Kenya where a cult almost identical to the Zar is known. The Saka ritual of the Wataita tribe includes “possession hysteria” during which the possessed women utter unintelligible sounds, wear costumes demanded by the possessing spirit and behave in a manner normally preserved for men. This includes impersonating men. While possessed, some women demand consumer goods. The ritual is therapeutic. Some affected women may even be severely neurotic, and in such cases, susceptibility to saka attacks may be very closely bound up with their neurosis.²⁶ In Kinshasa, the Zebola dance integrates the Zebola community. The dance is based on the familiar ethnic group of the dancer. Under the direction of the healer, the possessed, who are mainly women, behave in a sexually aggressive manner. The healer instructs the dance steps during a rehearsal. The spirit reveals its identity under questioning (dialogue) and explains the reason behind its presence. The orientation of the questions “reveals the healer’s profound knowledge of the society to which the patient belongs and the milieu in which she lives.” The healer is both a psychologist and a sociologist. The last public dance of the ritual is rehearsed and sometimes publicly criticised by the audience when it is over.²⁷

As both Kinshasa and Kenya have a common border and common tribes with the Sudan there could be a possible link between the Zar and the Saka and Zebola rituals. In other cases, however, we have a lot more than a mere “possibility” to go by. This is true of the Nigerian “Bori” as well as the Zar in Ethiopia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Niger. As far as the Bori are concerned, the pilgrimage route between Mecca and Nigeria passes through Sudan and provides a direct channel of two-way contacts. Large numbers of Nigerians settled in the Northern Sudan. The most recent reference on the Zar illustrates the results of these settlements on the points of contact. Kenyon²⁸ interviewed a Sheikha of Zar in Sennar, the central Sudanese town surrounded by the “Nigerian belt” in the Gezira. The woman, Soreya Ali, stated that patients from all over the country came to her Zar; but the fellata did not come: “They prefer to go to burei (bori).” The word fellata (a corruption of the word “fulani”) is Northern Sudanese slang that refers to Nigerian settlers. A settler told Kenyon that he remembered Bori from his childhood days in Nigeria. Bori is not only known but is also practised in the Sudan.

It is also significant that an alternative word used for the Zar “Sheikha” (leader) in both Egypt and the Sudan is *Kodiya*. The origin of this word is most likely the Hausa word “Godiya” which means “a woman possessed by Bori Spirits” according to Abraham’s Hausa English Dictionary.²⁹ Perhaps as

significantly, one of the spirits of the Bori is called Malam Alhaji (learned man and pilgrim).³⁰ Both these words are Arabic. There is another linguistic link however: the term *rieh* (wind) is used to describe the Zar in the Sudan and similarly the term *Iska* (wind in Hausa) is used in Nigeria to describe the bori Spirits.³¹ One can also note that the religious “Shakers” of St. Vincent, who go in a group possession trance in the church, use the word “wind” to describe the spirit possessing them³². Also similarities between the Sudanese Zar and the voodoo rituals of Haiti can be explained by the fact that slaves who were brought there from Nigeria and Dahomey started the Voodoo in Haiti in the second half of the 17th century.³³

The Zar exchanges between Sudan and Ethiopia are also tangible. Zar is known to tribes half of which live on the Sudanese border and the other half on the Ethiopian border. The red sea province of Ethiopia (Eritrea) was in the last century part of the Ottoman Red Sea Province which also comprised the present day Red Sea State of the Sudan. Large numbers of Ethiopians came originally from Sudan. The reverse is also true. When considering these twin versions of Zar, we note that in the town of Gondar, Ethiopia, it attracts members of the Sudanese minority. The chief “Zar doctor” is herself part Sudanese.³⁴ One of the most famous spirits in the Sudanese Zar is “Luliya, Al-Habashiyya” (the Ethiopian Luliya).³⁵ The Red Sea link is further consolidated by the fact that the Songhay possession cult of the Niger, where about half of the population are muslims, includes dialogue and spirits like Gomo Malina (Governor of the Red Sea) and Istanbula (a pious muslim chief who lives in Constantinople) which some see as a reaction to the shock of European (French) contact.³⁶ Furthermore, the Songhay were influenced by Yoruba and their oral tradition reports that a new family of spirits was brought from the Red Sea area, locus of the Zar cult, in the 1920s.³⁷ Also in this case pilgrims could have learned about these spirits on their way from or to Mecca.

If we turn to the Egyptian Zar, we find one reference in Arabic claiming that its origins are indeed Egyptian. This claim however is rather unreliable as it is made in passing and it is not well-documented or thoroughly researched.³⁸ A more sober assessment is to be found in A. Al Hussaini’s assertion that the Zar spread northwards from the Sudan to Egypt after the occupation army of Muhammad Ali Pasha subdued the Sudan 1820/21 and created the borders which exist today. Sudanese maids in the Royal Palace in Cairo introduced Zar in an attempt to save the life of Khedive Ismail’s daughter.³⁹ This is in line with earlier claims that Zar spread to Hijaz (in present day Saudi Arabia), the Sudan and Egypt through the movement of slaves.⁴⁰

In the case of Kuwait, the Nuban (Nubian, i.e. Sudanese) Zar uses incense, drums, a five-stringed African “rebaba” and chants to induce possession. Zar was introduced by a family whose mentor was Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait (1838-1915).⁴¹

On a visit to Kuwait in 1988, I tried to verify these claims and compare notes with other researchers. To my pleasure and surprise Ms Mariam Um Mustafa of the Folklore Department told me that a descendant of the family which introduced the Zar was still alive and keeping up the tradition. We went to visit that man, a Salih Murgan Al Mubarak, who confirmed Dr. Doukhi’s information and added that his own father (who died in 1947) told him that he and his family were kidnapped from the Sudan. He added that their people were the Berta and Jangi, both well-known tribes in the South-Eastern and Southern Sudan. Unfortunately, we did not witness any trance or impersonation on that particular evening. But both do indeed take place and are described by a Kuwaiti scholar as follows: “Tambourines and drums are beaten; the afflicted person dances until s/he falls uttering words of which she is unaware. Those present claim that the Zar Djinn is speaking on his/her behalf. The supervisor of the ceremony asks about the wishes of the djinn.” Sudanese terminology is used: Sheikha, Asyad (The Spirits), Nuzool (joining in the performance). In Arabic Nuzoul means “descent” from a higher level.⁴² The African origin is confirmed by other researchers, such as Al Shukri.⁴³ Clearly the regional proliferation and cross-fertilization of the Zar has been much in evidence.

The Zar in Northern Sudan

All borders of Sudan divide some tribe or other in two halves; one Sudanese, the other across the Ethiopian, Egyptian or Zairean border. This is an important factor in cross-cultural contacts. The Sudanese Zar cult has drawn the attention from a number of scholars. The most important and comprehensive contributions came from Trimmingham (1965), Barclay (1964), Lewis (1971), Constatinides (1972), Sargant (1973), Baasher, T. (1975), El Nagar (1977), Al Shai (1988), Boddy (1989), and Kenyon (1991). The following description and discussion of the Sudanese Zar is based on these studies and also is based on my observations and field work which is cited wherever appropriate.

As far as the origin of the Zar is concerned, there seems to be no conclusive evidence. Cerulli’s claim in his book from 1934 that its origin was “very probably” Ethiopian has influenced generations of researchers, despite his being

so cautious. He also says that the origin could as well lie with the “Kushites of the plains.”⁴⁴ Now the word “Kush” refers to an area South of Egypt inhabited by blacks, which of course now is the Sudan. This should lend more weight to B. Seligman’s 1914 theory of “double origin” for the Zar, from both Ethiopia and Sudan. Seligman witnessed a Zar ritual in the Sudan in 1909 and 1911 mainly among the Turco-Egyptian ex-slave army community, and noticed that in Egypt the Zar spread “whenever negresses have been admitted to the harem.”⁴⁵ Another point is a possible reference to the Zar in Ibn Daifalla’s account of a 17th Century Sudanese Fakir who treated disturbed persons without administering any medicine. The famous Zar refrain “Dastour Ya Siyadi” (Obedience, masters) which is still used to address spirits in a Zar ceremony is uttered in reply to this man.⁴⁶

The stages of the ritual

In the Zar ritual a number of different stages can be distinguished.

The *first* stage is that of diagnosis when a person (usually a woman) goes to the Sheikh or Sheikha of the Zar with a complaint. A Zar diagnosis called “Fath Al Ilba” in Arabic (the opening of the can) then takes place. Incense is taken out of the can. The incense burner is then placed under the arms and under the skirt of the “patient” with the Sheikha greeting spirits and inviting them. Subsequently, she (or he) can decide whether the “patient” is possessed by a spirit or not. In some cases patients are not accepted as members of the cult and are advised to go to a doctor. The fact which J. Kennedy observed among Egyptian Nubians practising Zar, namely, that the visit to the Sheikha of Zar comes usually as a last resort is also true here.⁴⁷ The implication is that the djinn has won and forced the “patient” after many futile attempts in the wrong direction, to seek appeasement or a “cease-fire.”

The fact that the patient is “usually a woman” is explained by the leading Sudanese psychiatrist Sulaiman. In the strictly Muslim society of the Northern Sudan, women - the majority of whom do not work - rely wholly on men for their financial support. To retain their man is the hub of their actions. They have very limited rights and no way to lay any conditions from a position of strength or equality. Zar survives against many odds because it is a way of having an independent voice. If a woman wishes to smoke a cigarette in public (or drink a glass of wine for that matter) she can only do so without reproach in a Zar ceremony. If a woman wants to show off her hair or figure, heavily bedecked

under the veil, head-scarfe or tobe, she can do so safely during a Zar dance. Nobody will mock or criticise her, because “she wasn’t herself” anyway. Her Zar is to blame. Onwuejeoguri gives a similar explanation to the predominance of women in the Nigerian Bori ceremony. He sees the ritual as a reaction by women to a deprived and subservient status.⁴⁸

Stage *two* comprises of the treatment of the afflicted person. The number of invitees is roughly determined, mainly those who are already members of the cult. A list of requirements is drawn; it covers the cost of henna (for dyeing the hands and feet), perfumes, incense, to prepare and clean the “properties” and costumes for the spirits and buy a sacrificial lamb (or hen). The cost of these preparations, usually covered by the husband, can be quite high and are cushioned by small contributions from members of the cult. This “financial burden” is easy to explain. If it is rumoured that the husband is considering taking a second wife, he can lose his financial balance after a Zar ceremony for the wife and either postpone or abandon the idea. A Zar ceremony which I attended in Al Sahafa, Khartoum in 1979 cost the head of the household LS300, which was more than his monthly income. Another point to consider is the preparation in advance of the costumes for the spirits. This indicates that the characters (or spirits) are limited or fixed, although more are introduced with the changing times. (A striking parallel is to be found in the account of Krader about shamanism among the Buryats of Southern Syberia. There, the Shaman keeps detailed genealogies of the spirits that can communicate through him.⁴⁹)

The *third* stage of the ceremony begins with a procession or “Zaffa” around the courtyard of the house. The person in whose honour the Zar is organised is given prominence. So is the sacrificial lamb which is guided along to the accompaniment of chanting and ululation. This Zaffa is a highly entertaining and relaxing occasion. The only Zaffa I witnessed in Souq Al Shajara in Omdurman in 1965 was a “warming-up” get together in which the women laughed, clowned and enjoyed themselves. The word Zaffa is however also used in the Sudan for the musical procession in main cities that marks the anniversary of the birth of Prophet Muhammad. And this religious link confirms the observations of both Barclay and Lewis that the Zar is a women’s equivalent of the Sufi tariqa (order) for men, from which women are excluded in a male-dominated society.⁵⁰

In stage *four* the ceremony proper commences. The main features are: dim lighting, the burning of a particular piquant Zar incense, throbbing tambourines and drums and the “strange” chanting that accompanies them. The songs and

themes are varied, according to the directions of the Sheikh or Sheikha, who supervises and orchestrates the whole ceremony with a great deal of authority and good timing. When the signature tune ushering a patient's particular possessing spirit is played, she joins the dancing, helped by the Sheikha or Sheikh. This "signature tune" is common to all rituals which carry the name Zar in Africa and the Middle East. It is, however, also known in possession trance cults in distant cultures, e.g. the Malay spirit seances⁵¹ and the trance dances of Bali.⁵² We should, at this point, remember the fact that music is a "language" which can be recognised by listeners as messages or stories and used for communication. Among the most treasured possessions of the Shukriyya tribe of the eastern Sudan is the large drum known as the Nahas (meaning copper, because of the copper base of the drum). It is beaten only on special occasions and any member of the tribe hearing it would know immediately that a leader has died or that a distinguished visitor has arrived. The oral tradition collector Al Tayeb speaks of the "signature tunes" of the Hadendawa tribes of the Eastern Sudan.⁵³ If any of them hears the "tribal tune" played, he would approach him demanding an explanation. If the person playing the drum would have no link at all to the tribe but insists to play on, the matter can lead to a duel. Furthermore, as Espanak states, each individual has his own inherent personal dynamism, his own inner and outer rhythms, which presumably can react to or be activated by the congenial music or movement.⁵⁴

The *fifth* stage is the highlight of the ceremony. After dancing for a few minutes to her particular "theme" (khait), a patient can go into a possession trance, shaking uncontrollably, followed by a period of calm to exchange a dialogue with the Sheikha or Sheikh. The spirit is asked and replies explaining why it possessed the woman and what specific demands it is making. When the spirit identifies itself, the Sheikh immediately helps the patient put on the proper costume. If the Zar spirit is Khawaja (British), the woman is given shorts or trousers, a pipe, a hat and a stick (all readily recognizable colonial clothing of British administrators). She then talks in tongues (presumably English). Whiskey or wine are provided on demand. Other spirits are the Pasha, the Ethiopian girl Lulyia the Hadandawi (from Eastern Sudan), the Shulkawi (from the Southern Sudan), Sheikh 'A. Al Jailani (A Sufi). The theatricality of impersonation is striking and the fact that women impersonate men is significant. Although role reversing of men and women is condemned in Islam, based as it is on a saying attributed to prophet Muhammad that specifically condemns "men who imitate women and women who imitate men", the Zar ritual leaves room for it. Since alcohol is also forbidden and smoking in public is unacceptable, a woman impersonating a (non muslim) khawaja in a Zar ceremony is thus engaged in a

taboo-breaking exercise. However, a much deeper significance in the theatricality and impersonation of the ritual can be found; it has an important function over and above its aspects of entertainment and spectacle. A cult like the Zar treats sick people “by operating a set of extra-normal behaviour in speech and gesture. They offer the sick person, who is himself behaving in an abnormal way, a framework of ideas and practices which is very different from that of normal everyday life. For the more purely physical illnesses the therapeutic effect of spirit medium practices may be no more than reassurance. But for the mentally ill (the “possessed”) the conceptualization in spirit idiom gives diagnosis and prognosis in terms of the patients’s own fantasies. Such a mode of fighting fire with fire often seems to have great stress-reducing effect, for both patient and audience.”⁵⁵

In the *sixth* stage, which takes place on the seventh and final day, a sacrificial lamb, ram or hen is killed and the patient steps over it seven times, after which the animal will be cooked and eaten. Some participants sip the sacrificial blood. The reason for this stage taking place on day seven and the number of times the sacrifice has to be crossed is not accidental, for in Muslim theology the number seven is ubiquitous. The number seven also bears the role as a cure or charm to help ward off the evil eye. An example of this is the Old anonymous Arabic manuscript edited by Winkler that is a form of “preventive medicine” entitled “Al’Uhud Al Sabaa” (The Seven Seals). And number symbolism (including that of number seven) was also known in Medieval, Renaissance, Greek, Babylonian and Egyptian sources. As for the sipping of blood - again this is strictly forbidden from the Islamic point of view. It is also interesting to find a parallel in other possession cult practises like the shamanic seances of the Achomawi North American Indians and the Buryat (to the North and West of lake Baikal in Soviet Asia) where blood is also sipped.⁵⁶ The sacrifice is linked to the healing process. When the possessing spirit identifies itself and agrees on a sort of armistice, it gets the offering of a sacrifice as a result. The shaman uses music to entice the spirit from the patient’s body and rewards the spirit by sacrifice; this rounds off the ritual.

The patient feels relaxed now and is at ease, but is unable to recall any actions undertaken by herself or others during the time of possession. (This aspect of relaxation also occurs in similar possession trance cults, such as the voodoo of Haiti⁵⁷ and that of the Senghay of Niger⁵⁸ and in the Zar of Iran.⁵⁹) An important factor in the well-feeling of the patient is the “group solidarity” which is very significant in the Zar. Mass psychology can be very effective, because the others reinforce an individual’s suggestibility by the expression of their own convictions and ritualized actions. The potency of music is greatest in a group because it unifies the group for common action and creates the atmosphere for change in

much extramusical behaviour. The influence of incense too should not be underestimated. According to Alfred Gell, the Umeda in New Guinea also use a magical perfume to induce a dream for the hunter “which betokens good hunting according to the system of dream augury followed” by them.⁶⁰

The end of the ceremony is marked by a visit to the Nile, where participants wash their hands and feet and the bones of the sacrificial animal are thrown in the water. This is probably a reminder of the days when the Nile itself was worshipped. Processions to the Nile until quite recently used to be a regular feature of different rites of passage in the Northern Sudan especially circumcision and marriage ceremonies. There is also a parallel belief in the Ethiopian Zar that it dwells in rivers and streams.

Two other points need to be underlined. The first is that Zar is not an “exorcism cult”, as Leiris was quite right to indicate.⁶¹ The aim of the ceremony is not to rid the body completely of the haunting spirit, but more to propitiate the spirit so that the “visits” are few and far between and are controllable. The second point is that, far from being a “dying art ... occasionally seen among pre-literate societies”, as one study claims ⁶², the Zar is very much in evidence in all major centres of population in the Northern Sudan. Demand is increasing to such a degree that the Sheikhs have now formed a “Union” of the Zar groups, as the most articulate Sheikh among them, Muhammad Wad Hulla reported. The Sheikh himself commutes between Khartoum and Port Sudan and has “regional links” with Zar practitioners in Egypt and Kuwait. The Zar flourishes mainly because there seems to be both a therapeutic and a social function in it. The end result is that the participants “feel better” after it. They stick to it and more are attracted, encouraged by word-of-mouth publicity. Moreover, once a person becomes a member of a Zar cult, he or she is with them for life. It is like the membership of an exclusive club.

The social function lies not only in strengthening the position of women as indicated earlier, but also in the fact that the Zar, as is the case with similar cults, is a “religion of the oppressed” which can play a role in socio-political upheaval (as it indeed did in Haiti.) Not surprisingly, rituals like the Zar can often be seen among slave communities and in rigid societies.

The Psychological Basis for Rituals: Scientific Evidence and Assessment

Let us begin this section by referring to a simple experiment carried out by a pioneer who visited the Sudan, where he, as part of his study of the human mind, attended Zar ceremonies and recorded the music. Upon his return to England, W. Sargant played the Zar music and determined that it was “effective in putting ordinary people into trance.”⁶³

What does that mean in neurophysiological and psychological terms? R. Prince has studied the literature and summarized the features associated with possession states in widely different cultures and he gives the following characteristics:

1. Induction of the state is frequently achieved through dancing to music which features a profound and rapid beat.
2. Induction frequently occurs following a period of starvation and / or a period of overbreathing.
3. The onset of possession is marked by a brief period of inhibition or collapse.
4. In the neophyte, collapse may be followed by a period of hyperactivity; once experience is acquired, a controlled, deity-specific behaviour pattern emerges.
5. During the state of possession there is frequently a finer tremor of head and limbs; sometimes grosser, convulsive jerks occur. A diminution of sensory acuity may be evident.
6. Return to normal consciousness is followed by a sleep of exhaustion from which the subject awakens in a state of mild euphoria.⁶⁴

In the Zudanese Zar, there is no record of either starvation or overbreathing. There is also complete amnesia about all action undertaken during a period of possession. Apart from these two points, all these characteristics can be recognized in the Sudanese Zar.

Elaborate laboratory experiments have also succeeded in verifying certain aspects of the possession trance which characterizes the Zar and similar ceremonies. As early as 1949, V. Walter and W. Walter have determined that “the specific effects of rhythmic sound stimuli are familiar and frequently exploited for various purposes,” which would seem also to be the case in the Zar.⁶⁵ Confirmation of the psychological basis of the unusual behaviour in ceremonies involving drums is given by A. Neher. He stated that “the behaviour observed in drum ceremonies and in the laboratory appear to have similar physiological and psychological characteristics which result from rhythmic stimulation”.⁶⁶ In other

words, trance can be induced in human beings if they are subjected to rhythmic stimulation by drums, which are the instruments most commonly used in the music of the Zar. An explanation to the feeling of well-being is provided by B. Lex in the relationship between the two hemispheres of the brain – the right which controls the emotions and the left hemisphere which controls analytic thought. Rituals (like the Zar) work because they alleviate prolonged stress and because the driving techniques employed are designed to “tune” the nervous system “and thereby lessen inhibition of the right hemisphere and permit temporary right hemisphere dominance”.⁶⁷ He also gives an explanation for the use of a “signature tune” in ceremonies like the Zar when he states that “the cortical and sub-cortical controlling autonomic responses appear to become conditioned to react to emotional stimuli, and once learning has occurred, autonomic fluctuations are no longer essential to emotional experience. This may explain the onset of trance in response to only a single cue.” Long-time Members of the Zar cult interrupt anything that they are doing and hurry to join in the ritual the moment they hear their cue.

N. Spanos has analysed rituals from a different angle when he states that hypnotic responding, multiple personality and demonic possession can all be viewed as role enactments “in which contextual factors lead actors to interpret their goal – directed actions as involuntary happenings.”⁶⁸ More emphasis is laid here on the theatrical and impersonation aspect than on the direct response to rhythmic stimulation. Spanos highlights the social context in which possession takes place, namely the associations of “increases in social position, power and respect that would have been available in other ways”. Thus the multiple personality is a “secularization” of the practice of “possession”, so much so that certain techniques are suggested to play the role of the “signature tune” and call forth and identify secondary personalities in modern hypnotherapy (which he calls scientific exorcism.) This can be supported by the existence of a ‘transitional stage’ in the ritual. In the Zar, as in many similar cults, possession can sometimes be ‘faked’. Out of six trances witnessed by S.F. Nadel among the Nyima of the Nuba mountains in the Sudan two were “quite clearly put on”. Faking is not difficult “because all can learn what trances look like (or should look like), and all are exposed, from early youth, to their stimulation.”⁶⁹ It is only one step from conscious faking to Spanos’s involuntary ‘faking’.

Quite a few writers who have studied rituals like the Zar are drawing parallels between theatrical forms and these rituals. Writing about dramatherapy, D. Langly and G. Langly stressed the ‘fantasy roles’ which people have. They drop most most of them as they grow older. One can draw on this base in dramatherapy

and ask people to play roles or reverse roles. The authors underline “group cohesive” roles and the creation of an “environment in which healing can take place.”⁷⁰ The Zar deals in the same currency. Elaborating her ideas about Dance Therapy, L. Espenak, likewise, talks in terms reminiscent of the Zar. To her, certain movements to rhythm and music often induce “the flow of fantasies that are both appropriate to and derivative of the particular muscular sequence”.⁷¹ Dance as a form of communication can try to make contact with another human being “or even a god”. Lewis considers the regular seances of peripheral possession cults as “danced psychodramas” which are very similar in tone and character to modern psychodrama or group therapy.⁷²

In comparing the Zar to psychotherapy, J. Kennedy has found a similarity in the “safety valve” effect as well as emotional support and discharge and the theatricality of acting out roles. For him the Zar is similar to dreams in as much as removed and repressed wishes are allowed free expression.⁷³ By contrast, psychodrama seems “artificial” and “contrived”. The “wholeness” of the Zar which continues for a week is preferred to the “one-hour” piecemeal sessions of modern therapy that uses similar techniques. And finally, A. Kleinman and L. Sung are so impressed by the succes of indigenous practitioners of possession cults in healing their patients, that they draw the conclusion of lessons to be learned by psychotherapy in the First World. They suggest the creation of a “clinical social science” in which research, teaching as well as practice are fused.⁷⁴

Recent Changes in the Zar

In recent times a number of changes have taken place in the Sudanese version of the Zar that mark the beginning of its shifting grounds, which constitute a development from a ritual into a theatrical performance, and which can by no means be seen as a unique phenomenon.

A major function of ritual in a society is that of ‘putting things right’. This function has been described by Victor Turner⁷⁵, as being part of society’s “redressive machinery” in cases of “punctures in the social fabric.” ... “divination into the hidden causes of social conflict (witchcraft, ancestral wrath, the God’s displeasure), prophylactic sacrifice, therapeutic ritual (involving the exorcism of malefic spirits and the propitiation of good ones), and finding an apt occasion for the performance of a major ritual celebrating the values, common interests and moral order of the widest recognized cultural and moral community, transcending

the divisions of the local group.” This role has gradually moved into the hands of the arts like the theatre which “take stock” of the state of society. Turner (and Richard Schechner) saw in the theatrical performance (which now wears the mantle worn by religion in the past) an explication of life and the best means of intercultural understanding. Thus, the shift from ritual to performance entails a shift in the nobility and loftiness of its role in our age – that of treating and healing the soul of society and of international relations.

Along similar lines, Richard Schechner himself hails the Kaiko celebration of New Guinea in which combat techniques are transformed into entertainment and performance. For him, these kaiko dances “are pivots in a system of transformation which change destructive behaviour into constructive alliances.”⁷⁶ Again the role of “performance” is elevated as it addresses questions seminal to the peaceful existence of humanity. He goes on to mention other rituals which made the shift from ritual to performance (the Whirling Dervishes of Turkey visiting New York) and states that “any ritual can be lifted from its original setting and performed as theatre.” He sums up by declaring that “theatre people are moving into areas once solely occupied by religion and politics.”

There is also a movement the other way, as theatre groups are increasingly using rituals as a base for a performance. But this has a long history as well, which begins with the great Russian pioneer of the techniques of acting K. Stanislavsky (1863-1939), well acquainted with Hindu methods of meditation, who advocated a system of acting whereby a character in a play effectively replaces (possesses) the actress: “... for instance, Anna Karenina should cease to exist merely as a part that has to be presented on the stage, but instead should become a certain woman-actress who shares the same thoughts and ideas of Anna Karenina.”⁷⁷ Also, another icon of modern theatre, Jerzy Grotowski, on contemplating the role of theatre and that of healing in society, noted that theatre leads to “liberation” from complexes in much the same way as psychoanalytic therapy. He aimed at creating a secular sacrum in the theatre in place of the (declining) religious one and stressed the psycho-social necessity of this change.⁷⁸ Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), whom Grotowski admired, had already advocated a theatre that employs “the magic means in the arts and words to be organically active like renewed exorcisms.” He called for a return of theatre “to its original purpose, to restore it to a religious, metaphysical position.”⁷⁹ And more examples of theatre-makers who became deeply interested in the relationship between the metaphysical and “performance” are Eugène Ionesco and Peter Brook.⁸⁰

In the regional locus of the Zar, the theatrical potential was not overlooked. In the Sudan, drama students of the University of Khartoum presented a Zar-based play, including possession and impersonation on 3 March 1977. For the present writer who devised and directed the performance it was a very stimulating and challenging undertaking. The Sudanese film director Ali Abdul Ghayyoun made a documentary film on Zar in 1982. In Egypt in 1981, Muhsin Hilmi presented the play “Dakkat Zar” as an explicitly anti-Zar statement meant to help the audience reject the Zar altogether. However, when the play was presented seven years later together with “Arousat Zar” by A. Alimi in the International Experimental Film Festival in Cairo, a change of attitude was recorded and the name of Artaud cropped up.⁸¹ Another play in which the Zar played a role was presented in Kuwait by Sakr Al Rushoud, and the core of the story is a wife who believes in the healing power of Zar and is making unreasonable financial demands on her hapless husband in order to organize a ceremony.⁸² Also, the critic Farida Al Naqqash called for the search for the roots of African drama in the Zar and underlined its similarity to Voodoo, suggesting that the latter was probably derived from Zar.

With this in mind, we can now consider the changes in Sudanese Zar. Born in Port Sudan 1933, Muhammad Wad Hulla had started practicing as a Zar Sheikh in 1954 and from then on he gradually established himself as one of the leading Sheikhs in Khartoum. His greatest achievement is that, despite the rising tide of religious intolerance in the country, he managed to take Zar out of the “underground” culture into the open. The first venture was in 1979 when he persuaded the members of his cult to go in the Friendship Hall Theatre for a performance. Those taking part were members of the cult itself, i.e. the Genuine Zar – possessed women - and not just actors. A second occasion of his group performing was during a TV recording for Sudan TV in 1981, which, regrettably, was never broadcast. It was, however, somehow “smuggled” to the video black market and is now widely available in the Sudan and abroad. The third occasion (in May 1987) was of special interest. The Sheikh agreed to bring his cult members to an open-air ceremony at the gardens of the National Council for Arts and Letters in Khartoum. The present writer was invited to comment upon the ceremony after it had finished. On that occasion the Sheikh kept everybody waiting for several minutes as he did his Islamic prayers a few yards from the acting area. This was interesting to watch because the man had actually been taken to court by some religious fanatics who disliked his Zar activities. On all three occasions, the Sheikh played the role of director and stagemanager. He directed the musicians, helped dancers to don their spirit’s costumes and “properties”, started a dialogue with the different spirits and either handed over

the gifts demanded by the spirits or promised to prepare them later. On all occasions several dancers went in a possession trance which seemed genuine. No holds were barred and “social control” was forgotten as women smoked or showed off their fine figures. All participants seemed completely unaware of the audience after the first opening minutes of the ceremony.

Sheikh Muhammad is clearly navigating in uncharted waters as far as the Sudan is concerned. If this tendency continues and is encouraged and developed, a home-grown theatrical art could develop alongside the drama that has been transplanted from Europe. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive; but the Zar-based strand will probably be more in line with the “spirit” of the people. Sheikh Muhammad is persisting along this promising path. He accepted an invitation of Ni’mat Hammad’s Company to tour Kuwait and take part in a *simulation* of a Zar ceremony by the actors and actresses. The tour took place in 1989 and Sheikh Muhammad was active on the stage dancing and directing the group. In a private discussion we held later, in which I encouraged him to persevere in the same direction, he seemed to be very positive about the way things went.

A number of similar developments have taken place in other countries, in Nigeria with the Bori, which has been gradually secularized; also with the Sinhalese healing rituals and Chinese healing rituals. That it is imperative to encourage Sheikh Muhammad in Sudan to explore a potentially rewarding path is demonstrated by the highly stimulating survey of the 1991 Grotowski “Objective Drama Project” which shows how ritual techniques can be married to the conscious development of a secular equivalent that aspires not only to cure the cult members, but also to heal the hearts of modern men and women.

Conclusion

The changes in the Zar Ritual in the direction of a form of theatre are significant and potentially of great weight for the development of an indigenous - home-grown - strand of Sudanese drama. This development will no doubt have repercussions for African as well as Arab drama, as the Zar must be seen as being part of the shared heritage. However, for such an idea to bear fruit there will have to be a more systematic intellectual commitment and follow-up. Such a transformation cannot reach a positive conclusion if left to “spontaneous” initiative or personal commitment. A project either under UNESCO sponsorship or under the sponsorship of a cultural research institution or a University can be

started with the aim of monitoring, studying as well as subtly channelling the incipient changes in the Zar ceremony. The result is bound to be good for both theatre and healing.

NOTES

- ¹ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, London, 1971, pp. 11-14.
- ² J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Part 1. vol. 1, London, 1911, p. 222.
- ³ E. Edelstein and L. Edelstein, *Asclepius*, vol. 2, Baltimore, 1945, p. 209.
- ⁴ W. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, London, 1935, p. 41.
- ⁵ A. Sendrey, *Music in the social and religious life of Antiquity*, Rutherford, 1974, p. 244.
- ⁶ M. Schneider, "Primitive Music", in: E.Wellecz, (ed.), *The New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 1, London, 1957, p. 50.
- ⁷ Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol.1, Oxford, 1933, p. 38.
- ⁸ N.P. Spanos, "Hypnosis, Demonic Possession and Multiple Personality" in: C.A. Ward (ed.), *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health*, London, 1989, p. 105.
- ⁹ D. Christie-Murray, *Voices From the God*, London, 1978, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ D. Eickelman, "The Islamic Attitude Toward Possession States" in: R. Prince (ed.) *Trance and Possession States*, 1966, p. 191.
- ¹¹ L.S.V. Massignon, *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, 3: 1971, p. 100.
- ¹² Ibn Khaldoun, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldoun (Ibn Khaldoun's Introduction)*, A.M. Catermeyer (ed.), Beirut, 1970, pp. 205-206.
- ¹³ E. Underhill, "The Mystic as Creative Artist", in: R.Woods (ed.), *Understanding Mysticism*, New York, 1980, p. 401.
- ¹⁴ S. Kiley, "US Feeds Its Souls with Snacks and Salvation", *The Sunday Times*, 17 February 1991, pp. 1-16.
- ¹⁵ I. M. Lewis, op. cit, p. 199.
- ¹⁶ A. R. Ludwig, "Altered States of Consciousness", in: *Archive of General Psychiatry*, 15 September 1966, p. 225.
- ¹⁷ W. G. Jilek, "Therapeutic Use of Altered States of Consciousness in Contemporary North American Indian Ceremonials", in: C.Ward (ed.), *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health*, London, 1989, p. 179.
- ¹⁸ E. Bourguignon, *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*, Columbus, 1973, pp. 9-12.
- ¹⁹ A. Kleinmann, and L.H. Sung, "Why do Indigenous Practitioners Successfully Heal?", in: *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 13 B, 1979, p. 19.
- ²⁰ C. Kessler, "Main Peteri" in: V. Crapanzano and V. Garrison (eds.), *Case studies in Spirit Possession*, New York, 1977, pp. 314-315.
- ²¹ W. Jilek, op. cit, p. 5.
- ²² E.T. Kirby, *Ur-Drama. The Origins of Theatre*, New York, 1975, p. 20.

- 23 M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, London, 1964, p. 241.
- 24 J. Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits. Women, Men and Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*, Madison, 1989, pp. 132.
- 25 L. Greenbaum, "Possession Trance in Sub Saharan Africa" in: E. Bourguignon (ed.), *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*, Columbus, 1973, pp. 64-81.
- 26 Grace Harris, "Possession Hysteria in a Kenyan Tribe", in: *American Anthropologist*, vol. 59, 6, December 1957, p. 1162
- 27 E. Corin, "A Possession Psychotherapy in an Urban Setting: Zebola in Kinshasa", in: *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 13 B, pp. 335-337.
- 28 M. Kenyon, *Five Women of Sennar*, Oxford, 1991, p. 203.
- 29 Abraham's, *Dictionary of the Hausa Language*, 1962 edition, s. v. "Godiya"
- 30 A.J. Tremearne, *Hausa Superstitions and Custom. An introduction to folk-lore and the folk*, London, 1970, p. 534.
- 31 M. Onwuejeogwu, "The cult of the bori spirits among the Hausa", in: M. Douglas et.al. (eds.), *Man in Africa*, London, 1968, p. 288.
- 32 J.H. Henny, "Spirit Possession Belief and Trance Behaviour in Two Fundamentalist Groups in St. Vincent", in: F. Goodman et.al. (eds), *Trance, Healing and Hallucination*, New York, 1974, p. 59.
- 33 A. Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, London, 1972, p. 25.
- 34 S.D. Messing, "Group Therapy and Social Status in the Zar Cult of Ethiopia", in: *American Anthropologist*, vol. 60, nr. 6, 1959, p. 1125.
- 35 J. Boddy, op.cit., p. 129.
- 36 P. Stroller, "Stressing Social Change and Soughay Possession", in: *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health*, London, 1989, pp. 272-273.
- 37 S.S. Walker, *Ceremonial Spirit Possession in Africa and Afro-America*, Leiden, 1972, p. 3.
- 38 N. Shuqair, *Jughfariat wa Tariekh al Soudan*, Beirut, 1967, p. 70.
- 39 A. Al Hussaini, "Aadil Al 'Ulaimi: Al Zal Yuqasid I jitihadat Antonin Artaud", in: *Al Watan*, October 10, 1988, p.26.
- 40 J.S. Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London, 1965, p. 258.
- 41 Y. Doukhi *Al Aghani al Kuwaitiyya*, al Dawha, 1984, p. 338.
- 42 H. Al Si'aidan, *Al Mawsou'a al Kuwaitiyya al Mukhtasara*, vol.I, Kuwait, 1970, p.344
- 43 I. Al Sukri, *Al Raqsat al Shabiyya al Kuwaitiyya*, Kuwait, 1978, pp. 163-173.
- 44 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1934 ed., vol . IV, article on Zar.
- 45 P. Constatinides, *Sickness and the Spirits. A Study of the Zaar Spirit Possession Cult in the Northern Sudan*, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1972, p. 32.
- 46 M. Ibn Daifalla, *Kitab al Tabaqat*, Y.F. Hasan ed.), Kahartoum, 1985, p. 140.
- 47 J. G. Kennedy, "Nubian Zar Ceremonies as Psychotherapies", in: *Human Organisation*, 26, 4, Winter, 1967, p. 186.
- 48 M. Onwuejeogwu, "The Cult of the Bori Spirits among the Hausa", in: M. Douglas et.al. (eds.): *Man in Africa*, London, 1969, p. 288.

- 49 L. Krader, "Shamanism: Theory and History in Buryat Society", in: V. Dioszegi and M. Hoppal (eds.) *Shamanism in Siberia*, Budapest, 1978, p. 195.
- 50 H.B. Barclay, *Burri al Lamab*, New York, 1964, p. 203. Also: I. Lewis, op.cit. p. 63.
- 51 C. Kessler, "Main Peteri", in: V. Crapanzano and V. Garrison (eds.), *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*, New York, 1977, p. 298.
- 52 B. de Zoete and W. Spies, *Dance and Drama in Bali*, London, 1952, p. 71.
- 53 In a conversation held with M. Al Tayeb, on 24 June 1986.
- 54 L. Espanak, *Dance Therapy*, Springfield, Ill., 1981, p. 22.
- 55 Introduction, by R. Firth, in: J. Beatie and J. Middleton (eds.), *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, London, 1969, p. XIII.
- 56 M. Eliade, op.cit., p. 307.
- 57 A. Kiev, "The Psycho-Therapeutic Value of Spirit Possession in Haiti", in: R. Prince (ed.), *Trance and Possession States*, Montreal, 1966, p. 144.
- 58 M.J. Merkovits, *Dahomey*, Vol . II, Evanston, 1967, p. 200.
- 59 T. Modarressi, "The Zar Cult in Iran", in: R. Prince (ed.), *Trance and Possession States*, Montreal, p. 203.
- 60 A Gell, "Magic, Perfume, Dream", in: I.M. Lewis (ed.), *Symbols and Sentiments*, London, 1977, p. 32.
- 61 R. Gilbert, *Music and Drama*, Chicago, 1985, p. 152.
- 62 T. Ba'shar, "The Arab Countries", in: *World History of Psychiatry*, J. Howell (ed.), London, 1975, p. 570.
- 63 W. Sargant, *The Mind Possessed*, London, 1973, p. 138.
- 64 R. Prince (ed.), *Trance and Possession States*, Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference R.M. Bucke Memorial Society, 1966, Montreal, p. 127.
- 65 V.J. Walter and W. Walter, "The Central Effects of Rhythmic Sensory Stimulation", in: *Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology*, vol. I (1949), p.82.
- 66 A. Neher, "A Physiological Explanation of Unusual Behavior in Ceremonies Involving Drums", in: *Human Biology*, vol 34, 1962, p. 158.
- 67 B. Lex, "The Neurobiology of Ritual Trance", in: E.G. D'Aquilli et.al. (eds.), *The Spectrum of Ritual*, New York, 1979, pp. 136-144.
- 68 N. Spanos, op.cit., p. 97.
- 69 S.F. Nadel, "A Study of Shamanism in the Nuba Mountains", in: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. I (1976), p. 35.
- 70 D. Langley and G. Langley, *Drama Therapy and Psychiatry*, London, 1983, pp. 12-23.
- 71 L. Espanak, op.cit., p.5.
- 72 I.M. Lewis, op.cit., p. 195.
- 73 J.G. Kennedy, op.cit., pp. 190-194.
- 74 A. Kleinmann and L. Sung, op.cit., p. 25.
- 75 V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York, 1982, p. 10.
- 76 R. Schechner, *Performative Circumstances from the Avant-Garde to Romillia*, Calcuta, 1983, p. 10.
- 77 K. Stanislawsky, *The Art of Theatre*, London, 1950, p. 127.

- ⁷⁸ J. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, London, p. 46.
- ⁷⁹ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, London, 1970, p. 68.
- ⁸⁰ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, London, 1964.
- ⁸¹ A. Al Hussaini, op.cit., p. 26.
- ⁸² Al Ra'I, "Al Zar wal Masrah", in: *Aafaq 'Arabiyya*, number 10, June 1978, p. 20.

AL-ZAR IN PERFORMANCE

A LATE 19TH CENTURY INTRODUCTION IN EGYPT

Eman KARMOUTY

Out of the heart of Africa, in a cascade of drums, music and magic chants, emerges al-Zar; a deep, dark, ancient ritual held for the invocation and placation of djinns and spirits that have chosen to possess the body of some unfortunate. As drums beat and incense burns, the ritual proceeds with incantations muttered by the Sheikh, a veritable witchdoctor and acknowledged exorcist, and revered and feared for his close ties with the djinnies, accompanied by his followers who chant and dance, endearing the djinn to leave the afflicted one. A circle of dancing people begins to form, while the deep aroma of incense fills the air forming a smoke screen. All participate in this communal spectacle of colour and sound; the patient, relatives, followers of the sheikh and others. As the cries and chants rise louder, with a chorus from followers and participants, the dance steps faster and wilder, excitement and horror fill the air as an animal is sacrificed and its blood dashed at the victim. An ancient form of catharsis, the blood offering forms a link between paganism, religion and drama.

In *Al Mawsouah al-Arabia* [*Arabic Encyclopaedia*], al Zar is described as folkloric rites, associated with special dances, incantations and loud drums. Its properties of driving away or calling upon evil spirits would point to its originating from Ethiopia, especially as the word 'Zar' is amhari.¹ Still practised in Ethiopia, some parts of Africa and the middle east, al-Zar is said to have its roots in Ethiopia, a derivation of pagan rituals and offerings, from whence it moved on to Somalia and Sudan. Ethiopians tell of how Eve gave birth to 30 children but hid the fifteen cleverest and most beautiful of them from God, who thereupon punished her by making them invisible creatures of the night, envious of their less gifted brethren of the day.²

Egypt, adjacent to Sudan, had immediate access to the rites and magic of Africa. The Zar was practiced extensively in Sudan, from whence it probably moved onto Egypt. Although some say that it has existed in Egypt since Ottoman times, or even before, most concede that it probably first appeared there during the late nineteenth century, merging with other practices as al-Zikr and evolving into three major forms: Saedi (Upper Egypt), Sudanese, and Abu'l Ghait. Although differing in some aspects, the general basics of the performance are the same.

There has been much dispute as to the original reference and meaning of the word “al-Zar”, some even asserting that it dates back to ancient Northeast African deities: Aw-Zaar (father Zaar), known as Osiris in Egypt, and Ay-Situ, mother Situ, known as Isis. Ay-Situ is still celebrated in a fertility rite and given offerings by pregnant women so that she will facilitate child-birth, but the ritual has now been incorporated into Islam, where it is called *kuror sitaat* and where Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, replaces Ay-Situ.³ Other explanations state that the word is derived from the Arabic word “Zar”, meaning “visited”. This last is largely agreed upon by most practitioners of the rite, since the concept of al-Zar basically indicates that a person has been visited or possessed by a spirit or djinn. This unwelcome guest is no ordinary djinn but one of al-asyaad, a djinn of high rank and immense power, who must be placated and not driven out as in Western Christian practices of exorcism. Therefore the ritual of al-Zar is held with all due pomp and dignity to appease him/her to avert displeasure and safeguard the release of the afflicted one.

Holding all who witness it enthralled by its mystery and force, al-Zar defies all who attempt to annihilate it. Used as a curative procedure, it enacts the ancient practices of bygone days, complete with witchdoctors, beckoning of djinnies and ethereal spirits. As such it is strongly opposed by the medical profession, which condemns it as mere colourful quackery. Overriding all medical, scholastic, and religious criticism, it is fervently adhered to by both Moslems and Copts, in spite of its pagan origins.

... every ritual performance, from a piece of primitive Australian magic to a Corpus Christi procession, ... is a traditionally enacted miracle ... Man needs miracles not because he is benighted through primitive stupidity [or] through the trickery of a priesthood ... but because he realizes at every stage of his development that the powers of his body and mind are limited.⁴

The theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss support this concept of man’s need for what his normal thought cannot accept or recognize but his more pathological thinking regards as feasible: “Through collective participation in shamanistic curing, a balance is established between these two complimentary situations. Normal thought cannot fathom the problem of illness, and so the group calls upon the neurotic to furnish a wealth of emotion heretofore lacking a focus.”⁵

Since it is frowned upon by Islamic and Christian authorities, who condemn it as a practice of demagoguery, it has been banned in Sudan and is prohibited in

Egypt, but still thrives though not as extensively as in the past. Even Ahmed Rushdi Saleh, a prominent writer of folklore practices and literature, dismisses al-Zar as “mere wild dances, as those carried out to induce prosperity, avoid harm ... proof of primitive folkloric practices”⁶, remnants of erotic, pagan dances and worship, carried out by the priestesses of Amun in ancient Egypt. In fact, the ancient Egyptian god referred to in connection with exorcism of spirits that have chosen to possess some unfortunate soul is Khonsu. “The hostile manifestation of an ‘effective spirit’(akh) as a ‘ghost’ is well attested in Egyptian writings it is significant that the possessing spirit, once dispelled by the protective image of Khonsu, is pacified by appropriate offerings and a celebration. The spirit is famished and in need of attention but not inherently evil.”⁷ In a popular episode a gifted sage found:

That the beautiful Princess Bent-Resht was possessed of a devil, against whose power he could do nothing.... When Khonsu came to the place where the Princess was, he worked upon her with the magical fluid of life, sa, and she was healed straightaway. And the devil who had possessed her cried out “ ... I will depart unto the place whence I came to gratify Thee, as for this purpose thou hast come. But before I go I beseech Thee to command that a festival be made ...”⁸

Thus the ritual of al-Zar would seem to date back to Pharaonic times along with the festivities that accompany it. Ritual is defined as “a repetitive social practice composed of a sequence of symbolic activities in the form of dance, song, speech, gestures, the manipulation of certain objects ...”⁹. The ritual of al-Zar begins with cleansing the room chosen thoroughly, placing grass mats on the floor, cushions along the walls and banners inscribed with religious slogans. The altar or seat is then placed in the middle of the room, where the participants can dance around it. Considered the shrine of the djinn, it is believed that it is where they congregate and watch the ritual. “It provides ritual magical symbols that are essential for al-Zar”.¹⁰ It is basically a high stool, on which a large tray is set, covered with a white cloth, piled high with nuts, popcorn, humus, henna and dried fruit, along with the patient’s jewellery. The stool is surrounded by candles that are lit and the ends of the cloth are then lifted up and gathered to form a lantern-like, conical or pyramid shape, on top of which is again placed bread and yoghurt. The overall structure would seem to constitute the shape of a pyramid, mosque, church, temple or a symbolic construction of the human psyche, reflecting a distorted freemason element, whose roots lie in the East.

Freemasonry conceives of the complete human being as having a body, a psyche/soul, a spirit and a contact with his Divine source ... it represents the psyche by the Temple of Solomon which it describes as a three-storey temple within which one can be conscious of the presence of Divinity ... the Ground Floor, the Middle Chamber and the Holy of Holies ...¹¹

Some suggest that Freemasonry does indeed date back to ancient Egypt, especially as the pyramid structure, so crucial in freemasonry, was an essential symbol of divinity for ancient Egyptians, placed atop all obelisks and shrines. "The masons saw their lodges as Egyptian temples and decorated them with all manner of Egyptian symbols ... the image of the pyramid and the eye, placed on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States and reproduced on the one-dollar bill".¹² This could infer that al-Zar did have some roots in Pharaonic times and also explain why the Egyptian Zar is usually set in a large room with an altar, in which the domestic living space is separated from the sacred space, as was the practice in ancient Egypt. In accordance with this, the leader of al-Zar could very well be the descendent or follower of the ancient priestesses who performed the ritual dances and uttered the magical incantations. However, the connection between Freemasonry and ancient Egypt reaches beyond mere symbols or structures to the concept within them, since the pyramid-like structure in al-Zar is actually a temple filled with offerings, laid at the shrine of the djinn or demon being pacified. The pyramid structure could also be symbolic of the ancient Egyptian concept of harmony evolving out of chaos:

The prototype for the true pyramid may well have been the focal point of the cult at Heliopolis. This was a squat standing stone, pointed at its apex, known as a benben ... it may well have symbolized the primordial mound that appeared out of the watery chaos of Nun, whence the sun rose for the first time and creation began. It was certainly believed to have been the first point hit by the rays of the rising sun.¹³

Wild Festivities

The ritual of al-Zar is based on creating a wild festivity that slowly builds to a climax of frenzy and excitement of all participants followed by a sudden, violent sacrifice and spattering of the offering's blood at the patient, bringing about a trance or faint with in the end the desired release from demonic possession and a successful catharsis. The leader of al-Zar is called a *Kodia* or *Sheikha*. She herself has experienced possession but has managed to come to terms with her djinn and

is therefore able to help others. As David Hicks observes, it is necessary that “a person wishing to become a shaman must have undergone some psychologically difficult experience or endured some physical hardship that has transformed his or her personality in some radical way.”¹⁴ Leadership is often passed from mother to daughter or through female members of the family, as men cannot inherit but may claim having been called to the practice. The inheritance also includes *al-ilba*, “the box”, which refers to the box, trunk or container in which the Kodia keeps her Zar tools of trade: rattles, charms, incense, secret potions, etc. No two boxes are the same, as every leader inherits her original box from the person with whom she trained, and from whom she acquires knowledge and experience. She is deeply respected for her occult knowledge and greatly feared for her ability to communicate with al-asyad, the djinn of elevated rank, beings of another dimension. She uses her extra-sensory powers to determine the condition of the patient who has been afflicted. Taking one of her or his personal belongings and placing it under her pillow, she performs her ablutions and prays before going to bed, for dreams are one of the methods of communicating with the djinn or asyaad and discerning the patient’s complaint, known as *kashf il attar* (revelation). She is also stage-manager and director, dictating the arrangement of all aspects of al-Zar; the altar or seat, chants, roles of each of the participants. It is thus clear that al-Zar is truly a dramatic performance in every sense of the word, complete with spectacle, music, dance, roles, audience and a live participation. The Kodia and her musicians occupy one side of the room, the audience soon to become participants filling the rest of the room. The spectacle about to unfold is in alignment with Artaud’s vision of theatre:

We are eliminating the stage and the auditorium and replacing them with a kind of single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will itself become the theatre of action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, because the spectator by being placed in the middle of the action, is enveloped by it and caught in its cross-fire. This envelopment is the result of the very shape of the room.¹⁵

After the stage and *mise-en-scène* have been set, the spectacle begins with a bridal procession: a medley of chants, choral song and dance. The patient is the ‘bride’, regardless of her age and most of the afflicted ones are women.¹⁶ The sheikha initiates the ritual with praise and prayer for the Prophet Mohammed, an Islamic appendage to ancient pagan practices: “*Allahuma saalli ala’l-Mostafa Nabi’l risalla w’bahr al-wafa.*” This is echoed by the chorus, her troupe, upon which she follows up with praise of other family members of the prophet. Against

a background of various types of drums and rattles, very ceremonial and crucial to the success of the Zar ritual, a rhythmical dance begins slowly and hypnotically to calm the affected person and to hypnotize and coax the demon out of the patient's body. This is accompanied by songs sung, each according to the "sayer" or djinn who has invaded the patient's body. Thus during ritual the "demons" that have taken possession of the 'bride', causing her sorrow or illness, are exorcized. The conflict within her is manifested through role playing as she acts both the part of the djinn who has possessed her, speaking in his voice, then reverting to her own character, displaying resistance. She may even dress in his customary garments, emulating his movements and gestures. This is carried out amidst a series of *tafkir*, moving the head to right and left to the accompaniment of vigorous swinging and swaying motions of the torso, to expel the djinn while tossing her head violently due to the belief that the last thing that the demons cling to is the hair. The enactment, role-playing, wild dancing and violent physical movements emphasize the dramatic aspect of al-Zar, even though there is no set text and it is all carried out through improvisation. It manifests Jerzy Grotowski's poor theatre based on "only two essentials ... the actor and the audience. Script, scenery, and other elements are considered less important—hence the term poor.... The actor—the core of his productions—was trained so that nearly every muscle of the body would be under complete control and could be moved at will."¹⁷

Music, dance, spectacle and role playing are then seen to be common characteristics of Zar rituals, as well as Moulids.¹⁸ Abu'l Ghait troupe members wear what is familiar to moulid audiences: long hair, white garments and a green tarboush (fez) and a green sash across their chest. Among their most important accessories are their white banners scripted with religious slogans in green, in association with Sidi Abu'l Ghait, the holy personage they pay homage to. It is thus clear that this troupe performs both rituals, those of al-Zar and moulids, donning the same costume, using the same musical instruments and displaying circling dervishes. The only difference is that it evokes the spirit of Sidi Abu'l Ghait to cure the patient, rather than any djinnie, as is the case with the two other troupes.

The Sudanese Zar troupe's costume also reveals its origin, as in their procession "the bride is preceded by two dark men, carrying sabres in their belts and rattles in their hands ... a man wearing a gold crown and gold attachments on his shoulders, wrists and knees ...".¹⁹ As for the Saedi (Upper Egypt) troupe, it is made up entirely of women, all dressed in black, as is the custom of Upper Egypt. The bride's or the patient's costume varies in each troupe. In the Saedi

troupe she wears a white dress which is smeared with the blood of the sacrifice; in Abu'l Ghait she wears a green dress, in accordance with their tradition, and as an indication that she has made peace with her djinn. In the Sudanese troupe she wears a pale blue dress. However, according to the role she plays, the particular role of the djinn, the bride's costume and movements may vary. If she is *yawara* she will smoke a cigarette and sprinkle the audience with cologne for she is a *bek*²⁰, but if she plays the role of the priest djinn, she will carry a cross.

“Every spectacle will contain a physical and objective element perceptible to all. Cries, groans, apparitions, surprises, theatrical tricks of all kinds, the magical beauty of costumes taken from certain ritual models, dazzling light effects, the incantatory beauty of voices ...”, writes Artaud in his First Manifesto for a future theatre.²¹ But by far the most intriguing factor in a spectacle like that of al-Zar is the dance which must begin gently slowly, back and forth²², in a kind of gentle bowing or nodding movement, then increase in intensity right and left, the drums and rattles drawing in more and more of the audience, all partaking in a communal dance till they are a huge indistinguishable mass of swaying bodies and chanting voices. The rhythm intensifies until the bride collapses into a trance. The drums and rattles are then used as protection for the dancers and the afflicted person. Lévi-Strauss succinctly describes the interconnectedness of the different parts of the spectacle: “This structure is a system of oppositions and correlations, integrating all the elements of a total situation, in which sorcerer, patient and audience, as well as representations and procedures, all play their parts. Furthermore the public must participate ... along with the patient and the sorcerer”.²³

The blood sacrifice is an essential constituent of al-Zar ritual and can be a bird or animal, being determined by the sayed or djinn in question. Thus Wara being a sultan or bek demands a pair of red doves, which are carried in turn by the Sheikha and the ‘bride’, placing them on her shoulders and head, after which the latter dances with them. When they are sacrificed, their blood is spattered or smeared on the bride's forehead, producing shock and causing her to fall in a faint, considered the cure for her state. This ceremony is deeply depreciated for its association with pagan practices and its offering to a demon spirit, while the blood sacrifice's establishment within Islam is ignored. Muslims sacrifice sheep annually in observance of Abraham's sacrificial offering in place of his son Ismael. The blood cult has a prominent place in Judaism as well, as the story in the Bible says:

For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats ... and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you" ... Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9: 19-22)

Indeed, along with the music, chants, commotion, wild dance, incantations and final trance, the spattering of blood at the finale of al-Zar ritual produces the desired cure and release from the djinn or demon. It is also strong proof of its being a cathartic, purging experience, not only for the patient but for the audience as well, who have been active participants of the ritual. Again the similarities with theatrical performances are striking "Cleansing, transfiguration, exaltation – these are objectives Artaud will accomplish through the medium of 'cruelty' ... at the end the spectator would feel relieved, as if awakening from a nightmare, the evil and terror cleansed away".²⁴

Al-Zar is an enriching and unique experience. It is a terrible, fearful ritual of ageless magic and bold, ancestral pagan worship amid an ear-splitting cascade of drums, pipes and tambourines; a truly dramatic performance and mesmerizing spectacle of unfathomable incantations, trances, role playing, swaying, dancing bodies, blood sacrifices, catharsis and communal festivity. Al-Zar is a dark, ancient ritual, bedecked with mystery, charm, violence and fear; it is a re-enactment of the past and bridge to invisible dimensions.

NOTES

- ¹, Mohammed Shafik Al-Ghorbal (ed.), *Al Mawsouah al-Arabia [The Arabic Encyclopaedia]*, Cairo, 1965, p. 961.
- ² Fatma Al-Masry, *Al-Zar: Dirasa Nafsiya w'Anthropologia [Al-Zar: A Psychological and Anthropological Study]*, Cairo, 1975, p. 18.
- ³ Waryaa. (2000) "Zar: Ancient Egypt and Egyptology". *EgyptSearchForums*. [Online]. <http://www.EgyptSearchForums.infopop.com> 29 May 2005.
- ⁴ Malinowski, pp. 300-301.
- ⁵ Claude Lévi- Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 181.
- ⁶ Ahmed Rushdi Saleh, *Al-Adeb Al-Shaabi [Folk Literature]*, Cairo, 2002, pp. 181-182.
- ⁷ William Kelly Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*. Trans. Robert K. Ritner et al. Cairo, 2003, p. 362.

- ⁸ E.A.Wallis Budge, *The Dwellers on the Nile: The Life, History, Religion and Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, New York, 1977, pp. 263-264.
- ⁹ Emily A. Schultz, and Robert H. Lavenda, *Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition*, California, 2001, p. 356.
- ¹⁰ Adel Al Alimy, *Al Zar w' Masrah Al Toukouse [Al-Zar and Ritual Theatre]*, Cairo, 1993, p. 136.
- ¹¹ W. Kirk MacNulty, *Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol*, London, 2001, p. 16.
- ¹² Kevin Jackson & Jonathan Stamp, *Building the Great Pyramid*, Toronto, 2003, p. 128.
- ¹³ Lorna Oakes, & Lucia Gahlin, *The Mysteries of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, p. 426.
- ¹⁴ David Hicks, *Ritual and Belief*, 2nd ed., Boston, 2002, p. 158.
- ¹⁵ Artaud, Antonin, *The Theatre of Cruelty: The First Manifesto*, reprinted in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*. Trans. Helen Weaver. New York, 1976, pp. 245-246.
- ¹⁶ Al Alimy, p. 82-86.
- ¹⁷ Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb, *Living Theater: A History*. New York, 1994, p. 450.
- ¹⁸ 'moulids' are celebrations for holy personages and are observed by Jews, Copts and Muslims. In all these, certain rites are observed and followed without failure, as the dancing, chanting and movement in circles or in parallel rows, lighting of candles, invocation, festivities at the end of the ritual manifested in large amounts of food offered for all, as well as the selling of trinkets and articles of symbolic significance, and the collecting of donations. Interestingly, the holy personages, are all addressed as al-sayed, or sidi, as e.g. Sidi Abu Al-Abbas, or Al- Sayed Al-Badawi; the djinnies, on the other hand, are referred to as al-asyad [pl. for sayed or sidi], see: Arafa Abdou.Aly, *Mawalid Masr Al-Mahrousa. [Moulids of Egypt Al Mahrousa]*, Al-Haram, 1995.
- ¹⁹ Al Alimy, p. 130.
- ²⁰ A Turkish and Egyptian title used prior to the 1952 Egyptian Revolution.
- ²¹ Artaud, p. 249.
- ²² Remarkably similar to that performed by Jews in prayer, moving their heads along with their torso down and up, back and forth in a nodding, bowing repetitive movement.
- ²³ Lévi-Strauss, p. 182.
- ²⁴ Albert Bermeld, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*, New York, 1977, p. 22.

WAZA RITUALS AS CRUCIAL SOCIAL PRACTICES

Imtithal EL TAYIB ABDEL RAHMAN

Sudan is an African country with a varied ethnic population that speaks many languages and dialects and with a number of different religions. Its culture is a complex, or a hybrid, of African and Arabic influences. In this article I am going to take one of the Sudan's regions, the Blue Nile State and its Al Barta tribe as an example of one of Sudan's many local cultures. The Blue Nile State is considered as one of the richest regions in Sudan of folkloric genres, in particular in its music which is closely related to the social life and traditions of its inhabitants.

When discussing the music of the Blue Nile State, the musical instrument locally known as "Waza" cannot remain unmentioned. It is a traditional instrument, popular among the Al Barta tribe which is roughly located between 34-36 degrees east and 10-12 degrees south. The area is on the edge of the Ethiopian mountains surrounded by the Fazoqolly mountains in the north, the Blue Nile in the east, Dinka tribes in the west (especially the Sinnar) and the Yabos Mountains in the south. From the north to the south run the series of Al-Barta mountains that take their name from the tribes who live along them. The most famous tribes are the Agaro, the Kushankuro and the Al Barta, one of the largest and strongest tribes. They form the majority of the population in the district of South Funq. All these tribes speak a common language, the Al Barta dialect. It is largely an agricultural area thanks to its rainfall and fertile land. One of the crops is called "Garao" or gourd (a kind of pumpkin), other crops grown there are durra and pearl millet.

Apart from being a musical instrument, Waza is also a traditional dancing ritual that is connected with social events and the environment, and its popularity does not only come from the connection with the musical instrument, but also from its relation with the ancient religion with its customs and traditions. All smaller minorities around the Al Barta love Waza and practice it during their social ceremonies. Although the Al Barta are Muslims, they still practice the Waza customs and traditions that have much to do with casting fire. The ritual with its distinguished activities and vigor attracts large audiences and gets an enormous artistic appreciation.

Waza is a generic name for a group of similar instruments, and one of the famous names for Waza is "zumbara", after the particular kind of single reed of

the instrument. A Waza – the instrument - is manufactured from “bukhas” or gourds which are grown locally. They have rectangular shapes and vary in length from two to sometimes three feet. Its design has special features and the makers prefer gourd produced the previous year rather than new ones because they get hard over time and are easier to cut and manufacture and produce a better tone. New gourds are not normally used, except when last year’s harvest was not so good. Al Barta are used to storing the year’s harvest until to the following winter. Before starting, the maker brings a good old instrument with a perfect tone, puts it in front of him and then starts manufacturing the new one with the same specifications. When this one is finished he starts making the other instruments. Each instrument consists of three pieces from gourd, the middle piece is put in first and then the lower piece that has the horn and at last the upper piece with the whistle. These pieces are fixed by small parts from grace, harpene as pins to connect them. The spaces between the two halves are filled with bee’s wax to prevent air leaking out. These pieces are fixed on the outside with four slices of gana. And so we have long horn with two sides, one small side to whisper in that gradually widens, with one foot diameter for the biggest one and two inches for the smallest one.

The Waza band consists of thirteen instruments in total, with an extra wooden horn dressed with a cow’s tail a half feet in length which is called bobong (“local pipe”). There is also a stick man, or “Kudia”, who stands in the circle cheering people on to share in the dancing (and carries a stick, hence this name). The total number is fifteen persons, not including the dancers.

Additional rhythm-instruments are made of six sticks, called “baly”, that are in the shape of an 8 and are put on the right shoulder being hit according to the song rhythm. There is also a “kashkosk” that is made of a gourd with a short neck to hold in the hands, filled with small stones, cowpeas or dried durra. The thirteen main instruments arranged from the biggest to the smallest are called: Waza dani, Shindin dani, Dool, Say sako, Agondu, Shingir Bala, Babi Bala, Waza moshang, Waza Allo, Adodo Bala, Mosh Khar, Dool Bala.

The Waza ritual connected with these instruments is practiced during all seasons except during Autumn when the Waza are given to the Sheikh to be stored in his house. They hang with a rope from the ceiling of the room in order to prevent them being damaged by termites. The position of the Waza Sheikh (“babaroti”) is given to a member of a family that is famous for the manufacturing and playing Waza. It is forbidden to own any Waza instrument without permission from the Sheikh who is the only supervisor of its manufacturing and is responsible for their maintenance.

At the end of Autumn, when begging for a good harvest at the next season takes place, the Waza ceremony starts with preparing “mareesa”, the local wine. Next is the slaughter of sheep, chicken and the preparation of durra. After having a drink from the mareesa the Waza Sheikh goes into the room where the Waza are hanging and starts bringing down the instruments.

The rituals start at sunset, when the Sheikh brings out the instruments, and the slaughtered sheep are prepared. After the meal and a short conversation they start playing, but not before they chew the durra and throw it on instruments. The festival is now ready to begin. I describe here one way of celebrating the Waza ritual. There may be different practices of other tribes, according to variations in their traditions, customs and social values.

Men and women are sharing in the dancing, old and young take part, but only men play the music and control the rhythm while the women do the singing and dancing. The music is played in a certain order whereby the Waza instruments are divided in five groups: the first group is formed by the Waza dani, shingir bala and the mosha khar, the second by the dool, the Waza moshang and dool bala, the third group by the say sako and the Waza allo, the fourth by the agondu and the adodo bala and the final group by shindir dani and babi bala. At the beginning the band must play three holy songs, in the order Bagro – SoSi – Yoyo.

The first song, Bagro, tells about the desire and longing for the homeland and the Bagro mountain, with its beautiful scenery of trees and water.

The second song, SoSi, is about a lazy man who does not work in Autumn, so that he has to work to provide food for himself (um Joko).

The third song, Yoyo, tells about the fear for a troubled life, especially in the beginning when one hears a predatory animal moving about. After these songs are finished, young girls start singing their songs and dancing which goes on until the end of the ceremony. These young girls’ songs do not exceed two lines and are as follows: “Musa, oh, musa, stereo, stero, you come to us from faraway, Hello, salaam to you.” Most Waza songs are about issues such as love and horsemanship.

One of the most crucial questions in this context is what would happen when the Al Barta tribe were to practice Waza during the autumn or, even worse, would not be practicing it at all? What, in other words, is the function of the ritual in their society. They, first of all, believe that their society would collapse and the

land will face draught so that there will be no harvest at all. The people would moreover lose the connection with their roots and ultimately their social values will disappear.

Which then are the the social values that are potentially hidden in the practicing of the Waza ritual? The social practice of the Waza ritual is comparable of practicing equality and democracy. It creates a unity between the people in society and differences between classes vanish. The ritual also stimulates social activities, sanctifies labour morale, and discards all sorts of laziness; all this is expressed in the songs that follow the rituals. Members of the society express their feelings, their desire for, and the return to their homeland and an attachment to their roots. The Waza ritual is considered to support a form of friendship, it ties relationships and creates intimacy between members of the society, expressed in dancing and accompanied by music and singing. And finally, the dancing in the Waza ritual is seen as a physical exercise, so that people remain fit to carry the burden of the work in agriculture.

THEATRE IN THE SUDAN: From Pre-islamic Ritual and Islamic Sufi Ritual until Modern Drama and a National Theatre

Khalid AL-MUBARAK

R.A.Gibb's succinct observation that Arabic theatre was "among the most neglected studies of Oriental literature"¹ draws from the present writer the thesis that within this field Sudanese drama is the most neglected aspect. So, this article eindnoot 2 examines the most neglected facet of a most neglected field. It will endeavour to cover the following scope:

- a. pre-islamic theatrical rituals, mainly ancient Nubian ritual, Shilluk rituals and the Zar (the last two are still practised in the Sudan).
- b. Islamic (sufi) rituals and the Darfur court jester.
- c. The beginnings of modern drama in 1880. Theatrical activities in Port Sudan 1916-1924.
- d. Theatre and nationalism 1921-1937.
- e. Bakht al-Ruda Teachers' Training Institute, 1934.

Thus the focus of what follows will move from the 7th century B.C. to the period just before the outbreak of the Second World War. As this of course is rather a long historical period, I can sometimes only give a summary in one page or less of papers which I have written earlier.

Pre-Islamic Rituals

Ancient Nubian Rituals

The most interesting rituals in ancient Sudanese history are to be found in the annals of Nubian Kings. In the year 662 BC. Tanut Amun, the nephew of Thaharqa - Nubian King of both his own country and Egypt - heard of the death of his uncle. According to Nubian customs, Tanut Amun, the son of Thaharqa's sister, was heir to the throne. Aware of this, Tanut Amun had a dream. He saw "two serpents, one on his right, and the other on his left. His majesty woke and he did not find them. His majesty said: 'For what purpose hath this dream happened to me.' And they spake unto him, saying: 'the land of the south is

(already) thine, conquer thou the land of the North’.”² Seeking to realize the dream, as interpreted by the priests, Tanut Amun had to perform many rituals:

Thereupon he left Egypt and went to Napata, he entered the Temple of Amen of the Holy Mountain, and he looked upon the face of the God, who acknowledged him to be King, He then made a great festival in honour of Amun, who was taken out from his shrine and carried in solemn procession by the priests, and endowed the sanctuary with 36 bulls (oxen), 40 vessels of beer and 100 shu.³

Tanut-Amen in effect tried to re-enact his dream. He fought his way into Egypt hoping to rule it in the way his uncle did and his dream had predicted. In fact he failed because the Assyrians defeated him on Egyptian soil. Apart from the idea of re-enactment, the way the statue of the god Amun was carried in solemn procession by the priests, and the sacrifices which followed present a very theatrical ritual.

Another example of a theatrical ceremony is the election of King Aspelta at the end of the 7th century BC. The King of Nubia was considered to be the son of the God Amun-Ra. His election was carried out in an example of ancient Sudanese democracy. Six delegates from the army, six men nominated by the chancellor, six nominated by the royal household and six by the keeper of the archives, gathered together in order to select a young and vigorous ruler. “The candidates eligible for election were introduced into the presence of the God, but Amen-Ra rejected them all. Subsequently Aspelta ‘the royal brother’ was brought by the priests before the God, and Amun-Ra declared that he should be their King.”⁴

We have here a situation in which twenty-four dignitaries are brought together, the statue of the god is then brought, and the pretenders to the throne ushered in, presumably by the priests who also give an interpretation of the God’s response. The young man rejected by the God is led away and the following one led in. This theatricality is re-enforced when we scrutinize ancient Nubian engravings. Proper groupings are always maintained, with the god or the King high up and those petitioning proportionately low and small in size.⁵ Thus, theatricality was an in-built constituent of ancient Sudanese rituals and representation.

Shilluk rituals

What makes the investiture of the Reth of the Shilluk tribe of Southern Sudan most fascinating is not the breath-taking theatricality of rituals, but rather the striking similarities that can be found between these rituals and those of the ancient Nubians and Egyptians.

Since I have already written a paper on this ritual⁶, it should suffice here to quote the passage which describes the ritual in some detail. E.E. Evans-Pritchard wrote:

I will recount briefly the chief phases by which the Kingship envelops the King-elect. The effigy of Nyikang, which is kept in the principal shrines, at Akurwa in the most northerly district of Shillukland, is brought out by his priest, to whom the King-elect has to make considerable gifts for their service in this matter, and together with the effigy of his son Dak is taken to beat the northern bounds of the Kingdom and then southwards, supported by an army of the north to fight the King-elect for possession of the capital. As the effigies pass through each district the people gather to pay their respect to Nyikang and to escort him to the next district, for it appears that during the interregnum the effigy is believed to contain the spirit of Nyikang, to be Nyikang in fact.

Nyikang's army and the army of the King-elect meet. In the words of Howell and Thompson, this meeting in battle of the two armies on the Arepejur, the boundary between north and south

symbolizes the ceremonial division of the country into two moieties. The balance between them is strongly emphasized at all points. The army of the King-elect is defeated and he is captured by Nyikang and taken by him to the capital. The Kinship captures the King. There Nyikang is placed on the royal stool. After a while he is taken off it and the King-elect sits on it in his stead and the spirit of Nyikang enter into him, causing him to tremble, and he becomes King, that is he becomes possessed by Nyikang. The concluding ritual acts follow. The new King has married a girl, traditionally provided by a certain clan, and this girl has an important role in the ceremonies of investiture. After the King's enthronement Nyikang seizes the girl and refuses to surrender her to the King on the ground that she was married with cattle from the royal herd, which is Nyikang's herd, and is therefore Nyikang's wife. On this issue Nyikang and the King summon their supporters to a second mock battle, in which the King

captures the girl. Nyikang thereupon pays the King a visit to make his peace with him. On the following morning the King receives the homage and exhortations of the chiefs and he undertakes to be a good King. Nyikang does not again contest the King's authority and some weeks later the effigies are sent back to the shrine at Akurwa.⁷

Diodorus of Sicily provides a description of an ancient Ethiopian (Nubian) ritual which highlights the similarity with the Shilluk ritual outlined above:

As for the customs of the Ethiopians, not a few of them are thought to differ greatly from those of the rest of mankind, this being especially true of those which concern the selection of their Kings. The priests, for instance, first choose out the noblest men from their own number, and whichever one of this group the God may select, as he is borne about in a procession in accordance with a certain practice of theirs, him the multitude take for their King; and straight away it both worships and honours him like a God, believing that the sovereignty has been entrusted to him by Divine Providence.⁸

Even more striking is the similarity with the description provided by Herodotus of an ancient Egyptian ritual (not connected directly with investiture):

At Papremis besides the sacrifices and other rites which are performed there as elsewhere, the following custom is observed. When the sun is getting low a few only of the priests continue being occupied about the image of the God, while the greater number, armed with wooden clubs, take their station at the portal of the temple. Opposite to them is drawn up a body of men, in number above a thousand, armed, like the others, with clubs, consisting of persons engaged in the performance of their vows. The image of the God, which is kept in a small wooden shrine covered with plates of gold, is conveyed from the temple into a second sacred building the day before the festival begins. The few priests still in attendance upon the image place it, together with the shrine containing it, on a four-wheeled car and begin to drag it along; the others, stationed at the gateway of the temple, oppose its admission. Then the votaries come forward to espouse the quarrel of the God, and set upon the opponents who are sure to offer resistance. A sharp fight with clubs ensues in which heads are commonly broken on both sides.

It is not surprising that such a passage⁹ (and other evidence) has led H. Frankfort to state that the Shilluk “retain many traits recalling Egyptian usages and beliefs.”¹⁰

The Zar

Like the Shilluk rituals, the Zar has also provided me with material for both a play and a paper (see footnote¹¹.) I will only quote the description of the ritual: “The highlight of the Zar ritual is the impersonation, when a participant goes into a trance. She (or he) then asks for the appropriate costume. The Sheikh or Sheikha helps the participant put on the new clothes. The participant speaks and acts like the character whose role she or he is ‘playing’. The Zar, originally Ethiopian, is also known (in varying versions) in Egypt, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other countries. Through West Africa it was probably transferred to the Caribbean in the form of voodoo.

Sufi Ritual

In his *Tabaqat*, Wad Dayfallah gives a description of the method used by Sheikh Tagul Din Al-Bihari to test the sincerity of his would-be disciples. Al-Bihari, who had come from Baghdad in the sixteenth century to spread the Quadiriyya Sufi order (founded by Sheikh Abdul Quadir al-Jaylani), invited all who had the desire to enter the order to a certain place:

People flocked to him asking to be initiated as Sufis. He forthwith erected a closet wherein he hid some rams. He then declared: “I initiate, show the way, and slay! Those who die do so as good believers.” Most people were scared. They dispersed. Mohamed son of Abdul Sadiq was one of those who stayed. He was young. He took off his shirt, performed his ablution and prayed two *rakaas*. The Sheikh led him inside and killed one of the rams. Blood trickled out and people thought that it was Mohamed’s. Then Sheikh Ban Naga, who was an old man, stepped forward. He said: “I am an old ox who has had his fair share of life. I have chosen to meet my god.” He likewise prayed two *rakaas* before entering. Another ram was slain inside and blood poured out for the people to see. The Sheikh then addressed the people saying: “Come on in! Stop envying one another. Stop being misers.” Nobody came forward. Then, the two men emerged safe and sound. The Sheikh told each one of them to eat his ram’s meat, inside which he hid a secret. He also prophesied: “These two will lead the land to prosperity.”¹²

The initiation rites themselves are highly dramatic. The Sheikh asks his disciples to sit opposite him, knees touching knees. He then repeats words and mimes hand movements. The ceremony ends with him drinking water blessed by the Sheikh. He then wears the colourful Sufi costume.

It is not surprising that the Quadiriyah is the most widely spread Sufi order among Muslim Sudanese until now.

The Court Jester in Darfur

A North African traveller who visited Darfur in 1803 gave a vivid description of men known as *muchis*. They were more than court jesters because they served the sultan as executioners as well. Here is the description of these men who had a special 'fancy' dress:

If the sultan is in his reception hall, two or three Muchis would stand by him. If he went out hunting or travelled, four or five accompanied him, dancing and singing in front of him, or saying funny things which make anybody laugh. They imitated the barking of dogs and purring of cats.

The Muchis have no fear of the Sultan's might and show strange daring towards him and other members of his court. They keep nothing secret from the Sultan. If they hear something terrible they report it, mentioning the person regardless of his status. They are never afraid of blame. If the Sultan wanted to declare any order he ordered the Muchis to do so and they went out shouting the information after sunset until everybody knew. The Muchis belong to the poorest people in Darfur, because they have no skill and depend upon gifts from princes. Princes fear them and are generous with them because they keep no secrets. If someone paid them, they praised him and filled the land with the news of his generosity. If someone did not give them anything they abused him and spread invective against him.¹³

The Beginnings of Modern Drama, 1880

School Theatre

Mukhtar Agouba was the first to spot the influence of the *maqama* on school theatre in the Sudan.¹⁴ The *maqama* is a narration in both rhymed prose and poetry; it comes in several sequels united by one narrator and one protagonist.

The *maqama* as a genre was begun by Badi Azzaman al-Hamadani (398/1007/8)¹⁵ and is the forerunner of both the short story and the play in Arabic. The *maqama* survived until the nineteenth century, and the last was written by Nassif al-Yazgi who died in 1871.¹⁶ The original Hamadani *maqamas* were intended as a novel way to teach young men Arabic style and composition.¹⁷ What happened in the Khartoum school was that two pupils presented a dramatized version of two *maqamas* by al-Harriri as part of their examination in Arabic. They were supervised by Ustadh Mohamed al-Gidawi (an Egyptian), the school's headmaster. This event, significant as it was, did not bear any fruit; because the Mahdist Revolution erupted one year later in 1881 and the Khartoum school was not spared after the fall of Khartoum in 1885. Many teachers and the headmaster (who succeeded the drama lover) were killed.¹⁸

The next most significant landmark is also provided by school theatre. It was a play written and directed by an Egyptian *mamur* for his pupils. The *mamur* wrote the play in Sudanese Arabic and it was performed in al-Giteina in 1909.¹⁹ The energetic and imaginative *mamur*, Abdul Quadir Mukhtar, later published the text, complete with photographs of the actual performance. One of those who took part in the production (he played the role of Muhammad, a pupil) told me that the *mamur* invited the local *marisa* (Sudanese beer) brewer and her regular customer to Sagur to play their real-life roles on the school's stage, and they both appeared.²⁰ The theme of the play was the necessity of encouraging education and desisting from *marisa* drinking and quarrels. The significance of the play is underlined by the fact that it was mentioned in the annual "State of the Colony" Intelligence report. During the performance, women had separate quarters and all the proceeds went to the village mosque.

We can thus argue that Nakatut, the *marisa* brewer in al-Giteina, was the first Sudanese woman to appear on a stage.

School theatre's tradition is further consolidated by what the late Abdul Rahman Ali Taha told me about performances in Rufaa in 1912, encouraged by Sheikh Babiker Badri.²¹ In his own memoirs, Sheikh Babir states that there was a presentation of a *riwaya* during the annual celebration of memory of the birth of Prophet Muhammad in 1903.²²

In Khartoum, plays were performed by both Arab and European communities after the reconquest of the Sudan in 1898. Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese communities performed plays after 1905 while British and Greek performances were also significant, mainly at the Gordon Memorial College.²³ Sudanese

contacts with these two currents was a good preparation for purely Sudanese productions.

Port Sudan

The most significant step in the development of pure Sudanese productions took place in Port Sudan where a theatrical company was formed in 1916 in which both Sudanese and Egyptians took part. The president of that company was an Egyptian, but the secretary was Sudanese, as were many members. The secretary, who had links with the White Flag Association, left us full records about the activities of this amateur company.²⁴ The group presented several plays and came to an end in 1924 when the British cracked down on the White Flag-led army mutiny and on the widespread violent demonstrations. The remarkable thing about *Gamyiat Attamthiel al-Adabi al-Khairiyah* of Port Sudan is that some of the plays were performed in order to raise money for building a mosque and a church (some of the Egyptian members were Copts).²⁵

Theatre and Nationalism

In Omdurman (across the river from Khartoum) the fusion between those advocating an end to colonial rule and those interested in the art of theatre was complete. They were, more often than not, the same people. This is demonstrated by what Hassan Nagiela wrote about a performance of *Saladin*, a play written by the Lebanese pioneer Nagib al-Haddad in 1893 and performed all over the Arabic-speaking world. The performance in question took place at the Graduates' Club in Omdurman on 27 October 1921. "Behind the scenes we saw Ali Abdul Latif, the officer, busily preparing the actors' costumes. Our brothers told us that he supervised the costumes and brought the swords which the play required."²⁶ This was the same Ali Abdul Latif who led the White Flag's serious challenge to colonial rule three years later. The significance of the name *Saladin* need not to be emphasized.

The Emergence of Sudanese Playwrights

Until the 1920s, theatrical activities relied wholly on Lebanese or Egyptian plays, written in classical Arabic, or on adaptations of English plays (also in classical Arabic) or English plays in English mainly at the Gordon Memorial College. The suppression of the 1924 revolution was predictably followed by a lull in theatrical activity, followed in the 1930s by the most significant link in the chain

of drama in the Sudan, namely, the emergence of Sudanese playwrights. Four playwrights burst onto the scene almost simultaneously: Khalid Abdul Rahman (known as Aburrous), Ibrahim al-Abbadi, Sayyid Abdul Aziz and al-Khalifa Yusuf al-Hassan. All four were poets, writing in colloquial Arabic. Their songs are to this day regularly broadcast by Radio Omdurman. Of the four, two stand head and shoulders above the others: Khalid Aburrous and Ibrahim al-Abbadi who died in July 1981.

Khalid Abdul Rahman (Aburrous)

Khalid Aburrous, approaching his 80th birthday and still active, wrote and acted in several plays. His claim to pioneering status rests on two plays: *Masra Tagoug* and *Kharab Souba*. Both were based on myth and on history. *Kharab Souba* (The Destruction of Souba, from 1937) deals with the fall in 1504 of the last Christian kingdom in what today is the Sudan. It looks at the interplay of love and intrigue which preceded the end of the Alowa Kingdom and led to the establishment of the Sennar Islamic Kingdom.

What concerns us, within the limited scope of this article, is Khalid's first play, entitled *Masra Tagoug* (The death of Tagoug), because it was also the first mature play by a Sudanese citizen. It was first performed in 1933 at the Graduates' Club in Omdurman when Khalid was still a student²⁷. The playwright's name was not made known - only the word *watani* (a national) was used to describe its author. The play is a dramatization of a "faction" about the love between Tagoug, the most beautiful girl of the Humran tribe on the Red Sea coast and her cousin al-Muhallag. Khalid Aburrous heard the story from his grandmother²⁸, but also many travellers and scholars interested in oral tradition have registered the story in several languages. One of them wrote the following summary of events after the poet al-Muhallag was already married to his beloved Tagoug:

The story tells that shortly after the marriage, Muhallag asked her to strip herself naked and walk before him in her unveiled beauty. Such a thing appears shameful to the strictly conventional Arab and so Tagoug refused. He importuned her again and again, so at length she said that she would if afterwards he would promise her, on his oath, to do her one favour. This he promised. She stripped herself and then told him that the favour was to be an immediate divorce.²⁹

Al-Muhallag had to keep his word; but eventually died of a broken heart. As he was the best fighter in the tribe, his death rekindled the hatred of old enemies who were only kept at bay by his prowess. They attacked, won and took Tagoug as a hostage. They soon began to fight among themselves over Tagoug. An old and wise man killed Tagoug in order to save the tribe from strife.

The play follows the main line of the popular story very closely, and includes some of the original poetry of al-Muhallag. The dialogue is crisp and well-written. Here is how Tagoug insists that al-Muhallag tells her about the wish he so desires, but is hesitant to put into words:

M: What I request is - no, I won't say

T: Be a man and tell me.

Love has brought us together as man and wife.

How come you insist on keeping your troubles secret from me. State your request.

M: I fear

T: Fear can only harm you³⁰

When he finally tells her, she does not see the point and tells him that she did not deny him love. He replies: "I am not denied your love; but I still want you."³¹ He wants something 'beyond sex'; but Tagoug is not a work of art for him to appreciate. She considers his request degrading and their whole world together collapses. By insisting on him being frank and expressing his wishes she is unwittingly paving the way for his, and ultimately her own undoing.

The play was not only significant because it was the first, but because of a combination of factors. It was written in the colloquial Arabic language of the central Sudan which was a unifying element for the different tribes. The melting pot of this colloquial Arabic was Omdurman, where the Khalifa Abdullahi brought thousands of his followers from all over the country after the fall of Khartoum and the Mahdi's death in 1885. All have contributed to the creation of a commonly understood dialect. The 'detribalized' central Sudanese Arabic was and still is a vehicle of national unity. It should be remembered in this connection that the British administrators supported and tried to consolidate tribalism and that detribalisation was the number one goal of the anti-colonialists.³² The choice of Sudanese Arabic also signified the existence of a 'Sudanese' identity, mainly Arab and Islamic but with its own intrinsic characteristics drawn from the fusion of many strands including the Arabic-Islamic as well as the Black African. Successive Egyptian khedives, kings and pashas insisted until the 1950s that the

Sudan was a mere extension of Egypt, with no separate identity. The choice of a Sudanese theme bears witness to the same tendency. It shows that Arab settlers in the Sudan were no longer drawing their cultural nourishment solely from the 'countries of origin' but from roots in their new environment; new local roots worthy of exploration and respect. To sever the umbilical cord is necessary for both mother and child at a certain point. It does not necessarily make the child deny his mother. Khalid Aburrous thus deserves a place of honour in the history of Sudanese drama.

Ibrahim al-Abbadi (1890-1981)

The second, and arguably more interesting playwright, was Ibrahim al-Abbadi. His love songs are among the best ever written in the Sudan. He composed poetry ostensibly effortlessly and on the spur of the moment. In the 1920s, he wrote several short plays, or rather theatrical lampoons in Kosti and Tandalti, some of which were set in brothels with prostitutes and pimps as the main characters. His main aim was to criticise the hypocrisy of those who pretended to be religious but frequented brothels discreetly.³³ In 1924/25 al-Abbadi was the poet of the revolution during which time he wrote a number of anonymous songs and was, at least once, identified and wanted by the colonial police.³⁴

In 1937 al-Abbadi wrote *al-Mak Nimir* (King Tiger). The play is about the triumph of love against a backdrop of intertribal alliances and balance of power. Taha from the Batahin tribe is in love with and betrothed to Rayyah also from the Batahin. The brother of the leader of the neighbouring tribe of the Shukriyyah (more powerful and greater in number) asks for Rayyah's hand in marriage. A conflict arises between the desire to forge an alliance with a powerful neighbour and the decent obligation to respect Rayyah's and Taha's love. The solution suggested by Taha is for him and Rayyah to run away. Thus, Taha would get his girl and his tribe - the Batahin - would be spared the wrath of the Shukriyyah. So Taha and Rayyah run away and head for the kingdom of al-Mak Nimir, the venerable leader of the numerous and military strong Jaaliyyin tribe. Before they reach their sanctuary, they are overtaken by the Shukriyyah who offer Taha safety if he abandons his beloved Rayyah. He refuses. A duel follows in which the young and agile Taha - fighting in front of his beloved and for her - unexpectedly turns the tables on the more experienced warrior of the Shukriyyah and mortally wounds him. The couple then arrive at Shendi and ask for the protection of al-Mak Nimir. This creates a dangerous situation. One cannot kill the brother of the Sheikh of the Shukriyyah and get away with it. Equally valid is the fact that al-Mak Nimir cannot surrender anybody who asks for his protection, even if this

may lead to war with the Shukriyyah, who are his allies and from which tribe his wife stems. A confrontation is thus brought about between two superpowers - in tribal terms - because of Rayyah's and Taha's love. War seems inevitable and particularly horrifying because the forces are equal: the type of situation in which no winner can emerge. Through the efforts of peace-lovers, the leader of the Shukriyyah decides to accept the mediation of a Jaali who goes to him in person and, in an act of statesmanship and magnanimity, he pardons Taha and averts war.

In his introduction to the text of the play, the playwright and academic Abdullah Ali Ibrahim traced and verified al-Abbadi's historical sources. The effort confirmed the validity of the main lines of al-Abbadi's oral tradition. The confrontation did take place historically in 1818, between the Jaaliyyin and Shukriyyah over the former's protection of the Batahani.³⁵ The only major addition is the love story. This also says a great deal about the validity and value of our oral traditions of which al-Abbadi is a representative, because this is a case in which it is assessed against the weight of modern scholarship and proven right. As a work of art, *al-Mak Nimir* cannot be too highly praised. In 1968, blinded by enthusiasm, I claimed that al-Abbadi's advocacy of detribalisation was beside the point for our generation because the real and new conflict in the Sudan was a class conflict. That statement missed the point. Tribalism is alive and well as witnessed by the way in which regional governments were recently constituted and tribal-based strife between the Southern Sudanese still exist today. There are of course class differences in the Sudan; and this play, if properly appreciated, applies to them as well because its deeper theme is the peaceful settlement of disputes through reconciliation. It can, in this light, lend itself to both a pan-Arab or pan-African as well as an international interpretation. I can well imagine a production presenting the play as the two superpowers in today's world, about to go to war over the protection of a small state offered by one of them.

Al-Abbadi chose for his story a period of history in which the Sudanese were still free from foreign domination which began in 1820/21. King Tiger, brought alive on the stage, was indeed the last king of the Jaaliyyin. So writing in 1937 under colonial rule, the playwright evokes the memory of a proud and free king who never put down his arms and chose to flee to Eritrea rather than surrender. 1937, the year of the first production of the play, was also the year in which the Graduates' Congress was being formed. It was established in 1938, and was the focal point for anti-colonial activities and the seed-bed of political parties. Its clarion call was, like that of the play, the advocacy of detribalisation. Its 'anthem', written by Khidir Hamad (an active member of the drama group and later a member of the Sovereignty Council) says:

Abandon North and South divisions
 That's the source of calamities
 Let's unite for a high jump
 Plant the homeland's love in all hearts
 Let them unite in its love
 Eastern or Western or Southern hearts...
 May Allah bless this land
 Which relies on its Nile³⁶

One of the main aims of the Graduates' Congress was formulated as "trying to wipe out tribal allegiances and put an end to the insistence of tribes to foster tribal unity as a separate entity from other tribes, a course of action which is bound to lead to tearing the Nation's wholeness and destroying its very existence. The Congress strives to make the word 'Sudanese' a weapon that erases tribal divisions and an instrument for removing the obstacles between the different regions of one and the same country."³⁷ It is relevant in this context to remember that the British colonial administration introduced laws in 1922 which enabled it to declare some provinces as 'closed areas' to which even Sudanese citizens could not travel freely.³⁸

In such a political background it is easy to see that the play, in handling tribalization, was ahead of the Graduates' Congress's call and right at the heart of the major bone of contention in the Sudan.

From an artistic point of view, the play is likewise significant. It resorted to the '*doubeit*', the Sudanese poetry which was and still is used in a form of non-dramatic 'dialogue' between competing poets, each taking up the rhyme of the last line delivered by his colleague and reciting more lines. The loser is the one who fails to provide the correct line at any point. Al-Abbadi thus resorted to a local medium with embryonic dramatic potential. Furthermore, he used the unifying central Sudanese Arabic and intentionally steered clear of tribal accents for characters coming from different tribes. This is one occasion in which an otherwise indefensible dramatic practice seems purposeful and logical. The style reflects the aim - a detribalized expression for a play that advocates the ending of tribalism.

Another vital factor is the reliance on tribal maxims and aphorisms, either taken from proverbs, sayings or popular wisdom, or coined by the poet. Some examples are given here. Taha talks to his bride-to-be about the postponement of their marriage because of her father's death. He says: "Grief has never brought

back a dead person from his grave". In her reply Rayyah says: "One is conditioned by the way one is brought up."³⁹ All scenes, without exception, are full of this popular wisdom. My favourite is the words uttered by Taha when Abdallah, an old man trying to protect the small tribes' existence, argues that the solution could be for Taha to relinquish his already determined understanding to marry his cousin Rayyah. The brother of the leader of the powerful Shukriyyah will then marry her and Taha's tribe will not be in danger. Taha replies in contempt: "How true is the saying: the elders of a country can bring it to ruin!"⁴⁰ This line was my choice for a title of an article on the play in 1968. I used it to refer to the political chaos which ended one year later in the 1969 coup.⁴¹ Al-Abbadi relies on tribal wisdom and values to write a play which seeks to demolish tribalism. The highlight of the play are the lines delivered by Annasih (the alert one) who is the court poet, hoping to discourage the king from war:

Let us be the sons of one man, so that others may take us into account,
 What use do I reap from being a Jaali of Dongolawi or Shaiqi
 That has only led to differences that made my brother my enemy
 Let our news reach those distant and near
 It should suffice that the Nile is our father and that our nationality is
 Sudanese⁴²

It should be noted that until the 1930s (and until very recently, in some families) the word 'Sudanese' was not accepted by the Sudanese Arabs in any reference to themselves; they used it to refer only to those who belonged to non-Arabic speaking tribes.

Yet another significant point about this play is that technically it was way ahead of anything written in the Arabic-speaking world in the 1930s or even the 1950s. It opens with a dream sequence, in which Taha jumps up startled and tells Rayyah, his beloved, about his dream. They were together with their cattle when a forest fire forced them to change direction. He then saw a number of large eagles following Rayyah:

I hastened. When they saw me they flew away.
 They disappeared in the *laoat* trees,
 But they soon returned, one following the other.

A fight takes place:

Your brother [referring to himself] met them with his thin sword
 The largest came forward while the others stood ready
 I gave him no time, his head was off and his wings were beating the
 ground

The dream is used as a metaphor for the sequence of events in the play, in which Taha saves Rayyah from the brother of the leader of the Shukriyyah and kills him.⁴³

We can thus state that the best play in the 1930s in the Sudan was a major work of art, the standard of which transcended local and regional boundaries, written by and inspired man of rare talent and insight. The contribution of al-Abbadi and Khalid Aburrous shows striking similarities to the establishment of national drama in Ireland by W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge and their group.

Bakht al-Ruda Teachers' Training Institute

While it is true that the colonial administration in the Sudan never established any institution for theatre studies, this fact has to be seen in perspective, since in Britain itself theatre studies had to wait until after the Second World war for recognition by universities. In the Sudan, Shakespeare was taught, as literature, and was sometimes performed in English. But the major contribution, as we should have the self-confidence and fairness to acknowledge, was made by Bakht al-Ruda, the Teachers' Training Institute on the White Nile. The TTI was established in 1934 and, gradually became a nursery for theatrical activities which prepared the teachers for supervising cultural activities in schools.⁴⁴ Those who took part in dramatic activities in Bakht al-Ruda included Dr. Abdalla al Tayeb, who went on to write plays and established (and built) a theatre for the University of Khartoum, Dr. Ahmed al-Tayeb, the first Sudanese to be awarded a Ph.D. in Drama, Al-faki Abdul Rahman, who took over the directorship of the National Theatre in 1967 (the National Theatre was built and started activities in 1959). He literally changed the course of events and laid solid foundations for future development; and Abdul Rahman Ali Taha, who went on to become Minister of Education after independence. Each of these men would require a whole paper, if not more, to do them justice. Their achievement makes it possible for us to state that theatrical activity in Bakht al-Ruda played, more than any other

single factor, the major role in spreading 'theatrical consciousness' throughout the country. Thousands of teachers trained in Bakht al-Ruda acquainted their pupils (and whole communities) with theatre and reached the remotest villages.

The Search for Form

The most mature and talented Sudanese playwright to make his mark after the attainment of independence in 1956 was Hamadnallah Abdulqadir. He wrote mainly for radio, but then, in a remarkable partnership with director Mekki Sinada, his immaculately written Shavian-Ibsenite influenced plays burst onto the National Theatre's scene. Beginning with the 1970-1971⁴⁵ season, when two of his plays were performed (*al-Mundhara* and *Khutubat Suhair*), he has continued to write regularly and draw large audiences. Like Numan Ashur and Saad Wahbi in Egypt, he never tried to explore local forms. The same is true of the most successful comic actor-director al-Fadil Saied, who also began his activities after independence in 1956⁴⁶ and under whose guidance most of the actors in semi-professional companies had their first training.

The search for a new form was begun by Abdalla al-Tayeb who in 1959 wrote and directed his trilogy *Zawaj al-Samar* at the University of Khartoum. In it he chose a theme from the Abassid caliphate era and presented it with songs and dances. Although a strong adherent of the classical metres of Arabic poetry, he was persuaded by expediency to compromise and make more than one character deliver different parts of one and the same distich. He also used different 'rhyme units' in the scenes.

In the first regular season at the National Theatre 1967-68, a veteran of Bakht al-Ruda TTI had his only play performed. *Sennar al-Mahroosa* was about the establishment in what is today the republic of Sudan, of the Arab-Islamic kingdom of Sennar in 1504 after the collapse of the last Christian kingdom of Alowa. Mr. Shibeika used the *muddah* performers to underline the religious theme. He made the *muddah* recite religious verses which were found in the oldest documents about the Sennar Kingdom.⁴⁷ The effect on stage was electrifying. The *muddah* was also represented on stage by director Omer al-Khidir in his production of Omar al-Hamidi's *al-Sail* in the 1977-79 season.⁴⁸ Others who were preoccupied with the search for a new form were Dr. Yusuf Aidabi and Yusus Khalil, both of whom work now in the Arabian Gulf States. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim chose the traditional open-air form of indigenous entertainment for his play *October* which was a re-enactment of the events of the

October revolution of 1964.⁴⁹

Director Uthman Qamar al-Anbiyah presented both the Zar ceremony and a traditional Shaiqiyyah wedding ceremony on stage during the Cultural Festival in 1979.⁵⁰

The achievement of the National Folklore Troupe should also be taken into consideration. Founded in 1968 with the help of Russian experts, the Troupe presented regular performances of traditional dances from all over the Sudan. It played an important role in legitimizing traditional performing arts on the stage. Director Mekki Sinada incorporated some of the Troupe's dances in his successful production of Dr. Ali al-Badawi's *al-Dahabayah* in the 1977-78 season. Hashim Siddiq made a significant contribution with *Napata Habibti* in 1972.

Conclusion

Writing in 1958, Jacob Landau stated the following about drama in the Sudan: "In Sudan, after the nationalist playwright Muhammad Tawfiq Wahbi had been exiled by the local British authorities, soon after the First World War, there does not seem to have been any theatrical activity."⁵¹

If we point out that the Muhammad Tawfiq Wahbi mentioned by Landau was an Egyptian⁵² and not Sudanese, we are left with nothing!! I hope that this chapter, by tracing the history of drama in the Sudan, contributes to a better understanding, and more thorough evaluation.

NOTES

- 1 In his preface to J.M.Landau, *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema*, Philadelphia, 1968, p. xi.
The chapter is from: *Khalid El-Mubarak Arabic Drama, A Critical Introduction*, Khartoum University Press, 1986, IV, p. 6"-95.
- 2 E.A. Wallis Budge, *Books of Egypt and Chaldean*, Vol.XXXIII *Annals of the Nubian Kings*, London, 1972, p. 72.
- 3 Ibid, p.ixxxvi.
- 4 Ibid, p.xcvi.
- 5 Ibid, plate vi opposite p. xc and plate iv opposite p. ixcli.

- ⁶ I also wrote and directed a play based on the ritual. The ritual scenes were later filmed for a documentary for West-German TV and shown in several festivals. In the play an old ma gives the following advice to the King-elect: "People will respect you if you are wise; but they will fear you if you are cruel. Ask not for their fear. Ask for their love; because rulers, good or bad, old and young come and go - Shillukland remains, and Shillukland is these people."
- ⁷ E.E.Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*, London, 1962, pp. 69-70.
- ⁸ *Diodorus of Sicily*, transl. C.H. Oldfather, Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1935, vol.2, p. 99.
- ⁹ *The Greek Historians*, vol 1, New York, 1942, p. 116.
- ¹⁰ H.Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1948, p. 43.
- ¹¹ Khalid al-Mubarak, "From Ritual to Performance", 24th meeting of African Studies Association, Indiana University, October 1981.
- ¹² Edited by Y.F. Hassan, Khartoum, 1971, pp. 108-109. I have dealt with the Sufi rituals in a paper available from The African Studies Association, UCLA, and in the play *Riesh an Namm* (The Ostrich Feather), Khartoum, 1976.
- ¹³ Muhammad Ibn Umar Attounisi, *Tashheez al-Azhan Biseerat Bilad al-Arab Was-Sudan*, Cairo, 1965, pp. 188-192.
- ¹⁴ Mukhtar I.M. Agouba, "Al-Qissa al-Qasir wa tatawwruha fil-Adab Assudan al-Hadith", unpub. MA-thesis, Dar al-Ulum Cairo University, 1968, p. 40.
- ¹⁵ Shawqi Dayf, *al-Maqama*, Cairo, 1964, pp. 13, 45.
- ¹⁶ Ignace Goldziher, *History of Classical Arabic Literature*, Berlin , 1966, p. 87.
- ¹⁷ Shawqi Dayf, *al-Maqama*, Cairo, 1964, p. 8.
- ¹⁸ Abdul Aziz Abdul Majid, *Attarbiyah fis-Sudan*, part Two, Cairo, 1949, p. 94
- ¹⁹ See my critical introduction to the text in: *al-Musiqa wal-Masrah*, Khartoum (Jan.1980), pp. 27-29.
- ²⁰ Sheikh Abdallah Bashir Sinada, in his home in Khartoum, 22 June 1979.
- ²¹ In his home in Arbaji Village (Hassaheissa) in 1968. The text of the interview was, alas, lost in a fire.
- ²² Amal al-Fadil, unpublished diss., Islamic University, Omdurman, 1978, p. 18.
- ²³ Ibid, pp. 19-21, 26-28.
- ²⁴ See my paper "Al Masrah fi Sawakin Wa Port Sudan", in: *al-musiqa wal-Masrah* (April 1979) , pp 1 1-13.
- ²⁵ Ibid, p.12.
- ²⁶ Hassan Nagiela, *Malamih Min al-Mujtama as-Sudani*, Beirut, 1964, p. 288.
- ²⁷ Khalid al-Mubarak, *Tajoug*, Khartoum, 1977, p. 8.
- ²⁸ According to him. I met him in his house in Omdurman on 8 August 1975.
- ²⁹ F.L. Harwood, "The Story of Tajoj", in: *Sudan Note and Records 1941*, p. 198.
- ³⁰ Khalid Aburrou, *Masra Tajoug*, Khartoum, 1971, pp. 34-35.
- ³¹ Khalid Aburrou, *Masra Tajoug*, Manuscript, Khartoum , Act III, p. 20.
- ³² *Wafd Assoudan, Maasil Ingileez Fiis-Soudan*, Cairo, 1946, p. 20.

- 33 We recorded some of these plays from him on 17 July 1981 at his house in Omdurman, one week before his death. His memory was almost perfect, as was his pronunciation.
- 34 Hassan Nagiela, *Malamith min al-Mujtama as/Sudani* , Beirut, 1964, pp. 222-223.
- 35 Ibrahim al-Abbadi, *al-Mak Nimir*, Khartoum, 1969, p. 27.
- 36 Cultural Dept. Ministry of Information and Social Affairs, *Aid al Khamsiny linadil Khirriegeen Biundurman*, Khartoum, 1981, p. 9.
- 37 Ahmed Khair, *Kifah Giel*, Khartoum, 1970, p. 211.
- 38 Muddathir Abdul Rahim, *Mushkilat Ganoub as-Suda*, Khartoum, pp. 41-44.
- 39 Ibrahim al-Abbadi, *al-Mak Nimir*, Khartoum, 1969, p.27
- 40 Act II, p.49
- 41 Republished in *Harf wa Nuqta*, Khartoum 1980, pp. 15-20.
- 42 *Al-Mak Nimir*, p. 118.
- 43 *Ibid*, p. 25.
- 44 Ibrahim, Dissertation “Bakht Arruda wal-Masrah” summarized by M.Fathi Mutwalli, in: *Magalat al-Musiqa wal-Masrah* (August 1980), pp. 15-18.
- 45 Osman Ali al-Faki and Saad Yusif, *al-Haraka al-Masrahiyya fi al-Sudan*, Khartoum, 1979, p. 56.
- 46 *Harf wa Nuqta*, p. 29.
- 47 Khalid al-Mubarak, ”Masrahit Sennar Al Mahrrosa, in: *al-Ayaam*, 28.5, 1968, p. 8.
- 48 Osman Ali al-Faki and Saad Yusif, *al-Haraka al-Masrahiyya fi al-Sudan*, Khartoum, 1979, p .63.
- 49 Unpub. Document by the playwright, in my private collection.
- 50 Khalid al-Mubarak, “Urs al-Shaiqiyya wa al-Masrah”, in: *al-Sahafa*, 15 March 1979, p. 6.
- 51 J.M. Landau, *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema*, Philadelphia, 1958, p. 98.
- 52 Hassan Nagiela, *Malamith Min al-Mujtamaas-Sudani*, Beirut, 1964, p. 197.

TOWARDS A SUDANESE THEATRE

The role of rituals and ceremonies in forming a Sudanese theatre

Saad YOUSIF OBEID

Introduction

In this paper an attempt is undertaken in encouraging theatre artists to make use of Sudanese rituals and ceremonies to form a distinguished theatre, a theatre that we can call 'Sudanese theatre'. The basic assumption, therefore, is that Sudanese rituals and ceremonies embodies dramatic and theatrical elements which can be developed into a theatrical form. Furthermore, we can also select shared elements to create a performance that brings together different Sudanese cultures.

Most researchers agree that theatre is a performing art which consists of performers and spectators gathering in one place where a performer performs an imitation of selected actions with dramatic elements. It is crucial that there are some fundamental differences between theatre and other performing arts. On the other hand, there are elements that differentiate the art of theatre from rituals and ceremonies; one of those elements is the act of imitation/representation.

Therefore, we study Sudanese rituals and ceremonies to see how Sudanese people perform and stage spectacles, and what their conception is about theatre, costumes, accessories and makeup. At the same time, the study will tell us something about the role of music and dancing in Sudanese life. The aim of this study is, in the end, to analyse the possible connections between Sudanese culture and the art of theatre.

I believe that importing into Sudan new theatrical trends from the West will not succeed in creating an outstanding Sudanese theatre; moreover, it will not benefit the international theatre. Also, I believe that Sudanese theatre makers themselves are the ones who best can be inspired by the Sudanese rituals because they understand them in their deep constitution. Therefore we must not wait for non-Sudanese to dig up our heritage in creating an original Sudanese theatre.

Sudanese rituals

In his life cycle, a Sudanese must pass through series of rituals and ceremonies which cover his life from birth to death. In spite of the fact that there are different cultures and religions in Sudan, all Sudanese communities have in common the use of distinctive rituals and ceremonies that are connected with things like birth, marriage, illness and funerals. Also every community has rituals and ceremonies related to general affairs such as hunting, celebrations and war.

Since we cannot yet speak about one Sudanese culture, this paper will try to select some rituals and ceremonies from different Sudanese cultures, as a case study, to look for possible elements of Sudanese theatre in rituals and ceremonies. We will look at the Zikir ritual in Muslim communities, the Zar ritual in some Sudanese cultures, the Bride dance ritual of Central Sudan and finally at War dance rituals of the Nilotic tribes of Southern Sudan.

Elements of theatre and drama in the Zikir

Each Sudanese Islamic Sufi group (Tariga) has its own way of practicing “Zikir”¹, however the main elements are the same for each group. In Omdurman, the Gatria Sufi Tariga performs a Zikir at Hamadelnil cemetery each Friday. The Zakara² and the spectators gather in a yard opposite the dome of Sheikh Hamadelnil. In the center of the yard they hoist the Taiga’s flag on a tall pole, and then the ceremony starts with an opening song conducted by the sheikh. The Zakara, wearing special costumes, start their dance following the rhythm of the drums and other musical instruments. With the warming up of the rhythm the Zakara begin an energetic expressive dance with an obvious participation of the spectators. This dance reaches its peak when one of the Zakara starts moving swiftly round himself while uttering strange words. This ceremony ends at sunset with the calling for the Almagrib prayer.

When we look at this ceremony from a theatrical and dramatic viewpoint, we can select some theatrical and dramatic elements which might be similar to western theatrical and dramatic rules. Some of these elements are:

1. The task of the Zakara in the ceremony is similar to the role of actors.
2. This ceremony has its own performers (Zakara), spectators, stage, settings and costumes (cemetery, dome, the flag’s pole and the dervish’s jibba³).
3. Music, songs and dances are the major elements of this ceremony.

4. In this ceremony there is an obvious dramatic conflict between the Zakaras' souls and bodies, where the souls pull them up to God and the bodies drag them down to the Devil.
5. The Sheikh of the Tariga is the leader of this ceremony and maybe the author of some of the songs and the designer of the dances.

Theatre and drama in the Bride Dance

The Bride dance is a part of the wedding ceremonies in central Sudan. It consists of a number of simple dances performed by the bride with the assistance of the bridegroom.

Weeks or months before the wedding's date, many arrangements must be made to prepare the stage for the ceremony by decorating the place and beautifying the bride with traditional make up and costumes specially made for this occasion. After many rehearsals, the bridesmaid takes the responsibility to train the bride how to dance a number of selected dances. The dances of this ceremony are mainly a sort of expressionistic dances that show how the bridegroom tries to control the bride and her startled reaction to his attempts. The audience in this ceremony participate by singing, clapping and encourage both the bride and the bridegroom by cheering and trilling cries of joy, but they do not participate by dancing.

The dramatic and theatrical elements of this ceremony are the following:

1. As if they were conscious of the theatrical nature of this ceremony, the bride's house is renamed "The house of the play" and the ceremony is called "Play", meaning here "Game and performance" and not "drama".
2. In this ceremony there is some sort of dramatic conflict between the bride and the bridegroom.
3. This ceremony has its special costumes, settings and lighting.
4. The bridesmaid is the director of this performance.
5. The songs and the dances are the forming elements of the ceremony, and they are organized in a special sequence that begins with a greeting dance and which goes up to a climax when it reaches the farewell dance at the end of the ceremony.
6. The main musical instrument used in this ceremony is a rhythmic folk instrument played by the bridesmaid herself.

Drama and theatre in the War dance

The War dance is one of several vital rituals and ceremonies of the native tribes in Southern Sudan. Although there are some differences in the details of this dance between the different tribes, when looking at it from a theatrical viewpoint a pattern can be established.

Noam Shogear attended a Shulluk⁴ war dance and we follow his description. It begins with the Shulluk gathering in a courtyard and dividing themselves into two teams. They put on their heads curious wigs, are wearing special dresses and are using accessories of feather, brass and ivory. Holding in their hands sticks and spears, “they acted in their dance an imagined war, every team attacks the other,” Shogear concludes his description.⁵ Again, the following dramatic and theatrical elements can be recognized:

1. The dramatic conflict, a war, in this ceremony is very obvious.
2. The audience’s enthusiastic participation stimulates the conflict.
3. In this ceremony the participants perform their roles in an imagined battle.
4. This ceremony shows the African conception of theatre make-up, costumes and accessories.
5. Music and dance are the main elements of the ceremony and are the carrier of the dramatic action.
6. The spectators of the ceremony are allowed to share in the ceremony.

Theatrical and dramatic elements in Zar:

Although some men do occasionally take part, the Zar ritual is mainly a women’s ceremony. Some of the researchers argue that the term ‘Zar’ is an Abyssinian word which means “spirit” or someone who cures the sick by getting into contact with spirits.⁶ The Zar is mainly held in a sick woman’s house and is attended by her female relatives and neighbours. It consists of a series of dances and songs.

Like the other Sudanese rituals and ceremonies, Zar has many theatrical and dramatic elements. we summarize some along the following lines:

1. Dances and songs are the main elements of the ceremony.
2. The sick woman always impersonates a male character.
3. Costumes and accessories are specially designed for the ceremony’s characters.

4. The women invited to attend the Zar are allowed to take part in the ceremony itself.
5. The conflict between the sick woman and the spirits is brought out through songs, dances and clear dialogue.

Sudanese Theatre

There may be two ways to reach a unique Sudanese theatre that depends on Sudanese heritage. The first way is to wait until these rituals and ceremonies complete their transformation from an everyday practice to an art that imitates life.

The second way is to select the distinguished elements that can be used to form a Sudanese theatre. In this study we adopt the second one, trying to extract a Sudanese acting, directing, and theatre architecture, performing (etc.) out of the Sudanese rituals and ceremonies.

Theatre architecture:

The Sudanese rituals and ceremonies prefer theater-in-the round that provides an opportunity to the audience to surround the acting area and to stand close to the actors, so they can easily participate.

Acting, singing and dancing:

Sudanese theatre requires an actor that can sing, dance and even play a musical instrument.

The participation of the audience:

The audience does not come to watch passively, so, the audience is allowed to participate by singing, dancing, not only by laughing and clapping.

Directing:

Although the director leads the group through the rehearsals, he also leads them through the show itself because he may be the leading vocalist, instrumentalist or dancer.

Conclusion:

So, the study of Sudanese rituals and ceremonies is a first step towards to a theory, and a practice, of Sudanese theatre that is derived from Sudanese heritage and which can enrich the international theatre. Some of these elements have already been experienced in some Sudanese theatrical performances but nobody encouraged the artist to carry on the experiment. Here, we call for establishing a studio to carry out experiments in Sudanese rituals and ceremonies to coin a new theatre.

NOTES

- 1 Zikir is a Muslim ceremony of worshipping God by singing and dancing.
- 2 Zakara are the singers and dancers, and the instruments used in the Zikir.
- 3 The dervisha's jibba is special multicoloured dress; the colours define the rank of the dervish.
- 4 The Shulluk is one of the major tribes in Southern Sudan.
- 5 N. Shogear, *Geography and History of Sudan*, Beirut, 1967, p. 228.
- 6 B.Seligman, "On the origins of the Egyptian Zar", in: *Al-Funun Al Shabia*, June 1971, Cairo, Ministry of Culture, p. 84.

Sudanese Folk Rituals as a Key to solving the Cultural Dilemma of Sudanese Theatre

Aadil Mohammad AL-HASSAN HARBI

Theatre historians and theatre critics in Sudan have argued about and expressed different opinions on the notion 'Sudanese Theatre' or 'Theatre in Sudan' for quite some time. They agree, however, in their opinion that a search for a specific formula of theatre is needed which accommodates different ethnic cultures in a unified whole. This goal can only be successfully achieved through of a form of theatre that is able to encompass all arts and the creative energy of all the people involved.

The Cultural Dilemma

There are a number of studies about the dilemma or crisis of theatre in Sudan which have all emphasised different aspects of what may have been its cause. Some studies focused on the texts of plays, others were dealing with theatrical facilities and still others discussed the activities of the creative forces at work. Most of these studies, however, seem to have forgotten that all crises can be overcome; the aftermath of a crisis is invariably a wider scope and broader view. It is also a rebellion against dullness and routine. The real problem, however, is the dilemma of the theatre itself. It has to function in a general cultural environment on the one hand, but on the other hand, there is in Sudan an ethnic and cultural diversity in which a general cultural climate is difficult to achieve. The cultural diversity in Sudan is linked to an ethnic idiom that unifies culture *per sé* and its distinct features and components, developed and coalesced as a result of geographical as well as historical factors. The Sudan, unique in its vast area and long borders, with different vegetation and environment, has produced many of these different ethnic idioms. A related factor is Sudan's linguistic diversity, with about 115 languages of communication.¹

A diversified culture is a culture which is coherent and mature in its unity, notwithstanding its different components. This sort of culture has the flexibility to interact and develop. Examples of it can be found in the Central Sudan and other areas where the fusion and mixture of two or more ethnic cultures has taken place. This process has enabled Sudan to acquire positive features and has led to a social and administrative cohesion in many areas. But the cultural diversity has

produced some negative features as well. It placed artistic forms, more specific the theatre, in a cultural dilemma, especially in areas such as the Angessana, the Nuba mountains and the Southern Sudan, where these forms did not represent their culture, or which did not address all the people of the Sudan. The difficult task, then, is to formulate a theatrical concept which is capable of embracing 115 languages and dialects as well as 571 ethnic groups. Each one of these groupings has distinct characteristics, folk rituals and beliefs which are potentially suitable for the development of theatrical forms. The dilemma, then, is to formulate the importance of theatre as a medium of expression in a multicultural country, in which some areas are entrenched in ethnicity, using folk ritual as a replacement for theatre.

Sudanese Folk Rituals

Folk rituals in Sudan are a social phenomenon that has been passed on through generations and which emanates from a heritage that supports and promotes it. They grow and renew themselves in response to the changes in social conditions. These rituals are linked to the life cycle (birth – illness – marriage – death) and give comprehensive coverage of life and its meaning. The very essence of human existence is revealed in rituals which provide the key to the confrontation with the secrets of existence as well as the explanation of life's enigmas. Rituals are the instrument which enable people to achieve a sort of equilibrium between the self and society.

Some Sudanese rituals are of a religious nature, while others are non-religious. Both are rooted in ceremonies and events which have been inherited from previous generations. There are a number of artistic elements in Sudanese folk rituals that are inseparable from social phenomena, which include the following:

1. Impersonation
2. Rhythms
3. Dance and movement
4. Group or collective expression
5. Singing
6. Accessories, make-up, tattoo, costumes.
7. Absence of a barrier between audience and performers

Despite the use of a language that forms a link and fusion between what is a

social ritual and what is artistic acting, there is a wide gap between the function of rituals in a social context and the function of art. Rituals are unable to bring about solutions for problems in Sudanese society – with its distinctive constituents. They alone cannot address problems like tribal conflicts and confrontations, create a spirit of cultural coordination and unity among the different ethnic groups and influence the dissemination of features and factors which are conducive to the creation of common social values. And, finally, they cannot create development and social progress.

Since rituals alone are unable to solve the problems of a diverse multicultural society, the only way out of the dilemma is through a form of theatre which has a most vital artistic value, namely functionalism. This functionalism consists of at least the following three elements:

1. An understanding of the similarities and differences between the social ritual and the artistic fields.
2. An awareness of the currents and trends which appeared in modern times and revolutionary concepts. Such philosophies and experiences were linked to rituals and their artistic structures which could be useful in promoting the art of acting and performing. A case in point is Stanislavsky as well as contemporary performances which employ rituals.
3. Such an approach should take place within a theatre workshop or studio in order to facilitate the extraction of a method which makes use of the diversity of rituals in Sudan and links that with European methods which were inspired by the linkage between rituals and the rise of theatre. It goes without saying that the basis of the European development of methodology is different.

This new function of theatre can be achieved by:

1. Acquiring abilities in acting which are extracted from rituals.
2. Extracting training methods for the development and promotion of an actor's performance and a positive influence on his physical state.
3. Making use of cultural and social concepts which are embedded in movements, gestures and sounds.

In short, the new theatre has to rely on the concepts of cultural and social diversity in Sudan and its positive influence on the physical, psychological and vocal development of the actor. Also, a study has to be undertaken of folk rituals and traditions so that a better understanding of training techniques will be achieved, in order to acquire skills and abilities and make them the core of the

effort of basing performances and training on folk rituals and folk practices. In the context of a theatre workshop or studio the aim is to come up with an academic method which could form a theoretical as well as practical contribution in line with the techniques on which most European theatrical methods were based (from the time of Stanislavsky to the present time.)

There are three fields on which this effort of creating a new theatre has to concentrate.

Firstly, European methods have to be implemented that were developed by Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, for example. They all did extract their basic training and preparation of their actors from folk ceremonies and ritual traditions. They differed, however, in the manner in which they employed these techniques, and each had his own method and vision. These differences can be summarised as follows:

The Stanislavsky method employed yoga training as well as circus and funfair games.

The Meyerhold method employed folk traditions and rituals in order to create his biomechanical style based on the scientific laws of mechanics

The Artaud method relied on the socio-religious factors which he imbedded and accumulated in gestures, movements and sounds.

The Peter Brook method drew upon the roots of international folk ceremonies and traditions. It went deep into the indirect structures and content of the underlying sound, movement, influence, perception and passion.

The Grotowski method was born out of the confrontation with traditional folk rituals, specially the Indian yoga and what he extracted in the form of a philosophy which is based on the modules of 'primitive' rituals and myths in order to tap the in-built capabilities of the actor.

Secondly, in making use of Sudanese rituals, especially the artistic dimensions like rhythm, music, grouping, dance and expressive gestures, concepts of both conflict resolution can be spread as well as that of the spirit of cultural fusion and unity and the values of tolerance.

And finally, but by no means the least important, a solution has to be found for the identity and authenticity of a Sudanese theatre with distinct characteristics which express the depth of our cultural diversity

Translated by Nasser Al Shaikh

NOTE

¹ See M. Ahmad Abdul Ghaffar, *Ghadaya Lilniqask*, Khartoum, 1988, p. 18.

THEATRE IN CONFLICT ZONES: Artistic traditions taken to task in post-war Sudan

Ali Mahdi Nouri

Since 1997, the German Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) has been conducting a series of theatre workshops in several countries, such as India, Bangladesh, Chili, Egypt and others, that are all focused on political-cultural issues expressed by the participants in each country. These workshops were directed by Alexander Stillmark, a Berlin based prominent theatre director and educator, who has a long standing experience with ethnic and multi-cultural theatre and groups.

In its capacity for international work and collaboration, the ITI has been largely active within communities of performers and non-performers in Third World countries, especially those that have experienced civil war, violence and ethnic or tribal conflict.

The method used in these workshops - which have recently taken the title of “Image Construction Site” - is a fusion of “The Theatre of the Oppressed”, “Image Theatre” and various improvisational techniques that Stillmark has developed during his long artistic experience that started with the Berliner Ensemble. The method of “The Theatre of the Oppressed”, devised and developed by Augusto Boal in Europe and South America, is the only theatre method, until now, that was specifically designed for issue-based theatre. Its aim is to deal with communities or groups of people that have been marginalised or victimized, such as groups of ex-prisoners, victims of violence, refugees, the mentally ill, drug addicts, and members of communities that underwent the process of ethnic war or conflict, resulting in social breakdown in a certain country.

“Image Theatre” in this context is both a theatrical technique in structuring, and a method of improvisation that uses body language more than verbal language, and is aimed at exploring the psychological and imaginative levels of the participants through images they produce in improvisation exercises which were designed by Boal, in addition to other exercises developed by Stillmark. Both these methods are suitable for non-performers and people from all age groups and cultural and social backgrounds. More importantly, they are made to help the group participating in them to build up a human relation of solidarity and

understanding through the workshop itself, which means that the workshop is in a way a medium of this integration and mutual acceptance between the participants. The result of the process is expected to create a more harmonious and productive social dialogue and exchange, which is a healing element for post-civil war situations.

In all its initiatives, the ITI has given special attention to the cultural presence and practice as well as the cultural heritage of the groups it works with, therefore the use of traditional forms of theatre, folkloric dance, song and storytelling becomes an integral part of the workshops. In this way, the participants reconnect with their artistic tradition, and do not regard the workshop as a foreign and alienating experience. This also allows the community to value their cultural components and learn how to invest in them and to promote dialogue and development, rather than looking at them as mere entertainment.

Sudan has been long known for its tradition of song and dance, as is the case all over over the African continent. Although the times of war, and the amounts of deaths, disease and corruption it has produced, have left a profound feeling of separation between the Sudanese tribes - whether in the North or in the South - and have eliminated the human value of primitive and spontaneous forms of art, there is still the chance to revive the roots and richness of those arts. The Sudanese community still has the possibility of creating a cultural centre where all can participate in a collective process of making art and sharing it with several audiences. The Sudanese ITI-centre, under the direction of Ali Mahdi, has already initiated the ambitious theatre project "Theatre between frontiers" which will be a vehicle for cultural collaboration in Sudan.

The case of Sudan reveals the importance of creating a cultural and artistic approach that could help the initiation and development of communities in post-war and post-conflict situations. This is what this project is attempting to do. The hope is that Arab and African artists and trainers who have been working with Boal and Stillmark are going to participate for a long time. Their cooperation will not only facilitate the communication on both the level of language and the social and cultural levels, it will enable them also to continue the next stages of this long term project. A further aim of the project is to create a vehicle for other artists and cultural activists to meet and explore this method and programme in Sudan, which would transform the place into a cultural platform and initiate many future connections and networks between the participants. Finally, the success of this project will lead to more openings in the area of cultural activism and cultural

management of such situations, where the project in Sudan can function both as an example and learning experience for future projects.

The ITI has started this initiative by inviting nine Sudanese actors from the “Theatre between Frontiers” to the new “Image Construction Site” workshop that was held during the “Theater der Welt” festival in Stuttgart, Germany, in June-July of 2005. It was aimed at preparing and training these actors to be part of the team of assistants to the trainers of the next workshop in Sudan, that was held in the autumn of 2005. It also helped in providing knowledge and information about the local community and of the possibilities of collaboration in Sudan later. The project is a cooperation between the ITI in Berlin, the Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio the Janeiro directed by Augusto Boal, and the Odin Theatret in Denmark.

THE PEACE CULTURE PROJECT

Community-based Performances

Abuelgassim GOR

In his contribution on the history of drama in Sudan, Khalid al-Mubarak highlights the important role that the Bakht al-Ruda Teachers' Training Institute had in familiarizing the Sudanese population with theatre and drama. A similar development has been taking place since 1996 with the establishment of the Centre of Theatre Research at the University of Khartoum. The Center currently runs the Peace Culture Project that aims at spreading the idea of peace in rural communities through the use of theatrical performances. The following is a description of that project, based on material provided by Dr. Abuelgassim Gor.

A reaction to the effects of cultural globalization has in recent years been the growth of community-based, identity-based, and minority-based performances. This “theatre for development” as it became known, helps people in their community to cope with the changes that have taken place through the process of globalization and makes them understand – and sometimes even adopt - the influences that work upon their community from outside. Within this broader framework of theatre for development, the Peace Culture Project aims at implanting the notion of peace into the minds of schoolchildren, to begin with.

The reasons for adopting the theatre for development in Sudan have to do with a growing dissatisfaction some actors felt with the activities of the Public Theatre Corporation. It did not sufficiently accommodate the artistic needs of the local population, but concentrated too much on the spreading of culture from the centre. Theatre for development also provides more room for theatrical experiment, and is more able to address the problems and issues on the local level; poverty, public health, war and peace and gender roles are the things that people are really concerned about. And finally, theatre for development can also create an awareness within the local community of the world around them. That world is Arabic and African, and it has its relationship with the West. In other words, theatre for development deals with global and local issues at the same time – hence the term “glocal”.

Theatre for development uses folk-lore, songs, music and dance from the local community because it is a community based form of theatre. Its aim is to make the people more aware of their own cultural roots and this growing awareness

could and should result in a change of opinion and behaviour. This form of theatre carries a universal human message directed on development in matters of health, environmental issues, illiteracy, to name but a few. It requires a thorough understanding of the local circumstances, and an analysis of the culture of the society and community where the theatrical activities are to take place. In order to make them work in the Sudan at least the following five elements have to be taken into consideration:

1. A decision has to be made about the language that is going to be used. Sudan is a country where many languages are spoken, and of course there must be some kind of common language for all participants involved.
2. A suitable place of action has to be chosen. Where does the play take place, and is it suitable for the specific subject?
3. Who are the participants?
4. In what cultural environment is the play going to be developed? Is it possible to include elements of the local culture in the play?
5. A decision must be taken on the appropriate time for working in the community in implementing the project. Is there a cultural festival taking place in the town or village where the project is going to take place?

These questions have to be answered by the person or group of persons under whose guidance the drama project takes place and it will of course take some time. The trust of the people has to be won in a process of intercommunication.

A particular model for a project of theatre for development would consist of at least the following stages:

1. A short play that has to be rehearsed and performed to win the people's confidence and attract their attention.
2. A longer play on the subject under consideration – assume a health issue – has to be performed in which villagers participate. This participation will create a closer relation between the play, its content and the community.
3. From this theatre piece a larger event has to be developed, involving the larger community (demonstration, group-rally.)

The result of the project will - eventually - be that a growing number of people from the community will be able to act as opinion-leaders. They will be of great importance in getting the message of the project through to the community as a whole. Through them the desired changes in values and behaviour may occur.

An example of a project has been a field-study undertaken a few years ago by a group of students among the tribes of Myssria and Dinka in the Sudanese province of Western Kordofan. Its aim was to gather information about the difficult relationship between the two tribes and analysing the root of the conflicts between them. The issue was the theft of cattle from one tribe by the other. The students made a radio broadcast of a play about this issue, and later held a workshop with a discussion afterwards during which people were able to express their opinion about the underlying causes of the conflict: lack of interest by the local government, lack of essential services (water, health, education), lack of care by the local oil industry. Whether this field-study has changed anything can - alas - not be judged from the material provided. What can be established however is the dedication of the project leaders and the people they have been working with.

EAST/WEST CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AS WAR BETWEEN THE SEXES

1. The Cruelties of Migration

Mieke KOLK, Sha'za mustafa

“There is a whole tradition in *immigrant fiction*”, says Kiran Desai, a young Indian female writer whose intriguing novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the 2006 Man-Bookerprize, in a recent interview in Dutch Journal NRC. “The structure of the story is more or less fixed. Departure from the homeland, lots of trouble, arrival in America, Europe, and in the end descriptions how it is to be a ‘Western’. But I realized that I could not tell my story without going back and write about the place I left. I experienced this necessity as a writer but for many migrants it is reality. Suddenly they realize themselves or the second or third generation that half of their story happens somewhere else, that half of their emotional life is missing. Not only as part of the past but also of the present”.

The loss of context, the loss of a surrounding where things which you do and say are understood as ‘natural’, work out in series of mostly traumatic experiences where generation, social class and race are determining factors as different forms of imprisonment in a post/colonial past. In this sense her book reflects the model the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih introduced in 1969 with his first Third World novel about migration: *Season of Migration to the North*.

Of course there are many differences between the two best-selling books but here I would like to concentrate on an interesting change in perspective, that is the *function of gender* and sexual relations in both novels.

Like those of Tayeb Salih's, Kiran Desai's main characters are male but where Salih re/presents the cultural clash between East and West as a gendered clash, where the hero tries to domesticate the foreign culture by dominating the foreign woman, Desai shifts for her love-interest from a male protagonist to a female, from sexuality to a love theme: a young Indian girl becoming obsessed by her first erotic experiences.

This change seems logic, different times, different positions and different home-lands. I would have left it like this, if not one of my Sudanese (female)

friends had brought a whole series of recent Sudanese migration novels to my attention.

On my request cultural journalist Sha'za Mustafa translated and adapted an essay of the Washington based publicist Muhammed Ali Salih about four novels recently published. The essay appeared in her Arabic journal *Ashargalawsat*, published in London since 2005.

What is surprising is that the male authors of the new novels offer the same kind of oppositional model East/West, Male/Female as Tayeb Salih had done, where Western woman 'insults' the Eastern man by her free sexual behaviour which he 'punishes' by leaving her for the chaste Sudanese woman at home.

I asked Sha'za Mustafa to concentrate her summary of the essay on

1. the male/female identities and relationships and
2. on the endings of the novel. As we know from literary theory, endings offer the author's ultimate truth and a solution to the ideological clashes that the text must solve.

From East to the West

The four other novels that deal with the cultural differences between East and West within a larger theme of migration are:

1. *Camels do not stop for the Red Light*, by Tarik Altayeb, 1999
2. *People of the Road*, Alkhidir Aaron, 2002
3. *Circles of Fear*, Ahmed Kair, 2005
4. *Do not awake the Ants*, Ahmed AlRufae, 2005

People of the Road deals with the hero Mamoun Said who has left his village in Sudan and traveled to Germany where he has to face the seduction by German women. *Circles of Fear* tells a love story of a Sudanese diplomat and an American woman. The novel of Tarik Altayeb *Camels do not stop for the Red Light* is about a young Sudanese man and his adventures among Austrian women (with an encouraging introduction by Tayeb Salih). *Do not awake the Ants* won a prize in the celebration of Tayeb Salih as author in the autumn of 2005 in Sudan. The novel is about a scientist traveling to London, who shows two states of mind. He lives in London with the mentality of the Sudanese village-where he is born, and while living in the village he looks at life with Western eyes-he always makes criticizing comparisons! In the end he decides to stay in Sudan forever.

All the novels reflect a series of themes concerning the many roots of Sudanese culture: Islamic, Arabic, African and the difficulty to get rid of them while facing the many problems for the young men in the West and the obstacles to adapt to the new cultural surroundings.

When we look at the effect of the *Islamic* upbringing we see many scenes of the religious culture the young hero's grew up in. Tayeb Salih's Mustafa Sa'eed remembers for instance the prayers of his father and when he returns in the end to Sudan he becomes a religious man, attending prayers and helping poor people. The *African* roots are reflected by the fact that most of the main characters are black men. The American heroine Suzanne in *Circles of Fear* describes her Sudanese lover Khalid as *the black guy*. Khalid himself writes to his friend in Sudan a long letter in which he connects being black with Slave Trade, Racial Discrimination, Demonstrations for Civil Rights etc.

While in England, Mustafa Sa'eed of *Season of Migration* tells that his girlfriend Isabella thinks that he is a primitive creature, naked, holding an arrow, catching elephants and lions in the forest. She tells him also that he looks like someone who eats human flesh. Mustafa's professor in Oxford does not hide his feelings towards him while saying: in spite of all our efforts to civilize you, you still act as if you come from the forest.

In Germany, Mamoun Said's girlfriend in the novel *People of the Road* sees him as African, dark coloured /burned by the sun. When she is angry she shouts at him: *You the black wicked son of the Negro*. In Austria hero Tarik is considered mostly as the product of Africa, its forests, its poverty. Girlfriend Gaby cannot hide her surprise that he is also intelligent and able to learn the language very quickly.

What is the answer of the Sudanese towards these cultural prejudices they are faced with, that are concentrating on the colour of their skin and their background 'in the jungle'?

Some act in the way the other see them, like Mustafa Sa'eed who had sex with four women, and promised to marry them. Three killed themselves and he killed his wife. But in the four other novels the men behave better, maybe as an effect of their Islamic upbringing.

In the USA, hero Khalid has just one woman, Suzanne. When she asks him: Will you leave me, he denies: no other woman will be in my life, you are my only

love, the first and the last love. Khalid prefers talking about politics to having sex. He spends hours talking about Palestine, Iraq, Arab politics and differences between their cultures. Most of the times it is Suzanne who says: Let us go to bed. In Austria, Tarik is too shy to get a girl, and if so, it is mostly the girl who takes the initiative by inviting him to her home for just 'a cup of coffee': "I stood up, surprised, amazed, she holds my hand and I was walking with her as a lost boy searching for his parents." And Mamoun in Germany refuses all attempts of the German women and when he feels desire uprising he asks God's forgiveness and leaves quickly: "It is great to live as a good strong man, in an angel's way in the country of Satan"!

In the end

All the novels show Sudanese males who are unable to integrate in Western culture and prefer to go back to their native country.

Khalid in *Do not awake us* leaves the USA when Suzanne wants to marry him and his sister wants him to marry a friend, saying to him: "the country of the Western people made you a Western man". Our hero dies in an explosion. The open ending saves him from making the ultimate choice. In the same way Mustafa Sa'eed returns home to a village on the Nile, marries a rural woman but is no longer able to overcome his problems, he disappears while swimming in the Nile.

Mamoun in *Camels do not stop...* also returns from Germany to his village and marries a woman there. He becomes a businessman traveling up and down and permits himself a love affair in Germany.

Muhammed Ali Salih ends his article with this comment :

In the beginning of the 21century we might expect new novels from the new generations and a hero who travels to the West, adapts with its culture, and marries one of its women "if they want to do so". It should be a hero who keeps to his culture, is proud of his Islamic religion, Arabic culture, and the African colour! Maybe one of those novels will carry in the title some reference to "be with them", according to the American proverb 'if you cannot beat them, join them!'.

EAST WEST CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AS WAR OF THE SEXES

2. Tayeb Salih's novel "Season of Migration..." traveling to Theatre in the North

Mieke KOLK

When the **Empire Writes Back**, taking up Edward Said's challenge to renarrate their cultural heritage and domesticate Western forms, authors of former British colonies can choose from several already proven positions:

1. writing adaptations of Western canonical texts;
2. writing stories from their own culture within a framework of conventional Western literary forms;
3. experimenting with those conventions;
4. forsaking any sort of exogenous influence in the form and methods of writing.

All these writers are involved in a critical dialogue between coloniser and colonized while expressing their point of view in their literature. Timothy Brennan, in his exciting article *The National Longing for Form*, offers us an ideological framework of these **third world-novels** where authors are either driven by nostalgia "outright attacks on independence" (V.S.Naipaul), possess a vigorously anti-colonial attitude "works emphasizing native culture"(Tayeb Salih and Ngugi wa Thiong'o), or present their work in "a cosmopolitan style and perspective" (Garcia Marquez, Wole Soyinka and Salman Rushdie.)¹

This mentioning in passing of Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih and his *Season of Migration to the North* is surprising. The author marks, not without reason, as intertextual influences both Shakespeare (*King Lear* and *Richard III*) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The novel is furthermore very subtle in its writing strategies, its East-West points of view often are conflicting or at least ambivalent and its reception-history is complicated. Politically criticized in Sudan and banned in Egypt and the Gulf States for its sexual frankness when the book was publicized in Arabic in 1966, it later sold millions of copies throughout Arabic countries and the rest of the world. The Motherland seemed not so pleased either when the English translation appeared a year later. Critics ignored the novel, and one even dismissed it as badly written and too episodic, "a common weakness in all Arabic writing".²

Colonial Humiliation

Marked as a turning point in 20th century **travel-narratives** that focus on East-West encounters, *Season of Migration to the North* was the first example of a non-Western novel dealing with the experience of exile and colonial humiliation, but above all with the loss of identity of a 'native outsider', both in the European diaspora and the homeland. Although the writer himself acknowledged in his foreword to the English edition "the underlying sense of desperation and gloom in the novel", coinciding with political upheavals in Sudan after the country became independent in 1955, the novel can hardly be called a *vigorously anti-colonial work* and the emphasizing of native culture against the old colonial powers seems an understandable strategy within the creation of the idea of a nationhood. Binding together disparate time and space elements, Tayeb Salih not only provides in his text a plurality of perspectives and voices but also a dialectic of various temporalities leading to a profound experience of being located in a space of the in-between for the different characters and the readers.

It so happened that last year after more than thirty years, the **Motherland** took up a promising dialogue, when it came back to Tayeb Salih's novel and its intriguing forms and themes.

Director William Galinsky of the National Theatre traveled to Sudan to discuss a stage-adaptation of *Season of Migration to the North* on which he was working together with Nigerian author Biyi Bandele. He stayed for three weeks, filmed the villages, the desert and, I guess, the Nile, and wrote and showed the first of three parts in London. Writing to me about the problems of the adaptation, he mentioned the village scenes from the sixties which could "*almost be lifted from the novel and put on stage*" in contrast with the story in London in the 1920s where the black hero of the novel seduces one white English woman after the other and in the end kills the (English) wife he married.

When I confronted my Sudanese students with his problem, during a workshop last December in Khartoum, they were hardly interested. Galinsky himself had chosen as a starting point and perspective the narrator who reconstructs the story of the hero Mustafa Sa'eed, first in London and later in his village in the North of Sudan. Years after the events in the late 1950s that comprises the death of the hero and that of his Sudanese wife Hosna, the narrator tries to understand what happened to all of them.

Asked where they would start the adaptation, the *female* students focused mostly on the killing of Hosna, the village girl that refused to adapt again to traditional village life after her husband had disappeared; one opted for the narrator lost in a drunken wild desert party.

Some others, males, chose the hero's swimming in the Nile, the river of no return, as their focal point; others again chose the hilarious village scenes with the elderly talking sex or the couple of male friends getting drunk. Only two considered scenes from the 'English' life of the hero. In a spontaneous manner they took what they knew and recognized as belonging to reality and daily life practice in Sudan.

In the English part of the novel the hero is very faraway indeed. But even more important, this same hero has chosen for himself to live the role of the **stereotyped black** in what I like to call, if one can say such things about literary characters, a hysterical process of **Self-Orientalization**: living out the Western clichés of the wild tiger in the dark jungle. This role-playing must have created ambivalence among the Sudanese students: it was probably either *too literary*, *too artificial* or *too touchy* and *too painful* one way or the other. Sudanese society lives in all shades of white and black but is still very much aware of ethnic differences, contained in the identity-mix of Arabic/Islam/African/Christian background but sustained by the North-South division: Arab-African.

In this article I want to offer some theoretical outlines that in the end helped me to understand the construction of the novel and explain, hopefully, Galinsky's problem with the dramaturgy of the English scenes.

I concentrate on:

1. Nation and exile as *topos* in the novel
2. Identities / mimicry and localized positions
3. Orientalization and sexual desire

Nation as Construction

"How could the most universally legitimate political ideology of our time, nationalism, fail to become a *topos* in postwar fiction? And how could its existence be ignored or replaced by the *topos* of exile, nationalism's opposite," Timothy Brennan asks himself. ³

It seems more of a rhetoric question when we think about exile no longer described by Western artists looking for different surroundings, but as that position lived by those displaced for political and economic reasons. Away from home, memories and longing shape 'the nation' both as 'the lived and living locality of a culture' to use terms of Homi Bhabha⁴, and in "geographies created by desire", producing documents "with multiple myriad components" of national consciousness.⁵

In the case of Tayeb Salih's novel, the Sudanese scholar Abuelgassim Gor pointed to the dimensions of the writing style in which "Sudanese latent culture, norms, customs and behaviour rises bottom up from the community to the surface."⁶

Brennan offers us another important notion, when he writes about language, style and the "*the many words in the exile family* that divide themselves between an archaic and literary sense and a modern political one: for example émigré versus immigrant, wanderer versus refugee, exodus versus flight etc."⁷

This apparently historical division, repeating itself also in tragic and comic modalities, gives a lead to the double 'realities' and 'realisms' which Tayeb Salih created in his novel: one of the **émigré, the wanderer (Wanderlust)** within an archaic, more tragic sense, and one in a political modern mood: the world of the postwar **immigrant, the temporary refugee, the ex-student**. Both modalities literally belong in different kinds of narration: that of the epic-heroic dimension of the wanderer - like the biblical lost son, and that of its parody in the genre of the novel, as Michael Bakhtin puts it, describing in a 'journalistic' way the ups and downs of the immigrant worker, the student, leaving and returning, and the problems of relocation in the homeland.

In Tayeb Salih's book both modalities and types of character are present and named properly: Mustafa Sa'eed and The (nameless) Narrator. The first reigns in a 'heroic narrative', as Edward Said called the 'romantic tales of the nation' with (reinvented) origins and telos, the other in a postcolonial domain of 'sorting things out' with an open ended present and a useable past, in a situation of not this/not that, which creates uncertainty and invisibility: the experience of the world of the in-between.

The combination of the two sorts of narration leads in *Season* not only to this exciting and experimental, and ultimately *postmodern* way of episodic writing, it also offers two styles of self-reflection, two life-styles one would like to say,

which find their identity both in the “movement of the solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the text with the world outside” as Benedict Anderson states.

But where the epic style concentrates on “beginning”, “first”, “founder”, “that which occurred earlier”, the novelistic approach, reflecting the “one, yet many” of national life directed itself to an ‘open ended present’, not so much as representing national identity but trying to create one.⁸

It seems clear that the movement through the landscape of Mustafa Sa’eed offers a classic case of a heroic route, a rite of passage through the liminal phase, here structured by contemporary, colonial conditions of male and sexual humiliation and revenge. His goal of *liberating Africa with his penis* succeeds splendidly, the women in London fall for him the moment they set eyes on him: “An African Giant in the English scene”, notes the narrator.

Mustafa Sa’eed, in post-Victorian pre-war London, offers an erotic dedication to his lovers that transgresses the boundaries of the white domain of sexual possibilities. But the Wagnerian *Liebestod*, the narrator speaks about the Freudian duality between Eros and Thanatos, that his wife forces from him through his knife, should warn us. The heroic dimension of the love-life of Mustafa Sa’eed takes the shape of a **literary construct**, a **constructed male phantasmagoria** offered by the author and presumably highly effective to the (male) readers. (That they are European or Arabic does not matter much, I suppose.)

Compared with this passionate hero, the position of the narrator is emotionally an empty one. In a way he is a double of the hero, but also his shadow in the heroic narrative. For another, a post-war generation his stay in England was already more matter of fact and apparently without adventures or strong memories. Writing a dissertation on an unknown English poet did not help much to explore and fix an identity after coming home. If he is something, he is a poet celebrating the happy landscape of his youth. His social position as a bureaucrat in Khartoum is dismissed in his village as useless; as useless as he is as an intellectual who in the eyes of the village males cannot decide on anything. The return of the native carries the potential ambiguous position of the ‘native outsider’: we are all tourists, says Homi Bhabha.

The narration about exile and identity develops thus along two lines: the romantic epic narrative of Mustafa Sa’eed is a story driven to a tragic end, both

archaic and not-real; the modern story of the narrator is one of a circular stagnation, of experienced ambivalence and hybridity.

Identity/Mimicry

Intellectuals in Sudan in the time of independence, in the middle of the 20th Century, lived in a devastating position of post colonial embarrassment losing their inner wisdom and often becoming native outsiders. From this oppressive climate the character of Tayib Saleh was borne: the native stranger who comes back from Europe where fishes die of the cold, looking for the heat in the desert and the sun in the North, not sure if the native population was going to accept him them.

Abuelgassim Gor is speaking, not without a romantic impetus, of Mustafa Sa'eed, who returned to Sudan and lived as a farmer, while the narrator studied in England and wrote his dissertation.

Gor's opposing of intellectuals and farmers, as 'fishes dying of the cold' against those living for 'the heat of the desert and the sun', touches upon a typical ideological problem of just those intellectuals: how to deal with a double past after returning to the homeland, the nation?

In search of a national identity, nationalism is most of all an urban movement, Bruce King points out, but "it identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the "folk" the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties. Nationalism aims at (...) rejection of the cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas."⁹

In the book Mustafa Sa'eed adopts this same attitude. Life in the village must offer salvation. Not only does the hero hide his history, it has also indeed become his story only, a past that functions as a mirror for the narrator who has to find his way in the present in the process of opening and evaluating *the story of my live by Mustafa Sa'eed*. Two intellectuals much influenced by 'foreign ideas' are lost near the river Nile-flowing from South to North.

In the end it is *Nature* (the desert, the river, the family-house, the friendships) that triumphs over *Mind*. It seems remarkable that the author does not allow the two intellectuals a form of exchange about the political situation in their home-country or, at least, their comments on the traditional way of life in the village.

Their main topic is not the hero's flamboyant intellectual career, but his erotic life in London and his pointed profiling as the 'Oriental lover' with all the attributes he and the women can imagine, in a fantastic scenario of sex and lust. In an at first shocking way, the self-representation assembles the Western imaginary around male blackness, including the positions of Western women in its scenario as part of the collective literary memory: the slave-girl, the Christian housewife, the arrogant wife of the colonizer and the lower-class servant-girl. They speak in a language of sexual stereotypes, which the author calls hilarious but which nevertheless is still at work between the North/West and South/East as recent Sudanese novels on the same themes of migration, and blackness and sexuality prove.

Long before feminist and postcolonial theory re-invented the term **mimicry** as a willful play with gender and intercultural positions, the writer offered them already in his novel. In a form of excessive mimicry, the character of Mustafa Sa'eed occupies an aggressive and transgressive position. When postcolonial mimicry as a concept aims at a "copying of the colonizing culture, behaviour, manners and values by the colonized containing both mockery and a certain 'menace', a blurred copy"¹⁰, then it must be clear that this black man mimics and plays at the same time with the expectations and values about the black man in a white and colonizing culture.

Like the concept mimicry that Luce Irigaray developed for Feminist Theory, postcolonial mimicry is *not*, Bhabha tells us, the familiar exercise of *dependent* colonial relations through narcissistic identification with the gaze of the white man (Frantz Fanon), nor a form of colonization-thingification (Aimé Césaire and the 'presence Africaine').¹¹ (noot Alif, 210 Said on Bhabha)

Both Irigaray and Bhabha work with Jacques Lacan's description of *mimicry as a camouflage technique in the human warfare*, where an escape is offered and agency is still existing. Another theoretical position would accentuate a more dependent, but no less active, role described by the Freudian concept of **hysteria** as an over-acceptance of the *socially* prescribed sexual role turning into excessive *sex*/sexual behaviour by those considering themselves dependent on the power of the white males: women and black men. Lost in the in-between of social realities and cultures, Tayeb Salih's novel offers a hero who, at least in the relation with his wife, disappears in the void between playing and being, losing agency and self-consciousness. "*I am Othello, Othello, a lie...*"

Orientalism and Sexual Desire

“The process of Orientalization is based on fetishism, on the ‘scopic drive’ (the desire *to see* what is forbidden), in order to render visible for pleasure and erotic domestication.(...) The colonial/postcolonial site is not ravaged exclusively by fixity, immobility, but by the interzonal shuttle of fixity and fantasy, fear and desire,” writes Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.¹² Against Edward Said’s concept of *Orientalism*, we see that Bhabha makes a strategic claim that in stead of the binary oppositions West/East and Male/Female, there is a fundamental interiority of splitting within these binary oppositions, a process which interrupts the calculated partition, intrinsic to colonial discourse. Fixity and fantasy, fear and desire, they change positions, are both part of the process of looking. The cultural cross-over as represented in the character of Musafa Sa’eed, is mirrored in that of *all* the female figures in the novel, who function as lovers and wives.

There is however a fundamental cultural and gendered difference between the two sexes. “As in most Arabic travel narratives the cultural clash between East and West poses itself as a gendered clash, as a gendered geography where the male tries to know and understand the new culture by ‘knowing’ in a biblical sense the women who belong to that culture.”¹³ Where these novels depict Eastern women as inviolable, protected fortresses, Western females are confronted with violence and annihilation.

The authorial exposure by Tayeb Salih of the Western females as both white and passive bodies on the bed of the hero, reminiscent of the classic pictures of Orientalist availability, ends eventually in a splitting up of legs, limbs, bellies and breasts prepared for pleasure, domestication and killing. And over their heads the black male triumphantly returns the gaze, which used to turn him into an object. European women in Arabic literature, states Evelyn Accad in the 1985 Casebook on *Season...* that appeared in Libanon, exhibit the double cultural standards: exploiting misconceptions of European women (she always wants sex) the African male will always desert her for the virgin back home. As if they were polluted, Western values must be eradicated before the East can find itself. From a cultural locating in the West, the male relocates in his own culture through a local woman.¹⁴

This local “unwelcome, circumcised, uneducated woman in Arabic society” itself is further no topic for any Arabic novelist, writes Suha Kudsieh.¹⁵ There is a big difference between literature and reality, which we find reflected in the figure of Hosna, the village girl that outgrew her farmer’s background in

something of a “noble deportment, a foreign type of beauty.” Only then does the writer allow her to stand up against the traditions and fight for herself, although she will be killed. She is allowed some freedom, but in subordination.

Reality and the Reel

At the end of the workshop in Khartoum on *Season of Migration to the North* of last December 2005, a young female director created a scene about what she interpreted as a ritualistic seducing and killing by Mustafa Sa’eed of the four English women-lovers in the novel. In short repetitive movements they were slaughtered like goats and put down on the floor side by side. Its rather grimly character was juxtaposed by a heartbreaking scene of the Sudanese widow Hosna imploring her father not to force marriage on her with old Wad Rayyes, crying that she will kill him and herself if he persists. The crying lingers on in the silent village that has to listen to the rape, mutilation and murder of the two newlyweds by each other’s hands.

I suppose the performance hinted to a solution of William Galinsky’s problem on stage. The two created worlds are not both true or cannot be true next to each other, realities are, as we know, constructed and the romantic heroic story has fallen out of time and space and is totally dislocated. And that must be mirrored in the theatre-space.

NOTES

- ¹ Timothy Brennan, “The national longing for form”, in: Homi K.Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Naration*, London, 1990, p. 63
- ² Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, translated by Denys Johnson Davis, London, Penguin classics, 1969/2003, Introduction, p IX
- ³ Brennan, in Bhabha, 1990, p. 60
- ⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation”, in: Bhabha, 1990, p. 292
- ⁵ Brennan, in Bhabha, 1990, p. 61
- ⁶ Lecture Abuelgassim Gor, College of Music and Drama, Khartoum, December 2005
- ⁷ Brennan, in Bhabha, 1990, p. 61
- ⁸ Bhabha, 1990, p.50
- ⁹ Bhabha, 1990, p.50
- ¹⁰ Homi.K.Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, 1994, p. 86

- 11 Alif, *Journal of Comparative Poetics* 25, Cairo AUC Press, 2005, p 210
- 12 Bhabha, 1994, p. 74
- 13 Suha Kudsieh, “*Season of Migration to the North: (Be)longing, (Re)location, and Gendered Geographies in Modern Arabic Travel Narratives*”, in: Inge Boer ed., *After Orientalism, Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks/Thamyris*, Amsterdam, 2003, p. 203
- 14 Evelyn Accad, “*Sexual Politics: Women In Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North*”, in: *Season of Migration to the North: A Casebook*, ed. Mona T.Amuni. Beirut, 1985, pp. 55-64
- 15 Kudsieh, 2003, p. 209

Biographies of the contributors

Dr Shams El Din Younis is assistant professor at the College of Music and Drama, Sudan University, and head of the department of Criticism and Theatre Studies. He obtained his Ph.D. in Literary Criticism in 2004, with a study on Rituality and Theatrical Performance, after a Masters degree in Theatre and Archaeology in 1999. After his stay in Yemen he worked as dramatic supervisor and member of the text-committee for television and as director Theatre in the House of Culture. In 1998 he studied at the University of Wales. He was involved in the Religion and African Aspects Conference(1998), the Conference of African Civilization into 21th Century (1999), the Conference for Development of Archaeology and Tourism (2000) and was recently co-organizer of the International Conference on Rituals and Ceremonies in Theatrical Performance (2005). Since 2003 he is General Secretary of ITI, Sudan Centre and involved in the project of Theatre in Conflict zones and The Exchange-program Theatre, Dance and Music between Sudan and The Netherlands. In 2006 he was invited to give a keynote lecture at the FIRT Conference in Helsinki/ Finland.

Dr Intisar Soghayroun El-Zein is Head of the Archaeology Department of the University of Khartoum. She received an honours degree in Archaeology at the University of Khartoum in 1982, and studied for her Master degree in Islamic Art and Architecture at the American University in Cairo (AUC). In 1987 she obtained a Ph.D. degree in Khartoum. Her fields of interest are Theoretical Archaeology, Theatre and Archaeology, Field archaeology, and Gender and Archaeology. In the past few years she has visited a number of conferences in Morocco, Finland and Canada. She was head of Department between 1995-1998, and took up the post again in 2003.

Dr Khalid Mustafa Mubarak is presently teaching at the Department of English of the Khartoum University. He is a prolific playwright and theatre-scholar and has lived some ten years in England in the 1980s.

He studied for his dissertation on *Arabic Drama; a Critical Introduction* at Yale University, USA, which was published in 1986 by Khartoum University Press. Khalid Mubarak was Dean of the College of Music and Drama in the 1980s .

Dr Eman Karmouty is currently assistant professor at the Department of English of the University of Alexandria in Egypt. She published reports and articles on Drama and Theater and literature. The last two year she taught drama and literature in Amman, Jordan. She has published internationally in the two foregoing Conference books, one on Arabic Theatre and the concept of Tragedy and one on the performance of the Comic in Arab Theatre.

Imthital El Tayeb Abdelrahman has a Masters degree in Criticism and Literature. She is currently Secretary of Scientific Affairs, Blue Nile University and lecturer at the Faculty of Education. She teaches Criticism and Arabic Literature.

Dr Saad Yousif Obeid is Dean of the Faculty of Music and Drama of Sudan University. Entering the College, he specialized in acting and directing. He also taught there until going to Egypt to continue his study and working in the field of his specialization while working in the Theatre until his graduation. In the last twenty years he directed more than twenty plays and acted in many others and in series on radio and television. He also presented plays of famous novels and wrote many scenarios for television and radio. An important topic in his work is the use of ritual factors in creating a real Sudanese theatre.

Dr Adel Harbi is Head of the Drama Department of the Faculty of Music and Drama of Sudan University. Having started a career as an actor in the children's programme on television in the 1960s, he attended the Art Academy in Cairo between 1976-1982, where he received his bachelors degree (with honour). During this period he worked at the Egyptian National Theatre and became a trainer himself while writing down his experiences. The first play he directed was Khalid Mubarak's *Almugmara*, an adaptation of an old Japanese story *Zen*. After his return he focused his teaching on the expression of the body, the effect of music on embodiment, time, rhythm and the body – that is ritual performance, and applied his findings in Zikir and Noba-Sufi traditions. In the research for his Masters degree, again in Cairo (1987-1993), he concentrated on the use of ritual phenomena and popular practices in the training of actors.

Ali Mahdi Nouri is a famous Sudanese actor and director in the theatre and infilm and television. He is founder of the National Theater/Albugaa Theatre; President of the Sudanese Actors Union and of the ITI Sudan Centre; General Secretary of the Arab Artists Union and President of the CIDCITI Unesco and EXCOM member.

Dr Abuegassim Gor teaches Criticism and Theatre-studies at the College of Music and Drama. His specialization and subject of his dissertation was Drama for Peace Culture. Since the start of the Peace Project in 1997, he has published several books in the area of peace culture and participated in conferences world wide in the field of his studies, both theoretical and in practice.

Dr Mieke Kolk teaches at the Institute for Theatre Studies of the University of Amsterdam. In the 1980s she specialized in Women Studies in Theatre and founded the feminist theatre group Theatre Persona that wanted to offer critical interpretations of the great/male classics. She publicized four books on Women and Theatre in The Netherlands and Europe, which are both theoretical and historical. Since 2001 she concentrates on the development of intercultural contacts between West and East, creating exchange programmes between Egypt-The Netherlands and Sudan-The Netherlands that are planned to run for three years. Since 2003 she co-organized Intercultural Conferences in Belgium, Morocco and Sudan and is editor of its proceedings.

THE INVESTITURE OF THE RETHSHIP; Rituality past and present

Khalid AL-MUBARAK

The King must die is a ritual with global features.

After a certain period or when falling ill, the King is helped to die whatever his wishes.

The sacredness of the Kings body is in Western medieval cultures transformed from an anthropological category into a juridical one: the king has two bodies: one political that can never die and one private that, alas, will die eventually.

The Sudanese Shilluk is a noble tribe with a long history. Nobody knows exactly how and why they came to settle in the areas they occupy. For our purpose they came from where the Bahr Al Arab came, from where Bahr Al Jabal came, Al Rahad came, the Sobat came, the Blue Nile came.

From their rich culture we concentrate on "The Investiture of the Rethship", the monarchy of the Shilluk.

The Reth according to some sources should never die a natural death. If this happens pollution will follow, and epidemics. That is why any Reth keeps his fatal illness a secret – but Shillukland is not a land for secrets.

Rumours

Characters

YOUSIF

FADIL

YOSIF: Have you heard?

FADIL What?

YOUSIF: This means you haven't heard.

FADIL: No! I might have heard something different from what you have in mind.

YOUSIF: What I have in mind is not ordinary. It's extraordinary, exciting and fantastibulous. Anybody who has heard about it would know it's the exciting thing.

FADIL: Well, we'll see, out with it then.

YOUSIF: As simple as that? Give us a cigarette first and sit down.

FADIL (*lights a cigarette*): So you think you know more about what's going on than anybody else.

YOUSIF: I do, I do. If the Kojur quarrels with his first wife I'm bound to get the news first thing in the morning.

FADIL: So I take it you've heard about their last.

YOUSIF: Well – I have of course some vague...

FADIL: Confess. You haven't heard! I'll tell you.

YOUSIF: O.K. What happened?

FADIL: Know that girl – whose parents returned recently from the North Akoj?

YOUSIF: Know her? I love her, I adore her. Did you see the way she walks (*imitates*) – Aha! How healthy. They say her father feeds her on nothing but Basta – Ah... how healthy.

FADIL: And how clean – did you notice how her skin shines? Majok! (*pauses*) Now the kojur noticed all this and more.

YOUSIF: And fell!

FADIL: No doubt about it! But her father who is a foreman in one of these ministries said the girl was a student in Khartoum, and was actually due to return the following day.

YOUSIF: He refused the Kojur?

FADIL: No doubt about it. His cousin is a very important man, so the Kojur cannot even harm him. He dare not.

YOUSIF: Now back to the old quarrel, who told the Kojur's wife?

FADIL: I don't know. But when he returned home she watched him silently and asked (*imitates*): "Isn't Adyeng's girl lovely?" The Kojur said: "I don't like the way she walks."

YOUSIF: Did he say that? Ha, Ha, Ha!

FADIL: No doubt about it. She then added slyly: "Wouldn't she be suitable for your young son? The Kojur didn't reply. The old woman then added: "Better go and ask for her hand on his behalf before one of these old men sees her walking and tries to lay his dirty hands on her."

YOUSIF: Did she say that?

FADIL: No doubt about it. At that point he realised that she knew everything and the quarrel began. (*pauses*) Did I tell you something you didn't know or didn't I?

YOUSIF: You did. You most certainly did. But now it's my turn to surprise you. There is something about somebody who is more important than the Kojur. (*walks around*)

FADIL: Who? The girl herself?

YOUSIF: No, no.

FADIL: The Mudir?

YOUSIF: No, No (*makes sure nobody is listening, sits down*) The Reth himself!
 Didn't I say extraordinary?

FADIL: Careful, look here I don't want any trouble. (*and waits a minute*)

YOUSIF: (*silent*) I (*whispers*) understand he too has an eye for a gentle walk and
 for lovely girls that are fed on noting but a Basta and Torta.

YOUSIF: Wrong. It has nothing to do with women.

FADIL: (*disappointed*) Nothing to do with women! You must be crazy! Is there
 anything that has nothing to do with women? (*They poke their noses*)

YOUSIF: (*stands up*) The Reth is ... how shall I put it ... is not feeling very well.

FADIL: No! That is not true. I saw him – wait a minute. I didn't see him this week
 (*silence*) The trouble with our present Reth is that he has no character. True,
 he has a policeman in every corner but apart from that you don't feel his
 presence.

YOUSIF: It's not a slight headache or an upset stomach. This time it's more
 serious.

FADIL: Are you sure?

YOUSIF: Dead sure. And if it's serious, it'll have serious repercussions. (*puts
 his hand around his neck*)

FADIL: No doubt. And bloody consequences about it. (*They sit*) No doubt about
 it.

—

Physician and Citizens

Road

Characters

Old Woman

Old Man

Physician

OLD WOMAN: Ah ... Oh ... Oh ... Ah ...

OLD MAN: What's the matter with you my dear? What's the matter?

OLD WOMAN: Nothing Nothing is the matter with me.

OLD MAN: But you're moaning and groaning... Ah...Oh...(*imitates her*) and
 you're holding your stomach!

OLD WOMAN: Nothing is wrong with my stomach.

OLD MAN: Nothing? That's strange! Could it be – Ah (*hesitates*) could it be that
 you have something inside there? At your age!

OLD WOMAN: Shame on you! I am no longer a woman in that sense. My eldest son is almost fifty years old now. Ah....Oh.....Ah... (*stops suddenly*)

OLD MAN: There you go again. (*silence*) I'm on my way to dr. Naim. Come on, I shall walk along with you.

OLD WOMAN: I was going to him anyway. He's round the corner, isn't he?
 (*They enter after episode with a nurse/receptionist. The doctor is at his desk, writing. They greet, he does not reply, then quite late he condescends with a dry 'Hello'*)

PHYSICIAN: Here's your prescription. (Hands it over without looking up)

OLD WOMAN: What?

PHYSICIAN: Take it, quick. I'm busy.

OLD WOMAN: But you don't know what I'm complaining of?

PHYSICIAN: I know, I know. You're not a normal patient, my dear. You come very often. And I know all your complaints. I've prescribed you some medicine, which would be all right for all of them. You needn't pay for it at the dispensary.

OLD WOMAN: But – may be I have something different. Something new. How do you know?

OLD MAN: Yes....How?

PHYSICIAN (turns to OLD MAN): You keep silent. All right. Cut a long story short. Anything new?

OLD WOMAN: How do I know! I am not a doctor. You are. You tel me, come on.

PHYSICIAN: Oh dear! Oh dear!

OLD WOMAN: You should see me, touch me, listen to my heart, ask me to show you my tongue, ask me to say AAGH! And then make up your mind.

PHYSICIAN: So, so. You think you can tell me how to do my work? The fact that your son was my schoolmate should not make you so, dear! All right, take your clothes off.

OLD WOMAN: My clothes?

PHYSICIAN: All of them.

OLD WOMAN: In front of all these people? (*laughs*) If you say so. (*starts to undress*)

PHYSICIAN: Not here – behind the curtain. (*She goes behind*) I know what's wrong with her.

OLD MAN: What then?

PHYSICIAN: Old age.

OLD MAN: (*shouts*) What did you say? (*softly*) Is that the Reth's trouble too?

PHYSICIAN: What?

OLD MAN: You heard me. This woman is younger than the Reth. We hear all kinds of rumours about the Reth's health.

PHYSICIAN: I am the Reth's private doctor. Any rumours about his health are malicious gossip. He is....

OLD WOMAN: (*shouts*) I am ready!

PHYSICIAN: Lie down and relax, dear. Your body needs some rest and some air. (*to OLD MAN*) I assure you the Reth is quite fit and healthy.

OLD MAN: Are you sure?

PHYSICIAN: Of course. I saw the man this morning.

OLD MAN: Exactly! My informer was right. You left in a hurry, using the back door.

PHYSICIAN: I did so because I attended to one of his wives.

OLD WOMAN: I am ready!

PHYSICIAN: Just lie down and relax, dear.

OLD WOMAN: I did so.

PHYSICIAN: Excuse me a moment. (*goes behind the curtain*) (*Shouts*) say AAGH!

OLD WOMAN: AAAGH!

PHYSICIAN: Louder!

OLD WOMAN: AAAAGH. (*silence*)

PHYSICIAN: (*comes out*) Your turn now. What can I do for you?

OLD MAN: Nothing.

PHYSICIAN: How do you mean? Why did you come?

OLD MAN: To keep her company.

OLD WOMAN: (*shouts*) That's not true!

OLD MAN: And because I wanted to be sure about the Reth's health. His health concerns us all.!

PHYSICIAN: Quite! Quite! Come out (*to OLD WOMAN*).

OLD MAN: (*pretends to cough, pours money on the table to take out a handkerchief*). May I put this here?

OLD WOMAN: (*comes out*) Where's my new prescription?

PHYSICIAN: (*hands her the same prescription as before*). Here take it.

OLD WOMAN: Isn't this the old one?

PHYSICIAN: No. Take it. Now goodbye. I'm busy.

OLD MAN: Let's go. I shall come to see you later doctor.

PHYSICIAN: What for?

OLD MAN: I shall tell you then. All in good time. (*they make for the door*)

PHYSICIAN: Hello. You forgot something, didn't you? (*hands over the moneybag*)

OLD MAN: Ah...yes...yes. I didn't quite forget it... I ...

PHYSICIAN: You won't find me here if you come later. (*they leave*)

OLD WOMAN: Here I assure you again, the Reth is quite healthy. Do not listen to malicious gossip. Now, read this for me.

OLD MAN: A-S-P-I-R-I-N-E. Aspirine. Good medicine! Come on.

OLD WOMAN: Oh, Ah....Oh.

(EXIT)

Newcomer and Villagers

Characters

Newcomer

Old Man

Old Woman

Yousif

Fadil

NEWCOMER: Ha...Hello....

VILLAGERS: Welcome home, welcome back.

NEWCOMER: Everybody all right, I hope?

VILLAGERS: Thank you, all right.

OLD MAN: We're always right here, no matter what happens to you in the towns or abroad.

OLD WOMAN: Yes, always all right.

YOUSIF: You seem to be doing quite well in the North, don't you? Look at his clothes.

FADIL: Yes, look at them!

NEWCOMER: There's nothing special about my clothes.

YOUSIF: It's a long time since you've come – have you come in order to witness the event?

NEWCOMER: I've come for a private reason.

FADIL: A private reason!

OLD MAN: No, there are no secrets in this village. Did you come for the festivities?

NEWCOMER: Which festivities?

OLD WOMAN: The investiture of the new Reth.

NEWCOMER: New Reth? But the old Reth is still alive.

YOUSIF: Alive – yes. But he won't be for long.

NEWCOMER: Is he dying?

OLD MAN: No. But he is very ill. He has to be helped to sleep, to depart, leave in peace.

NEWCOMER: Helped? What are you suggesting? You can't be consider killing him as our forefathers used to do!

FADIL: We don't call it killing!

NEWCOMER: Doesn't matter what you call it. It's murder, it shouldn't take place.

OLD WOMAN: My dear boy. Nobody asked your opinion or permission. You leave your land, live and prosper somewhere else. When you come back, you object to things we do in order to protect our land.

ALL: That's true, That's true.

NEWCOMER: Superstitions – all superstitions!

YOUSIF: How dare you.

NEWCOMER: I'll report you to the police.

FADIL: They know. They can do nothing to stop it, because the Reth's own family will help us. Nobody can ever prove anything.

NEWCOMER: Do you really believe there's something called Nykiang?
(*they chase him away*)

- Killing the Reth; - First mock battle

Ashol meets his Fiancé

Characters

Ashol

A.M.

Old Woman

ASHOL: Oh ... hello? How are you? I've found you at last. (*they shake hands*)

A.M.:hello Ashol.

ASHOL: I've looked for you everywhere. I've been to your mother's cottage, to your aunt's and niece's and I left you messages with half a dozen people. Fancy meeting you like this on the road. Didn't you know I was looking for you?

A.M.: Yes, I did. But...

ASHOL: I came for you. Not for these drab streets and cottages. Look here, see what I bought you.

A.M.: Listen Ahol.... I would rather you don't show me.

ASHOL: Here these...perfumes by Mume Rochas, especially for you. And here...this dress suits you. It's your colour too.

A.M.:Listen. I've got to tell you something.

ASHOL: No you listen, and see first, my love. This necklace is from Berlin, I went there for a conference. See here? Your name is engraved. Here see..... This is your make-up case. I have been waiting for this day – three years! When I get lonely in Khartoum I think of you. When my friends go out I stay in, to save money. No I've come to take you away with me. We shall never part again. Yohwaa...! (*jumps around*)

A.M.: You see, I got engaged during your absence.

ASHOL: Engaged?! I thought we considered our vows more binding than any engagement!

A.M.: Well, you see, you've been away for three years, I thought you'd forgotten me.

ASHOL: Are you serious? Is this the will of your father?

A.M.: No, It's my own will.

ASHOL: So this is why everybody seemed so embarrassed and secretive! Who is this lucky man?

A.M.: It's Omar.

ASHOL: The new Reth!

A.M.: Yes.

ASHOL: But the Reth has more than hundred wives. If he were a simple man, it would have been okay. I'm sorry. I have to play the civilised fool. Congratulations from the bottom of my heart.

A.M.: Sorry I'll have to go now, my mother will be worried about me.

ASHOL: Goodbye madam, may you prosper with him and live happily ever after.

(*OLD WOMAN enters, meets ASHOL on his way out*)

OLD WOMAN: Welcome back my son. I heard about your arrival (*tries to kiss him, he stops her*)

ASHOL: All right, all right.

OLD WOMAN: What did you bring from Khartoum?

ASHOL: Here. All these are presents. Take this. (*the make-up case*)

OLD WOMAN: Oh... Thank you so much. (*opens*) What's this?

ASHOL: This is for dry lips. (*amused*) It makes them moist.

OLD WOMAN: (*dry lips*) And this?

ASHOL: A deodorant. It stops you from perspiring (*is carried away*) and this is hair remover – if your moustache grows, or your beard. You use this to get rid of it.

OLD WOMAN: Thank you very much, my son. But, my son, are you sure these things are for me? Didn't you give me the wrong case or something? *(Pauses)* But wait a minute. I met this girl just now. Could it be....you got them for her, didn't you?

ASHOL: You may take them if you want them, I really mean it.

OLD WOMAN: No. I'll take a reward from you, all right. But not these. Something I deserve. *(Pauses)* With these, I can get you a most beautiful bride.

ASHOL: No thank you.

OLD WOMAN: What size does she wear? Seven? This is the commonest size. Don't throw your goods away.

ASHOL: I wanted her in particular, don't you understand?

OLD WOMAN: Yes I do, I understand. If she's pretty, in your eyes. There are others that are prettier. If she's a good cook, there are others who are probably better. If you want children, there are others who can bear you a hundred if you can feed them. Leave the matter to me. Your late mother was a good woman. She would have helped my son, had she found him in such trouble.

(ASHOL laughs)

(EXIT)

Advice to the Reth

Omar el Shiwain:

My son,

You see these people, your people? They are the most dissatisfied lot that ever came together anywhere in the world. Everyone of them thinks he is better than the others and everyone of them – deep inside – believes that he should have been ruler of this land. Each and everyone of them sees himself in your place; nobody of them sees himself in his proper place as farmer or labourer or housewife.

That's why I always say – no ruler will ever please our people. No matter how good, just, modest or helpful he is, they will always grumble. We are grumblers by instinct, my son! We always complain. I suppose it makes us happy. My advice is – remember: Even if you create paradise here, these people will be discontented

and they will complain and gossip. That's why the best way to rule them is not by kindness, but by firmness – not by modesty, but by power – not by consultation, but by ruthless orders. Ruthlessness is the only word they understand and respect. Take this from me: If you are not ruthless and merciless, they will cut you to pieces, with their tongues and their spears. If you scare them, they will respect you and love you and our land will know stability, prosperity and progress.

So be firm. Do not allow any nonsense. And remember you were chosen in order to lead, not to entertain our people. You cannot rule without difficult and painful and bloody decisions. “You cannot make food without killing a chicken or uprooting vegetables. You cannot make an omelette without breaking an egg – and you cannot remain in power without breaking a dissident's neck.” (*coughs*) I had better sit down now.

Mustafa R:

My Reth,

Beware of foreign enemies. Love your neighbour, but don't be gullible. Be generous to your neighbour but do not allow him ever to take your house. Be friendly to your neighbour, but keep your eyes open lest your friendliness be interpreted as weakness. Be a man of peace, do not stand a fight, but if you were forced to fight, then fight to the bitter end. There are good foreigners and bad foreigners, just as there are good Shilluk men and women and bad Shilluk men and women. So, watch your frontier and be selective. Your frontier is like the door of your house. Let in whom you like and keep out whom you don't like. But never sleep with your front door open. Never – never – never. If you do, you may never live to realise your mistake.

El Fadil:

My son, My Reth,

A young man like you would probably not like my advice. But that doesn't matter much. I am an old man and have nothing to lose except my experience. What is the point in taking it with me to the grave? I've given advice to two Reths before you on similar occasions. They didn't like it, but when they were old they thanked me for it when it was too late.

Let me ask you first – How many eyes have you got? More than two? Have you got one in your back, or one in your foot? No. Only two eyes, like him, and him,

and him, and me. Have you got two noses? I see only one, like him and like the poorest peasant in Shillukland. Have you got more than one stomach? Can you eat more than that (cups his hands) in one meal? You are young, you can probably eat much, but not more than the capacity of one stomach.

Why do I ask you these questions? Because I want you to remember that you are a human being, not a demi-god. Yes Nykiang puts you above us, but to be better, not worse. Power is dangerous. Tomorrow, you will have hundreds of flatterers, hypocrites, and sycophants – They will kiss your hand, kiss your head, kiss your boots, kiss the dust under your feet. They will tell you that you are the greatest man that ever lived. Don't you ever believe them. See through their flattery and through your human weakness; and remember, you are like the rest of us. Only blessed by the spirit of Nykiang. Tomorrow people will flock around you. If you smile, they will laugh and chant "Long live the Reth." If you tell a bad joke, they will guffaw; if you fart, they will clap and rejoice. Your head is more important, even though you have two eyes and a nose and a mouth like the rest of us. You have a greater responsibility than any of us. If he thinks twice to make a decision, you should think tens of times. His mistake affects him and his family, yours affects the whole tribe. So be not rash and be not arrogant, intoxicated with power.

People will respect you if you are wise. But they will fear you if you are cruel. Ask not for their fear, ask for their love. Because rulers – good and bad, old and young – come and go. Shillukland remains, and Shillukland is these people. Don't you ever forget that.

Fath el Bari (Reth):

Allow me first to greet you all on this occasion, young and old, men and women. (*Pauses, looks around*)

I'd like to say this ... I have no illusion whatsoever that mine will be an easy task. I know that I will not be sitting on a stool of gold, but on a lion's back. But I also know full well that I am the man for the task, helped by Nykiang whose spirit pervades my body and my soul. And helped also by you, not all of you but by most of you.

I have no illusion about your the feelings. I know some dislike me, some love me and some would be quite prepared to help overthrow me. To them I say that their feelings shall not stop them from working for Shillukland. If they want to do so, I won't stop them. I'll only be too happy. It is this land that unites us. I did not choose to do harm here – nor did any of my enemies. We all have rights to this air and this earth (takes dust). That is why my adversaries will be free to work for

the land if not for me. They don't have to become passionate supporters of mine, but they also won't be allowed to obstruct my efforts. On this I can make no concessions.

As for those who like me and support me – I say this. I know the good things, I do. So help me by criticising me. By telling me about the weaknesses. I need honest supporters, not flatterers as our brother here has described them.

To my relatives I say this. Do not expect or ask for privileges or preferential treatment. I am Reth for all, and on behalf of all.

To all our neighbours I say this. Shillukland has got its problems – formidable problems. But we shall solve them all, or at least try to do so. This is my dream; and this is the desire of my people. Our revels have ended. Let's all work and never take a day off unless it is absolutely necessary.

(walks away)