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Nadia Naar Gada

The African Worldview in Kateb Yacine's *Le cadavre encerclé* (1954) and *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité* (1959)

Abstract

This paper revisits Kateb Yacine's *Le cadavre encerclé* (*The Encircled Cadaver*, 1954) and *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité* (*The Ancestors*, 1959) by suggesting a new direction for a reading, which helps to explain many invisible areas in the two plays. This postcolonial approach may perforce the reverse of the reviews that stress the author's borrowing and imitation of the Western theatrical models. It is a reading, which is based on the theoretical scheme, which was suggested by Wole Soyinka in his book entitled *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976).

Parole chiave

Transitional Figure,
Communion with Ancestors,
Past myths and Rituals

Contatti

gadanadia@live.fr

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to lay the basis for a reflection on an integrative model of analysis, which engages the possibility of studying African drama out of its Western context and literary tradition with particular reference to the Algerian poet, novelist, playwright, and theatre Director, Kateb Yacine. More specifically, we propose to re-examine two of his plays namely, *The Encircled Cadaver* and *The Ancestors Redoubling Ferocity* to suggest that for Kateb Yacine, art is not at a remove from life. Rather, it is intrinsically involved in engaging with its context, history and the condition through which it is experienced.

Though the plausibility of this thesis may first appear unconventional to critics, who are used to regard artist without moral or political responsibility while situating artifacts as

autonomous entities isolated from any particular function and divorced from their 'social fabric'. In what follows, the intention is mainly to show that when the form, the content and the link between them change, the nature of our understanding of art's autonomy must also change according to political, social situations, which cannot be absolute while art cannot be functionless, and timeless. Irele Abiola (1981) is right to point out that writing is the outcome of a representation of facts, collective experience, and reconstruction of the states of consciousness stimulated by that experience. "*If African writing has any value at the present moment, any significance, it is essentially as a function of the comprehensive testimony it offers of the turns and patterns of an unfolding drama of existence in which [Africans] have been and continue to be involved*" maintains the theorist (Abiola. 1981:1).

The purpose is, however, not to veer too far in a reactive direction, exaggerating the power of the local context to reveal the forms and set meanings a literary work takes. We rather argue that there is a close relationship between the body of African literary forms and the global cultural aesthetics and we find it helpful to develop this dialectics as an alternative to the Eurocentric and Afrocentric approaches. Such a posture is necessary and rewarding for both African and European as it offers the possibility to look at artifacts far from their provincial uses and from opposing and binary angles. The oppositions, according to Achille Mbembe, are not helpful because they cloud our understanding of post-colonial relations (Mbembe. 1992:3).

In order to show the ways in which Kateb Yacine's selected plays gain an autonomy from the Western theatre, we shall stress the dissimilarities in the aesthetic forms, foreground the discursive and theatrical practices, which distance them from the Western ones in addressing the subsequent questions: how does the playwright incorporate an African way of living and thinking through rituals, traditions, and local beliefs. How does he make use of his dual heritage to his advantage in presenting a postcolonial ideology rooted in the fact that although the colonized Africans were influenced by European domination, they can still portray their rich ancestry prior to colonization?

Relevant to his literary output, Kateb has shown all along his artistic career that Algerian people have rich cultural traditions and systems of thoughts that can be considered as an alternative to European imposed ones. Our close reading of his two plays aims to show how Kateb Yacine, without dismissing the impact of his colonial education, finds a place to stand, to speak to in relation to the western standards that are imposed as interpretative measures on his culture. Given this description helps to question Eurocentric criticism that usually seek for ancestry, equivalents and precedents of stylistic trends in African drama in the Western literary traditions, while seeing it as deriving from the same traditions.

Focal to our analysis is to analyze Kateb's plays from the nuances of the Algerian culture in order to examine the way the playwright uses the African cosmology to establish a close link between metaphysical realm and human action, the way the playwright looks to the ancestors as model for imaginative inspiration, how rich and complex the symbolism of the ritual can be to articulate a diversity of cultural experience, and the importance of reconciliation as a contribution to peace. Like all societies, the Algerian one is organized and has its own fully developed culture, history, mythologies, and religious ceremonies. Throughout the plays, this intersection of theatrical forms is presented within the social

and political context of the Algerian Liberation War. These and other African ancestral values are in accordance with the Soyinka's conception of an "African Tragedy". Yet, before delving into an exposition of the African worldview in Kateb's plays, there is need to make explicit Soyinka's perception of tragedy, which will subsequently enhance our understanding of the plays. By using Soyinka's dramatic conception, we aim to show that Kateb Yacine draws inspiration from accounts of his kinsmen to refine his culture; his world view emerges in an elaborate fusion of artistic quality and individuality worth of a serious study.

1. Theory and Method Analysis

We find Soyinka's approach to be of an informing relevance, first because its framework and conceptual tools strengthens the relationship between local and global rather than the universalist vs particularistic impasse. It avoids the 'essentialized' version of the romanticizing of Africa or that of conceding to the dominant privileging of the supposed "artistic autonomy" of the West. Second, it provides what may be called a "glocal" understanding of the relations of power in challenging the binary paradigms already popularized by Afrocentric and Eurocentric criticism alike. Third, it provides a fruitful way into the general question of this relational and inclusive approach regarding the study of African Drama as it seeks to reorient our world view in ways that challenge the Eurocentric imposed formulations and Western analysis that recognize neither African ancestral thought nor its past. Fourth, it promotes the ways in which constructive criticism of a given reality can be used to create other realities and artifacts that make transcultural analysis possible.

Awam Amkpa is right when pointing out that Soyinka's dramatic practice represents an inspiring and exciting archaeology of postcolonial cultures. It is grounded in the conceptualization of mythic tragedy as a site for fueling communal consciousness of marginality and desire for change, rather than as a bastion for consolidating tradition for its own sake. His works, adds the reviewer, challenge authoritarianism whether derived from colonial or indigenous sources and enunciate symbolisms of resistance and agency, the birthing, if not the destination of postcolonial desire. Its goal is dis-alienation as a constant process of deconstructing domination and seeking a language of equity and justice (Awam Amkpa.2003:33).

The idea of the "Fourth Stage" is part of Soyinka's attempt to create a non-western poetics for the study of African drama, which was published in his *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). Taken as a whole, Soyinka's essays suggest that dramaturgy, although inherently political, does not conform to prescriptive models for knowing or describing individual and collective political identities. He argues that an African tragedy is shaped by the grief resulting from the mental distress during the separation and disintegration of the spirit from the self. Tragedy channels anguish into a creative purpose which releases man from a totally destructive despair, realizing from within him the most energetic, deeply combative invention and bridges it with visionary hopes. The battle of the will is primarily creative. Drama would be non-existent except within and against this symbolic representation of earth and cosmos, except within this communal compact whose choric essence supplies the collective energy for the challenger (Ibid, pp, 39,145-146).

Soyinka places the “Fourth Stage” as the main essence of the African tragedy because it challenges the rational assumptions of the West by establishing transitions between past, present, future and between the worlds of gods and that of humans. Time for the Westerners is divided into past, present, and future while in Africa, it is based on the community’s collective sense that has complex ties to the ancestral world. In such a structure, the acts of being born, of living and of dying are regarded as natural processes of transition. The birth of a child is an occasion for celebration as is the death of an old person. The world of the living is an arena for conscious reparations through sacrifices, rituals and mythology codifying the moralities of being and becoming. It is a process that summons a consciousness for change without necessarily naming the manner of such change beyond its immediate anti-colonial directions. Such consciousness can happen in the worlds of the living, and in the modes of remembering the dead and the ancestors. The “Fourth stage” as Soyinka conceives it, stands as the vortex of archetypes and home of the tragic spirit; it is also fourth area of existence or the transitional level surface between the realm of the Living and the world of the Dead. This fourth space represents the dark continuum of transition where inter-transmutation of ultimate spirit and materiality meet. It contains the expression of the cosmic will (Ibid. 26,149).

To bridge this gulf, to succeed the transition, and to re-establish order out of the disarray, sacrifices must be made to the forces of the underworld to allow the re-unification of human essence and the divine. These rituals and ceremonies of appeasements are performed to the cosmic powers, which lie as guardians of the gulf. They are performed to effect reconciliation between the visible and the invisible parts of the cosmos. In this way of thinking the world, human action are closely linked the cycles of nature. All extraordinary phenomena manifest in the human psyche as an imbalance between physical and metaphysical sacrifice, which is the curative means to restore the equilibrium in being. The African tragedy is a reflection of an African worldview, by which Soyinka means a skillful exposition of an African traditional way of thinking, which is suggestive of the main cosmogonist practices and acceptances, which contribute to the harmonization of the human functions, external phenomena, and supernatural suppositions with individual consciousness emerging as a normal self adjusting process in African temper of mind. The theorist illustrates such a philosophy with, for instance, the need for a mediation of ritual that is performed as a communal activity rather than an act of worship; it is an act of cosmic totalism rather a religious performance (Soyinka, 1991:122).

From the above conceptual clarification, there is a need to draw the relationship between Soyinka’s conceptions of an African worldview and look in what sense it might be applied to Kateb Yacine’s selected plays. The implicit challenge to ‘africanize’ his drama has been missed by many of Kateb’s critics. By adopting Soyinka’s approach, we have set out to examine the way Kateb provides an African framework to his plays by incorporating his ancestral myths and rituals, the way he uses a revolutionary discourse to “decolonize the minds” and break from dependence on his colonial masters culture. The playwright uses oral cultural markers, which lead to a detailed interpretation of the two plays, which we shall first of all briefly summarize.

2. *The Synopsis of Kateb's Plays*

Le cadavre encéclé and its sequel *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité* were published as a trilogy entitled, *Le cercle des représailles* (*The Cercle of Retaliation*) in 1959. The former was first published in 1954 in *Esprit*; it was banned in France and was produced in Brussels by Jean-Marie Serrau. The two plays are clinical exposés of the inhumanity and deceit. Although they were written and first performed in France to a French audience, Kateb provides an African framework to his plays by incorporating his ancestral myths and rituals. Their complex structures do not narrate a story as such; the main purpose is to narrate macabre and frightening historical situations. The objective is not catharsis, but rather shock and psychic hurtful based on experience. Both revolve around the main protagonist, Lakhdar, who moves from monologue to another, expressing his mental distress, suffering, pain and obsessions. Through him, the playwright revives his ancestors' collective memories, to which he adds recollections and actions of the war. He exposes the ravages of the war and the destruction caused by the French repression and dramatizes the plight of innocent people, who were caught in the demonstration of May, 8th, 1945.

The two plays also provide a virulent secular vision which combines the re-creation of the pre-colonial African worldview with a possibility of transporting its main features to an obsessive description of the Algerian revolutionary existence. The playwright combines revolutionary fervor with a distinctly humanist vision, which he finds in the ancestral practices of his people, guided by an adherence to traditional codes of conduct in which he finds no contradiction. The visionary reconstruction of the past in the two plays is undertaken for purposes of a social direction and the playwright's vision consciously obeys the unifying, harmonizing ideals of his ancestral society. His world-view is secular and humanist in its insistence on the revolutionary integrity, which refuses to be trapped into advocating violence for its own sake. The same vision derives from a philosophy that he elicits from a familiar ancestral past that paves the way for a better future. The above short summary suffices to establish that the plays explore themes such as traditional and cultural and intergenerational conflicts. Of equal importance a thorough understanding of both the socio-cultural and emotional factors contributing to the delineation of the characters is needed to reach an interpretation that is reflective of the plays' manifold stylistic strategies by which the playwright distantly himself and gains his artistic 'autonomy' from his Western influences.

3. *Contextualization of the Plays*

The encircled Cadaver and its sequel *The Ancestors Redoubling Ferocity* were produced during a period when the Algerian nationalist movement developed to a higher level of struggle when the major parties fighting for the liberation of Algeria shifted from nationalist parties to a liberation movement. The two plays expose the ravages of the war and destruction caused the bloody events of May, 8th 1945. They portray the French oppression of Algerians people and foretell the titanic struggle that took place to end it. Central to the plays is a protagonist, Lakhdar, who evokes strong feelings in the reader when seeking to reflect the nature of the conflict between the oppressed people and the colonizer. Through this character, the playwright expresses his thinking about the self and the world in a well-built lyricism, which dominates the action. He uses some flashbacks to depict episodes in the history of Algerian people's struggle for liberation to reinforce the tragic mood and interrupt the logical progression of the action (P.32). He

refers to the eve of the demonstration of May 1945 and its preparation (P.24). Furthermore, flashbacks tell about Lakhdar's childhood, his arrest, and torture in prison (P.48).

The atmosphere of gloom and terror is announced from the very first scene of *The encircled Cadaver* that shows the main protagonist, Lakhdar, dying and his corpse surrounded by other Algerians, victims of the French repression. He stands immobile in the centre of a universe that turns around him. Amidst a disorganizing and reorganising world, he tries sorrowfully to relate two inconsistencies of a devoted fighter by moving from "la rue des Vandales" (The Vandals Road), a place like many other places of blind terror into a ritual empathy with ancestors. The resurrected man, withering on the floor, addresses the audience as "a jury", in a long monologue, and tells the story of colonisation (P.16). At the midpoint of the play, follows a 'reflection scene', in which Lakhdar evokes the events of 8th, May, 1945. The events describe acts of grief and sorrow caused by his detention and torture by the French police (P.47).

The playwright exposes Lakhdar's fall and his way of interacting with other victims without showing any form of *hubris*. The tragic character's misfortune is not brought about by some error or frailty for which he is responsible. In developing his conception of an "African Tragedy," Soyinka proposes an aesthetic principle where the objective of tragic art is not to provoke a catharsis that terrorizes and consigns a community to fatalism and to a 'monologic' description of its world. Rather, it awakens the community to conditions of injustice and urges for a deliberate inventiveness that seeks to harness cultural resources to achieve dis-alienation (Soyinka.1991:34). By the end of the play, Kateb breaks the barrier of tragedy and comedy by ending it on a hopeful note expressed through Ali, the son of Lakhdar and Nedjma, throwing bitter oranges on the audience, a vision of communal action for the future. Though the exact direction of the action is left open-ended, one might interpret the act as a prophetic warning on the nature of the first crop of the Algerian independence.

4. Reversal of Individual Heroism

Amid the representation of brutality on the stage, it is through Lakhdar that the playwright reverses individual leadership into ritual sacrifice of the man who one dies to save many. Kateb re-examines and revises the existing history to emphasize past revolutionary tendencies of collectivism and communal survival while de-emphasizing success through individualism. He then turns what was thought as "primitive", "barbaric" into complex African mythological systems by reference to his ancestors. What motivates Lakhdar is his choice of destiny and what strengthens his readiness to self-sacrifice is his desire to reconcile the forces at play within the cosmos by perpetuating the harmonious interaction between reality and the world of ancestors. Lakhdar becomes a medium and an agent of divide reordering, who allows the Algerian traditional belief system to transcend oppositional contact and social change. Kateb's creative interpretation of an African cosmology and the exploration of his protagonist's consciousness through his perception of death as a rite of passage and his use of ancestors as archetypes and spiritual entities to predict social change can be linked to his communal African psyche combined with his social vision with its philosophical outlook. Such vision can be interpreted as a mean to face the colonial chaos.

The author makes the past coexist with the present and linked to the future. Opposing the hierarchical linear nature of western philosophical tradition and culture, the playwright establishes connections between the cyclical patterning: the time of ancestors and that of the living. In so doing, he creates a kind of cyclical repetition and a process of “cosmological space-time continuum”, which parallels the one provided in Soyinka’s fourth stage. The connecting passage linking the two areas of existence becomes possible by Lakhdar’s passage through the primordial gulf and his ritual sacrifice to have an effect on his community’s liberation. His communal rite takes on spiritual, social and political dimensions as it releases the community from the colonial tyranny.

5. Lakhdar, a Ritual Archetype and a Transitional Figure

From the beginning of the play, Lakhdar re-acts the cosmic inconsistency of life and death and the passage from the world of the living to that of ancestors. After being ruthlessly injured, his soul and body become in a state of disassociation for as long as he struggles against death (P.16). He goes above the apparent in order to build a quasi-mythological existence with the essence of reality. He prepares spiritually and physically to his disintegration and re-assembly with the womb of origin. He plunges into his self-motivating rhetoric, which equally attracts our identification to his preparation for death. As a master rhetorician, he weaves verses with metaphor to chase away any fear or doubts that his given mission might generate (P.25). His choice of the “place des Vandales” as a site to publicly reclaim the power and honor vested in his traditional identity as a member of the colonized community is significant. In a colonial world where traditional sources of authority have yielded to colonial masters, he needs the ancestors’ affirmation of his exalted place in the political dispensation, a place about to be memorialized by his performance of ritual of death.

The death of Lakhdar stands for the crossing and linking of the two forces, his death becomes the essential moment of cosmic communication accomplishing the unbroken chain in the life cycle. As he is about to transit through the passage of life and death, through his leave-taking, he insists, must be marked by the sign of rebirth and renewal (P.21). Lakhdar becomes a metaphor for regeneration; he symbolizes the continuity of his society (P.28). It is these two impulses that drive his ritualistic performance and the trance mood he gets into defines and sets him discursively as a bearer and fulfiller of the expectations of the community members. He engages in a mission to restore hope and his words ensure a belief in the force of the community in the service of collective interest.

The other technique that Kateb integrates to reinforce the powerful theatrical advocacy of political and social action is the ancient “rite of passage”, which is a vital part of the African community, which was used to unite, to educate, and remind people their history, culture, and origins. This process is used to record the journey of Lakhdar through the impenetrable void as a mediator between the chaotic world of the war and the ancestral universe of regeneration. Through his monologues, he engages in a moral and symbolic struggle; he overcomes his internal conflict because morality and well being of his community are prior to any individual excess. He informs everyone that he is not afraid of death (P.55). By accepting it, he starts his journey to traverse the gulf between the world of destruction and that of re-creation. His pathway in direction to death as a “living-dead” remains the decisive expression of the important reason of his people. Lakhdar is more than a man; without any regret, he willingly joins and becomes part of

the ancestral world of his ancestors. His sacrifice is motivated by his desire for continuation of the cycle of life. It can also be interpreted as an effort to affirm life by reversing the powers of death and evil. His grief and sorrow can therefore, contribute to bring renewal and regeneration to his community members. Like Soyinka's Ogun, Kateb's main character plunges through the abyss and calls his friends to follow him.

Through his progress to the gulf of transition, Lakhdar begins his second existence as a spirit and starts his journey to the Land of the Dead. Entering that micro cosmos is conditioned by the loss of individualism. Having lost his identity, he enters totally the abyss of transition and becomes the spirit voice from the insubstantial void. The spiritual voice expresses its grief and warning alike:

Je descends dans la terre pour ranimer le corps qui m'appartient à jamais; mais dans l'attente de la résurrection, pour que, Lakhdar assassiné, je remonte d'outre-tombe prononcer mon oraison funèbre [...] afin que la lunaire attraction ne fasse survoler ma tombe avec assez d'envergure (P.17).

(I go down into the earth to revive the body that belongs to me forever; but awaiting the resurrection, so that, Lakhdar assassinated, I ascend from beyond the grave to pronounce my funeral oration [...] so that the lunar attraction does not fly over my grave with enough wingspan).

Lakhdar becomes a sorrowful voice, which expresses a projection of man's physical, social, and psychic conflict against powers, which prevent him to live in harmony with his environment. Moving as an itinerant shadow, his primordial voice becomes that of a self-expression, which vehemently denounces and then supersedes all the colonial oppressive authority. It becomes the representative voice of the dead ancestors, uttering sounds which the protagonist hardly understands (P.35). It reflects the awesome glimpse of the transitional gulf, which focuses on moral and metaphysical concerns. From monologue to another, it expresses the dissolution of the character's self, his suffering, pain and obsessive struggle, refers to the viable values of the traditional community, and grief and sorrow intensifies with exorcising verses (P.28). Lakhdar's quest symbolizes the human search for a self, a transcendence of the limitation of morality tied to all human looking for the basic security of moral acceptance, which is narrated against the atmosphere of colonial cultural obliteration.

As a wandering ghost, Lakhdar retains, however, his rights in position and relinquishes all specific claims. As an ancestor, he continues to hold rights in the worldly property of his tribe as the following statement illustrates "Le cadavre demeure en vie pour déclamer la plénitude d'un masculin pluriel" [The corpse remains alive to declaim the plenitude of a plural masculine] (P.17). His transition can be divided into three phases: separation, margin, and reincorporation. The first one starts with the separation of the soul from the corps when Lakhdar becomes "L'ombre s'est mise en marche" (The shadow starts walking) (P.17). He sets himself apart from the other victims: "Ici je me denombré et n'attends plus la fin. Nous sommes morts" (Here I count myself and wait for the end) (P.17); as he isolates himself from the world of men, he enters the void: "Et je retourne à la sanglante source, à notre mère incorruptible, la Matière jamais en défaut, tantôt génératrice de sang et d'énergie, tantôt pétrifiée dans la combustion solaire" (And I return

to the bloody spring, to our incorruptible mother, a never faulted material, sometimes generating blood and energy, sometimes petrified in solar combustion) (P.15-16).

Through his wandering, he crosses the town where he was born when he wonders: “Je me retrouve dans notre ville. Elle reprend forme. Je remue encore mes membres [...] je sors enfin de cette Mort tenace et de la ville morte où me voici enseveli” (I find myself in our town. It takes shape again. I still stir my members [...] I finally come out of this tenacious Death and the dead city where I am buried) (P.25). Without place and position, the voice is caught in an empty space: “A court de temps et d’espace” (Short of time and space) (P.49), it becomes the embodiment of the social, communal will; it submits to the authority of the community, which is the repository of the whole length of the culture’s values, norms, and attitudes.

Lakhdar seems to live in time and out of time; the ambiguity of his position is expressed through a variety of symbols. Grief, for instance, is expressed in that far more disturbing and infinite area by stating: «Je viens dormir dans la rue, et que le temps piétine [...] maintenant que le temps dispute à mort ma mémoire [...] nul horaire ne sera plus mien, et mon sang dilapidé ne connaîtra jamais de norme, ni de débit» (I come to sleep on the street, and that time tramples [...] now that time disputes to death my memory [...] No scheduling will no longer be mine, and my squandered blood will never know a norm, no flow) (P.27). What is important is that his departure into an inner world from which he comes back allows him to speak with a new force for action. This ritual bears common traits with the ceremony of “Anzar”, an ancient ritual sacrifice part of Algerian Berber mythology, which remains alive in various traditions and festivals. Today, some regions practice this rite set by the ancestors to do away with the evil forces believed to hover around and bring water to the land.

6. The Ritual Sacrifice of Berber Rain-God “Anzar”

The playwright’s focus on Lakhdar’s spiritual sacrifice symbolizes the sacred life of the Algerian community prior to the successive foreign conquests and rests at the heart of its daily practices as a site for expressing its culture. His sacrifice is animated by a sense of commitment and duty to die for the sake of his community. His death ensures the continuity of the community and pinpoints the heroic stance of the community members and their willingness to die in an act of absolute surrender for liberation from manifold forms of oppression. This rite of sacrifice takes a symbolic significance in the sense that it is a prerequisite for the survival of the communal folk culture and preserves the viability of the community. The sacrifice of “Anzar” becomes then a marker of cultural identity and a tool of resistance against acculturation. It is endowed with a regenerative force which can partly be accounted of the Algerian belief systems with their strong emphasis on the idea of freedom, the common concern of combating evil, disease, misfortune, and supporting reconciliation, harmony, well-being and human fulfillment.

The performance of rituals is also a way to renew a lost bond and free oneself from the traumas of the present. The entire ceremony is framed around the concern to fight social ills and bring a certain order into the chaotic life. Rituals, as Catherine Bell writes, strengthen feelings of belonging to the community and provide the spiritual tools that help them understanding the present situation to envision the future. They function as instruments of social control since they are used to structure interactive relationships and contribute to create an effective social change. Rituals are endowed with the power to

redress “the social dramas of everyday life” enabling the community to “scrutinize, portray, understand and then act on itself”. They also help to construct particular types of power leading to a kind of social conformity (Bell, 2009:169-170).

Kateb uses death ritual of “Anzar” as a basic social, cultural and political act because it stands for the refusal of a culture to die. The ceremonious death of Lakhdar translates the cultists’ desire to leave its mark. It becomes an act of recovery of the right to act, to intervene and change the course of history. In short, it is a symbolic act of reassertion of communal rites and therefore a marker of cultural identity. Moreover, rites are a site of collective memory in the sense that the dance of sacrifice is a moment of remembering the past through the recreation of the world of ancestors. The latter is a way to reconnect with Algerian roots and its ancestors and thus retrieve and recuperate its ancestral culture. By centering the narrative on rituals, Kateb suggests that Algerian culture has its own validity and ethos while pointing to the way violence, set within the framework of ritualistic practices, may result into the survival of the community.

In *The Ancestors Redoubling Ferocity*, the sacrificial death of both Hassan and Tahar is used to re-imagine a ‘community’ where unity and positive morality prevail. The challenge of the future therefore lies in the need to develop positive morality, a prerequisite for liberation from the tarnishing effects of colonialism. The playwright understands change in terms of the ‘will to action’ and the capacity and willingness of men to change their condition. By rendering the experience of Lakhdar, Nedjma, Hassan, and Mourad, through the focus on rituals, he manages to create a space in which the characters, regain subjectivity and agency.

7. The African Prize Discourse and Communion with Ancestors

Though Lakhdar quits conscious reality, his consciousness is extended to embrace another original reality, that of his ancestors: “L’âme seule suffit pour traverser le monde” (The soul alone suffices to cross the world) (P.29). During his transition through his symbolic disintegration, Lakhdar accepts arbitrary punishment without complaining (P.31). He keeps silence and gives no information about his friends; he accepts torture, death, and sacrifice: «[Lakhdar] accepte le sacrifice et garde l’arbre» (Accepts the sacrifice and keeps the tree) (P.59). In so doing, he submits to the general authority of the ritual elders, which endows him with additional force which enables him to cope with his intolerable situation when he says: “Je m’élève au crépuscule vers les ancêtres peupliers dont la statue remue feuille par feuille au gré d’une imbattable chevauchée végétale, rappelant dans la nuit en marche, la cavalerie dispersée des Numides à l’heure du Maghreb renouvelant leur charge» (I rise at dusk towards the poplar ancestors whose statue stirs leaf by leaf at the will of an unbeatable vegetable ride, Recalling in the night on the march, the dispersed cavalry of the Numides at the time of the Maghreb renewing their charge) (P.27).

Lakhdar lives long enough and acts, like the Numidian knights for whom he dreamt only greatness. His worldly loss is replaced by a communal experience of his ancestors of whom he speaks with such love and longing. The play abounds with actions with which the main protagonist trip off the pretensions of the French colonizer and reduces them to nothing, this statement proves the point: “La victime apprend au bourreau le maniement des armes, et le bourreau ne sait pas que c’est lui qui subit” (The victim teaches the

executioner how to handle weapons, and the executioner does not know that he is the one who suffers) (P.16). Lakhdar survives his confrontation with forces that exist within the dangerous area of transformation and succeeds to restore ethical order and equilibrium to the power relations by dominating the unjust oppressor. Lakhdar's inflexible will robs the colonial high oppression of its power; his challenging statements are voiced in what follows: "C'est ça votre exécution? C'est ça? A vous de parler. Allons, parlez! (Is that your execution? That's it? It's up to you to speak. Come on, speak up!) (P.51). The strength of the victim's tragic will is obviously intended to display the alienation of his torturers from the fact of regarding the victim as human and aims to describe the colonial justification for their acts of barbarism. The victim's self-reversal can be interpreted as an undying collective force which is sustained by bravery and challenge.

The other cultural marker with which Kateb reverses the logic of Western world appears through enactment of the interconnectedness of the Algerian cosmology of cyclic time, life, and spirituality. In his study of Berber traditional worldview, Gabriel Camps states that communion with ancestors in pre-colonial Algerian society help to learn about the relationship between humans, spiritual, and metaphysical worlds. For Berbers, life will not come to the end by death because the ancestors stay and continue to live with their family and community, and thus, they also have an effect on both. The benevolent ancestors protect, punish, and reward the living because their power is increased by death (Camps.1980: 217).

After performing his ritual of death, Lakhdar puts himself in the mercy of his ancestors; he becomes their messenger and their mouthpiece. The main protagonist was chosen by for his qualities; he epitomises the suffering spirit of man, uncomplaining, agonized, and full of qualities of endurance and martyrdom. Analogous to African ancestors, right from the beginning of the play, Lakhdar emerges as a man who is impelled by a noble ideal, that of giving his people their lost sense of identity, and a distinct cultural personality (P.32). Lakhdar is also conceived as an admirable leader, an organiser of the demonstration. He is committed to the liberation of his country and is convinced that only blood sacrifice can redeem his country (P.26). Kateb's main protagonist challenges the colonial order and refuses to fight a meaningless war. He fights to preserve something greater than himself. He is endowed with an attitude of political defiance to colonial oppression that is hard to be crushed. He enjoys a triumphant moment of power over his agents of oppression, who are now reduced to nothing.

The French soldiers are belittled and cut down to a point when he utters the revealing words: "C'est un canon qu'il faut pour m'abattre. Si le canon m'abat; je serai encore là" (It is only a cannon that can beat me down. If the canon strikes me; I'll be there again) (P.17). Lakhdar objects with vehemence to the situation in which he finds himself. He does not accept his fate meekly; he cries against oppression and has consented to sacrifice his life so that others may derive joy in a free life (P.31). Through this revolutionary process, the playwright attacks the very foundation of the French assimilation policy" and beats the French colonizer at his own game while the whole tragedy becomes a communal ritual performed to bring renewal and liberation to those who are oppressed and subjugated.

Lakhdar's heroism is evidenced in his unquestionable commitment and self-sacrifice and stands for his people's struggle and resistance. Though he is unable to change things, he

can provoke self-awareness in designing a spiritual projection of the future. His death has crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, but he stands in the present reality on the edge of the gulf; he has nothing left with physical existence. It is such transitional memory, which takes over and intimation rock him on an orange tree (P.59). This phenomenon in which Lakhdar is possessed by the spirit of the ancestors is a fundamental part of Algerian mythology. In his essay "The Berbers and the Divine" Gabriel Camps explains: "The 'possession' is the achievement by the possessed in the top of ritual of 'actual freedom of spirit from the material world'. It is a state of transformation which indicates that 'hidden things enter the body of the man', who become a medium, a messenger of some ancestor spirits or divine powers filling him with the gift of prophecy" (Camps.1980:222).

As an ancestor too, Lakhdar is obsessed by the spirits who speak through him. In sum, what has his struggle been, after all, but an effort to maintain that innate concept of dignity which impels to action. It is in that moment that appears the nobility of his spirit and his proximity to the wisdom of his ancestors. It may be instructive to point out the way Lakhdar submits to the authority of his community to elevates the grandeur of his people. *The Encircled Cadaver* is not an "imitation of actions arousing fear and pity" while "*hamartia*, the tragic flaw remain of secondary importance. The change of Lakhdar's misfortune from happiness to misery caused by "some error on his part" does not happen. The cathartic experience in Kateb's play is worked out through the re-enactment of Lakhdar's rite of passage as he shifts from the world of the living to that of ancestors. His tragic transformation leads to the renewal, reinforcement, and liberation for the individual and the community. It appears that Kateb is rather interested in returning to the roots of African drama which emphasizes, according to Soyinka, "a symbolic struggle with chthonic presences, the goal of the conflict being a harmonious resolution for plentitude and the well-being of the community" (Soyinka.1976:38).

8. *The Power of Masks, Music and Dance in the Plays*

Throughout the two plays, Kateb produces role-playing performed narration through the transforming process of the mask into mask and back to the mask in order to rehabilitate the ancestral spirits during the masked ritual performances. The description of change in role playing as a process of masking, unmasking, re-masking in full view of the audience replicates the traditional concept of man/ancestor communion, which is never perceived from a real physical presence but in a representational and symbolic interaction through masking. The bearer of the mask is human with flesh and blood whose words and actions are representational of the opinions of the spiritual world. In his *Post-Colonial Drama* (1996), Gilbert writes:

Masks are mostly used to create archetypes and to help establish ancestral links; thus, in ritual transformation, the masked performer is animated by the spirit/god he or she depicts [...] Masking in post-colonial drama often marks a theatre that is both spiritual and political in reference. While a mask conceals the face of the actor, it also reveals the site of culture, the significance and power invested in the mask outside the context of the play. In contemporary African texts, the use of a ritualized mask generally signifies a shift away from imperial expectations and a return to traditional values, and an overturning of colonizing, western influences. It also asserts the continuation of traditional or

indigenous ritualized religious practices despite the influence of Christian missionaries (Gilbert.1996:63).

The process of artistic retrieval in Kateb's play is taken a step further in his *The Ancestors Redoubling Ferocity*. The playwright makes the committee of ancestors take the centre of the stage. All of Mustapha, Hassan wear masks and Nedjma a black veil. While Lakhdar is transmuted into a vulture and a bird of death whose mission is to protect the daughters of the Keblouti tribe, Mustapha and Hassan wear and prepare themselves to join their lost Friend Lakhdar: "Nous passons de l'autre côté, juste le temps de rendre visite à Tahar" (We move to the other side, just the time to visit Tahar) (P.128). They wear masks to get rid of the Tahar, the traitor and murderer of their common friend, Lakhdar; he will be executed by Hassan. The execution of Tahar illustrates that Kateb fought the liberation battle on two fronts: against the colonizers and against the Algerian nationalists who continue to make war with each other. Symbolically, it can be understood that the playwright finds a source of inspiration in the principle of the ancestral retributive justice and wisdom, which is the remedy to social insecurity. The spirits of ancestors punish to remind the living of their duties. But their intervention is for good and educational purpose. The benevolence of the ancestors has nothing to do with the irrationality and capriciousness of the Greek Gods.

Furthermore, Nedjma wears the veil and becomes the wild women on her way to be recuperated by the tribe ancestors (P.131). The use of mask represents a spirit and it is believed that the spirit possesses the character as the puts on the mask. He goes into a trance-like state in order to receive guidance and wisdom from the ancestors. The character voices the messages and translates it to the community. The veil and the mask, Monica Wilson (1954) suggests, are deeply anchored in the African culture. They are believed by Africans to be the shades (spirit of deceased female relatives of ancient ancestors) and rituals reveal their values at its deepest level. The masked men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. The study of rituals is the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies (Wilson, p, 241, quoted in Turner.1991:6)

What also add to the archive of traditional forms in Kateb's plays, which deviate from the norms of imposed verbal language, are the playwright's use songs as a core to performance. Songs are not used for mere entertainment, but rather encode and decode the messages therein. The playwright incorporates songs and dances as part of the communal activity. They have a significant regenerative effect as they reinforce the community on stage and, in turn, the community in the audience who are also urged to fight colonial oppression and maintain their honor. Kateb uses them to highlight the Africanness of the plays and to suggest that the European concept of music cannot explain the type of music that his people have, and they may not fully understand its relationship with ritual and drama, especially the songs composed and sung by guerrillas on the battlefield.

These songs were an important component of the whole liberation struggle. They helped to mobilize the oppressed people of Algeria behind the liberation forces. They were the spiritual food that spurred the fighter to fight on and if needed to die for the liberating Algeria, to suffer and persevere until it was free. Through the play, one repeatedly

observes the chanting and dancing of chorus which are principles of oral literature in Africa. Drumming, singing, music and dancing, according to Gilbert, have become pillars of modern African drama. Dance's patterned movement also offers the opportunity to establish cultural context, particularly when the dance executed challenges the norms of the colonizer. In this way, dance recuperates postcolonial subjectivity by centralizing traditional, non-verbal forms of self-representation (Gilbert.1996:239).

Kateb Yacine inserts songs as cultural values that provoke the audience's participation as in the traditional performances. After independence, he abandoned the European style of an enclosed space for the open air arena style theatre in an effort to restore the African participatory relationship between actors and their audience.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis re-examined provides an alternative to the earlier studies, which examine Kateb's plays as derivative from merely European theatrical forms. If there is any conclusion to be drawn, it is simply this: Kateb's plays align more with Africa's functional theatre than with the Aristotelian or Brechtian ones. Although he was educated in the colonial school, which involved learning Western forms and literary structures, he stresses his oral cultural heritage and his African origins, thereby contributing to the decolonization and autonomy of his plays. Liberation in this sense means ending all foreign domination and a rejection of foreign imposed literary tools.

As many Postcolonial authors, who seek, each in his own way, to re-locate the African artist as an agent in human history in an effort to eliminate the illusion of the fringes, Kateb Yacine's plays display a mixture of multi-cultural and socio-political experiences that shaped the author's psyche. His plays starting from *The Encircled Cadaver* stand for his imaginative effort towards a modern literary aesthetic that is unquestionably African and secular. His restitution of a distinct human entity, his praise of its long erased elements, and his revalorisation of an Algerian social psyche stands for his tireless efforts to re-define and refine his Algerian and African culture.

The interest in using local customs, traditions, and value system stands for Kateb's postcolonial posture while giving them a taste of originality; hence a vibrant African authenticity wherein customs like singing, dancing, rites of passage and ritual becomes alive. Forthrightly, he sides with playwrights, who used Western forms and language in order to dramatize and introduce his cultural heritage to the West. He then frees the art and culture of his people from the Eurocentric paradigm by writing about the myth, folktales and beliefs of Algerian people. He also sought to politicize his audiences into rejecting the ascendancy of colonial logic, which describes the world in Manichean terms of good and bad, civilized and barbaric. Consequently, it remains the responsibility of today's intellectuals to avoid, as Soyinka and many other postcolonial theorists suggest, limiting their studies to the mono criterion methodology of the West.

In other terms, they should, avoid the conditioning of the social being dictated by the western monologism. Kateb Yacine demonstrates, to paraphrase Soyinka, how the coloniality of culture can and should be perpetually challenged in order to imagine new utopias for a dystopic world. In his trilogy, *The Circle of Retaliation*, it is the African

traditional worldview that wins at last which suggest that his refinement of traditional values presupposes a sense of what wholeness is and what the beautiful could be.

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