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In Pursuit of African Christian Drama

by Odhuno Were, Todd Roberts



**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts**

Department of Drama

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2001



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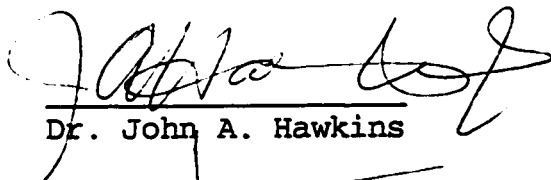
Arise, shine, for your light has come
And the glory of the Lord rises upon you

Isaiah 60:1

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "In Pursuit of African Christian Drama" submitted by Odhuno Were, Todd Roberts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts


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Date: April 3 2001

Dedication

To My mother Leonida Opiyo Were and my dear wife, Judith

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I discuss a new genre - African Christian Drama - by proposing the possibility of integrating thematic and theatrical elements of African traditional heritage, including African traditional religion(ATR), into Christian Drama in Africa. I discuss some elements of traditional African theatre and propose their use in African Christian Drama. In order to provide a clearer dramaturgical understanding of traditional African theatre informed by ATR, I show similarities and differences between ATR and Christianity. I show how elements of ATR that, in concordance with Christianity, can apply to African Christian Drama. In the thesis, in an effort to discuss political, religious, cultural and sociological issues affecting post-colonial Kenya, and to a large extent sub-Saharan Africa, I examine two plays: *Muntu* by Joe De Graft and *Pambazuka Afrika*, a production of MAVUNO Drama Group. In my examination, I illustrate the concept of African Christian Drama.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I take this honour to thank God the Almighty for His abundant grace, mercy and peace from the time He gave me the vision to pursue the idea of African Christian Drama. God has been my Provider and anchor in the whole process and I will continue to praise Him always!

I am grateful to my family (Karapemo) for their moral support. Most importantly, I thank my loving wife Judith for her daily encouragement. I also thank my dear Mama Leonida Opiyo Were for her sacrificial patience as I study far from home. I salute my graduate colleagues, and Department of Drama staff for supporting and inspiring me in various ways. I am especially grateful to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Alex Hawkins and committee members Dr. Piet Defraeye and Dr. Robert Appleford, for great guidance and advice. I thank my editors, Nicole Lukasik and Rose O'Kane, for enduring the pain of reading my writing. Special thanks to Jan Selman, Carl Hare and Dr. Rosalind Kerr for always being attentive to my special needs.

Finally, I thank the donors of the Harriet Snowball Winspear Scholarship, the Student Financial Services, and the International Centre for their financial support through awards, bursaries, and loans. And for all of the many people that I cannot possibly name here, I thank my God upon my every remembrance of you. May God bless you indeed!

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Introduction

In this thesis I will discuss a new concept -- African Christian Drama -- as it addresses issues of independent post-colonial Kenya and rediscovers elements of African traditional religion. The resulting vibrant new style of drama retains the essence of its precursors in its presentation of Christian drama and at the same time incorporates traditional African elements. Since it is my hope that the concept of African Christian Drama will go beyond the geographical boundaries of Kenya to other sub-Saharan countries, as well as countries in the rest of Africa, I have used the term "African Christian Drama" instead of "Kenyan Christian Drama". Therefore, I hope the reader will temporarily suspend belief regarding the critical term "African". Where necessary, I have endeavoured to be specific with the examples used in the overall thesis. I have used the terms drama, theatre, and performance as appropriate to both published and unpublished plays. I have also included in Chapter Two a discussion of similarities and differences between African traditional religion and Christianity. An understanding of some of the basic belief systems and practices will enable a clearer dramaturgical understanding of traditional African theatre.

The key to success in the resulting process of

integration between elements of African traditional religion and elements of Christian drama is for artists and playwrights to develop and practice an attitude of sensitivity in relation to issues that create conflict when the Christian Gospel interacts and attempts to blend with other cultural and spiritual beliefs. When done properly, this process of integration can result in an uncompromised presentation of the key truths of the Christian Gospel in the unique context of traditional African religious and cultural elements. Given this, I hereby propose my concept of an African Christian Drama. To illustrate my proposal, I have chosen two post-independence plays to discuss in this thesis, both of which may be considered examples of African Christian Drama: **Muntu**, a play by Joe De Graft; and **Pambazuka Afrika**, a production by MAVUNO Drama Group as led by Mkawasi Mcharo in Kenya.

The concept of African Christian Drama may be characterised in two major ways: thematically and theatrically. Thematically, African Christian Drama addresses the social and political issues that affect Africans within the continent and in the Diaspora, among which are the enduring influence and effects of the Christian religion on African society. Theatrically, African Christian Drama makes use of indigenous elements of African

theatre that are carefully selected by artists to express African Christian culture.

I propose that the major function of African Christian Drama is to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and at the same time reveal the deeper indigenous African elements that intersect with Christianity. Also, I suggest that African Christian Drama at its best explores the opportunities that African traditional religion offers to Christianity, and how elements of African identity connect with sites of Christian identity. Traditional African theatre functions for clear purposes within the community, and knows no notion of "art for art's sake". Its functions include educating the young and old, and serving as a mechanism for uniting the community. From this standpoint, African drama works well as a tool for the Christian endeavour in Africa. I therefore propose that African Christian Drama must have an inherent priority to present the Christian message. For this reason, I shall start with one of African Christian Drama's most important characteristics: the mandate to sponsor any original production that falls under this description. The mandate and sponsorship shall stem from Christian organisations; for example, a church body, groups of churches, Christian theatre groups, or any other organisation that has a significant relationship to a

Christian body. Joe De Graft's **Muntu** and Mkawasi Mcharo's **Pambazuka Afrika** both adhere to this characteristic. The World Council of Churches commissioned **Muntu** and **Pambazuka Afrika** was a product of MAVUNO (literal meaning: Harvest) Theatre Festival, a Nairobi-based interdenominational annual drama festival. Other plays that could be characterised under this description include David Mulwa's plays such as **Redemption**, commissioned by the National Christian Churches of Kenya, and **Jesus Christ Is Born**, produced by Kenyatta University and the Kenya Television Network in 1994.

The purposes of individual groups or festivals may differ. The mandate to present the Gospel through drama means that the Church must be willing to enter into a dialogue with the cultures that its emissaries encounter, including those practicing African traditional religion and customs. This dialogue, rooted in Christian principles, means that Africa can be willingly won to Christianity, insofar as Christianity agrees to become African. Broadly speaking, African Christian Drama functions to inform its audience of a culture to which I refer as African Christianity. I propose that African Christian Drama should demonstrate the fact that African drama in itself, like other artefacts of a culture, is not an isolated entity. Therefore, it is misleading to study it in isolation. It

arises from, and mirrors, African communities and their historical experiences.

Some of the theatrical elements and techniques that African Christian Drama borrows from traditional African drama include storytelling, audience participation, use of theatre-in-the-round, ritual theatre, use of particular traditional costumes, and oral language (including poetry, proverbs, African imagery, riddles, allusive language). Also, it makes use of African music, specifically traditional instruments as found in various African communities; song and dance; ceremonial make-ups; tales; re-enactments of community festivals; and mime. Since African Christian Drama encompasses and addresses a broad spectrum of issues, I propose that it should not be limited to established styles or conventional forms of dramatic expression. Hence, those who wish to explore African Christian Drama using other dramatic forms and styles need not be discouraged, as long as such performances embody the African Christian's commitment to his identity as a Christian and an African. Leland Ryken states in his book

Culture in Christian Perspective:

The arts can embody truth in four different ways. The arts tell us the truth about human preoccupation, values, longings and fears. Art is true to life when it adheres to the reality principle -- when it accurately pictures the contours of external and inner reality... Works of art do not automatically tell the truth at every level. But they always have a high potential to

tell us the truth at one or more levels. [p.158-159]

In relation to embodying the African Christian's commitment, African Christian Drama should make reference to historical and contemporary social problems, including the beginnings of missionary work in Kenya, slavery, colonialism, how Christianity was hijacked by imperialism, and present-day politics. In Kenya, I have often observed that there is a close relationship among theatre, society, and politics. Therefore, African Christian Drama must also explore the negative impact that the history of Christianity and imperialism has had on African societies, and the subsequent effects of these impacts on the present generation.

One of the functions of theatre is to liberate. Africans went through colonialism and slavery and are capable of fathoming the concept of and need for liberation. My understanding of Christianity is that Jesus Christ came into this world as God in the form of fleshly man so that everyone can be liberated in every way - mentally, physically, and spiritually:

"I have come that they may have life,
And have it to the full" [*John* 10:10]

I believe that any true theatre artists in Africa who express themselves as Christian should encompass Jesus' ideals. Ideally, it is desirable that these artists acknowledge that different audiences have unique cultural

and social complexities. For this reason, all that these artists need to do is to show their audience great love and respect. At the same time, they should avoid imposing dogma on their audiences while ignoring their aesthetic needs. Many previous dramatic works done by many missionaries and African playwrights have ignored the deep needs of the individuals whom they set out to reach. It is clear that many of the first missionaries to Africa failed to acknowledge the close attachment of the African people to their deities and cultural patterns, and thus failed to engage effectively the African audience with the Gospel.

On the other hand, African playwrights of the pre-independence and post-independence eras occupied themselves with just a few themes in an attempt to liberate Africans politically and mentally. In the end, they wrongly prioritised the very essence of their own and their audiences' humanity - their spirituality. In Kenya, for example, an analysis of the major plays (written after independence) that have emerged bears this out. For example, plays by Ngugi wa Thiongo such as *I'll Marry When I Want*, *Mother Sing For Me*, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* concern themselves with the history of the struggle of independence, heroism, and hatred of capitalism. Francis Imbuga's *Aminata*, *Man of Kafira*, and *Betrayal In the City* concern themselves

with the liberation of women, betrayal, and abuse of political power; Kenneth Watene's *My Son For Freedom*, *The Haunting Past* and *The Broken Pot* deal with myth, cultural freedom and heroism; and lately, Oby Obyerodhyambo's *Drumbeats on Kirinyaga* is a provocative African folk tale criticising the greedy bourgeois. In whatever field the African person finds himself, the question of wholeness, freedom, and identity continues to be his quest, whether conscious or not. A discussion of the ideological identity crisis of the African peoples is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, later in my discussion, I shall give some personal experiences that relate to the belief systems of African traditional culture and drama.

In his book, *In Pursuit of Purpose*, Dr. Myles Munroe acknowledges that we, as human beings, are the sum total of what we have learned from all who have taught us, both great and small. When I hear discussions of post-colonial issues of Africans, I think of the above statement. Over years of debate, many African scholars have placed the blame for the ills of the African continent squarely on Africa's contact with such ideologies such as colonialism and imperialism, and the practice of slavery. For example, Ngugi wa Thiongo has been one of the most articulate critics of the Christian Church, and by extension imperialism. In his novel, *A Grain*

of Wheat, one of the characters named Kihika narrates his general disillusionment with the foreign ideologies symbolised, in his perception, by the Church:

We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said: Let us kneel down and pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in Heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth. [p. 36]

Ngugi Wa Thiongo's character Kihika represents many Africans who felt and continue to feel the effects of the encounter between Africans and the Christianizing white imperialists. The wounds created in the African psyche were a product of two things: the atrocious attempts by Western civilization to transform the world of the African people into the image of Europe; and the devastating impact of the ideologies such as slavery, colonialism, and capitalism that dominated the consciousness of Western people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The religion brought by the Western missionaries was inevitably combined with these ideologies. Notable was the imperialists' ideological colonisation that masqueraded under the guise of Christian missionary work. This misuse of Christianity severely affected the communication of the true message of the Christian Gospel to Africans. The negative consequences of the missionaries'

work will take generations to undo. It is for this reason that Ngugi wa Thiongo has proposed the concept of "decolonising the mind" in his book of that title.

Elsewhere, in his paper titled "*The Global Education Project*", Ngugi states:

"To decolonize our minds we must not see our own experiences as little islands that are not connected with other processes"

-Ngugi Wa Thiongo: *The Global Education Project*

In the early stages of the activities of Western missionaries in Africa, these emissaries were not living up to the true message of Christ. The early missionaries failed to acknowledge respectfully the "other" - that which it did not understand - in this case, the African identity and consciousness. First, the missionaries avoided dialogue. Paving the way for their imperialist white brothers, the missionaries were quick to proselytize without fully interacting with Africans on equal and common ground. Many missionaries set up separate schools exclusively for their families and followers, always regarding items and ideas from their mother countries as being superior to those of the African people. Some of the missionaries alienated themselves from the African people physically, with the result that they had little knowledge of how Africans actually lived. Also, it seems that the missionaries felt they had no recourse but to destroy the personality of

Africans before embarking upon the teaching of the Christian message. This was a principal catalyst for the phenomenon of depersonalization. By this I am referring to the disintegration of all of the unique elements that give Africans their identity: language, religion, sense of community, their defined economy, and their political structures. For example, three unique aspects of the African people violated by the imperialists and the missionaries were their manner of expression through their language, their dress, and their performance traditions. Because of the introduction of formal Western education and the money economy, Africans lost their sense of uniqueness, a source of God-given pride and honour. One cannot overemphasise how, by these measures, existing African values and principles were destroyed.

As a theatre artist, I am concerned with the aspect of cultural expression, which embodies performance. In a research paper titled, "*The Language of African Literature*", Ngugi wa Thiongo elaborates:

"...communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. In doing similar kinds of things and actions over and over again under similar circumstances, similar even in their mutability, certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge emerge. Those experiences are handed over to the next generation and become the inherited basis for further actions on nature and on themselves. There is a gradual accumulation of values which in time become almost self-evident truths governing their conception of what

is right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, courageous and cowardly, generous and mean in their internal and external relations...They develop a distinctive culture and history. Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language...the collective memory bank of a people's experience..."[p.289 ***The Post Colonial Studies Reader***]

Going through formal education, every Kenyan knows that English is more than a language, it is the only recommended language. With the knowledge of English, one is highly regarded in the society. For those who went to school during the colonial period, and later after independence, it was common for students to be heavily reprimanded in school for speaking their mother tongues such as Gikuyu, Luo, Kikamba, or Kalenjin. Thus it can be asserted here that the first African encounter with the West resulted in the phenomenon of depersonalization for Africans and their future. The depersonalization effect led to poverty on many levels: sociological, emotional, cultural, and religious. Hence, it can be deduced that the collapse of traditional African culture during the period of colonialism rendered Africans culturally and socially confused, if not completely empty. Having travelled this uneasy path, Africans seemed no longer at ease in the world in which they had traditionally lived. This is because they were deprived of the social and

psychological tools that made life safe, comfortable, and controllable, and therefore they seemed condemned to lead a life of cultural poverty, and of dependence on the foreign colonizing states.

In addition, the organic and synthetic connection that Africans had with African traditional religion that gave rise to cultural expression, including theatre, was thus severed. The alienated African person became the proverbial donkey who must gallop faster and faster in order to grasp the Western cultural, economic, and political carrot dangling before its eyes. Oh, how such a life of mimicry and lack of originality has exposed the African people to deep psychological and psycho-cultural problems! The only way for many Africans to confront these problems is to acknowledge that which really gives them encouragement, that determines their true essence as a people, and that gives them moral, economic, political, and sociological drive. It is my contention that, for Africans, many of these elements are derived from African traditional religion.

For this reason, I see no problem with the re-awakened, true Christianity's use of the theatrical or philosophical elements of traditional African culture and religion, as long as these elements are in concordance with the Bible. African Christian Drama must communicate the elements of

cultural and political alienation brought about by the contact with outside influences, and at the same time pick up the remaining unique elements of traditional African culture and religion that can be positively related to Christianity. Furthermore, although missionary contact did have its negative influence on Africans as a people, Africans have nonetheless progressed as a result of the sum total of all their experiences. Present-day Africans need to acknowledge their past, because even though Africans cannot completely comprehend the effects of their historical past upon them, it still indirectly affects them. Therefore, I can say that, as a twenty-first-century African, I am still culturally indebted to the legitimate thoughts and practices of the traditional African way of expression.

Three things have partly influenced me to pursue the integration, through drama, of traditional African religions and culture into Christianity: my involvement with the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival; my encounters with key individuals I met in formal school and in village life; and the influences from my family. All of these influences have helped to shape my thoughts about the real possibility of continuity between and integration of African cultural expression and Christianity.

My investigation of the significance of African

traditions as I observed them in the Drama Festivals began in my own town, Kisumu. I have been a part of the festivals as an actor since childhood, and later as a director and adjudicator. Looking back, I realise that the numerous themes expressed in the performances have dealt with moral issues. Hence, awards were given in reference to the effectiveness of the plays to convey strong moral lessons to the audience. For example, it is common to watch plays dealing with themes such as corruption, social and personal irresponsibility, respect for authority figures such as parents and teachers, HIV/AIDS and the warnings against contracting the disease, and the value of hard work. It is clear that artists involved in the festival have been encouraged to think of theatre as being functional to this purpose of conveying a moral lesson. As I have proposed, it is clear that African Christian Drama can then draw naturally from this characteristic. The Kenya Music Festival, which is organized just one term following the Drama Festivals, has one competitive category of "traditional and cultural performance". In this category, there are dramatisations of various traditional attributes, including religion. For many years, I was part of the artistic and spiritual journeys that motivated most of these performances, and the experiences I underwent while

participating in such performances were pivotal in shaping my theatrical perspectives.

Mr. Fred Obiero, one of my Christian Religion Education(CRE) teachers at Sawagongo High School, prompted my first conscious contact with African religious customs. Among the topics he taught was African Traditional Religion (ATR) and its relationship to Christianity. He imparted his full grasp and appreciation of deeply held African beliefs and customs. At the time that he was teaching CRE, Mr. Obiero was still an ardent practitioner of ATR himself. His understanding of traditional African people and their religions mesmerized me. In particular, Mr. Obiero had knowledge of the hierarchy of authority and the detailed rituals performed in traditional African society. His stories were authentic, because he was much older than the rest of the teaching staff, and therefore considerably wiser by my cultural understanding. Mr. Obiero's influence on my life was not completely clear to me until I embarked on pursuing a definition of the concept of an African Christian Drama.

I must also mention the influence from my late grandfather, Kileopa Rapemo Adero. He was born in 1879, and saw the arrival of the white missionaries. He told us that in his time, the practice of ATR was an unquestioned

reality. Later, he was converted to Christianity and became a strong follower, taking part in the activities of the church in my village. When I was about eleven years old, I was amazed by the manner of his prayers, which were distinctly different from those of other Christians. In adoring God, my grandfather would refer to Him by using names that are not understood or employed by most Christians. They are names that were often used by ATR followers in the past, but were offensive to the missionaries. At the beginning of each day, my grandfather would, in reverence to God, use such titles for God such as "Obongo Nyakalaga", "Ochieng Wuon Chieng", "Ohinga", "Jachwech", "Nyasach Nyiseche", "Juok", and "Tham". Literally, these names mean the attributes of God such as the ubiquitous one, the one who flows everywhere, Omnipotent, Lord of Lords, and Creator. Even though the format of my grandfather's prayers was influenced by ATR, at the end of his supplications he would assert his strong belief in the Christian God. Thus, he would end his prayers, "E nying' Yeso Kristo Ruodhwa Amina", which means "In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen". These memories of my grandfather have taken me through several journeys in my spiritual life, and they weigh heavily on my decision to explore the meaning of and possibilities for traditional

African customs within Christianity. Indeed, my grandfather's expressions at that time, being a result of his relationship to God no matter how he perceived Him, still remain to me a convincing example that demonstrates the possibility of a smooth combination of Christianity with any culture.

As a Christian artist, I believe that drama is a platform upon which thematic and theatrical explorations of African traditional culture can flourish for the African Christian person who wishes to fulfill his calling as an artist. First, like all dramatists all over the world, I believe that African Christian Dramatists have to recognise their primary role as artists in their respective communities. In his book **Artist the Ruler**, Okot P'Bitek highlights the centrality of art in society, and the accompanying values rooted in any artistic experience. Most importantly, African Christian artists must view themselves as Christians first, regardless of their geographical origins or ethnic background. Furthermore, whether they are Luo, Kikuyu, Yoruba, Ibo or Kalenjin, they must respectfully acknowledge the racial tribal barriers, along with the denominational barriers that have plagued Christianity as a whole since its inception.

Chapter One: Aspects of Traditional African Theatre

In this section, I will present key elements of African theatre from which African Christian Drama may draw its theatrical inspiration. I will introduce and clarify the levels and types of theatrical performance relating to African theatre in terms of places and times of different kinds of performance, their secular and religious natures, and the types of performances characterised by ritual or narration. I will introduce elements and patterns that characterise African traditional theatre. These include techniques such as the theatre-in-the-round stage formations, the use of empty space, storytelling, masquerades, masterful music (especially through the use of African drumming, silence and incantations), symbolic regalia, tableaux, and African dance. I will discuss characterisation in light of African drama. Finally, I will reiterate the thematic patterns in drama as found in the traditional African setting.

To demonstrate their distinctiveness, these dramatic patterns retain certain inherent qualities that most African societies share. As Joachim Fiebach notes in his paper titled "Openness and Mobility of Theatrical Communication in Africa: Cultural Identity and International Aspects", the forms of theatre should go beyond socio-political issues to

embrace the response to "...the cultural needs,
"Weltanschauung", the experiences and the basic attitudes of
the various social strata." Of the present African theatre,
Fiebach writes:

"...The openness to elements from non-indigenous
cultures can be traced back to traditional theatre
in Africa. To a certain extent the traditional theatre
was 'open' to or capable of infinite change. Seen from
this angle cultural identity as far as African theatre
is concerned could be understood as a phenomenon that
is as well made up by a set of nonidentical elements.
Or put it this way: it is essentially characterized by
discontinuity. Avant-garde type forms of contemporary
African theatre have developed a similar structure.
They are authentic elements of various African contexts
or groups including the less discussed Christian
groups predominantly shaped by intellectual groups. On
the other hand they draw on models and patterns of non-
European cultures and have developed quite a few traits
which have close affinities with European, American and
Asian forms". [p. 33 ***Drama and Theatre in Africa:***
Bayreuth African Studies Series vol.7]

Thus, "infinite change" should characterise African
Christian Drama both in the present and in the future. Like
its open-minded parent, African traditional theatre, this
nascent dramatic form must embrace the dynamics of cultural
change by incorporating ingredients of traditional African
indigenous drama. These ingredients will include elements of
conventional drama such as props, costumes, makeup, scenery,
and masks. For example, there is a particular costume among
my tribe known as "owalo". It was created to give a graceful
look to women dancers and to exaggerate their hip-dancing
movements. "Owalo" is a sisal skirt usually worn by dancers.

Over time, its length and thickness have changed. In certain circumstances, the material has also changed from plain sisal to pieces of cloth, strips of leather, grass, and even tanned tree bark. Despite all these changes, the purpose and identity of "owalo" has remained the same. Hence, African Christian Drama must also be characterised by such "infinite change" for its own survival. I believe that there are many elements of traditional African theatre that have now become unknown, and that cannot be traced because of the inability of past Christian artists to embrace change. Many of these artists were unwilling to integrate any element of the African traditions within their art for fear of being branded evil by church leaders and members. Therefore, their performance followed the patterns set by the early missionaries.

Traditional African theatre is also different from conventional drama because of the different venues in which it was performed. First, there are the venues in which theatre is performed in festivals and in the larger community. In these venues, theatre takes on various shapes, depending on the purpose for the gathering. During the festivals, theatre can be either secular or religious. Most of the secular theatre in the festivals is unscripted and highly melodramatic. Although thoroughly rehearsed in most

cases, there is a lot of improvisation in dialogue and acting during performance to suit the background of the local audience and the occasion. The religious performances use simple plots and are preoccupied with moral teaching. Everybody in the community participates in one way or another.

The festivals may be in honour of a celebration such as harvest, marriage, post-initiation ceremonies, or the arrival of rain. There may also be perennial, seasonal festivals, or even emergency rituals that would call for a theatrical performance. All of these occur before a wider audience, and usually need experienced performers. The festival is an important focus for the performing arts, including drama. Hardly a season goes by without one, because there is a widespread belief in and consciousness of the value of the festival as an integrative event in community life, and as a means of upholding a people's way of life. It is therefore important that African Christian Drama tap into the theatrical potential that is created by these festivals. One of the reasons that the African Christian artist should draw on this potential is because certain aspects of the festival, such as public worship, can be replaced without difficulty with Christian worship. In traditional Africa, public worship has often been an

occasion for the performance of music and dancing, and the enactment of belief through drama.

The second venue of theatrical performance occurs mainly in the homestead. It is here that talent is nurtured prior to exposure to the wider community. The main focus of theatrical performance can be found in oral performances during sessions such as the evening storytelling, narrative drama, singing, children's games, and simulations played during such times as cattle herding, working on the farms, and mock wrestling. At the homestead, young people sharpen their listening, singing, acting, and musical talents, learning from their peers and older people such as grandparents, uncles, and other relatives. It is also at the homestead that young people learn the value of communion with the supernatural through religious rituals. In a discussion paper read at the World Festival of playwrights in Warragul, Australia, titled "*Trends in Theatre in Kenya*", Ezekiel Alembi stated:

"...when a man woke up in the morning, for example, he would go out and while facing the east would say prayers to God through the ancestors. He would spit towards the east...In the evening, the heads of homesteads would perform the evening prayers but this time while facing the west. Children would sit round fires listening to and participating in different oral performances." [Alembi: *Trends in Theatre in Kenya*]

Apart from the distinct venues of theatre performances, there exist two forms of theatrical rendition in African

traditional theatre: ritual theatre, and narrative drama. Ritual theatre refers to those performances done during religious ceremonies such as circumcision, burial of elderly men, marriage ceremonies, and harvests. Narrative drama, on the other hand, emphasises the recounting of experience in a manner that goes beyond mere linguistic expression. More and more paralanguage is used to pass along and share a total experience. By para-language, I refer to those expressions apart from verbal communication in performance such as straight dialogue, monologues, and songs included in performance. For example, mime, dance, music gestures, and voice variation are some of the many techniques employed in both ritual and narrative drama, forming the elements of dramatic art.

There are many elements of African traditional theatre that are similar to those of conventional drama. However, there are some that are uniquely African. To begin with, in most cases, the stage configuration in traditional African theatre follows a pattern similar to that of theatre-in-the-round. The performers and audience sit or stand in a circular configuration. In some cases, a soloist or lead storyteller can move to the centre of the circle during the performance. In many African societies, the circle symbolises the continuity of life. Homesteads and huts are

built, and theatrical performances including dance are choreographed, in circular shapes to symbolise the continuity and the interconnection of various phenomena in African life. Another stage formation used for narrative drama is in the shape of horseshoe, wherein the storyteller is the central focus, while the participants (both the actors and audience) play the parts of the characters in the story.

Storytelling, often led by older people, is an important element in traditional African theatre. Storytelling, being part dramatic and part narrative, encourages intense visual and emotional interest for the audience in African theatre. Within the storytelling technique, there is great potential for dramatic action, movement, and miming. It is also in storytelling that a good mastery of language is exemplified through poetry, imagery, voice variation, and allusive language. A good storyteller is judged by the way he engages the audience by asking relevant and provocative questions as he tells his story, thus involving the audience emotionally in the performance. A simple example can be found among the Swahili people from the coastal province of Kenya, among whom the storyteller starts his story by asking the audience common questions:

STORYTELLER: Hadithi, hadithi? (story, story?)

AUDIENCE: Hadithi njoo! (Come story, come...!)

STORYTELLER: Paukwa (Once upon a time?)

AUDIENCE: Pakawa (There was!)
STORYTELLER: Sahani (Plate? asking what it is used for)
AUDIENCE: Ya mchele (For rice!)
STORYTELLER: Giza? (Darkness?)
AUDIENCE: Ya mwizi! (For a thief!)
STORYTELLER: Kiboko? (A cane?)
AUDIENCE: Ya mwalimu! (For the teacher!)

Later in the storytelling session, the audience sometimes hijacks the performance, and may punctuate the narrative by remarks, singing a song, clapping their hands, dancing, or telling themselves some of the familiar sections of the narrative. At such occasions, the narrator takes the position of observer. Accomplished storytellers also have a mastery of dancing and singing. In most cases, storytelling takes place as a daily experience in the homestead. However, storytelling also takes place in the larger community in festivals and ceremonies such as "kisera" (marriage negotiation) ceremonies among the Luo.

At the festival or community level, there is another unique element of traditional African theatre in the person of a masquerade. In the absence of a narrator, the masquerade serves as a catalyst to a performance and serves mainly during specific festivals. One or more people can play the masquerade. In my own tribe (the Luo), the masquerade can be seen in the "tero buru" ceremony. "Tero buru" literally means accompanying or taking the ashes of the dead man away from the village. Hence, "tero buru" also

denotes "the journey of the earth", as the spirit of the departed elderly and respected person is appeased in a mock warlike procession. Among the Luo, it is believed that upon one's death, the body will become ashes and later be returned to the earth.

Participants in the "tero buru" ceremony include elders and a few chosen young men. Bulls and other livestock also form part of the solemn procession that involves singing of dirges, commonly known as "gueyo", which literally means barking. As a man engages in "gueyo", he also concentrates on praising the dead, himself, the community, or some individuals in the community, or in what is known as "pakruok", which literally meaning "praise". There is an example of "pakruok" in the play **Pambazuka Afrika**, when the character Laana praises the continent of Africa:

LAANA: The drum! The African drum! Remember Mama's story? In the beginning -- that's when it began to beat. Throughout the Bible, it continued to beat. The great man Moses married a woman from Africa. The Queen of Sheba, the black queen from Africa toured Israel with great treasures from this very land. Simon of Siren who carried the cross behind Jesus on his way to crucifixion. The Ethiopian eunuch who believed the Gospel. The African drum. It beat throughout civilization, built by black people. The Egyptian Pharaoh, Namura, who united the upper and lower Egypt was black, and many others who came after him... [Act 2. Scene 1: **Pambazuka Afrika**]

Elaborate costumes are given to the "tero buru" participants, including the livestock that are adorned with

bells hung around their necks, green twigs, and tree branches. Some "tero buru" participants masquerade as spiritual guardians, and symbolically fight against the spirits of death. While returning from the mock fight, people in the procession carry their spears, clubs, and shields. The livestock are literally chased away in every direction and some jump on top of the fresh grave. Ironically, "tero buru" is also supposed to be a peaceful ceremony symbolised by the green twigs and branches, but it is believed by the participants that after the warlike action, there will be peace. The masquerades are supposed to be emissaries of peace, goodwill, and continuity, despite the death of the individual that occasions the "tero buru". The masquerade technique is seen mainly in conventional West African plays. For example, in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Wole Soyinka uses the masquerade in the character of the King's Horseman to bring the message of continuity between life and death.

Complementing the masquerade is authentic African music and dance, especially the rhythm of drum. The drum is perhaps the best known element of African life, so that when non African people think of African music, one of the first things they usually think of is the drum. The drum can stand on its own, but it is best suited to be accompanied by

flutes, xylophones, a good voice for singing, and delivery of poetry and dirges. Tonal language also contributes to the patterning of drumbeats, which is the equivalent of verbal phrases in conventional text-based theatrical works. Thus, the less dramatic moments are filled with the drum language. By "less dramatic moments", I refer to those moments in performance when new characters, ideas, or new jokes have been understood by the audience. These moments are also free of interjections by other elements such as a dirge, dance, or "pakruok". In essence, every drumbeat communicates something to drummers and audiences. Understanding drum language requires that a person is either trained to understand it, or is brought up in the community in which a particular type of drum is mainly used.

A story can be told, a rhetorical question raised, a poem recited -- all in the form of drum language. The result is an entertainment of dance and song alternating with drum language. For example, in the competitive annual Kenya Music Festivals, it is required that some traditional songs use dance to tell a narrative. Many composers and choreographers have rediscovered the traditional method of filling up the less dramatic moments in their dance pieces with the drum language. Church services and worship in many African congregations to some extent also employ this drum language

technique. During worship, or at times when the preaching session has intensified, people respond as much to the spirit of music as to the spoken word. African drumming within the precincts of churches has been accepted by most denominations as a way of worshipping God.

In De Graft's **Muntu**, the drum language is evident, especially through the symbolic drumming by the Divine Drummer. The play opens with two drummers -- the Divine Drummer and the Community Drummer -- conversing in their drum language. At the end of the play, the drummers become commentators and narrators. However, there can be disadvantages with drumming, especially in a contemporary theatre setting. In the traditional African theatre, there is unrestricted drumming, which suits the open-air setting. However, the full potential of drumming cannot be achieved if performances involving drumming take place in theatre buildings. When the drummer gets carried away, as often happens, it becomes hard to hear the verbal dialogue or the singing in performances. In order to be successful, the drummer needs to be an excellent listener in order to contribute to a harmonious performance. This is especially important in African Christian Drama, because it is a message-oriented drama rather than merely entertainment. All in all, the drum language element in plays is an aspect of

African traditional performance that can be used extensively in present African Christian Drama to help develop characterisation, dialogue, and plot. For example, a specific drum type can be used to represent a character in a performance so that every moment the audience hears the beats of that drum, they will associate it with that character. Thus the intensity of drum beats determines the characters' complexity and how they relate to the entire plot. Also, the values held by the character can be determined by the tone and pitch used by drummers. Now, every performance is unique insofar as interpreting the meaning of the drums' tone or pitch is concerned.

Complementary to the use of drumming is the use of silence. In African traditional theatre, the drummers, masquerades, and storytellers often use silence as an important element in their performance. Silence, incantations, and trances can be used by these performers, especially in ritual drama, to evoke a sense of space that operates as a fearful reminder of man's helplessness in the disturbing environment that he defines variously as void, emptiness, or infinity. Silence works alongside such devices as mime, dance, and a display of other symbolic adornments, such as costumes.

It must be noted that the technique of silence is

mainly applicable to performers playing characters or presenting new thoughts or their own ideas within the community. Thus the performer engages in performativity -- a symbolic gesture that is being as well as doing. It is a doing that constitutes a being, an activity that creates what it describes. In this instance, the performer may question an incident, a person, or the community, especially if the performer wishes to address sensitive political issues. Hence, as the performers pause in silence during a performance, the audience is given a moment to absorb the new thoughts and ideas of the performers. A group of performers may also choose to encourage a new message by the use of silence. When used, silence can be preceded or followed by some sound such as "mmmmhh", "eeeehh", and "mayo!" Silence is used to encourage a message in the sense that during the silent moment, audiences are able to comment on the performance (if need be) through such ways as "pakrouk". Thus, through silence, there can be development to the plot. The performer may choose to be silent so as to allow the development of the plot to take an impromptu direction by the audience. Hence, silence could initiate new ideas or plot patterns through audience participation. For example, a storyteller wishing to make a contribution in a censoring society, may opt to use symbolism known only to

himself to criticise a regime. The storyteller may choose to remain silent and let the criticism emanate from the audience.

The use of symbolic regalia is another aspect of traditional African theatre. These come in the form of special costumes for different character types in a performance, as well as in the form of masks, stools, skins, and weapons such as clubs, shields, spears, bows and arrows. Ritual theatre, for example, employs masks and symbolic stools more than any other type of theatre. According to Keir Elam, theatre can be construed "...as the complex of phenomena associated with the (performer-audience) transaction: the production and communication of meaning both in performance itself and with the system underlying it..." [p.2 *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*]. Thus, the symbolic elements used in African traditional performance literally underscore the specific transactions of performers and audiences in relation to the characters' speeches, roles, relationships, and responsibilities. The overall experience of many performances that employ such elements, therefore, is not literal but symbolic.

The traditional African theatre consists of interrelated episodes and tableaux presented against the background of a natural setting. For example, in De Graft's

Muntu, there are episodic moments when visual elements are emphasised instead of dialogue and plot. In **Pambazuka Afrika**, the tableau device is put into effect throughout the play by the singers, band players, and dancers as a symbolic reminder of the inherent joy of the community, despite the reality of political turbulence. Sometimes, there is a deliberate break in the continuous narrative or plot to emphasise the visual elements such as dancing, and the interaction of the symbolic regalia.

Thus, dancing becomes a very important element of traditional African theatre that should also be central to African Christian Drama. African dance, with all the emotional excitement that is involved, is highly symbolic, hence valuable to Africans. In many rites of passage, it is dance that becomes the way of expressing the value of the rite. In his book, **The Development of African Drama**, Michael Etherton states:

"Consider this: One of the tribes in Zambia, the Chewa, has a spectacular dance which celebrates rites of passage. The dance is called Nyau and masquerade is performed on the occasion of a funeral. In one of the villages in this area there was a man who was able to dance the Nyau so well all the people from the surrounding communities acknowledged his pre-eminence in the art of the dance; and because the dance celebrated death as a transition from this world to the next... How could dance have ever been considered as an art in the midst of the emotional and physical chaos of a funeral? The dance and not the people are given contemporary value." [p. 314-315]

It is possible to classify African dance with only those dance movements that evoke sexual appeal if we consider that many African dances involve contortions of different parts of the body, especially the waist. However, such classification need not be applied to all African dances. In an unpublished Master's thesis at Kenyatta University titled "*The Development of a Popular Theatre in Kenya*", Karani

Kakai states:

"The vigorous waist-shaking is an attempt to apprehend death through an imitation of the sexual act. For sex is central to the procreative and therefore, the regenerative role of man. The shaking of the waist becomes the affirmation of society's belief in life and continuity. It becomes the celebration of the future and the process of regeneration." [Karani: *The Development of a Popular Theatre in Kenya*]

In addition to its role in funeral rites, dance in traditional African theatre may express meaning drawn from other aspects of the culture. Most dance movements in Africa are derived from day-to-day activities and special events such as warfare, farming, winnowing, and the grinding of grain. Therefore, having been a part of the production ***Pambazuka Afrika***, in which dance was an integral part of the whole production, I believe that as Christian artists, we must master and moderate dance. This means that artists need to apply self-restraint and group temperateness as they engage in dance. Above all, every choreographed dance must be modest and avoid evoking any extraneous sexual message.

This is because audiences vary in their understanding of the extent to which dancers are merely dancing to celebrate a meaningful event, or using the dance as sexual provocation. For example, it is common to hear shouts of disapproval from African audiences if the majority of them are not in unanimity with the dance.

It is important to clarify how characterisation works in traditional African theatre. First, characterisation can be shared by a group of performers or audience. For example, in De Graft's **Muntu**, the characters are used to represent or symbolise certain types. Many of the characters are not even given individualised names. Instead, they are known as First Son, Second Son, First Daughter, Second Daughter, and so on. This is because of the idea of community ownership, and the participatory nature of African theatre. Individual actors sometimes play characters, although this is rare. Second, characters are often stock figures with backgrounds familiar to the spectators. Even the best playwrights and composers are aware of the fact that the characters they create, and the actors who shall play them must be well versed in the knowledge of the common man, even when playing the roles of spiritual beings. One example of a stock character is the Village Idiot. He can be likened to Azdak in Bertolt Brecht's **The Caucasian Chalk Circle**. The Village Idiot

character is the most commonly exemplified by leading Kenyan playwright Francis Imbuga in his plays *The Successor*, *Man of Kafira*, and *Betrayal in the City*. Typically, the concept of stock characterisation sometimes entails creating characters that are less appreciated within the plot but serve a greater purpose for the playwright. Often the stock character embodies the moral message that the playwright wishes to express to his audience. Other examples of stock characters are the "BeenTo's" as found in de Graft's plays such as *Muntu* and *Sons and Daughters*. As John Ruganda puts it, these stock characters "tell the truth laughingly" through idiotic characters like Mulili in *Betrayal in the City*, or SegaSega in *The Successor*, who are generally despised by the community, yet much of their illiterate and funny utterances carry a lot of meaning.

In terms of the fate of the "tragic character", one can say that tragedy in African drama does not exist as it is defined by European dramatic theory. In Western tragedy, for the individual tragic figure, his personal hopelessness is the culmination at the end of a tragic play. His personal hopelessness is what brings hopefulness to the community as a whole; he suffers personally, but the life of the community goes on. Since in African traditional performance, there is minimal focus on individual characterisation, the

drama emanating from the community seldom portrays tragedy in this way. For Africans, in most communities, there is belief in life after death. Thus, it is clear that there is concordance with the Christian theology of life after death. Most dramas written in postcolonial Kenya explore the anti-tragedy rule, as outlined above, in their plot. This characteristic is common, mainly in traditional African communities. Over time, this characteristic has succumbed to characteristics more typical of European or Western forms.

Because of the presence of the Western-educated audience who form the majority of the theatregoing public, it is difficult to produce traditional African plays that do not include Western elements. This is because the inclusion of Western elements enables educated Africans to engage in deconstructing the dramatic form and content images built in their minds through Western education and lifestyle, and those images that they encounter daily as Africans. In short, the educated African engages in decolonising his mind. Including Western elements in the productions is important because many of the Western-educated audience have been educated to like them. When I refer to characteristics typical of Western forms, I do not imply that all Western drama has a narrow range of forms and principles dramaturgically and visually. However, it must be noted that

at the time that Western drama was formally introduced to Africans during the colonial and postcolonial era, emphasis was placed on such aspects as "the well-made play" and "Aristotelian drama". The African plays written and performed during and after this period have for the most part followed these European forms. Some radical anti-colonial dramatists, upon learning the new Western theatrical languages and techniques, reverted to using some of the techniques in their drama.

In the introduction of this thesis and in defining the idea of an African Christian Drama, I referred to its thematic content as being integral to this proposal. I wish to reiterate that unlike Western theatre, whose backbone tends to be expressed as conflict in drama, African theatre is more concerned with poetry of life, its rhythms, and its life cycles. In his comment on the idea of the universe-connection of traditional African theatre, Scott Kennedy says that "...it may be concerned with the wrath of gods and with the pleasure or displeasure of the hidden forces of nature that determine success or failure. Consequently, it focuses upon what one must do to control the forces of the universe..." [p. 1819: *In Search of an African Theatre*].

I have identified some theatrical elements of traditional African theatre that can be integrated into my

idea of African Christian Drama. I believe that it is not possible to utilise fully all of these elements in one production or performance. However, it is possible to apply a variety of these elements within one production. I also believe that producers, directors, and actors wishing to employ certain controversial theatrical elements of African traditional theatre must do so in moderation, and with the utmost respect toward their various audiences. Thus, I suggest that dramaturgical research of audience attitudes be undertaken prior to productions. For example, in some rural parts of Africa, a production team may find it much more difficult to integrate any controversial theatrical element which may be perceived as belonging only to African traditional religion.

Chapter Two: Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

The fundamental reason why the Christians were so keen to suppress African performing arts was that they realized cultural forms held the symbolic key to the religious and moral bases of indigenous societies.

-David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre* [p.18]

A new dramatic genre that incorporates Christian and African beliefs can provide a fulfilling integration of theatrical elements. Audiences may better appreciate this integration if they understand that religion, strictly speaking, is about values. It is about fidelity and the convictions that ultimately comprise a person's sense of belonging. The concepts of belonging and individual identity are always influenced by the values of society. In proposing the concept of an African Christian Drama, I am aware that there are conflicting values between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity. At the same time, however, they share certain common principles. By building upon these principles, while at the same time recognising that opposing principles exist, African Christian Drama may offer a realistic approach in dealing with conflict on a religious and cultural platform.

As I indicated in the introduction, traditional African theatre, from which African Christian Drama draws many elements, served functional purposes. In the preface to his book, *African Theatre Today*, Clive Wake says:

"Perhaps the most important thing to stress is that theatre is being used in Africa as a means of education, celebration, protest and discovery..."

[Preface ***African Theatre Today***]

This means that art is not simply for art's sake. It serves a purpose within communities and cultures greater than entertainment. Furthermore, traditional drama has a direct connection with communal life, which is organically and synthetically influenced by ATR. Thus, traditional African communal life can be succinctly described as being a religious culture. In his book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, John S. Mbiti asserts that Africans are "notoriously" religious. Religion, and the beliefs that go along with it, permeate every aspect of the lives of African people. Furthermore, the African religious world view was part of, and shaped, communal life. In his book, ***African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective***, Richard Gehman notes:

Traditional religion was not practiced in a segregated compartment of life, but was lived throughout life, integrating and permeating all of life. ATR drenched the African as rain drenched the parched ground. ATR was relevant in all situations and conditions of life. For the African depended always and completely on the supernatural powers of the world about him to aid him in his quest for posterity, prosperity, and position. [p.55]

Elsewhere, John S. Mbiti also states:

"...Wherever the African is, there is religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.

Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death..."

[p. 2 ***African Religions and Philosophy***]

But what exactly does one mean by "religion"? The term "religion" has been a source of substantial debate among theologians, social scientists, and others in various fields of study. For some, religion is a way of life dictated by dogmatic rules and formal behaviour. Clifford Geertz offers an objective definition:

"Religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in people by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. "

[p. 90 ***The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays***]

For Christians, the main symbol of their religion is embedded in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence, the term "Christian" can be absolutely defined as that person who identifies himself/herself as such; embraces and engages in the practices associated with the followers of the first century rabbi, Jesus (Yeshua) of Nazareth; and subscribes to the tenets of Biblical faith generally recognized by other followers of Jesus as constituting Christianity.

The history of Christianity in Kenya involves the African Independent churches or African indigenous churches that grew out of a protestant mission context soon after the

arrival of the first missionaries. Often in frustration with Western missionaries, these African independent churches (AICs) have gone their own way and continue function without reference to overseas churches. They range from independent versions of Western protestant churches to highly syncretistic versions of African traditional religion. AICs have continued to grow and flourish and proliferate, but have become far less concerned with integrating Christianity into traditional African culture as they had done in the past. This is mainly because African people are becoming less traditional and more urbanized and western in their culture.

Clifford Geertz clarifies the concept of "culture" with a definition useful for dramatists. He asserts that culture "denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life". It is clear that theatre artists continually employ and are affected by these symbol systems that function as the essential signifiers of religion. The manner in which audiences perceive a religious symbolic representation on stage will vary from place to place, depending on the religious world view. Therefore our

understanding of the similarities and contrasts between ATR and Christianity will facilitate a better integration in the proposed African Christian Drama. No matter how one looks at the similarities and contrasts between Christianity and ATR, I believe that they can be placed into two categories, namely those concerning the relationship between the individual and his community; and those concerning the relationship between the individual and the supernatural world. Since drama as a discipline makes use of expressions that arise from these relationships, I will discuss these relationships with reference to the similarities and contrasts found in both religions.

The first and most important similarity can be found in the way individuals perceive the nature and concept of God and His attributes. While there are various concepts of African traditional religion different from those of Christianity, the concept of the deity of God is undeniably shared by both belief systems. In ATR, as in Christianity, the individual believes in God through reflecting on the natural environment, God's creation, and observing the forces of nature made in God's hand. God is seen in what He does. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, provides for what He has created, and is the ruler of the universe. Hence, in African traditional heritage, it is not

uncommon to see rivers, lakes, mountains and forests turned into sacred places of worship, praise and prayer to God.

In his book, **African Religions and Philosophy**, John S. Mbiti states:

"Expressed ontologically, God is the origin and sustenance of all things. He is "older" than the Zamani(Kiswahili word for "long time ago") period; He is outside and beyond His creation. On the other hand, He is personally involved in His creation, so that it is not outside of Him or His reach. God is thus simultaneously transcendent and immanent...But God is no stranger to African peoples, and in traditional life there are no atheists. This is summarized in an Ashanti proverb that says: "No one shows a child the Supreme Being". That means that everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct, and even children know Him".

[p. 37-38 **African Religions and Philosophy**]

Likewise, the Bible states:

"...since what may be known about God is plain to them(mankind), because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities -- his eternal power and divine nature -- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." [**Romans** 1:19,20]

The attributes of God are also shared unequivocally by both religions. God is viewed as even possessing human attributes. He is seen as a father and a friend. Some people believe that God has eyes and ears, and can smell and taste. For example, among the Luo, there is the belief that the whole community is under "Wang Nyasaye"(the eye of God) to show God's transcendent quality. Similarly, as Christians believe in God as being merciful, holy, all-powerful, and

all-knowing, so do adherents of African traditional religion. To show that God is the first and the last thing that comes to the mind of Africans, in his book **Introduction to African Religions**, John S. Mbiti gives the example of the Zairean Pygmies. In a traditional African hymn, the Pygmies summarised thus:

In the beginning was God
Today is God
Tomorrow will be God. [p. 52]

The above hymn resonates positively with the Biblical view of the nature of God as "the Word" in John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God".

Furthermore, the apostle Paul gave a speech that provides a theological basis for missionary work with non-Jewish people and non-Christians, including believers in ATR. On an elevated spot in Athens, Greece, Paul delivered a speech (commonly referred to as the Areopagus speech) that not only reiterates agreement about the existence and supremacy of God, but one which I consider as one of the earliest approaches to comparative theology:

"Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands...From one man he made every nation of men,

that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that man would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, we are his offspring. Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone: an image made by man's design and skill. [**Acts** 17: 22-31]

It is clear from Paul's speech that there are remarkable theological similarities between Africans and Christians when it comes to their perception of God. This similarity falls under the category of the individual and his relationship with God. In his book **African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective**, Richard Gehman gives a summary of belief in and worship of the Supreme Being in ATR and concludes:

"There are both strengths and weaknesses in the ATR knowledge and worship of God...Truth and error are co-mingled together. But we can affirm that the ATR notion of God in many ways forms a continuity with Biblical revelation. Through general revelation truth is disclosed. And through the fall of man, error has clouded and perverted that knowledge. But despite the clouded and confused vision, God has not left Himself without a witness". [p. 193-194]

The next similarity falls under the category of the individual's relationship with the community. This is in reference to the idea of a scapegoat. In Christianity, the idea stems from the fact that the sins of believers were confessed and symbolically transferred to the sacrificial

Lamb, Jesus Christ. The idea is rooted in the fact that certain wrongs, misfortunes, or personal and community mistakes cannot be forgiven nor atonement made for sins unless there is a sacrifice. Hence, one or more individuals must be willing, or be forced, to take upon themselves the responsibility of sacrificing themselves for the good of the entire community. In ATR, the focus of the religion is man. He is taught that he intrinsically gains and loses as a member of the entire family. There are many instances where a person surrenders any individualism for the sake of the whole community. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, this idea of a willingness even to die for the sake of saving the family's, and by extension, the community's good name is exemplified through the character of the King's Horseman, Elesin. Despite the intervention of a colonial District Officer to prevent the sacrificial ritual suicide, demanded by the death of the King, Elesin ensures that he fulfills his role as a scapegoat, albeit quite late. Therefore I deduce that Christianity's teaching on sacrifice and the idea of a scapegoat are similar to those found in traditional African philosophy.

Among the Luo, in reference to the Christian sacraments, there is the concept of "sawo" (literally meaning "sacrifice" or "giving up oneself") that has been

used by the church since the introduction of Christianity into Africa. Both **Muntu** and **Pambazuka Afrika** make use of "scapegoats" in their main characters. I have come to the conclusion that most traditional African performances would seldom cause any catharsis without the idea of a scapegoat being sacrificed. Renowned African playwrights like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Ijimere Obatunde, Francis Imbuga, David Mulwa, and many others have also employed this device in their works.

For dramatists, the idea of a scapegoat can be analysed on thematic levels, whereby tragic characters' actions and intentions can be scrutinised. In terms of its presentation, actual sacrifice most often involves the spilling of blood. Both Christians and adherents of African traditional religion place a high symbolic value on blood. Even though ethnic communities in Kenya differ in the manner in which they express the high value of blood to them as a sacrifice, their fundamental belief is that blood is sacred. For example, the Maasai people in Kenya are known to drink raw cow's blood mixed with milk as a way of directly absorbing the "source of life" from cows and other livestock. Therefore, the spilling and drinking of blood is always a justified action by that community. In terms of play presentation, blood as a symbol of sacrifice can be shown

openly, as in the case **Muntu**, or only implied in dramatic dialogue. For example, in **Pambazuka Afrika**, Ketu's bloody death is merely reported by a policeman to his family, and the audience does not see the actual scene, partly because of the sanctity associated with human blood. Since the audience is familiar with some "road accidents" in Kenya being used politically as means of eliminating political dissenters, they can only empathise with and share the pain of Ketu's sacrifice.

One other common element found in both ATR and Christianity is the presence of evil. Both religions agree on the existence of evil, and on how evil comes about. In Christianity, as in ATR, evil comes from external dark forces, and also from within individuals.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms".
[**Ephesians** 6:12]

At the same time, John S. Mbiti elaborates upon the presence of evil in ATR thus:

"...African peoples are much aware of evil in the world, and in various ways they endeavour to fight it...In nearly all African societies, it is thought that the spirits are either the origin of evil, or agents of evil. We have seen that after four or five generations, the living-dead lose personal links with human families, and become "its" and strangers. When they become detached from human contact, people experience or fear them as "evil" or "harmful".
[p. 266-267 **African Religions and Philosophy**]

In African traditional religion, human beings can call upon evil forces to persecute and punish wrongdoers. Sorcerers, witches, and magicians can also wrongfully use evil forces in wicked ways. It is believed that witches possess mystical and innate powers within themselves and use these powers for evil purposes. It is thought that merely by looking at someone, or wishing evil on someone, the witch will bring harm. Among the Luo, if one is suspected to have been "looked at with the wrong eye", as it is commonly known, he will have to be treated by a "jayath" or "ajuoga" [medicine man]. Sorcerers, on the other hand, are thought to use black magic and medicines against others. For example, by placing specially prepared charms near someone's house, it is believed that they can bring harm to that person. Even so, every individual can choose whether or not to become an agent of evil. In Christianity, as in ATR, there are consequences related to every choice a person makes. Therefore, if African Christian Drama is approached on the basis of themes such as the existence of evil, there shall be minimal conflict.

There is also agreement between Christianity and ATR when it comes to various processes of life, including the many rites of passage. Both religions believe in the continuity of life after death. This belief obviously

influences artists in their understanding and symbolic expression of the relationship between the past, the present, and the future. In ATR, when someone dies, he does not completely cut off communication with the community to which he belonged. Since the ATR philosophy consists of the visible and the invisible, meaning that adherents of ATR beliefs are not only influenced by the things they can physically see and touch, but also by the invisible, the dead person joins the recently dead (usually known as the living-dead). After four or five generations, he joins the long-dead (ancestors). As a living-dead he is consulted as a spiritual being who sees more clearly than the living. The wisdom and thoughts of the living-dead are believed to live on in the community, since the living-dead are merely dead physically, yet not long-dead. In this regard, ATR is in agreement with Christians who also believe that the dead are simply dead physically and will resurrect on the day of Jesus' return:

"For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..."

[**I Thessalonians** 4:16-17]

Since the concept of life after death and the cyclical nature of human beings exist in the world view of dramatists

and other artists, the preparation and expression of their work will reflect such a world view. Thus, a funeral scene, for example, will not always be the end for many African plays. In *Pambazuka Afrika*, Ketu's death is followed by the birth of Wema's illegitimate child, signifying the rebirth of Ketu in the newborn child.

Furthermore, I perceive that the theatre artist as a living human being can become a vehicle and a link between the living dead and the living in performance. Like the medicine men, the magicians, and spiritual seers, the theatre artist and other performers are believed to have more insight into the supernatural realm. Among the Luo, I have witnessed a drumming session performed by traditional "ohangla"(special drums played for spirits) players. Typically, the drummers are singers and performers who have undergone formal and informal training under specialists such as medicine men and ATR priests. These "ohangla" drummers can play music that can only be understood and danced to by those who either possess the same powers that they have, or have undergone similar spiritual training. Since ATR is expressed through elements as dance, music, proverbs, riddles, wise sayings, art, and symbolic regalia, which are the embodiments of traditional African theatre, it is theatre artists who weave and express the continuity of

the rites of passage in their community. As a rite of passage, death is also viewed by ATR as a rebirth with the process of life. Hence, most traditional African performance will encompass birth, initiation ceremonies, and death as being "rebirth" of some sort. This means that, to some extent, both ATR and Christianity share the concept of being "born-again" which is fundamental to Christianity and rooted in the words of Jesus: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" [*John* 3:3].

Birago Diop, an African poet, summarises the Africans' belief in life after death as follows:

Those who have died have never ever left us
They are with us in the home
They are with us in the crowd
The dead have a pact with the living
[*The Dead Are Not Dead*: Birago Diop]

ATR and Christianity also share the idea of community spirit and unity, or "ecclesia", that is prevalent in both religious belief systems. For the ancient Greek, *ecclesia* referred to the legislative assembly. For the church, it means a congregation. Nonetheless, the basis of this word is rooted in oneness of mind, gathering together physically in one place, and sharing issues, joys, and misfortunes communally.

The community spirit of Africans remains part of every African, despite geographical separation or contact with

Euro-American lifestyles. Africans are brought up to believe in sharing their experiences, burdens, and responsibilities with their immediate and extended family. The communal family is at the core of the African society. In his paper titled "*Can Christianity Dialogue with African Traditional Religion?*", Peter Sarpong gives an example that can be attributed to every African who has experienced traditional community life:

"In my own life-time, Asante (a tribe in Ghana) has seen a time when one could take food items from another person's farm without the latter's knowledge or consent. It was sufficient for the one who took the plantain or pepper to inform the rightful owner afterwards that he took it for personal consumption. He was believed, and would not abuse the trust by selling what he had taken".

Similarly, Christians are also born into the family of God called the church, where they experience the real sense of community. Christians, like Africans, are called upon "not to give up meeting together..." but instead to "encourage one another" [**Hebrews** 10:25]. I believe that the integration of theatrical elements from African traditional culture into African Christian Drama is plausible, because theatre is by nature a communal experience.

Even though there exist similarities between ATR and Christianity, it is important to note that the two religious systems have some fundamental differences. Because of these differences, some Africans have totally abandoned their ATR

beliefs and have sought spiritual refuge in Christianity. On the other hand, some have felt the need to return to their roots, as they see a better alternative in ATR than in Christianity. Even though there are calls for many Africans to return to their roots, a complete return in the true sense of ATR will never be possible. This is because the true form of ATR has been adulterated by other new and multiple ideas and practices that did not exist formerly.

The main differences between ATR and Christianity are found in their theological emphases. As Richard Gehman asserts in his book, ***African Traditional Religion In Biblical Perspective***, "ATR is anthropocentric". This means that man is the focus of ATR, while God is removed from the centre. Another African scholar, Tokumbo Adeyemo, also notes in his book, ***Salvation in African Tradition***, that "the African peoples do not seek God for His own sake. They seek Him in worship for what they can get out of Him". [p.47]. When John S. Mbiti describes the Africans' objective in their religion as being *utilitarian* in his statement that "God is rarely brought into the picture, except on major occasions when people solicit His intervention and assistance"[p.95], his assertion is that the Africans are involved in the exploitation of God rather than a true veneration of the Creator. This aspect of African

traditional religion is definitely important for us as dramatists since we are concerned about the dynamics of the relationship between man and God. A clear understanding of this relationship should help us to fully portray and evaluate characters in performance.

On the other hand, Christians believe that the Bible reveals God as the centre of Christianity, and that God is not only the origin of man, but He should be the ultimate goal and purpose of man's life. Christians believe that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. By integrating both belief systems and focusing on man and God simultaneously, I believe that my concept of African Christian Drama offers an opportunity for continuity and dialogue for Africans who have found themselves caught between these two religious world views.

Unlike Christians, adherents of ATR also do not teach that God's Spirit can live in people. While various African traditional religions believe that many forms of spirits can live in people, none holds that the spirit of the Creator God dwells in humans, as Christianity teaches. This makes a difference for African composers and actors alike if they have to express their understanding of God in light of this spiritual relationship.

Another difference between ATR and Christianity is in

the attitude toward conversion. Christianity stresses the importance of winning converts, whereas ATR does not. ATR does not motivate its believers to teach and convert people from other beliefs. In fact, African traditional religion's beliefs are specific to each ethnic group, and unless someone is born into a specific tribe, he is always considered an outsider. For the Luo, the terminology used for an outsider is the derogatory "*jamwa*", meaning one who does not speak the language nor follow the customs. No matter one's race, nationality, or ethnic background, as long as one is not purely born a Luo, he will remain a "*jamwa*". Therefore, there is no possibility of ever being integrated into any particular African traditional religion if one is not born into that community. By contrast, Christianity is inclusive in that it expands its community of members in part by conversion.

ATR and Christianity conceive of sin very differently. Sin in ATR is mostly concerned with transgression of morals or community norms. There is difference in the severity of sin, depending on whether someone of the same ethnic group or someone of another group commits it. Hence, when it comes to the idea of sin in ATR, the focus is shifted from sin being against God to mainly being a transgression of fellow man's environment, peace, and morals. By contrast, in the

Christian belief system, sin is seen as being against God, even in rebellion towards God.

Another striking characteristic of ATR is the zealousness of superstitions and the fear of the unknown, especially death. However, in the Christian belief system, death is not to be feared. Instead, the Bible teaches of a single judgment, followed by everlasting rest, or punishment, of the soul. For the Africans who follow ATR, death is clouded with a lot of mystery, fear, and superstitions. In contrast to Christianity, many forms of ATR teach that after death, humans can be born back into the realm of the living. For example, a story is told in my family about my elder brother, Odhiambo Nyarianya. When Odhiambo was born, he kept crying the whole night, keeping my mother awake. It is said that in the daytime, the child was calm and seemed fine. Despite receiving medical attention, and even after doctors could not explain why the child was crying during the nights, the problem went on for days. It was not until an old medicine woman was consulted that things changed. She told my mother that the child did not like the name he had been given. Together, the family embarked on resolving the dilemma by trying several names of past ancestors and other dead members of the family, as was the custom. Several dead people's names were called out

loudly for the child to hear, but nothing seemed to appease the child's spirit. Surprisingly, when the name of one of my grandfathers -- "Nyarianya" -- was mentioned, the child quieted dramatically. This illustrates the extent to which Africans associate the dead with supernatural abilities, and the importance they place on rites of passage such as birth.

Another example of the difference between ATR and Christianity concerns funerals. On several occasions, I have witnessed how people wrangle over how to bury a dead person, where they shall bury the body, and many other complicated customs. When a prominent Nairobi criminal lawyer, S. M. Otieno, died in 1986, there was a protracted legal battle that lasted six months between the deceased widow, Wambui Otieno, and the Umira Kager clan to which Mr. Otieno belonged. The clan claimed that Mr. Otieno's body should not be buried by his wife near Nairobi. They wanted to bury him, according to Luo customary laws, at his ancestral home in Nyalgunga near Lake Victoria. Contending that "jochiende" (ghosts and spirits) would haunt the family members, Mr. Otieno's brother said, "If my late brother's body is not buried at home, Wambui and her family will have bad luck". Such bad luck could be manifested in various ways, including car wrecks, birth defects in the community, dead animals, and even people drowning in Lake Victoria. In

the end, if after the long trial the Court of Appeal had not granted the clan burial rights, they would have resorted to burying "yago", a local fruit tree, to represent the late lawyer's body, as is customary for the Luo.

During a funeral, a dead person's body may "refuse" to enter the gates of a homestead. The vehicle carrying the body may break down to signify the "refusal"; an accident may occur during the funeral procession; the dead body may physically swell up in an unusual manner; and there may even be tears flowing from the eyes of the dead body, a blatant abomination to the community. All of these are often superstitions, and can be read to signify some displeasure associated with the deceased person. The mystery associated with death and dead bodies in ATR is in contrast to Christianity. I believe that these mysteries and superstitions offer valuable ingredients for dramatists who wish to explore how Christianity interacts with African culture.

Whereas beliefs and practices such as necromancy (that is, communicating with spirits) are forbidden within Christianity, other aspects of ATR from many African communities are more consistent with Christian beliefs. Many Africans have traditionally maintained intimate relationships with departed spirits, communicating with

them, honouring them with offerings, depending upon them for guidance, and acknowledging their presence. At the same time, ancestral spirits and lesser gods are usually the primary communicants with humans on earth. They often communicate, yet they do not carry the same desires that living humans do to the Creator God. This is in contrast to Christianity. According to the Hebrew Bible, the chief word for necromancy is "*darash*", whose root appears many times in the Old Testament. "*Darash*" means "to ask", "to seek" and "inquire". It often means, "to inquire of God", to "consult Yahweh", or to ask the prophet who serves as the mediator for God. Thus Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ is the mediator between human beings and God.

Sacrifices are offered in ATR in order to placate, appease, or ask favours from the spirits. They are often offered when a wrong is committed. By contrast, Christianity teaches that it is God's will for all people to be forgiven and saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

I have highlighted the ideological similarities and contrasts found in ATR and Christianity, because they help us define thematic and theatrical boundaries as we attempt to engage in integrating elements of African theatre into Christianity. These thematic and theatrical boundaries will shape African Christian Drama in many ways. Themes drawn

from socio-religious happenings, taboos, and the expression of certain rituals, will all become relevant subjects for theatre artists. Similarly, religious symbols will become important and relevant for dramatists. Theatrically, there will be a wide variety from which to draw, as the manner of expression and communication of the Gospel will vary from people to people. The manner of worship, the expression of praise and gratitude, and the ways of communicating the Gospel will differ as well.

Whereas the Christian Gospel is unchanging in its content, it needs to live up to its potential of being relevant to every culture. For this reason, the Christian Church in Africa needs to contextualise her faith so that it becomes truly rooted in the life of the people. This will answer the cries for a genuine, authentic African Christianity. My attempt to formulate the concept of an African Christian Drama stems from the fact that there is a need for a new approach by Christianity to the people on the African continent. It is important to note that Africans, when they adopted Christianity (or other non-African religions for that matter), were not embracing a completely new concept of religion. The main function of ATR has been to give protection to the people from evil. With the arrival of Christianity in Africa, the fight against the forces of

evil involved the same approach as with ATR.

Therefore, to the African, the new Christian faith retained essentially the same functions as their traditional religion. The Christian religion, with its many ways to cast out evil -- exorcisms, use of holy water, wearing of robes, rosaries, use of emblems such as the cross, praying to Mary, eating and drinking of bread and wine as sacraments -- were not new to Africans. They were substitutions for their old charms, amulets, medicines, tribal body marks, and initiation rites. This is because the traditional African saw evil as a threat to life, and all of their religious, cultural, and political expression was built around the need to eradicate evil from their lives.

At the same time, within Christianity, Africans found a way to confront the problem of death, which they had formerly approached with such fear. Such concepts as eternal life for all, regardless of their social position, were extremely appealing to Africans. In a paper titled, *"African and Christian: from Opposition to Mutual Accommodation"*, James Kiernan states:

"One can opt for a different form of religion while retaining the same function"

As African Christians express their new social, religious, and political "way of life", dramatic writings and plays that fully represent their way of life become inevitable.

"...Beyond the past that we know..."- Odhuno Were

Joe de Graft's play, **Muntu**, succeeds as an African Christian Drama because of its use of myth as a background; the unique application of traditional African theatrical elements; integrated Christian and African thematic content; and most important, its sponsorship by a Christian organisation. From a critical look at Arthur Kemoli and Helen Mwanzi's book titled **Notes on Joe De Graft's Muntu**, it is clear that as De Graft craftily addresses several important themes that have become relevant in independent African nations, he also succeeds in depicting many aspects of African culture. Such themes include a historical theme, creation, greed and materialism, change, power, resistance, and religious hypocrisy, all of which are relevant for discussion in African Christian Drama. Most importantly, De Graft uses myth as an aspect of African oral culture. Later, I will discuss the themes and myth as backgrounds in the play.

First, let us begin with the play's sponsorship. The categorisation of **Muntu** as an African Christian Drama, due to its having been sponsored by a Christian organisation, is based on the church's depth and openness in dealing with social and political issues in Africa. In 1974, the World

Council of Churches (WCC) had its fifth Congress in Nairobi, Kenya. At one point in the planning process for the event, the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC), WCC's representative in African countries, approached de Graft and asked if he could help them express to the Council, in the form of a staged performance, what they described as the "challenge" of the African churches. According to *Mazungumzo* journal, at the time, De Graft was teaching at the University of Nairobi, where he developed a UNESCO-sponsored theatre arts course in the Faculty of Education. Somebody must have mentioned de Graft as someone who could produce something dramatic which could convey the appropriate message. Of course, the organisers of the event had been wondering what the content of this dramatic contribution should be and exactly what shape it should take. It was from here that the play *Muntu* began.

In an interview published by the journal *Mazungumzo*, De Graft asserts that he accepted the invitation partly because he had himself "as an ordinary human being passed through certain experiences in life", referring to rites of passage. He also acknowledged the rites of passage as they exist within Christianity. He was baptised into the church, confirmed, and was a recognised church member. Later, he decided to "leave" the church:

"So I've done a bit of thinking about the Church and

its message to human beings especially in Africa. I felt this would be an interesting assignment but I warned the representatives of AACC that I wasn't a Christian and wouldn't want to be hamstrung in any way. If they liked what I wanted to say, fine; if they didn't, they could reject it. But I wouldn't let them tamper with anything that I said although I assured them that I would that I would try to be as mature as possible. **Muntu** was the outcome of it..." [p. 14]

From the playwright's standpoint, **Muntu** is a product of thoughts about the Church, especially in Africa. The play is about the church as it focuses on humankind; in this case, humankind in Africa. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that, despite the criticism of the church within the play, the church's sponsorship of **Muntu** was a worthy cause. Also, the fact that the church was willing to continue working with someone who had openly stated that he was not a Christian shows the church's willingness to enter into discussion of the issues affecting with them(Africans). All in all, the final product, **Muntu**, would not have been possible without the sponsorship of the church. Although church sponsorship by itself does not qualify a play to be considered an African Christian Drama, it is a valuable characteristic of African Christian Drama. The church is justified to sponsor or give a mandate for the production of African Christian Drama, because in the end its members can introduce the Christian message through the production no matter how much criticism the church gets.

One of the salient features of traditional African performance is its use of oral renditions, especially the use of myth. A simple description of "myth" in this context is a story about a people's past that tries to explain the origins of life and of death, and how these two contradictory forces may be reconciled within society. In Kenya, for example, every community has a creation myth that is orally passed down through the generations. For example, my grandfather related to us that the Luo came from their ancestor, Ramogi, and for that reason, Luos are referred to as "*Nyikwa Ramogi*", meaning the grandchildren of Ramogi.

In his introduction to **Muntu**, de Graft states that he used the adapted form of the Balozzi creation myth from Zambia as his predominant means to explore particular themes such as alienation. In the play, he explores other themes such as materialism, which causes man to alienate himself from God and others; change and attitudes towards change; religious hypocrisy; power and resistance to power; and endurance. In addition, de Graft also brings up the historical themes connected with the African continent, such as slavery and colonialism. He addresses all of these in an attempt to grasp the root causes of the ills that plague Africa today. **Muntu** also shares these themes with the play **Pambazuka Afrika**. A closer look at how these themes are

knitted together with myth, as background to the plot of the play **Muntu**, reveals the importance of myth to African Christian Drama.

In **Muntu**, Odomankoma the Supreme god created Nyambe. Nyambe in turn created mankind. Through greed for power and wealth, mankind gradually moved further away from his creator god. According to the Balози people, Nyambe lived on earth with his wife Nasilele a long time ago. It was he who made the forest and the rivers and the plains. It was he who made the animals and the birds and the fishes. He also made Kamunu, the first man and his wife, who slowly began to exhibit greed for power and wealth, and grabbed land and killed animals for food. In his displeasure, Nyambe began to withdraw. Using the help of medicine-men and Liuyii the Spider, Nyambe crossed the river to the city of Litooma, where Kamunu could not easily reach him. However, Nyambe could easily reveal himself to mankind whenever he was offered water in a wooden cup. In their book, **Notes on Joe De Graft's Muntu**, Kemoli and Mwanzi state that sometimes, according to the myth, when man dies, he may join Nyambe on the other side of the river, especially if the deceased had been a constant worshipper. In **Muntu**, de Graft uses the myth to comment on man's alienation from God, his greed, and his inclination towards the unnecessary destruction of the

environment, all of which further separates him from that which is good. There is a striking similarity between this myth and the Biblical message in Genesis of the alienation of mankind from God.

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground...' " [**Genesis** 1:28]

And later on:

"So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden..." [**Genesis** 3:23-25]

It is obvious that de Graft was also reflecting on modern society, which destroys the environment without discrimination, and in which people consume more than they need. By using myth successfully with a Christian audience in mind, De Graft proves that it is possible to integrate elements of ATR into Christianity. Therefore, **Muntu** may be considered as an African Christian Drama.

The plot of the play is as much African as it is Christian. The play is based on a story that starts long ago in the origin of mankind. Also, the play is not divided into acts, but instead, nine sections. The first seven sections represent the seven days of creation, which parallels the Biblical creation story as found in **Genesis**. Later, there are various phases of the history of Muntu's family, which

is a symbolic representation of the African people.

There is the opening section, "The Arrival", when Muntu and his six children, having been on a long journey from far across the universe, become the first of the tribes of man to arrive. This "long journey" parallels the Biblical trip, related in *Exodus*, of the Jews from Egypt to Canaan. After "The Arrival", there is the second section, which de Graft called "Evening of the First Day". It is followed by "The Second Day" when Muntu and his children meet with Odomankoma Gyereba (Divine Drummer). There is mention of the imminent death of Muntu, as the children offer their prayers to Odomankoma. They also affirm that work is necessary for survival. The Third and Fourth days are thus respectively dedicated to tilling and sowing. Here, de Graft succeeds in integrating the idea of "work and worship", which is shared by both Christianity and African traditional culture. By using this integration, the play further shows how it may be considered an African Christian Drama.

The Fifth Day is the fishing and hunting day. At this moment in the plot of the play, it is clear that de Graft has chosen a depiction of traditional African life within a Christian background. The Fifth Day witnesses the return of the Second Son with the Three Neighbours from a place where the Second Son has encountered beasts, wild men, and greedy

men who can kill. The First Son is the one who carries the vision of his father Muntu. As the Community Drummer, he interpretes the message of Odomankoma as revealed by the Divine Drummer. The Second Son is a ruthless fighter who fights not only to conquer but to "destroy" his enemies [p.19]. He enjoys pomp and ceremony, and is content to be showered with titles even if they are ironical. The Third Son is Nyambe's most faithful worshipper among the siblings. He is also a practical thinker, and is in all his actions emotional. Being an emotional man, he is quick even to raise an unloaded gun, despite his lack of shooting skills.

Muntu experiences disillusionment and anger at the Second Son's suggestion that evil must be paid back with evil. Muntu is disturbed by the future of mankind, as mankind is increasingly bent on killing and spilling blood, which is against Odomankoma's law. In this section, the play makes good use of an element of ATR -- the libation ritual - - as Muntu pours water upon mother earth. It is then that the children wake up to join him in prayer by raising their hands to the "three branched tree of Nyambe". The raising of the hands, and the "three branched tree of Nyambe", is also a reminder of the Old Testament admonition to the worshippers of Yahweh to lift up their hands as they worship and praise Him:

Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord

who minister by night in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise
the Lord. [*Psalms* 134: 1,2]

There is also a parallel to the Holy Trinity with reference to the "three branched tree of Nyambe".

The Sixth and Seventh Day represent, respectively, the seasons of harvesting, and prayers of thanksgiving. Specifically, the Seventh Day is similar to the reference to the Biblical God resting after creation, not only because Muntu and the children take stock of their work and offer thanks to God, but also because it is the same number of days mentioned in the Bible. The pattern of days ends at the seventh day in the play while the plot continues, just as it does in the Bible. As Muntu and his children offer prayers and thanksgiving to God, the Second Son, who no longer owes allegiance to the religion of his people, having been lured by the new ways of life offered by the foreigners, interrupts them.

In this section, some ideological conflict is manifested physically on stage. With the help of the Three Neighbours, the Second Son virtually enslaves his brothers and sister, but gives freedom to the First Daughter to go wherever she likes. The Second Son also gives three of the sisters to the Three Neighbours in marriage. This signifies the way that foreign domination of the African continent has

masqueraded under the guise of a hidden "good relations" agenda. Apparently, the Second Son's trick is nipped in the bud as Muntu's daughters use seduction to weaken the strangers, eventually disarming them. The Second Son, caught unawares by this move, flees, promising to return one day "with thunder and lightning". His selfish spirit and resentful attitude depicts the dictators and power-hungry leaders of Africa who would not let go of their positions. Amid protests from the Third Daughter, who believes she is made pregnant by one of the strangers, the Third and Fourth Son quickly tie up the strangers, and the Third Son suggests that they castrate them. In a manner befitting his position, the First Son cautions against this and turns to prayer. The Divine Drummer closes this section by playing a proverbial tale about creation. Thus, the play is punctuated with another element of traditional African theatre before the plot continues.

As Muntu's children settle down, although it seems that peace is elusive, their collectivism and unity reflect the moral backbone of a traditional African society. Until then, the audience has been prepared for the upcoming scenes depicting refer to the events that would later be very significant for the African continent. There is the Coming of the Water-Men (Europeans) with their money economy and

the inhuman slave trade; the Coming of the Desert-Men (Arabs) who also come to deal in slaves. The final sections in the play portray the Reunion of Muntu's children, as the Fourth Son returns home. There is talk of family reunion and the reestablishment of harmony. Meanwhile, de Graft continues to portray the idea that the rifts and conflicts in Africa have mainly been precipitated by the foreigners. This is because the Water-Men and the Desert-Men vow to keep Muntu's children divided, and to cut off resources such as oil and armaments. The division among the children of Muntu prepares and allows for the return of the Second Son, who, we recall, vowed to come back with "thunder and lightning".

Several instances in the play express de Graft's assertion that the seeds of conflict among Africans were planted in Africa in the early years of slavery and colonialism. The real conflict in the play occurs upon the return of the Fourth Son, who is accompanied by his friends the Water-men. The Fourth Son represents those commonly referred to as "Been-to's". These are Africans who had been to Europe or America for further studies or work. In the meantime, the First Water-Man declares all Muntu lands "The Majesties' Overseas Domains in Africa" following an imperial decree. This leads to an open struggle among Muntu's sons, as each claim his inheritance. The portrayal of this

conflict is important, because it shows that, no matter how long Africans may leave for greener pastures in Europe or elsewhere, there comes a time of returning - and the matter of return has many significances. For some, there is the physical return with all the trauma associated with it; for example, some Africans suffer cultural shock, alienation, and other losses. Others return to the traditional modes of tackling difficult problems such as evoking customary laws when dealing with burial rights. For example, in Chapter Two, I gave the example of the Umira Kager Clan and the widow of former Nairobi lawyer S.M. Otieno. It is no wonder there is a re-emergence of ATR even among the most devout and Western-educated African Christians.

Despite the conflict among Muntu's sons, the First Son portrays his true African brotherliness by extending an open arm and forgiveness to the selfish Fourth Son:

FIRST SON:

I do welcome you back;
And I know you have not changed:
You still are a son of Muntu
And a child of Nyambe
Maker of mankind
Maker of bird and beast and field! [p.73]

The words of the First Son fall on deaf ears as the Second Son orders the seizure of the First Son. The Second Son's discontent stems from the fact that the First Son sat on Muntu's stool, thereby symbolically asserting more authority

over him. Apparently, it is the First Son who had the right to inherit Muntu's authority and his stool, as is customary in many African communities. Here, de Graft has integrated the social and religious order of African traditional life. With the disintegration of the traditional order, he reminds the church that she should not let individualism, selfishness, and the quest for social position derail her true cause on the continent. It is clear that the Second Son is driven by selfishness, since he proclaims that anyone who stands against his ambitions should die. The negative effects of the unwelcome introduction of the money economy and capitalism are felt as the quest for power and material domination takes over the African brotherhood. The second Son threatens terror upon his brothers:

SECOND SON:

Stand him against the tree.
So shall all men die
Who stand against me
From this time forth
No one shall call me Second Brother
My name shall be OTUM
The Multi-Messiah.
All Powerful One! [p.74]

In his dictatorial stance, Otum then declares everybody in Muntuland an Otumist, insisting that they owe allegiance to him alone. The First Water-Man changes positions, and becomes the Either-Neither Man. De Graft has cleverly used this title to criticise the political stands taken by some

of the early missionaries and many spiritual leaders.

The Second Son has since changed his name to Otum, and the events that follow his return also change significantly. As Otum seizes power, he is condemned by Nana, the Sixth Son, who refuses to bend his knee to Otum. Nana possesses infinite calmness, and his principled philosophy is an anathema to Otum. Toward the end of the play, Otum can no longer hold his peace due to the provocation from Nana's stern morality. He rises in anger and, in the final moments of the play, shoots Nana as ideological forces represented in the characters regroup in shock and horror, after which the Divine Drummer closes the action of the play. The end is unexpected. In this instance, there is a clear symbolic Christian influence that further qualifies **Muntu** as an African Christian Drama. According to the Biblical scholars, one of whom is Betty Miller, the number six symbolises the world and it is Man's number; it falls short of seven, therefore it is imperfect. Thus, in the Bible, the number six is used to refer to the number of the beast:

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666. [**Revelation** 13:18]

By first giving Nana the title Sixth Son, de Graft has shown that from his beginnings, Nana is human, even as Jesus Christ was also human. The word "Muntu" is a derivative of

the Kiswahili word "mtu" or "utu" which means "man" or "human". Also, on his forehead and palms, Nana bears the symbol of Muntu. This shows how he continues to symbolise man. The plot of **Muntu** reveals several themes such as creation, as depicted through the use of myth; greed and materialism, as portrayed by the rebellious sons of Muntu who abandon the strong African kinship represented by the Muntu family, and the strangers who bring slavery; political, religious, social, moral and economic change, and its effect on the continent; religious hypocrisy, as seen in the likes of the Water-Men, one of whom keeps changing his position to suit his survival on the continent; and power and resistance, embodied in the personality of the Second Son who later becomes Otum.

As far as being an African Christian Drama, **Muntu** expresses a motif of reworking historical material such as slavery, colonialism, and the arrival of the first missionaries. This must have been the "challenge" presented to de Graft in 1974 by the African church leaders who were part of the World Council of Churches Congress in Nairobi. In terms of connecting with Africans spiritually, members of the Congress must have noted that they needed to connect with the people in all levels of life. Drama offers a possibility of reworking the historical material that

influences Africans, and also bridges the real interests of all people, past and future, of the African continent. **Muntu** spans the whole African existence by symbolically depicting actual events in Africa from the beginning to the present, including the political murders, wars, military coups, and the cancerous corruption debilitating the fast-decaying African communities. Indeed, **Muntu** is a play about man -- African man. It is about man created by God with certain resources to use and to develop, not only for his own survival, but also for the glorification of God. De Graft cleverly articulates this message, which is consistent with the teachings of ATR, in **Muntu**. The play also succeeds as Christian artefact, because it does not ignore the central focus of the Christian God, which is man.

In presenting his material, Joe de Graft has achieved stylistic complexity. I contend that a critical look at the stylistic devices employed by de Graft, coupled with what emanates from the plot and the themes, reveal the influence of the Biblical message upon the playwright. It is partly for this reason that **Muntu** should be classified as an African Christian Drama. Therefore, it is necessary to mention briefly the theatrical devices he has employed to make the play a memorable experience for the actors and the audience. I was originally drawn to the play because of the

influence on me from Mr. David Mulwa, one of my lecturers at Kenyatta University, who participated in the original production. It was clear to me that Mulwa had been highly impressed by the play's style and artistic language. In general, the stylistic devices used in the play are symbolic: the time span of the play; the use of bare stage with the five concentric circles at the centre; Muntu's symbol carried on his forehead and on Nana's palm; the raised hand; large cast; audience participation; and the costuming.

De Graft skilfully makes use of African music and drumming, which he uses not merely for decoration, but for symbolism. At the centre of the play is Odomankoma Gyerema, the Divine Drummer, who acts as the community voice, setting the pace of the action, commenting on it, participating in it, and often bringing it to a conclusion. Consequently, it is he who introduces the session of counselling on the evening of the first Day of Arrival:

DIVINE DRUMMER:

So the evening came of the first day
The Day of Arrival
And the children gathered round their father
To take stock of the long day's happenings
And to learn from them

The Divine Drummer also plays the role of the time-keeper in the play, for when it is dawn, he announces it on his talking drums. The Divine Drummer controls time even by a

single sentence in the play when he so wishes:

DIVINE DRUMMER:

And so for Muntu and his chidden
The end of the second day
The Day of Counsel;
And the beginning of the third
The day of Tilling (p.17)

In announcing time, the Divine Drummer also reminds man of his obligation to rest so as to be fresh for the next day's tasks. Hence, the Divine Drummer's words provide rhythmical punctuation to the play, which reinforces the idea of progress from work to rest.

The time span covered in the fictional reality of the play is staggeringly long. Starting from a mythical past, the age of the creation of man, **Muntu** spans the period of African settlements in various places, covers the era of colonialism, moves right up to independence, and even later projects into the future. In order to handle the multitude of themes that emerge during this long time span, de Graft resorted to the use of a bare stage and symbolic materials. For example, to imply a long view of the past, Muntu's procession comes in single file playing a metal gong that symbolically rings far into the distant past, and into the distant future. The first stage directions reveal the significance of the journey:

"And now, a procession of people in single file,
travel-weary from regions beyond the confines of Earth,
led by the Gong.
Let them traverse the middle space our space

Towards Earth..."[p.1]

In his hands, Muntu carries a "Nyamedua" and a three-branched stick, which are symbolic of the inheritance from Nyambe, and the intended continuity of their tradition. In the introduction to the play, De Graft states:

"Among the Akan of Ghana, the "Nyamedua" is the shrine which stands -- or is used invariably, in ancient time, but only occasionally now at the entrance to the homestead, or close by the communal tree which marks the 'navel' of the village or town. The name means "Tree of Nyame or Nyambe as used in Muntu, using a form of the Creator's name adopted by me from a creation myth of the Balози people of Zambia". [Introduction to **Muntu**]

Muntu and his children are also carrying ropes for tents, and the bare skeleton of ropes is intended to imply the brief stay of Muntu and his children here on earth. Muntu emphasizes the brevity of their stay: "Here we are but brief sojourners".

There is also the dominant golden symbol of five concentric circles on the tree at the centre of the stage. In the introduction to the play, De Graft emphasises the need for a complete understanding of the symbol. This is especially useful for directors, actors, and the audience at large, because this five-circle symbol is the visual point of focus for the wide range of ideas explored in the play.

The symbol consists of five concentric circles partially touching each other. This symbol represents the

creation and development of man, given that at its centre is the symbol of the embryo. The concentric circles signify man's development and movement outwards towards his continued aspirations. To suggest a free-swinging spiral seen from above, the central circle encompasses the complementary embryonic signs, which, according to De Graft, had represented the whole mystery of creation: of life and death, good and evil, positive and negative, water and fire, light and darkness, male and female, love and hate. De Graft also reiterated that if the central circle symbolises the "heart" of creation, then moving outwards from the centre, the other circles represent humanity, then the earth as created by Nyambe. Odomankoma and eternity lie beyond the outermost circles. The second circle, combined with the arrowhead and the cross symbols of the sexes, represent the aspiring man. The symbol of the aspiring man touches the third and fourth circles. These are the earth and the universe. For the first production of **Muntu**, in the background behind the five-circle symbol, there was the symbol of the raised hand.

From the play, it is clear that there is a link with Christianity, because of the cross symbol incorporated into Muntu's symbol. Furthermore, Muntu carries this symbol on his forehead and chest, while Nana(The Sixth Son) carries it

on his palm. Nana is the character most similar to Muntu; his language is strikingly similar to Muntu's, and he is very aware that the new order brought by change is not good for man. From birth until after the departure of Muntu, Nana is the Christlike figure. There is a suggestion that he is reincarnated and born again by the Third Daughter. She appeals to him with these words:

THIRD DAUGHTER:

Save me, my son,
Or are you not my son,
And Muntu's grandchild? [p.86]

Nana is also very assertive, and denounces the "Caesars" of this world -- religious hypocrites like Jean Pierre, European colonial powers, oil magnates, and diamond hunters like the Fourth Water-Man(Rodrigues):

NANA:

I carry no passport
All the world is my home! [p. 81]

In contrast to the Three Neighbours' symbol of clenched fist, Muntu and his children use the raised hand to symbolise peace and good will to all mankind. These symbols help to connect effectively for the audience the dramatic themes and events in the play.

Another stylistic device whose origin is in traditional African theatre is audience participation. **Muntu** has a large cast of twenty-five people. The cast could be characterised as even larger, if one were to include the many anonymous

voices shouting from the auditorium. For those familiar with African popular theatre, it is normal practice for the audience to participate in the performance, especially if the production includes certain chants, songs, and even dances. In a performance of **Muntu**, the audience can participate in the action, mingling with the large cast.

The audience is able to distinguish among the various characters because of the playwright's skilful use and selection of language. For example, Muntu's lines ring very differently from those of the First Water-Man:

MUNTU:

They sleep, unmindful of trials yet ahead:
Brother in hostile competition against brother,
Sister set in jealous rivalry against sister:
All in violent strife and conflict!
Yet there is hope
If you would but come again nearer,
O Nyambe! [p.10]

Muntu uses proverbs and poetic language with ease, while the First Water-Man's utter hypocrisy and emptiness is manifested in his language:

FIRST WATER MAN:

This is holy ground, Jim.
The Lord said:
 Thou shalt not kill;
The Lord also said:
 Come to Me, all ye that are heavy-laden,
 Oppressed and down-trodden,
 And I will protect you and give you rest.
If you move against my flock,
Either you, Jim,
Or you Andries,
Or you, Infidels,
I will shoot, and shoot to kill!
I know I stand alone armed beside these poor folk;

But I also know the Lord is on our side [p.50-51]
Similarly, there is no way the audience would confuse the Second Son with Nana, the Sixth Son. In the dying moments of the play, the war of words is clearly demonstrated by the conviction with which they are spoken:

NANA:

You are a man of some courage, Jean Pierre,
A man of some virtue too:
But deep down you are afraid of Life and Death!
You have stayed alive for so long only because
You are a clever juggler of words!
But your skill of words is bound to fail you...

SECOND SON:

Hold your tongue,
Lest I destroy you! [p.87]

The characters can also be distinguished by means of costuming. Muntu and his children are clad in African traditional costumes. Although the Neighbours also wear African traditional costumes, they also have spears as weapons. At some point, some of Muntu's children change costumes, and the change of costume is easily recognised by the audience as a symbolic change.

African music, which characterises most African theatre, is also an integral aspect of the play. Joe de Graft conceded that, due to cultural differences between Kenya and Ghana, from which he heavily borrowed the concept of the Divine Drummer, the first production did not have the full experience of the Ghanaian "asafo" and "tumpun" talking

drums, which would have achieved better effects theatrically than those used in the original production. The use of the drum as a stylistic device also reveals the many roles played by the Divine Drummer in the performance. In the scenes in which he is directly involved, the Divine Drummer affirms through his talking drums that he is indeed superior to man. He constantly makes his presence felt. This is emphasised by the inherent power of the drum, which he plays throughout the play. The drums are symbolic of Africans' communion with their gods. The Divine Drummer's name, Odomankoma Gyerema, signifies that he is a direct representative of the gods. Although he is a man, he is also spiritually removed from man, and is often mysterious. The Divine Drummer is also the only performer capable of playing alongside another drummer, Community Drummer, also known as Oman Gyerema. The same performer who plays the character of Community Drummer also plays the character of Muntu's First Son. It must be noted that only another drummer can understand the language and secrets of other drummers. In the play, it is the Community Drummer who can fully understand and interpret the drumming of the Divine Drummer. Such interpretation can be heard through the words of the Community Drummer:

COMMUNITY DRUMMER:

The Divine Drummer says, if he went somewhere
he has returned [p.2]

understand the language and secrets of other drummers. In the play, it is the Community Drummer who can fully understand and interpret the drumming of the Divine Drummer. Such interpretation can be heard through the words of the Community Drummer:

COMMUNITY DRUMMER:

The Divine Drummer says, if he went somewhere
he has returned [p.2]

The Divine Drummer also acts as a counsellor. Having existed since the beginning of time, and being close to man, he can pass on the guidance and will of Odomankoma. As he participates in human activities, he counsels them. In the play, as the Divine Drummer helps in leading the songs, his words are reminders of his role as the people's counsellor:

DIVINE DRUMMER:

When Odomankoma died
In whose hands did She leave Her affairs? [p. 11]

It is through the Divine Drummer that the First Son is reminded that as a leader, he must speak out against injustice, since this is the will of Odomankoma. The most important lesson that we learn from the Divine Drummer is that in the face of continual estrangement and alienation of man from his god, collectivity and sacrifice must be the essential modes of survival:

DIVINE DRUMMER:

When shall sky and earth come together again?
If all mankind suffers together
The individual does not suffer. [p. 22]

Incidentally, these were the messages of some of the first African nationalists such as the late Kwame Nkurumah in Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. Some of the lines in Kenya's national anthem, which was written during the independence period, remind patriotic Kenyans never to forget "umoja", which means "togetherness".

"May we dwell in unity(umoja), peace and liberty,
Plenty be found within our borders"
[-from the Kenya National Anthem]

It is also through the Divine Drummer that we learn that man has caused his own estrangement from god. Although the Creator has always been there, depicted in the image of the stream with which man identifies daily, man has only created the path recently:

DIVINE DRUMMER:

The path crosses the stream
The Stream crosses the path:
Which then is elder?
Did we not build the path to meet the stream?
The stream flows from long ago
From the beginning of things...[p.34]

The Divine Drummer appropriately concludes the whole action of the play, echoing the Biblical saying that "those who have ears, let them hear" [Matthew 11:15]. Reminding the audience that all that people need in the world is "peace and good will to all mankind", the Divine Drummer concludes on his drum:

DIVINE DRUMMER:

This story that you have seen and heard,
If it happened as here presented...
If it did not happen as here presented
Peace! Peace! Peace! [p.90]

Besides the drum, there is the singing of traditional songs during the seasonal activities of tilling, sowing, harvesting, and thanksgiving. By using these songs within a Christian context, sometimes appropriately changing the words to suit the Christian context, it is clear that **Muntu** is an excellent example of an African Christian Drama. The songs that were used in the original production were mainly Kenyan folk songs carefully selected from different ethnic communities. With a variety of more than forty different ethnic communities, each with a different language, the cultural blend on stage was strikingly rich theatrically.

During the musical episodes, there are accompanying mime sequences done to rhythm, in order to keep the images clear and convincing. The use of the mime sequences somewhat removes the play from the plane of easy realism, and places it into a dreamlike realm in which we can glimpse the past, the present, and the future of mankind. It is undeniable that for Christianity, the concern for man's destiny is substantial, and the fact that **Muntu** delves into the theme of man's destiny through African music illustrates how well the play integrates African cultural elements into Christian

drama.

Finally, one of the most striking features of **Muntu** is its use African language. Even though De Graft wrote the play in English, he has employed African imagery, poetry and chants. There are various varieties of language used in **Muntu**. Whereas poetry is used throughout most of the play, prose is used for specific effects. For example, whenever Muntu is seen offering sacrifices at prayer moments to his god, he makes use of poetry:

MUNTU: (*offering libation*)
To Earth, our Mother
Listen, O My children
Some things we know
Some things we do not know
Whence we came we do not know
Whither we go we do not know
But these things we know
 Long the journey
 Not always easy the way
 And here but a brief sojourn
 While we prepare for the road ahead. [p.4]

Thus in exalted poetic language, Muntu reaches out to his god. He also portrays the essence of Odomankoma when he addresses the god thus:

MUNTU:
 You Black Fire-breasted Rock
 At the still heart of the fountain [p. 21]

But de Graft also uses prose language through Muntu and the other characters. Describing mankind to his children, Muntu paints poetic images within the framework of prose language:

MUNTU:
 ...Frail of body, yet freer in spirit than the

lightning and the winds; bound to the ground, he seemed, yet always reaching out towards whatever he thought it was that lay beyond the star...[p. 8]

Muntu also adopts specifically rhythmic and chanting style language to reflect the spirit of communal singing as seen in the harvest and thanksgiving songs. In such instances, the audience is provided with thrilling musical and poetic renditions as the story unfolds:

MUNTU:

For as long as the sun travels the sky

CHILDREN:

Odomankoma remains with us.

MUNTU:

For as long as the moon and stars ride the night

CHILDREN:

Odomankoma remains with us. [p. 45]

Elsewhere, the children sing individually as the Divine Drummer plays a closure on the Talking Drums:

MUNTU:

We have come a long way my children

FIRST SON:

The elements have been kind to us

FIRST DAUGHTER:

We have not lacked food on our way

SECOND SON:

Nor good pasture for our sheep and cattle.

SECOND DAUGHTER:

Nor fresh water for all our needs

FIFTH DAUGHTER:

But no longer with us the sky as in days gone by, when I was a little child. Those were the days, Father.

MUNTU:

Happier days than now?[p.67]

De Graft's use of language also exemplifies irony in the play. When Otum forcefully takes power, the chorus of

chanters goes on: "Giver of Sun, Giver of Rain, Giver of Life..." However, these epithets are not intended to praise Otum as their Nyambe; instead they mock him, and this drives home a clear irony, because it is the same chorus who had previously praised Otum who now turn against him in mockery. Similarly, the First Water-Man uses Biblical language, drawing well-known phrases from the Bible such as "love thy neighbour as thyself"[p.36], "thou shalt not kill"[p.50], "leave unto Ceasar those things that are Ceasar's"[p.87]. Ironically, the First Water-Man is the first person to break the rules expressed in these passages; this duplicity is integral to Otum's character.

In addition to the skilful use of language to show the dominant poetic images and to depict character, language is also used to suggest the attitudes caused by social change. When the Second son returns from exile using words like "master" and "servant", the audience is made aware that he is a changed man. So is the Third Son, who comes back speaking Americanisms and "bloody revolution"[p.68]. The slave traders are no exception. Through their use of such phrases as "sjambok", "kaffirs", "infidels", "desert scoundrels", "uncircumcised Christians", and "exchange of human beings and merchandise", we are made aware of the predatory and destructive cultures of the slave traders who

imposed themselves on Africa.

Muntu makes use of elements of African traditional culture within a Christian context. The play succeeds even more because of the skilful stylistic devices that De Graft uses to portray a frank historical picture of the continent of Africa. As an example of African Christian Drama, **Muntu** draws heavily from African myth, and successfully integrates elements of African traditional theatre into Christian drama. Even though these elements as used by de Graft are independent of each other, they interlock together and contribute to furthering the African Christian themes in the play.

"A simple soul is an exceedingly pure crystal.
Penetrated, illumined and warmed by the rays
of the sun of justice"
- from **Pambazuka Afrika**. (Original author unknown)

Participating in the play, **Pambazuka Afrika**, left an indelible mark on my theatrical journey. The beginnings of **Pambazuka Afrika** were in 1994, when a group of youths from Nairobi Pentecostal church initiated a mission titled "Hope for Africa". They expressed their optimism first through music, then through theatre. The drama was developed from a skit entitled "Africa Arise" by Carol Mandi. I attended one of the first meetings of rewriting "Africa Arise", at which Raymond Kiruki, who had just graduated from Nairobi Theatre Academy, Mkawasi Mcharo, and Carol Mandi were given the mandate to put together the **Pambazuka Afrika** script. The room was filled with excitement as the vision of hope for Africa was born. For a number of months, this vision of hope burned inside the hearts of these youth as they discussed the purpose and destiny for Africa as a continent and their part in it. They had to begin somewhere, and the Kenyan theatre scene was the appropriate place.

A year later, in April 1995, the relatively small production began to break through the confines of a single church, and **Pambazuka Afrika**, a full-length play, was

conceived by Mkawasi Mcharo, Raymond Kiruki, and Carol Mandi.

The Kiswahili word "pambazuka" literally means arise, and is often used, as in phrases like "kumepambazuka", to imply it is dawn. The phrase "Pambazuka Afrika", therefore, denotes newness, an arising, a dawn for Africa. So a direct translation for the play would therefore be "Arise Africa!" In fact, the theme song of the production was titled "Oh Arise Africa Arise". In October 1995, MAVUNO theatre group (commonly referred to as MAVUNO) took over the production of **Pambazuka Afrika**. "MAVUNO" is a Kiswahili word that means harvest. At that time, MAVUNO was the only Christian theatre organization in East Africa. It operated in parallel to the Kenya Drama Festival Association, because it organized annual drama festivals and competitions among church and youth groups presenting Christian plays. When Mkawasi Mcharo met with Mwaniki Mageria, then the Chairman of MAVUNO, to discuss the possibility of producing the play, the play was seen as having great potential for proclaiming hope to the continent. Such an adventure fell within the mandate of MAVUNO, and only three months later, the production process began.

Mwaniki Mageria became the official producer for the production, bringing his business acumen acquired from being

experienced in sales management positions with several leading companies in Nairobi. Gabriel Omondi wrote and directed the music, while the choreography was done by Nairobi Theatre Academy graduates Joy Kiruki and Amazing Grace Kibarabara. I was honoured to design and operate the lighting for the two-hour production.

From the vantage point of the lighting dimmer board, I watched the performance and the reactions from the audience throughout the play. More than forty performances were given at the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi and the Little Theatre in Mombasa, as well as in other smaller venues in Kenya. With an audience turnout of more than ten thousand, the production broke Kenyan box office records that had stood since the establishment of its national theatre in 1952. In addition to these performances, we gave a number of free performances in churches, such as the Nairobi Pentecostal Church, which has a capacity of more than 1,000 seats.

In 1997, the production moved to Ethiopia National Theatre in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the All-Africa Conference of Churches, and played to a full house (1,000-seat capacity) audience drawn from across several African nations and the Diaspora. In the audience was Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu, who was later

granted an Honorary Doctorate degree at the University of Alberta at the Spring 2000 convocation.

Much of **Pambazuka Afrika** was aimed at giving hope to Africans. The play also has a universal appeal, especially in the belief that the healing of a battered family begins with the healing of the individuals within it. Therefore, the **Pambazuka Afrika** team was convinced that the play needed to, and could break international barriers. Anyone can identify with the story of a personal struggle to find validation and acceptance, and build a meaningful existence within seemingly hopeless circumstances. **Pambazuka Afrika** is a way of saying to all citizens of the world, including Africans, that no matter how uncertain and difficult life circumstances may be, there is always hope, and a way out of every dilemma.

In a pattern similar to Joe de Graft's **Muntu**, the story of **Pambazuka Afrika** spans at least three generations. There is the generation who witnessed the arrival of the missionaries; there is the generation who grew up in colonial Kenya; and finally, there is the post-independence generation who witnessed the bitter taste of neo-colonialism. In the story, within the span of a generation, a single-parent family consisting of a mother, referred to simply as Mama, and her three children, Ketu,

Laana and Wema, live out their sorrows and triumphs in post-colonial Kenya. There are significant similarities between this play and **Muntu**. First, the plot does not depict a normative family consisting of a mother and father and children. Like the character Muntu in the play **Muntu**, Mama is alone in bringing up her three children. In **Muntu**, we are informed that the mother of Muntu's children had died prior to the start of the play, but in **Pambazuka Afrika**, there is no indication of the existence of a father. We are left to imagine our own conclusions regarding his whereabouts. Second, both Muntu and Mama witness the arrival of the missionaries and the imperialists in their land, and both are compelling in their poetic language, and storytelling:

WEMA: Mama

MAMA: Yes child.

WEMA: That was a beautiful story.

MAMA: But I have told it to you three times already.

WEMA: Every time you tell it, it sounds good.

[p. 2 Act 1 Part 1]

In **Pambazuka Afrika**, Mama is a compelling storyteller who grew up in colonial Kenya, saw the coming of the white people, learned how to read and write, and experienced the conversion crusades of the missionaries. She now functions as a source of guidance and hope to her two sons and a daughter who have to face life in a rapidly dwindling economy, amid political instability and cultural confusion.

The very names of Mama's children symbolise the experiences they go through and what they represent: the name Ketu stands for belonging and communality; Laana stands for a "curse"; Wema stands for goodness and innocence. Hence, by choosing symbolic names, **Pambazuka Afrika** makes use of an African traditional religious attribute.

In every African community, a name signifies a specific attribute. Thus, naming ceremonies are held in high regard. In **Pambazuka Afrika**, the name "Ketu" is most likely derived from the word "Kwetu", which means "Ours". His name stands for a sense of belonging and communality. The idea of communality is very strong in most African traditional religions. Even after his death, Ketu unites his family, and the community thereby lives up to the meaning of his name. Ketu embodies an even more radical philosophy that sees enslavement in anything foreign:

KETU: I still don't understand Mama. I keep
searching for the truth in religion, in
tradition but all I find is enslavement.
Where am I going? [Scene 1. Act 1]

In the play, Ketu is Mama's first-born son. In many African traditional societies, the first-born is expected to embody the core philosophies of the society, beginning with those in his father's homestead. In **Muntu**, for example, we notice the zeal with which the First Son defends such African traditional ideals as brotherhood, peace and unity. Ketu,

who is also a graduate of law school, is therefore significant in **Pambazuka Afrika** because of his eminent position. Ketu makes the radical decision to join politics, and means to face "the killers of hope, the godless maniacs who destroy without shame or apology". Ironically, Ketu's verbal outburst, and his dissatisfaction with the way the government is being run, is a realistic way of depicting the quality of many politicians who would do anything to ensure that their powerful positions are not threatened. In the end, Ketu is assassinated by his opponents in a "planned accident". In the past, real-life outspoken critics of the Kenyan government, such as the late Bishop Alexander Muge, have been assassinated in mysterious "accidents".

Laana is the other son whose name is symbolic. The word "Laana" in Kiswahili means "curse". He is the one who is expelled from University for speaking out against injustice. Through this character, Mkawasi Mcharo reminds us of the many university student strikes that have become part of most public universities in Africa, including Kenya. At one time or another, many outspoken Kenyan political, cultural, social, and human rights activists who went through public universities faced the threat of expulsion from their respective universities and colleges. Some were actually expelled and had to find other universities outside of the

country in order to complete their studies. Laana's character represents these young scholars, and his utterances in the play epitomize the philosophies of justice and fairness which he represents: assertiveness; a challenge to fight for equality; and a belief in the ancestral religion and the customs of the African peoples versus the ideologies imported mainly from the West. Therefore, no matter what controversial positions Laana takes within the play as far as Christianity is concerned, his inclusion as a character in **Pambazuka Afrika** shows how it is possible to integrate African traditional ideology into a Christian drama:

LAANA: Pastor, equality is an illusion that exists only in a dreamer's world. I feel sorry for dreamers like you. In fact, we sail in the same boat Pastor. You and I are cursed sons of Africa, it's in the Bible...[Act 1 part 2]

Elsewhere in the same scene, Laana continues his assertiveness on such issues as freedom and equality. When the Pastor attempts to calm him down by reminding him of the cause of Jesus Christ's death on the cross, Laana's reaction is predictable. Even the promise spoken by a man of God -- that the curses of which Laana speaks have been expiated by the death of Jesus on the cross -- falls on deaf ears. It takes a while for the Pastor to convince Laana into believing otherwise:

PASTOR: Just as he hung on the cross to bear our

iniquities, he took upon Himself all the curses that had been handed down to us. Laana, when Christ died in your place, He did so also to set you free from the bondage of curses. He whom the Son sets free...

LAANA: I know...I know... is free indeed. I'd rather believe in our ancestral religion and customs than all this imported ideology that was not meant for the African in the first place.
[Act 1. Part 2]

Thus, Laana reflects the ideological polemics that are still carried along by many educated Africans who have rejected the products of Christianity and imperialism. Now, whether this polemical standpoint should be accepted without investigation is a matter of personal choice, because there are also those who strongly regard the imported ideology as vital to the development of the continent. Or could we surmise that the rejection of Christianity for the likes of Laana is a way of hiding the guilt from failure and laziness which people like him represent? In the play, Laana has accepted a job as a primary school teacher. Because of the stigma and the connotations of failure associated with being a Primary(elementary) school teacher in many African countries, Laana has acquired a destructively low self-esteem which he nurses with alcohol. Perhaps, by portraying Laana's character in light of his alcoholism, the play seems to point to failure due to the imposition of the money economy into the African continent. This imposition has disregarded and undermined the deep beliefs in ATR held

by people like Laana.

Then there is Wema, the only daughter in Mama's family. She is the youngest, and she was studying medicine when she fell in love with a white man who eventually raped her. The name Wema literally stands for the goodness and innocence, which she represents. In the play, she is faced with the challenging decision of whether or not to abort her illegitimate child. Due to her confusion, fear, and shame, the pregnancy becomes too far gone, and eventually her alcoholic brother begs her not to risk her life with a late-stage abortion:

WEMA: Why do I have to live through this. I am so
confused.

LAANA: You cannot dwell on the past. You were kind to
a man who spat on your face. It was not your
fault. You must live for the future.
[Act 2 Part 1.]

It is interesting that Laana is proclaiming hope here as a son of Africa who had earlier asserted that Africans are cursed. Judging by Laana's previous negative attitude, it is he whom we least expect to encourage his sister by such words. Thus in Laana, the play is echoing the theme of hope, even from the despised and "hopeless" within us. At the same time, Mkawasi seems to be asking the questions: Should Wema decide to keep the child? Could the product of rape become the family's source of joy and hope? Just like the many children of Africa, now the products of the rape of slavery,

of colonisation, and of rotten post-colonial self-governance, is the *Pambazuka* child going to reflect the identity of the African peoples? Will the child bring hope for the peoples of Africa living on the continent and in the Diaspora? Pessimists would say otherwise, but I believe that the child represents a generation of hope and renaissance, not only for Africans, but also for the whole world. Even though the intentions of the child's biological father were selfish and despicable, Wema did not choose to abort her child. Thus, the child signifies that everyone needs a second chance. Also, because the child is proclaimed as the offspring of injustice, "a child of war and pain", she becomes everyone's child, and is poised to be sensitive to the suffering of others.

With reference to the production to which I referred earlier, and the performance of the play on stage, the most important aspects were the music, the integration of ritualistic aspects of traditional African lifestyles with minimal conflict with Christianity, the lighting (especially for the premiere performance at the Kenya National Theatre), and the youthful qualities of the performers. Almost all of the actors were picked from unfamiliar backgrounds, and were generally unknown to the Nairobi theatre-going public. This was in itself an indication that the hope for Africa was

actually starting to be expressed within the theatre community. Over the years, outstanding plays have always used the same actors and actresses who are involved in the city's theatres, giving the profession an elitist image. With **Pambazuka Afrika**, a new trend was being set which was to give hope to young artists in small church youth groups to aspire to the valuable profession of theatre.

An exposition of the play would not be complete without mentioning a quotation that seemed to have been a favourite of Mkawasi and the ensemble:

"Arise and Shine
For your light is come
And the glory of the Lord
Is risen upon thee". [**Isaiah** 60:1]

The above quotation summarizes the purpose and significance of the play **Pambazuka Afrika**. A critical look at this quotation taken from the Biblical book of **Isaiah** reveals the rising action motif, and direction of the subject matter of the play **Pambazuka Afrika**. From the beginning of the play to the end, various theatrical elements are used to signify a rising from despair to hope. This is seen both at the level of the individual, and at the level of the community. Examples of the elements used include dance, dramatization, oral traditional narratives, poetry, ritual performance, audience participation, songs, mime, and direct dialogue.

There are many references made to established canonical sources such as the Bible, as well as well-known liberation songs such as "Redemption Song" by the late Reggae Maestro Bob Marley. Many of these elements are taken from the context of the traditional African lifestyle.

At the beginning of the play, Mama plays various theatrical roles, including that of storyteller. Using her strong and melodious voice, she begins her story of Africa with a song of forgiveness:

MAMA :And Mabemba: Wuriri, wuriri mwanedue
Wuriri kan'dika, kan'dika Kamghunda kecha
kamanda leti, kamanda leti {I will not revenge,
you are my sister and I forgive you}
[Scene 1 Act 1]

The technique of beginning a narrative with a song is a well-known technique in many Kenyan communities, and many refined artists use this technique effectively. In the case of **Pambazuka Afrika**, Mama uses this traditional setting to draw her children into the story of Jesus, and the arrival of the white missionaries. She goes further, to tell of her personal struggle with the "white" religion of Christianity.

The narrative technique is combined with background drumming to denote changes in the direction being taken by the story. For example, just after Ketu says that he does not understand his destiny, the sound of African drums beats with a slow tempo in the distance, barely audible. As the

drums are distantly played, Mama gives hope to her children:

MAMA: My children, to know where you are going,
you must first understand where you come from
and where you are. You must know your true
identity to know where your destiny lies. Is
everyone ready for another story?

Thus, an atmosphere is created with the drums in which certain statements that are dear to Mama are given more emphasis. There are many times that the playwright employs the drumming elements. In the subsequent scenes, the drums are used much more loudly in varying crescendos, perhaps to show the unpredictability of events for the African peoples. Drumming is also combined with a dramatisation of the creation story, as Mama narrates to the children the story of the beginnings of Africa. It is a proud story, an inspiring mixture of myth and the Biblical creation story. At the end of the strong narration, dancers are introduced for the first time. They proudly celebrate African heritage, her natural resources, her material culture and art. Such a combination of dance, song, and narration is very effective in the opening scene of the play, and it is proof that African Christian Dramatists can use such traditional African elements. In the end, Mama is not portrayed as denying the Christian message, but she explains to her children, as anyone would, that the new Christian religion seems strange to her.

The scene that follows is influenced more by Western drama. It is set indoors, and it shows how children have grown up and have partially embraced the Christian tradition. Ketu's down-to-earth personality is shown as he embraces a realistic approach of solving his community's social problems by vying for a political post. He is also concerned about the future of his sister, Wema, seen earlier on stage with Raphael, the white man who later rapes her.

Ketu asks Laana:

KETU: Don't you care anymore about our sister?
Caring about one another in this jungle is
our unity. Have you forgotten Mama's words
so soon?[Act 1 Part 2]

Laana answers that it is true that "...it is a jungle out there and the law of the jungle that operates. Each man for himself." [Act 1. Part 2] He exits, leaving Ketu alone to reminisce about the beating of the African heart that once cared for brotherhood. There is total silence as Ketu tries to listen to the African drums, which are now silent. In the audience, there is an expectation of drumming in the background, but nothing happens. It is only when the image of Mama comes back to the scene that the drumming resumes. It is clear that the drumming technique is effectively employed here to further the play's themes.

Topics related to African traditional religion are also featured prominently in the play. When Ketu seems to be

frustrated by the fact that the likes of Laana have forgotten Mama's words, she appears as the returning spirit, and her voice is heard in the background. Earlier, Laana and the Pastor are engaged in an argument for and against the supremacy of ATR and Christianity.

LAANA: ...I'd much rather believe in our ancestral religion and customs than all this imported ideology that was not meant for the African in the first place.

PASTOR: (*Shocked*) You mean you would rather believe in witchcraft?

LAANA: That's just a term the whites used to discredit our traditions. They worked for our forefathers. Why shouldn't they work for us?

KETU: Brother, why do you so often forget Mama's Words? [Act 1 Part 2]

At this point, another Western drama technique is used. The voice of Mama is heard in a flashback as the beating of the drum is heard in the background. The lights fade out on the three characters on stage. The three remain physically present in the background until the voice of Mama also fades out. This section best illustrates the integration of ATR into dramatised dance and poetry as Mama speaks:

MAMA: Listen, listen to the rhythms of the drumbeat in the Savannah. It speaks of the rising sun that shines upon the face of Africa and her children. The children who for centuries have woven in and out of a cyclic meaninglessness of time seeking salvation in the repetition of man-made traditions calling to the spirits of the dead for intercession in times of trouble. Listen, listen to the drum that calls upon you children of Africa, to arise in the fullness of your splendor and fight the monsters in your minds that block your path to the realms of success, of fulfillment, of hope. [Act 1. Part 2]

Laana feels the effect of this integration of drumming, dramatised dance, and poetry. For the first time, his mood becomes solemn. He is almost sober, despite having been very drunk in the previous scene. He exits, leaving Pastor and Ketu on stage. At the end of this Act, Pastor and Ketu are in agreement regarding venturing into politics.

The play also makes use of ritual and physical commotion as theatrical devices. The pastor bestows his blessings upon Ketu by praying for him, and just as they get down on their knees, there is a noise at the door. Wema stands there a sorry sight; her clothes are torn, and she is breathing heavily in shock and grief. There is a blackout. This scene shows how it is possible to integrate both Western-style techniques of straight dialogue and lighting, and such African traditional theatrical techniques as ritual, within a single scene.

Following the blackout, we are again presented with the storytelling scenario as at the beginning of Act One. Mama here solidifies her role as the returning spirit and the guardian of the night by coming back to clarify issues in contentious moments. It is also clear that Wema and Ketu have learned some of Mama's speaking techniques. They have also embraced her vision of hope; hence they are willing to participate in mapping their own destinies and those of

their brothers and sisters.

KETU: No, Sis. I see a vision for Africa. I see a mighty hand beckoning Africa to arise from its pool of genocide, of poverty, of theft, bribery and corruption. To arise from a stagnant pool of abused leadership where it sits glued by a spirit of immorality. I see Africa start to stir, very slowly. Someone is agitated, someone is tired of the smell, someone is starting to pick up his mat and walk away from the stench. [Act 1 Part 3]

Immediately following Ketu's words, there is a calculated silence. The technique of silence serves to enhance the plot, and provide theatrical continuity. It allows time for Ketu's words to be understood by the audience. Also, after the silence, there is continuity from straight dialogue, as previously used, to song. In the song, the theme of encouragement is enhanced. Thus, there is also continuity in terms of form and content in the play. The content of Ketu's lines becomes more fluid and easily understood by the African audience because song is introduced as a new form. The song "*Pambazuka Afrika*", the theme song of the play, emphasizes Ketu's lines. For the first time in the play, the song is sung immediately after Ketu's speech, and there is an integration of dramatised dance and song techniques.

After the song and dramatized dancing, Wema is able to understand the hidden plans beneath the beastly nature of the white man who raped her. As she narrates how the attractive, calm and intelligent man Raphael lured her,

drums are introduced. The use of the drum in this instance is significant and unique, since there are many moments in the play when there are crescendos or decrescendos to signify mood changes. As Wema narrates her ordeal, it is clear that all the characters share the ordeal. Mama then enters as slavery is re-enacted by means of this scene, while the song "Child of Africa...Don't Cry" is heard in the background. What happened to Wema reminds Mama that had the people of Africa looked more deeply into the eyes of the slave trader(s), they "... might have stopped him(slave trader) from the rape of Africa through slavery and colonization..."

MAMA: ...Born free, they died in captivity. Africa mourned the loss of her stolen children, her dignity, her independence. Raped mercilessly, her drum beat no more. Yet although crushed, her spirit remained unbroken. And amidst the plunder, her new life began to grow. The seed of hope sprouting from the grounds of oppression. Nurturing this seed she knew it wouldn't be too long before [pregnant with hope] she gave birth to independence. [Act 1 Part 3]

It is at this point that the drumbeat reaches a crescendo, and there is singing and dancing in celebration of "Uhuru", which means Freedom. All this does not seem to give full comfort to Wema, who feels lost. Nonetheless, she promises that she will not destroy the life that grows inside her, but instead will nurture it and let it bring back her lost pride and dignity.

Wema and Laana later attempt to live up to their promise of uplifting their dignity and pride. Furthermore, Laana has now been partially transformed. He has abandoned confrontational arguments. He is also no longer under the influence of alcohol. Drumbeats rise in crescendo as he talks about the African drum. Even though Mama at this point in the play is literally gone, the drums continue to beat in the background. Laana has learned to dance to the beat of the African drum, and he talks about the relationship between the beginnings of Christianity and of Africa. Here, we witness the symbolic use of the drum as Laana sings and dances. It is ironic to note that Laana teaches Christian Religion Education(CRE) in school:

LAANA: The drum! The African drum! Remember Mama's story?(*Drumbeats begin, rising in crescendo*).In the beginning -- that's when it began to beat. Throughout the Bible, it continued to beat. The great man Moses married a woman from Africa. The Queen of Sheba, the black Queen from Africa toured Israel with great treasures from this very land. Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross behind Jesus on his way to crucifixion. The Ethiopian Eunuch who believed in the gospel. The African drum. It beat throughout civilization, built by black people. The Egyptian Pharaoh, Namura, who united the upper and lower Egypt was black, and many others who came after him. [Act 2. Part 1]

The above stanza is actually delivered poetically in a dirge. It is a proclamation that shows a significant advancement in the life of Laana. Before, he had represented the many people in Africa who had highly doubted the

authenticity of the Christian gospel. Whereas Laana knew all about the Christian Gospel and its message of hope to Africa, he reiterates that it did not mean anything to him. Instead, he had chosen to subscribe to what he refers to as "the dark-continent-of-doom theory", which I presume was a negative portrayal by some early missionaries and explorers. According to this theory, the continent of Africa and its people are portrayed as hopeless.

Another musical instrument is played symbolically in the next scene, as Wema and Laana receive the news of the death of their brother Ketu. A flute plays mournfully as the scene comes to an end, and the lights fade out slowly. The sound of the flute is briefly interrupted as Laana smashes a beer bottle in anger. In many traditional African communities, the flute, like some other wind and brass instruments, was only played during mourning. Some communities prefer the loud trumpet to announce a death. For example, among the Luo, deaths are announced by a big trumpet called "*abu*", but among the Coastal peoples, the flute is often used. As playwright and director, Mkawasi Mcharo made use of the traditions of her people, the Coastal Miji Kenda, by employing the flute technique to signify the demise of Ketu in the play.

In the final scene, we are introduced to the

open-air-setting technique. This is a technique that is very common in many African plays and performances. Certain choreography can be witnessed in the theatre-in-the-round models, and crowd scenes are made possible by an open-air-setting. Furthermore, the crowd scene depicts the reality of community spirit that exists in many traditional African societies. Usually, there is an address made by some respected personality, and in the case of **Pambazuka Afrika**, Laana is the person who addresses the crowd. The crowd does not find it unusual that he has changed his stance regarding the major issues facing them. His speech is reminiscent of Kenya's first Prime Minister and President, Jomo Kenyatta. On the night when Kenya attained her independence, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, as he was usually referred to, spoke about fighting poverty, ignorance, and disease:

"... as we participate in the pomp and circumstance, and as we make merry at this time, remember this: we are relaxing before the tall that is to come. We must work harder to fight our enemies - ignorance, sickness and poverty...Let us all work harder together for our country Kenya".

[Independence Day speech: 12th December 1963].

As Laana addresses the crowd, a man shouts in the crowd that the Book -- that is, the Bible - talks about proclaiming justice to the nations. Nobody seems to join the man except Laana, whose voice rends the air as the crowd gets excited:

LAANA:...We are not doomed to poverty!
We are not doomed to ignorance!

We are not doomed to disease!...
[Act 2 Part 2]

As Laana continues to excite the euphoric crowd, he urges that corruption and bribery must be fought against and eradicated. Most importantly, the theme of destiny is echoed as Laana continues in low tones to persuade the crowd that only a changed man can change society:

LAANA: Away with the gun! Arise Africa and follow
your God-given destiny through Him who came
to proclaim justice for all nations!
[Act 2 Part 2]

Before Laana completes his speech, the pregnant sister, Wema, screams, and there is a commotion. It is clear that she is in labour as the women in the crowd shove away the men so that Wema can give birth. Mama, the returning spirit, the guardian of the night, re-enters the scene. Amid ululations and celebrations, she silences the people:

MAMA: I heard the cry of anguish at the death of
Ketu I heard the cry of justice from my children.
I heard the cry of hope make its way into this
world(*indicating the child*). And I have come that
you may know that you are all children of the same
mother, children of Africa. I bid you stay and
listen to the story of Africa. [Act 2 Part 2]

Mama's tone and language has not changed from what it was at the beginning. This shows her emotional consistency. She admonishes the crowd and Laana to take care of the new-born child. As the surviving uncle, Laana is given the responsibility of ritually naming the child. Before the play

ends, this element of ritual naming is evoked. Laana literally picks up the new-born child and lifts her up to the audience:

LAANA: No man's child today, you become a child
of all of us. African child, somewhere in this
confusion is the person God means you to be...
Have a dream. have a vision but wherever your
dreams and vision lead you always remember
that you are an African child. [Act 2 Part 2]

Members of the crowd then join together in singing a song of hope and praise as the sun starts to rise and shine on their faces. It is expected that the audience can also join the dance even if they may not know the words of the song. Here, audience participation as an element of African traditional theatre is employed. The music band, the singers, and the dancers literally take over the performance. The final song of the play is the most vibrant and joyful one because it is a praise song. The song praises God and urges Africans to arise and fulfil their God-given purposes:

O arise, Africa arise!
O arise Africa arise!

It's time for you
To show the world
What God has done
He set you free, arise

Arise! Arise!

The world is watching and waiting
To see what you are doing.
Arise

Arise! Arise! [Act 2 Part 2]

For me as an African Christian, the success of the original production of **Pambazuka Afrika** resulted from its captivating musical potential against a background of a strong subject matter. **Pambazuka Afrika** may be categorized as an African Christian musical in part because of the excellence of the music and singing. Its visual enactment of the inhuman treatment of slaves by Arab Slave traders elicited emotions reminiscent of the play Muntu. Also, the potential of African traditional dance and costume were fully exploited in terms of choreography and design without being sexually provocative or questionable; hence, the performance was acceptable for audiences of all ages.

Conclusion

The plays **Muntu** and **Pambazuka Afrika** have pointed to the possibility of integrating African traditional theatrical elements into a Christian context. It must be noted that many of these elements find their roots in African traditional religion. The resulting blend, which I have proposed as African Christian Drama, should be considered a unique dramatic genre, based on its theatricality and subject matter. It is my contention, especially regarding sub-Saharan Africa, that the intentions of a drama should be motivated by a desire to effect social change in various levels in society.

Muntu was the creation of an individual playwright, whereas **Pambazuka Afrika** was an ensemble effort. In the end, both plays worked well to integrate the thematic and theatrical conflict found in the history of Christianity in Africa.

By using these plays to represent such a model of integration as African Christian Drama, I offer this thesis as a platform for a continued exploration of various aspects of Christian Drama in Kenya, and in Africa as a whole. In order for African Christian Drama to be fully established and recognised as a canon, important ideas I have raised in this thesis must be developed further. For example, works of

this thesis must be developed further. For example, works of African Christian Drama that have not been recorded need to be historicized and classified. In an internet project titled, "*African Christianity: A History of Christian Church in Africa*", there is an assertion:

Unfortunately African Christians rarely recorded their stories, while European and American missionaries regularly sent letters to their relatives, mission boards and financial supporters in Europe and America. As a result we know far more about European and American missionaries than we do about the African catechists and evangelists.
<http://www.bethel.edu/~letnie/AfricanChristianity/>

It is my hope that as efforts are made to do more theatrical productions which show an integration of African traditional heritage and Christianity, there will be similar efforts to research and document this unique genre of African Christian Drama. For example, research directed toward specific acting and directing styles, the dynamics of managing and staging such productions, and the theatrical and thematic differences of the genre as found in different parts of Africa need to be considered. Thus, dramatic works existing in Africa and the Diaspora that should be classified under the genre of African Christian Drama need to be identified and documented.

Most importantly, in order to integrate elements of African traditional religion into Christian drama, there must be a level of openness among those who may hold

different or opposing views regarding aspects of ATR and Christianity as expressed in drama. I believe that the church leadership such as pastors, church youth leaders, deacons, Christian missionaries, and Christian organisations' leaders shall do a great service to the full liberation of African Christian artists if the leaders stop censoring artistic ideas brought forth by artist for the common goal of the entire Christian community. Such ideas may incorporate traditional African practices. Some ideas may also require political or social readjustments by the Christian community without necessarily changing their faith. Hence, Christian dramatists, in partnership with church leaders, must be creative and cautious in their approach to integrate contentious elements of ATR so as not to be misunderstood. In the past, many creative ideas proposed by dramatists within churches and Christian organizations have been discarded by the church leadership because they are perceived superficially and misunderstood. The nature of creativity should take the form of focusing on the theatrical content of each production for the purpose of finding agreeable expressions, words, dance movements, or songs. During the preparation of **Pambazuka Afrika**, the production team worked closely with a spiritual representative from a church who could give an objective

response that was expected from typical church and local audiences. Finding such creativity is not an easy task to undertake, since we as humans are bedevilled by humanity's oldest problem: the fear of people who are different from us. Nonetheless, the appreciation of our differences in a multi-ethnic society glorifies God. The problem, around the possibility that such an approach of integrating contentious elements of ATR into Christianity, is ignorance. Whereas I acknowledge that there are specific words, dance movements, songs, or actions that might be unacceptable to many audiences, artistic intentions should be taken into consideration. It is for this reason that I wish to see diverse ways of exposing African Christian Drama go beyond traditional stage presentation. Instead, I wish that there were more experiments with techniques such as those used in Drama in Education to explore African Christian Drama.

However, before we reach this stage, it is important to research and systematically document dramatic works related to the concept African Christian Drama. Such works may have been written in the past years, or may be presently in the making. I also believe that with good awareness programs such as workshops and seminars on African Christian Drama, many inspired artists will be encouraged to continue or start creating more works in this genre. Currently, there is

an unfortunate trend in Kenya whereby many artists including African Christian artists in drama continue to ape "new" styles and techniques of drama from outside, yet there are a lot of traditional African aspects that are not fully exploited. As much as it is important to learn and understand the dynamics of theatre from the rest of the world, I believe that African Christians ought to be responsible for upholding those aspects of traditional African theatre that uniquely identify them. What Kenya and the rest of Africa needs are not further polemics but answers to her epidemics such as AIDS, corruption, unemployment, and famine. We can use drama as a tool to reach out to the masses in order to create an environment of social and spiritual awareness, and eventually to address these problems.

African dramatists must first accept that all things that has God created, including elements in African traditional heritage, can be utilised theatrically for His own purposes. The role of the dramatist is to explore creatively thematic and theatrical elements to draw the masses to whatever message is relevant to the people. This is the challenge and the invitation that the African Christian Dramatist must faithfully extend to African traditionalists and to the rest of the world. I believe that

both **Muntu** and **Pambazuka Africa** have embraced the challenge and have become forerunners of a new genre -- African Christian Drama.

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