

Recalling the Past in Postcolonial Drama: From Counter-History to Sociopolitical Redress

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ABSTRACT

Through examining the texts of Ama Ata Aidoo's play *Anowa* (1970), Jack Davis's play *Kullark* (or *Home*) (1979), and Dennis Scott's play *An Echo in the Bone* (1974); this paper shows how postcolonial drama functions as an effective means for exploring occluded pre-colonial and colonial periods through constructing alternative histories that both refract the official accounts of the colonialist history and redress or treat contemporary societal and political exclusions. To this end, the researchers argue that the counter-discursive/counter-historical task of many historical postcolonial dramas is to reconstruct their histories in a way that confirms the essential socio-political function of such plays. In this sense, a conscious linkage is being made between contemporary post-colonial communities and their past pre-colonial and colonial histories.

INTRODUCTION

According to Indian political psychologist, sociologist, and cultural critic Ashish Nandy, "history might be only one way of constructing the past and other cultures might have explored other ways... it defines our relationship with the past selves" (52, 54). Similarly, Greg Dening argues that "history is not the past: it is a consciousness of the past used for present purposes" (170). Starting from the assumption that there are different historical narratives that fracture any singular view of a past, we examine a number of postcolonial plays that address the issues of historicity and dramatic functionalism as presented by different postcolonial dramatists. By examining the texts of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1970), Jack Davis's *Kullark* (*Home*) (1979), and Dennis Scott's *An Echo in the Bone* (1974), we intend to show how postcolonial drama functions as an effective means for exploring occluded pre-colonial and colonial periods through constructing alternative histories that both refract the official accounts of the colonialist history and redress contemporary societal and political exclusions. In addition to its counter-discursive/counter-historical task, reconstructing these histories by postcolonial playwrights has a very important socio-political function – one that appears so clearly when we try to link contemporary post-colonial communities with their past, pre-colonial, and colonial histories.

The socio-political impact of many post-colonial plays has always been perceptible. For instance, Dedan Kimathi, the famous Kenyan anti-colonial fighter who had been

viewed with disdain by the Jomo Kenyatta regime and subsequent governments for several decades, and as a leader of terrorists by the British, has reclaimed his stature as an anti-colonial revolutionary in the eyes of both Kenyan people and the government during president Mawa Kibaki's presidency (December 2002 –April 2013).¹ The government erected a bronze statue of the "Freedom Fighter Dedan Kimathi" on graphite plinth, in central Nairobi. This monument was unveiled in 2006 (about 50 years after the execution of Kimathi, and 30 years after Ngũgĩ's and Mugu's reviving of this controversial historical figure in their remarkable theatrical performance, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976). Moreover, in a more recent announcement (June 2013), the British government acknowledged for the first time that the elderly Kikuyu and other Kenyans had been subjected to torture and other horrific abuses at the hands of the colonial administration during the Mau Mau emergency.² The government expressed its "sincere regret" that these abuses had taken place and urged that the process of healing for both nations begin. Compensatory payments of £2,600 (about \$4, 200) were paid to each of 5,200 vetted Kenyan claimants.³

In fact, history's intersection with drama is, as Dening puts it, not merely coincidental. Rather, "history and drama are both based on a conscious interpretation of events" (295). By examining the selected postcolonial re-workings of colonial master narratives, we intend to show how the dramatists resorted to their national histories during the pre-colonial and colonial times not simply to glorify their past which was misinterpreted, misrepresented, or appropriated

by a Eurocentric colonial discourse, but also to guide and enlighten contemporary postcolonial communities during their post-independence and later phases of history. The present study shows how these dramatists conceive history as a consciousness of a past that is reconfigured to serve present and future purposes. Thus, the past, as resurrected in their dramas, functions as a magnifying lens through which contemporary political and social problems (encountered by postcolonial communities) were being thoroughly exposed in the hope that these peoples would benefit from the historical examples provided to them in building more promising alternative futures.

Postcolonial dramas, which recall certain historical figures and/or specific historical moments from the pre-colonial and colonial past of the post-colonial locales for which they are created normally, constitute remarkable domains of counter-memory. This type of drama achieves what Michel Foucault refers to as “the insurrection of a subjugated knowledge” as it provides a mode of (re)remembering against the grain (2003, 7). This drama resists oblivion and empowers representatives of the suppressed other with a unique capability of counter-remembering (or counter-historical narrating) that releases their long-suppressed voices. According to Foucault, “subjugated Knowledges” are forms of experiences and remembering that are pushed to the margins, disqualified, and rendered unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing and hegemonic discourses. The historical experiences and memories of the colonial and post-colonial subjects are the best embodiments of the concept of “subjugated Knowledges.” In his genealogical approach to history, Foucault suggests that critical genealogies contribute “to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free” (2003, 10). Postcolonial drama, like other forms of postcolonial literature, present dynamic critical genealogies that facilitate the production of powerful counter-histories as they narrate those experiences and memories which endured being unspoken and suppressed within the frames of colonial official history.

In “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse”, the renowned Australian scholar in the field postcolonial studies, Helen Tiffin, describes how postcolonial literary counter-discursive rewriting becomes a pressing demand and an urgent need for postcolonial writers:

Processes of artistic and literary decolonisation have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. This has frequently been accompanied by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered ‘reality’, free of all colonial taint. Given the nature of the relationship between coloniser and colonised, with its pandemic brutalities and its cultural denigration, such a demand is desirable and inevitable. (1995: 95)

Tiffin’s description corresponds with the role played by *Kullark*, *An Echo in the Bone*, and *Anowa* which constitute a conscious attempt to create that “entirely new” and “wholly recovered reality” of the native.

To use Foucault’s terminology, we contend that a piece of postcolonial drama – as a representative of counter-history

– breaks the continuity of imperial glory. It “reveals that the light – the famous dazzling effect of power – is not something that petrifies, solidifies, and immobilizes the entire social body, and thus keeps it in order; it is in fact a divisive light that illuminates one side of the social body but leaves the other side in shadow or cast it into darkness” (2003, 70). In this sense, postcolonial drama becomes an effectual domain of counter-discursivity. Here, the peoples who once lived in the dark side and were forced to remain in the shadows of imperialism and colonialism, are now given the chance to outcry “from within the shadows” (70). They outcry “the discourse of those who have no glory, or of those who have lost it and who now find themselves, perhaps for a time – but probably for a long time – in darkness and silence” (70). As it can be seen in the examples which we demonstrate in this article, postcolonial counter-history is the history of defeats and exploitation which is linked to those “epic, religious, or mythical forms which, rather than telling of the untarnished and un eclipsed glory of the sovereign, endeavor to formulate the misfortunes of ancestors, exiles, and servitude” (71).

In his 1969 (translated 1977) essay “What is an Author?” Foucault proposes some useful observations with regard to how to fight effectively against the “omissions” and active oblivion maintained by discursive practices, i.e. how to listen to the lost voices that have been suppressed and rendered mute. Foucault argues that in counter-history, the struggle against discursive omissions and exclusions entails a “return to the origin.” If we return to the origins, maintains Foucault, “it is because of basic and constructive omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension [...] this non-accidental omission must be regulated by precise operations that can be situated, analyzed, and reduced in a return to the act of initiation” (1977, 135). Through this allegorical return to the origins, postcolonial dramatists take us to “those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in false and misleading plentitude” (135). In fact, a large number of postcolonial dramatic works involving mnemonic narratives that foreground past experiences of colonial subjects during their encounters with colonization and imperial powers project this precious moment of returning to the origin whereby they counteract and eventually revoke the intended omission and occlusion of particular subjugated communities and certain historical indigenous figures.⁴

Alongside the fact that most of postcolonial counter-historical dramas involve a process of returning to the origin, there exist two similar yet distinctive counter-memorial strategies, namely “rediscovery” and “reactivation.” According to Foucault, rediscovery functions as a means through which “the perception of forgotten or obscured figures” (134) occurs. Reactivation, on the other hand, involves the process of inserting the discourse “into totally new domains of generalizations, practices, and transformation” (134). The major works examined in the present study involve all of the above-mentioned three practices of counter-history. In fact, through returning to their peoples’ origins and reactivating their past (whether pre-colonial or colonial) the examined dramatists dedicate their works to rediscover the obscure sites of their histories. Through presenting these “new” dis-

coveries about their controversial historical figures or neglected historical experiences, the selected dramas not only desubjugate the historical knowledge of the once colonized subjects whose experiences were occluded and marginalized by the oppressive systems of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism; but rather they address the dilemma of social injustice from which certain groups (being ethnical, religious, or social) of their post-independence and postcolonial nations are still suffering. In fact, we believe that the reactivation of past memories and historical experiences in postcolonial drama is directed to achieve those two socio-political purposes. Interestingly, the double-faceted function of postcolonial “historical” dramas is applicable to a wide swathe of postcolonial dramatic texts, and constitutes a paradigm for different playwrights from around the Anglophonic world. We hope this study will attract researchers’ attention to further the critical analysis of the two-dimensional function of postcolonial drama, the rich yet neglected genre.

DISCUSSION

Anowa

Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Anowa* is exemplary of this two-dimensional function of counter-historical postcolonial drama. The play relates through the traditional frame of African “dilemma tale” the story of a woman whose family and community punish and banish for marrying a man of her choosing, Kofi Ako.⁵ Together the couple develops a business of selling animal skins on the coast of the Gold Coast (known now as Ghana) during the 1870s, a time that witnessed a substantial growth of trade in the region. When Ako decides to enter the prosperous trade of slaves, his wife Anowa is appalled and she gradually grows detached from him. When Ako accuses Anowa of being barren and (in a climactic moment of the play) demands divorce, Anowa publicly confesses that she and her husband have not had sex for several years. She accuses him publicly of being impotent and suggests that he exhausted his masculinity acquiring slaves and wealth.

The play with its recalling of the history of slavery in the Gold Coast during the second half of the eighteenth century is an allegorical denouncement of all forms of oppression and economic exploitation since the early days of slavery until the contemporary neo-colonial era during the 1960s. The play presents a form of counter-history, emphasizes the necessity of (re)remembering against the grain, and acknowledges the difficulty of retrieving such memories. In the third part (or phase) of the play, Anowa remembers when her grandmother told her about the great houses which were built by the “pale men” (Gilbert, *Postcolonial Plays* 118). She recalls how she raised many questions about white men who came “from far away. from beyond the horizon” and who looked like them [Africans] but as if they were peeled of their skins, “like a lobster that is boiled or roasted” (118). Anowa specifically remembers how her questions about slavery were hushed by her grandmother and other women of her community who believed she was a witch to ask such questions: “no one talks of these things anymore! All good men and women try to forget;/they have forgotten!/What

happened to those who were taken away? Do people hear from them?/Shut up child. It is too late child./Sleep well, child. All good men and women try to forget;/They have forgotten” (119). Anowa cannot keep silent any more with regard to the injustices she observes around her. The question of slavery as a horrible and unspeakable memory permeates the play from its onset to its end.

Aidoo dramatizes her female protagonist to symbolize all Africa - a mother of all Africans. In a highly symbolic moment in the play, we see Anowa relating her memory of a nightmarish dream in which the white slave-dealers appear as uncanny creatures:

I dreamt that I was a big, big woman. And from my insides were huge holes out of which poured men, women, and children. And the sea was boiling hot and steaming. And as it boiled, it threw lobsters, boiled lobsters, each of whom as it fell turned into a man or a woman, but keeping its lobster heads and claws. And they rushed to where I sat and seized the men and women as they poured out of me, and they tore them apart, and dashed them to the ground and stamped upon them. (119)

Telling this dream to the women of her family, the little girl is labeled as a witch and reminded not to speak about it. Anowa cannot but remember what others tend to forget and hide: “any time there is a mention of a slave, I see a woman who is me and a bursting of a ripe tomato or a swollen pod” (119). By letting Anowa speak the unspeakable, Aidoo reminds us about the difficulty of remembering against the grain, but she, at the same time, stresses the importance of remembering and resurrecting suppressed memories of the past.

The importance of remembering this buried history of slavery in the Gold Coast at this critical moment of post-independence Ghana, we believe, stems from the playwright’s desire to find relevance between the exploitative and oppressive systems of slavery and the exploitation and social injustices maintained by the excessive “capitalist” neo-colonial cult in post-Nkrumah Ghana.⁶ Helen Gilbert, the well-known Australian researcher in the field of postcolonial drama, tells us that the play was set on the Gold Coast about thirty years after the Bond Treaty (an agreement granting the British trading priority over the Fanti Area in present-day Ghana). The Bond of 1844, says Gilbert, not only bound Fanti slave traders to the white imperialists but it positioned them at a historical juncture where the narratives of both colonialism and capitalism intersected (*Postcolonial Plays* 98). The play from the beginning expresses the issue of Africans’ complicity in the slave trade (a recurrent theme in most African historical postcolonial plays) by drawing the forceful image of British forts “standing at the door/Of the great ocean” (102). This notion of complicity continues throughout the play. The figure of the African capitalist who would exploit other Africans is embodied in the character of Kofi Ako, the Fanti trader, who enslaves his fellow men for the accumulation of wealth. Interestingly, the scenes enacted in the third and final phase of the play are set in Ako’s “big house” which is opulently furnished with foreign furniture, and where the pictures of both Queen Victoria and Ako himself are hung

side-by-side in the background to remind the audience of the interconnectedness between the external imperial system and its neo-colonial indigenous allies. Aidoo takes her audience and readers back to these dark moments of the history of west Africa and confronts these histories to enable them to better see how Ghanaians, as social beings, as both producers and products, are implicated in the transmission and penetration of their past in their present and possible futures. As Vincent Odamtten puts it, “without the deliberate recovery of these histories, in the context of the struggles of real people, Aidoo’s audience will have only an abstract notion of why the perplexities of neo-colonialism so circumscribe our lives and seem to continually narrow our horizon of expectations” (1994, 43). In this sense, Aidoo’s reactivation of the history of slavery through the personal narrative of an African woman is meant to redress the many social injustices which are being inflicted on millions of “Anowas” in post-independence African communities where social and political oppressions have a double impact on the lives of those subjugated female subalterns whose narratives are condensed and spoken out by Aidoo’s female protagonist.

Kullark

The necessity of remembering the history of the marginalized and the suppressed becomes the grand motive behind writing other postcolonial plays that belong to the former “settler-invader” colonies in countries like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.⁷ While an African postcolonial play, like *Anowa*, addresses the social injustices inflicted upon the downtrodden classes of the playwright’s contemporary Ghanaian communities, especially women, a play like *Kullark* (Home) (1979) by Australian indigenous campaigner and political activist, Jack Davis, gives a painful insight into the process of colonization and the transformation of the playwright’s people. *Kullark* specifically traces the history of the long suffering of a *Nyoongah* (Aka *Noongar*) indigenous family.⁸ The play presents three interconnected plots that represent three historical periods anachronically. The time span of the play ranges from the moment of Western Australia’s invasion by European peoples in 1820s to the play’s present time (1979). The first plot relates the first encounter between Yagan (and his tribe) with the first settlers who were led by Captain James Stirling, founder and first Lieutenant-Governor of the Swan River Colony (1831-38). The second unearths the strife of Thomas Yorlah whose children were taken from him under the 1934 Aborigines Act. The third plot involves a contemporary generation of the Yorlah family. As a cinematic montage, the play collapses over 150 years of *Nyoongah* experience into a two-act-performance time.

Interestingly, the play presents the history of contact and expansion in South West Australia with exact dates, times, and statistical numbers using Brechtian devices of quotation from a variety of documentary writing forms (that represent the white’s version of the aboriginal history during the 19th and 20th centuries) such as Settlers’ letters and diaries, the royal decrees read by Captain Stirling, and Australian official proclamations; direct address to the audience; and

enactment. As Joan Tompkins notes, the white documentary form, is turned back on itself with the addition of the black perspective in the play (“Oral Culture” 56). Through its theatrical time wrap, Aboriginal singing and dancing, and use of *Nyoongah* language, *Kullark* removes the power from European recorded textual history to ensure that the suppressed voices of the Aborigines are heard as well not only in English but also in their own native tongue.

The play’s revolving backdrop skillfully juxtaposes the different versions of history: the Western explorers’ map of the Swan River bisects the painting of the *Nyoongah* mythical symbol, the Rainbow Serpent. Davis’ brilliant theatrical technique of the revolving screen is an artistic embodiment of the counter-historical power of his play. The insertion of this movable screen metaphorically suggests the “increasing incursion by whites into the Aboriginal experience” (Davis 6) but it, at the same time reverses the agency of the colonial discourse and restores the power of Aboriginal myth and subjectivity through the recurrent reappearing of the painting of the Rainbow Serpent. The play disrupts the power of the map which signifies the colonizers’ control over alien space because this map is never left intact for long and the Rainbow Serpent remains the dominant image of the setting.

The action of the first plot, which resurrects the historical figure of Yagan (throughout the play) functions as a counter-discursive narrative that subverts the colonial discourse in Australia and the contemporary discursive historical white narrative about the early encounters between the natives and the settlers. The play recalls the *Nyoongahs*’ reaction to the Aboriginal experience (including traditional songs, rituals, and way of life) comes to interrogate the settlers’ attitude in which they conceptualize the land as an occupied merely waiting for cultivation by Europeans. It also exposes the hypocrisy of the colonial pretension regarding their civilizing mission in the virgin Australian wilderness. Captain Stirling’s offering of clothing to Yagan and his tribal family as a civilizing gesture at the beginning of the play, for instance, is juxtaposed with the many songs of lamentation and the narrated accounts about the massacres in which the colonizers ruthlessly exterminated thousands of the natives within a few decades. Specifically, cutting Yagan’s head – after killing him and sending it to a scientist in England in the hope that it “will prove of phrenological interest and a worthwhile addition to [the scientist’s] collection” (Davis 33) – is remembered in the play to ridicule the colonial claims about civilizing the natives. *Kullark* presents a sympathetic account of the story of the native who was depicted in Western historical discourse as a very dangerous criminal.⁹

The second plot furthers the issue of Aboriginal displacement. Thomas Yorlah’s story, which relates his continued attempts to get his kids and wife out of the Moore River Reserve, reactivates the history of maltreatment of the Aborigines in concentration camps in Australia during the 1930s. Thomas Yorlah struggles very hard to win an exemption for his family from the Removal Act. And when he fails to convince the authorities about the justness of his cause, he decides to run away with his family: “Me, Mum and the kids. Four times I run away and four times I got six months’ gaol.

That's two years, twenty-four months, eh! But by Gawd it was worth it. Yeah, every night in the boob was worth it, an' if I had to I'd do it all over again. Yeah, I'd do it all over again" (Davis 65). This plot exposes the hypocrisy of the historical figure of A. O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia (1915-1940) by including him as a character that is involved in the deterioration of the Aborigines' social and humanitarian conditions. Alec Yorlah, Thomas' son appears as an enthusiastic young man who is full of hope and great expectations for a better future for his family. After serving in the Australian Army during World War II, Alec eventually gets his citizenship papers and entertains the dreams of starting a new life with his father, mother, and bride in a real house for the first time.

The third plot presents Alec as a jobless poor and discriminated against colored man who drinks a lot. The life of the contemporary Yorlah family is no better than that of their predecessors. After all efforts of assimilation of the Aborigine families within the Australian community, racism continues to dislocate the natives in their own homes. Through all the memories invoked in the play, Davis seems to send the following message to his audience and reading public – this message is stated by a white character, the Colonel: "I'm ashamed to say, Alec, that Australia is still a racist country. Oh, not in physical terms so much, but morally and mentally we're still a racist nation at heart. People will always treat you differently and find some excuse to justify their actions" (59). Consequently, the varied reactivated memories in this play serve two purposes. First, they counteract the discursive white narrative about the history of the Aborigines in Australia. Secondly, they address the social problem of racism in the country in the hope that new generations would not repeat the mistakes of the past and rather would create a new multi-racial and tolerant community where social, political, and economic justice is rightly preserved for the subjugated and marginalized members of this community.

An Echo in the Bone

The above-mentioned two socio-political purposes of historical postcolonial drama also preoccupy the structure of Dennis Scott's *An Echo in the Bone*. Like what we have seen in *Kullark*, Scott's play (through its ritualistic recalling of the history of the subjugated in Jamaica and the Caribbean) fractures the fixity and authenticity of the discursive historical narrative by creating cinematic flashbacks with concentric themes that project the neglected experiences of slaves and colonial subjects. The cinematic or metatheatrical remembered scenes in the play are equally intended to address the social problems which contemporary Jamaicans were encountering during the early 1970s.

Although the play was performed in the 1970s, its major setting where the process of remembering against the grain takes place is the 1930s. The overall action of the play is framed by the Nine-Night ceremony of the dead.¹⁰ In the play, Crew, for whom the Nine-Night ceremony is being held, is believed to be dead and it is only through performing this ritual that we discover both what has happened and

why it has happened. Crew, who farms a smallholding just outside the big estate, has killed the white owner of the estate, Mr. Charles and then apparently committed suicide. The playwright wants to assure us that such a violent act should not be viewed as a senseless act of a deranged or drunken man. Rather it must be understood in terms of the past of the subjugated, not just the immediate past of this farmer's life but also the more comprehensive past which constitutes the history of black people in the West Indies. For this reason, the action of the play which originates in the old barn behind Crew's cottage moves through spirit possession back to a 1792 slave-ship, an auctioneer's office in the slave market in 1820, woods near an estate in 1833, a Great House in 1834, Crew's field in 1937, Crew's house four years ago, and outside Mr. Charles' Great House last week.

Like *Anowa* and *Kullark*, *An Echo in the Bone* is about the necessity to understand the present in terms of the past. As Renu Juneja rightly observes, the whole ceremony in the play is "a means to remember what might otherwise be forgotten" (100). When one of Crew's friends, P commemorates Crew in the ceremony, he remembers the long suffering of Crew and other Black farmers in Jamaica and says, "... and nobody remember how strong you was. And when they squeeze the canes nobody knows how much blood it takes to make the rum hot and sweet"(86) to which Rachel, Crew's wife and the organizer of the ritual ceremony, responds: "I remember, I remember. Thirty years long like three hundred" (86-87). In this sense, Crew's immediate personal experience is being remembered to segue the larger history of exploitation and subjugation under slavery in the West Indies.

As a counter-historical project, Scott's play lets its audience and readers confront the unspeakable history of slavery in the Caribbean islands. When Crew's son Sonson becomes possessed by the spirit of his father, all the characters attending Rachel's ceremony of the Nine-Night are involved in a multiple of flashback performances in which they reenact the roles of both slaves and white oppressors without donning white masks. This control of the black body over the reactivated historical memories reflects the subversive power of black counter-narrative which appropriates the discursive narrative of imperialism. Several examples that illustrate this moment of subversion can be found throughout the recalled scenes. Although these reenacted memories depict the traumatic history of slaves, they allow us to hear the voices of these slaves, their arguments, and their mockery. Indeed, the recalled scenes empower the black subjects whom the playwright employ in a process of subversion in which they mimic the imperial acts, speeches, and behavior of British sailors, officers, slave holders, and slave-dealers. For instance, in the first recalled memory in the play, Brigit (Rachel's daughter-in-law) reenacts the role of a haughty English lady who is traveling aboard the slave-ship to meet her father, the plantation owner on one of the Caribbean islands. She looks at the huddled slaves contemptuously: "[T]hey're filthy. What dreadful animals!" (Scott 91). The "white" lady then starts to read a newly-published volume by Mr. Bryan Edwards about the islands. She reads aloud a passage in which the English historian describes the nature of different

African slaves classifying them in terms of their docility into a variety of categories. According to *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of History of Science*, “Bryan Edwards was a Jamaican planter and politician who published a well-respected History of the West Indies in 1793. He articulated the planter view concerning the value of the West Indian colonies to Great Britain, and opposed the abolition of the slave trade” (Blouet 215). By letting Brigit reenact the role of a white woman in this recalled episode of the history of the Blacks in the Caribbean, Scot’s play becomes the space where the objects of Edward’s written historical record are, in the Bhabhan sense, empowered with the performative strategy of mimicry through which they fracture the fixity of the English book and thus liberate the subjugated knowledge of the colonial subjects who were disenfranchised by British imperial discourse.

However, this moment of empowerment of the suppressed voices costs dearly. One example that illustrates the difficulty of articulating the voices of the slave spirits is the case of the slave reenacted by Rattler, the mute drummer who attends Rachel’s ceremony of the Nine-Night and plays a crucial role in recovering the spirits of the past. As a slave aboard the ship, Rattler (who appears as a mute person in almost all of the scenes of the play) becomes an eyewitness who not only exposes the Western system of slavery but he also deploras African slavery system which accompanied several internal conflicts and wars among Africans themselves: “I saw when they took her [the wife of another slave on board]. It was no worse than I seen your people do to mine in the year of the war between us” (90). After Rattler is involved in a fight with another slave, the white officer, Bosun tries to forcefully stop the fighting but gets offended by Rattler who in a gesture of defiance spits on the officer. In a furious moment of retaliation, Bosun cuts off Rattler’s tongue. Cutting off Rattler’s tongue by an agent of imperialism metaphorically stands for the suppressive colonial discourse which for hundreds of years has silenced the voices of the African displaced subjects. However, Scott’s recurrence to the indigenous rituals as a medium for liberating these muted voices revokes what the English officer has done to the mutilated slave. As Valéré Bada notes, the role of the mute “rattler” (drummer) points to the crucial but incomplete function of language in reconstructing the past (2000, 86). In fact, the traumatic yet empowering remembering of the past in the play is facilitated and even precipitated with each beat on the drum which functions as a compensatory element not only for the mute Rattler but for all the silenced Africans in the West Indies. Together with the dancing and singing of the tranced characters/actors, Rattler’s beating on the drum functions in the same manner the revolving screen does in Jack Davis’ play.

Like the case in most postcolonial dramatic works, which reactivate past subjugated experiences, Scott’s play resurrects all the experiences of economic exploitation under the systems of slavery and colonialism to address the problems encountered by the contemporary post-independence society in Jamaica specifically, the socio-economic problems that faced the country during the 1960s and

1970s. After Jamaica had attained its full independence in 1962, strong economic growth marked the first decade of the country’s post-colonial era under the conservative governments, which were led successively by Prime Ministers Alexander Bustamante, Donald Sangster, and Hugh Shearer. Specifically, investments in the industry of bauxite/alumina fueled the relatively high rates of economic growth in the country. However, this industrial boom did not ameliorate the actual lives of the majority of the Jamaican population. Most of the major economic projects were run by either non-black and white Jamaican minorities or international franchise corps especially British companies.¹¹ Most of Jamaicans (who were black) were living in miserable conditions. Rates of poverty and joblessness increased tremendously during these formative years especially with the return of tens of thousands of Jamaican workers to Jamaica after they had been expelled from England when the country attained its independence. Thus, the spread of crime rates and the degradation of the Jamaican society were the immediate results of the unjust distribution of the economic wealth in the country.

In Scott’s play, the characters who participate in Crew’s commemorating ceremony share the status of poverty and accordingly identify with one another. For instance, we see Madam, the shopkeeper complaining to Dreamboat, the jobless young man (who asks her to let him buy “one little piece o’cheese” on trust: “Trust, trust, all the time. You think I can live when de whole village taking food out of my shop and not a penny coming back?” (Scott 94-5). In fact, Crew’s story itself reflects the problems encountered by small Jamaican farmers. The central conflict in the play, the murder of Mr. Charles, occurs when the white rich land-owner (who has just returned from England after several years of absence) diverts water and thus prevents Crew and many other black farmers from yielding crops. To Crew, the murder of Mr. Charles is justifiable because “he was a bad man, and the earth was calling for his blood for what he do to us ... All of us...” (87). In this sense, the murder incident is not just an act of racial violence. Rather, it is illustrative of post-colonial economic violence in Jamaica.

The economic disenfranchisement of the black farmers by white land-owners in the play is one manifestation of the economic deprivation of the majority of black population from the national economy which is controlled by the non-black minority. Discussing this problem, Scott’s characters cast their doubts on the presupposition that things changed after the country had attained its freedom:

STONE. Stone. You should get yourself a little piece of land, that’s what Crew tell me, last time we was together. Settle down, Stone, he say, and raise a crop. For what? I watch how the big land-owners they corner up with their own and sell the sugar back to us for four times what it cost us to raise. I know. I see inside of the office sometimes, and the big house that they build from two hundred years ago, when all of us worked the land for nothing, like animals. You think things change any?

P. We are free now. That is a big change.

Brigit. You feel so? You skin white, then Mass P.? To

them you is still dirt, nothing you can say will change the way they look at you. No respect... How can a man live easy without respect? (109)

Through focusing on specific experiences of economic exploitation under the imperial system of slavery, Scott sends along a warning message to the authorities in his country. His message is, we believe, that the socio-economic dilemma of the black populace in the island, which began on a racial basis, will continue to appear if the economic disparity between the wealthy white elite cult and the rest of the Jamaican people keeps widening.

CONCLUSION

In all of the plays discussed above, the process of remembering past colonial and pre-colonial experiences – in the form of flashbacks or dreams – is primarily channeled to serve the same multi-faceted ends. On the one hand, the act of remembering in these plays interrogates the discursive imperial narrative concerning these very resurrected histories. On the other, this subversive act brings about a state of social transformation in which oppressed ethnical groups or social classes become re-enfolded and included in the social and economic structures of their post-colonial nations.

It is noteworthy that the authors of the plays resort to similar dramaturgical techniques that help them achieve the counter-imperial and socio-political purposes of their artistic works. One of the interesting common features that characterizes these dramatic texts is the emphasis they put on the notion of the cyclicity of history. The playwrights set the scenes of their dramas in different historical periods. The temporal levels of the studied plays are structured anachronically – different pasts intermingle with the present and sometimes the future appears before the characters in a state of magical realism. In *Kullark*, the histories of the aborigines (during their first encounter with the European colonizers in West Australia) and their descendants keep on emerging and re-emerging amidst the contemporary setting of the play. Likewise, the histories of the slaves and their freed descendants continue to echo in the present setting of *An Echo in the Bone* through a meaningful ritual recalling of the dead. Interestingly, the cyclicity of history also dominates many famous post-colonial dramas such as Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* where native myths and rituals facilitate the resurrection of dead characters from the past and bring them into direct contact with characters that represent the contemporary setting of the play. Similarly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, and Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* begin where they end and then present to their audiences/readers several flashbacks from the past. Some of the scenes of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* depict the last days in the life of the Kenyan anti-colonial leader. These scenes appear with other scenes that present a contemporary plot alternately. In *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, two historians (imperial and oriental) participate in unfolding the last years in the life of a controversial anti-colonial leader in a way through which dreams intersect with remembered historical events. Presenting counter-historical events in the form of intersecting cir-

cles in these postcolonial dramas demonstrates the vital role played by postcolonial playwrights.

The recurrent notion of the cyclicity of history in these plays projects what we conceive as the ethical role of the postcolonial playwrights as social reformers who crave to achieve and protect principles of social justice among their communities. In this sense, the anachronic counter-discursive historical scenes, which subvert the chronologically-ordered official "History" of imperialism, become the vehicle through which postcolonial playwrights send their cautionary messages to their communities and political leaders to warn them against repeating the same mistakes of the past which keep reemerging in new and different forms.

ENDNOTES

- 1 End Notes Jomo Kenyatta (1894 – 22 August 1978) was the leader of Kenya from independence in 1963 to his death in 1978. He served first as Prime Minister (1963–64) and then as President (1964–78).
- 2 The word "Mau Mau" had come into use to explain the existence of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army during the Emergency period in Kenyan colonial history from 1952 to 1962.
- 3 For further information about this announcement, follow the following Web link to listen to the NPR news report about this unprecedented event: <http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&is-list=false&id=189968998&m=190141005>
- 4 In addition to *Anowa*, *Kullark* (Home), and *An Echo in the Bone*, examples of these counter-historical postcolonial dramas include: *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004) by Indian playwright Girish Karnad; *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) by Kenyan writers Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo; *A Dance of the Forests* (first performed 1960 / published 1963) by the Nigerian playwright and Laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Wole Soyinka; *Mahavidroha 1857* (or *The Great Rebellion*) (1973) by Indian actor and author Utpal Dutt; *Collision of Alters: A Conflict of Ancient Red Sea Gods* (1977) by Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, the Poet Laureate of Ethiopia; *Kiriji* (1970) by Nigerian playwright Wálé Ogúnymí; *The Black Jacobins* (1936) by Afro-Trinidadian writer C.L.R. James; *Riel* (1967) and *Gabe* (1973) by Canadian writers John Coulter and Carol Bolt respectively; *Kinjeketile* (1970) by Tanzanian writer Ebrahim Hussein, Henri Christophe (1950) and *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) by Saint Lucian Nobel Prize Laureate Derek Walcott; *Woza Albert* (1981) by South African writers Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon; *Nana Yah* (1980) produced by the Sistren Theatre in Jamaica; *George William Gordon* (1976) by Jamaican author and playwright Roger Mais; *The Sacrifice of Kerli* and *The First South African* (1977) by South African female playwright Fatema Dike; and *Bran Nue Dae* (1990) by Australian composer Jimmy Chi and his band Kuckles.
- 5 A dilemma tale, aka judgement tale, is typically an African form of short story whose ending is either open to

conjecture or is morally ambiguous, thus allowing the audience to comment or speculate upon the correct solution to the problem posed in the tale (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The prologue as well as the beginning and the end of nearly every phase of the three phases of Anowa consists of commentary given by the choric figures of the Old Man and Old Woman (collectively known as The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-and-Piper, a regional expression for society's opinion).

- 6 Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (21 September 1909 – 27 April 1972) led the British colony of the Gold Coast to gain its independence as the first African country to gain autonomy from the British Crown in March 1957.
- 7 In settler-invader colonies “the invading Europeans (or their descendants) annihilated, displaced and/or marginalized the indigenes to become a majority non-indigenous population” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 193-4).
- 8 This term is used to refer to Western Australian Aborigines.
- 9 As a gesture of recognition of the rights of aboriginal populations in Australia, the head of Yagan was repatriated in 1997. It was given a ceremonial reburial by the Nnoongar Australian minority in 2010 (38 years after the premiere of Davis' play).
- 10 The Nine-Night ceremony is a wake-like ritual practiced by many of the syncretist Revival cults of Jamaica and is observed particularly by the followers of Afro-Jamaican cults of Pocomania. The Jamaican black populace believes that for nine nights after death, the ghost rises out of the grave and returns to its familiar haunts. According to this ritual, it is believed that on the last night the ghost visits all his relatives and his associates, overlooks all that are his, and then departs altogether. (Beckwith 70 and 77).
- 11 For further information about the socio-economic scene in Jamaica during the 1960s and 1970s, see John D. Forbes' book Jamaica: Managing Political and Economic Change.

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