

Substitution And Resemblance: Traditional African Drama As Models Of Ecology Theatre

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Abstract

Performance in Africa fulfills several functions. It may be a symbol of status and prestige, a means of acquiring and maintaining political power, a stimulus to farming or trading, a piece of entertainment. In this paper, we add environmental regeneration and stability as another important function of traditional African performance. Bearing in mind however, that they are various kinds of performances found in Africa, we have tried to isolate the genre which we deem ecofriendly. This paper recommends more research into this performance style given the global concern over environmental degradation and climate change and its colossal influence in sub-Saharan Africa.

Key words: Ecology, theatre, traditional African drama, substitution and resemblance

Introduction

It is important to state right at the beginning of this paper that our conclusions are quite tentative and that the solutions suggested here bear greater relevance to the African continent which has borne the brunt of climate change. There is also the need for more research into this mode of performance. What the rest of the world could do is perhaps learn or borrow from the examples highlighted in the paper, subjecting them to modifications that best suit their creative, cultural and environmental temperament.

The 21st century was heralded with much hue and cry about the environment of the planet earth. The scepter of global warming, natural disasters such as earthquake, flooding, drought and desertification among others have highlighted the phenomena of environmental degradation and the unbridled exploitation of the planet's resources. This has led to a global effort to checkmate the free-fall and despoliation of the

ecosystem. In the universities, various academic disciplines have keyed into the effort towards sustainable ecosystem and have fashioned theories, hypothesis as well as practical methods to tackle the problem. The field of drama and theatre is not left behind because scholars and practitioners have continued to experiment with performance forms and styles that address the global ecology problem. Some of their experiments have yielded a rich and varied repertoire of performance modes that highlight the ills of environmental degradation while celebrating the idea of sustainable ecosystem. In this regard, scholars such as, Baz Kershaw, Bonnie Marranca, Barnett Gabrielle, Joan Littlewood and Richard Schechner readily come to mind. To this constellation of echo-theatre movements and practitioners, one would also add some traditional African performances which this paper will focus on. Before proceeding further, we shall pause briefly to examine the concept of ecology and ecology theatre.

The Concept of Ecology

Ecology as a term is said to have been coined by the German biologist, Heinrich Haeckel in 1866. It is derived from the Greek word *oikos* which means household. It shares the same etymology with the term economics, invariably one can say that the term ecology implies “the study of the economy of nature” (*Microsoft Encanta*, 2009). In the words of Nuvit (2012), it is the study of the environment in its inter-animating relationships, its change and conservation, with humanity recognized as part of the planetary system (4). The Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies (2012) sees ecology as the scientific study of the processes influencing the distribution and abundance of organisms, the interactions among organisms, and the interactions between organisms and the transformation and flux of energy and matter. It goes on to say that the hallmark of ecology is its encompassing and synthetic view of nature and not the fragmentary view. Nuvit (2012) citing Berg, says that ecology can be differentiated from the environment which according to Berg, is “Really a view of what’s around us in a fairly narrow perspective” (Cited in Murphy). It is the interaction of all natural systems and beings in the planetary biosphere (177).

The importance of ecology is attested to by the fact that it has yielded numerous research works and various divisions and schools of criticism such as eco-feminism, green cultural criticism, shallow ecology and deep

ecology among others. It is along these lines of research that Ursula K. Heise (2008), uses the term, eco-cosmopolitanism to talk about the relationship between the imagination of the global and ethical commitment to the local environment. She establishes conceptual connections between environmentalism and eco-criticisms on one hand, and theorizes globalization, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism on the other hand (1-17). Drawing from personal observations, Ursula thinks that the “planet’s life forms are linked in such a way that they come to form one world – encompassing, sentient superorganism” (10). She also argues that ecologically oriented thinking has yet to come to terms with one of the central insights of current theories of globalization; namely, that the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place (10).

The importance of research on sustainable ecology can further be garnered when viewed from the backdrop of the fact that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2012) report on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development recommends the inclusion of climate change, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity in teaching and learning. The African continent remains one of the most affected in the global assault on the ecosystem as a result of the profit driven actions of Western multinationals, capitalist promoters and their local collaborators. According to the *Associated Press* (2012), as at September 2012, the London SOCO International (an oil company), has gone ahead to exploit its oil concession in the Congo DR Virunga National Park which is the oldest park in Arica and designated as a UNESCO world heritage site. By the same token, the French oil giant Total has taken up a concession covering over 85% of Virunga’s 7,800 square kilometers. These economic acts portend grave danger for a fragile ecosystem already contending with the ravages of war, local deforestation and game poaching.

Ecology Theatre

In the introduction I mentioned some scholars who have made significant contribution in the study and practice of theatre ecology. These theatricians saw the need to use the theatre as a vehicle to impact the ecosystem positively. I would say that this was perhaps, part of what

the *Environmental Theatre Movement* had sought to do, though with much challenge. The limited success of this movement in impacting the natural environment could probably be attributed to the fact that it merely attempted to eliminate the distinction between the audience, the actor and space, while making the natural environment merely incidental to the dramatic process. In recent times, this experiment of marrying theatre with the environment has also received impetus from groups such as *The Welfare State International* in England, and the United States based *Bread and Puppet Theatre*. These groups took the theatre to the streets often working in desolate environments and neighborhoods. Again in the United States, there have been attempts to experiment and situate live performance of plays within a natural environment such as forests, mountains and rivers. A good example here is documented by Gabrielle Bernett (1994) where radical environmentalists confronted the logging industry by making the logging site the location for the performance.

There are other notable examples in dramatic literature where environment has been used deliberately to orchestrate either a desolate echo system or an idealistic one. In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the tree on an empty stage projects the image of an apocalyptic eco-disaster. Another play that evokes the same ecological anxiety is Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*. It is also in this sense that Downing Class (2010), examines the ecology of some classical European dramas such as Aristophanes' *The Birds*, Shakespeare's *Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faust*. Tim Morton (2007) also gives us another example of this design in some plays of Aristophanes where the human chorus imitates the natural sounds in *Wasps*, *Frogs* and *Birds*.

Baz Kershaw (2007), in his book *Theatre Ecology: Environment and Performance Event*, examines the challenges to theatre and the purposes of performance in an ecologically threatened world. While Bonnie Marranca (1996), employs the term ecology as a whole system of approaching performativity. Wendell Berry (1986) believes that "nature and human culture, wilderness and domesticity are not opposed but interdependent". For him, such is the basic premise of ecology as a science and environmentalism as a philosophy. He concludes that some dramatists represent nature and culture dualism and conflict (1). This

appears to be an extension of Claude Levi-Strauss's (1983) notion that culture and nature were a universal binary.

The main thesis of this paper is divided into two parts. First it will highlight examples of what we may consider as models of eco-performance in traditional African society. Secondly, it will attempt to trace the process of substitution and resemblance which translates these performances into living artefacts that impact the people's lives and preserve the organic equilibrium within their environment. Correlative to the above, this paper will also examine the tension that exists in the apprehension of these performances among some scholars of Western and African persuasions. The nature of this work would not permit for a detailed description of the dramaturgy and ritual associated with the traditional performances that are cited in this paper. However I shall highlight those features which I consider germane to our main concern of eco-performance, namely, reverence and good use of natural elements and the indigenous cyclic worldview of Africans which is anchored around man, nature and the spirit world. Three examples of traditional African performances will be used in this paper. These are the Ekine performance of the Kalabari Ijaw in Nigeria, the Faro masked performance of the Bamabara people of Mali both in West Africa, and the Hunting ritual performance of the Lesotho and Xam Bushmen of Southern Africa. We shall begin with the Ekine performance of the Kalabari.

Traditional African Echo-friendly Theatre

The Ekine Society of the Kalsabari Ijaw according to Robin Horton (1891), was introduced by a goddess similar in nature to the village heroes who came from outside the village, taught men how to make masks, dance the masquerades and care for the shrines. This myth points to a recurrent pattern in West Africa such as the Ohworhu festival among the Urhobo in the Nigeria delta and the Osun performance of the Yoruba in South West Nigeria. The name Ekine comes from the spirit that lives in the water. These water spirits are represented in masks and mine performances. They are seen as the lords of the creeks who are thought to live in esoteric villages under the water, spruced in gold and fine cloth. They are anthropomorphic and zoomorphic and sometimes a combinations of the two. The masks clearly represent human, animal and the aquatic environment of the Kalabari people. The common heartwood

of the mangrove forest is used in creating the mask heads because the people believe that the water spirits come from the “emo” (mangrove). The Kalabari water spirits are specifically celebrated in a manner that reveres their aquatic environment which they feel shapes the structure of their existence and defines social ranks and lineage bonds. This performance reflects nature and the heroes and ancestors of the people’s culture. Natural features represented in the masks include crocodiles, hippopotamus, sharks, and turtles among others. One could say that the fact that the water spirits are depicted with features of water animals and human features reflects the Kalabari belief in the symbiotic relationship between man and their natural swamp ecosystem.

The Ekine performance highlights the symbiotic relationship between the environment and the human members of the Kalabari ecosystem. It endorses a cultural design that yields to an active scheme of regeneration, reverence and preservation. This cultural complex helps to maintain stability of the flora and fauna of the local habitat. The masked symbols which are gotten from their immediate environment, are a tacit reference to the indispensability of the other elements of the ecosystem in the ultimate survival of the human species.

The second performance tradition we will examine comes from the Bambara people of Mali in West Africa. This masked performance celebrates the flora and vegetation in the people’s yearly cycle of cultivation, planting and harvesting of farm crops. The Bambara form part of the Manding linguistic group which includes the Madinka and the Dyula. The land of the savannah constitutes the primary life-giving resources of the Bambara. Apart from cattle grazing, their main occupation is farming. For the Bambara, farming is the oldest and noblest profession and this world view is significantly reflected in their ritual performance where the earth and its regeneration is highly emphasized. According to Bambara myth, before the dawn of agriculture, people had no limbs and worshiped an omnipotent God. In time this god came down, took root in the ground and became the first of all trees. Men were now made to take shelter under the wonderful lush green tree which had no need for water and which subsequently became the earthly symbol of the Creator-God. The myth goes on to say that Musso Koroni, the Tree’s jealous wife, originated techniques of farming and is thus remembered in their performance that celebrates the life

sustaining attribute of the earth. This reverence of the earth and the environment are found in their initiatory of performances such as the N'domo, the Komo, the Tyi Wara, the Nama and Kore (Brain, 1980). These performance rites are closely related with farming and the seasonal circle. Masks are made to reenact this myth of the inauguration of farming and the quest for harmony in the ecological and cosmic cycle. We can cite an example of one of the masks performances of the Bambara; Faro, to illustrate our point further. Faro performance reenacts the spirit of order which triumphed over primordial lust. He introduced techniques which brought further order to the cosmic chaos. In doing this Faro provided man with a lot of skill with which to interact and conquer his environment. Thus a number of agricultural masked performances are done in order to seek the protection of Faro. This myth and the rites and performance associated with it, form a strong basis for the history and culture of the Bambara. In this performance of the masked groups, the action of Faro in creating ordered agriculture, and an ordered world is symbolically celebrated. Other masked performances that appropriate ecological elements found in Bambara include the Tyi Wara male and female antelope masquerade performance that celebrates the natural fauna of the people and the tree image of the N'domo. In the words of Robert Brain (1980),

From an early stage the Bambara wears masks, perform ceremonies and are subjected to farming duties and a corporate discipline which will continue all their life in one or more of the initiatory associations. The boys farm their ritual fields with special care and the food produced is considered as sacred first fruits, eaten with care and treated as symbols of the earth and of the sun which nourishes (73).

One can say that the centrality of the Faro performance is the Bambara environment which finds relevance in their agricultural cycle. This cycle celebrates the cultivation, planting and harvesting of crops. The symbol of the tree here is a vivid allusion to the life sustaining capacity of the natural vegetation. Like the Kalabari, this performance has derived its source material from the immediate environment of the people and in this, orchestrated the unity of man and his ecosystem as one unique bond

of reciprocity. The land sustains man; hence, man should protect and celebrate the environment.

We shall take our third instance from an African culture group with livestock farming as its mainstay. In Lesotho and among the Xam Bushmen of Southern Cape, there is a ritual enactment which indicates the symbiotic relationship between man and animal. They observe a complex set of rules when hunting animals. In their culture, shooting an animal with a bow and arrow involves a very intimate self-identification between hunter and prey. This relationship manifests vividly in a situation where the hunter deliberately kills an animal he has no use for, say a big animal like an elephant. By killing this animal which had been created by God deliberately, the hunter suffers a temporary pollution and castigation. He feels that God is angered by the act. This 'divine anger' does not measure much in magnitude if he were to kill a small antelope which he and his family will obviously consume. Another ritual enactment shows how more large animals were created from the blood and fat of the one killed in the hunt. This cyclic myth is reenacted all over again to ensure that all animals killed indiscriminately are brought back to life. In the words of Lorna Marshall, (1976) "The Bushmen believe in a complex spiritual force which is associated with birth and death, which affects the weather and links human beings and specific game animals". She lists the animals endowed with this force to include Giraffe, eland, wildebeest, and rhino, among others. Small animal which are often hunted for food and can reproduce in great number do not share in this spiritual essence.

The culture of the Xam of Southern Cape does not kill game for the mere fun of hunting. It is a tradition totally at variance with the modern proclivity to hunt animals for trophy which has in turn engendered the phenomenon of poaching and despoliation of numerous animal species in the ecosystem. The fact that varied species of animals have coexisted with the Xhosa and in fact other indigenous African culture groups until the dawn of colonization from the East and West perhaps, attests to the fact that the indigenous people practiced a culture that fostered the survival and growth of these animals. In addition, the thirst for exotic medicines in South East Asia in recent times has also greatly undermined the animal population of Sub Saharan Africa.

Substitution and Resemblance in Ritual Performance

Having highlighted three African performances that celebrate features of their ecosystem, we shall proceed to examine the process that imbues these performances with efficacy and believability within their environment thus making them tools of ecology regeneration and stability. To begin with, it is important to observe that these performances are ritualized. They are not cast in the mold of the conventional cause-to-effect and dialogue driven Western theatre. The mythos that gives them substance and content resides in the shared environment and commonality of the people. Hence the performances are an organic and integral part of the existence of the community. They employ theatrical elements such as masks, music, dance and mime. They are equally served by an avid and complimentary audience of the natives for whom the performance holds much significance. I have chosen to term the path through which the people experience and relive these performances as the process of substitution and resemblance which is a term derived from the capacity of a symbol to transcend what it may seem to be. The tendency to substitute the ordinary tokens of ritual performance with the collective mythos and cosmic experience which forms the people's way of life orchestrates the ritual as they believe in the efficacy of the 'art' performed. De Young (1999) has studied this pattern of symbolic substitution and resemblance extensively. In his view, the substitution of the performed activity for real environmental elements build interrelationship between the environment and human behavior. To the Western oriented rationalists this often appears vague and in some cases, illogical. Hence Echeruo (1981), questions the efficacy of the Igbo Odo masquerade performance of the Igbos of South East Nigeria as anything beyond the religious, and concludes by classifying traditional Igbo performances such as the kinds we examined in this paper as eco-theatre, "inaccessible" (147). The traditional performance that is our focus here, however, goes beyond the narrow confines of conventional drama of narrative plot and conflict. It yields its own significance not through rigorous denotation and connotation but rather through an effective and experiential channel. Schechner (2006), in explaining this process calls it transportation and transformation (72). Although Schechner's scheme envisions this as an activity that happens on the subconscious level only, I would rather argue that it could also manifest on a conscious level in form of a collective way of doing things. In other words, the subconscious 'possession' of the main participants

could be at the luminal level to use Tuner's (1982) classification, but most certainly at the conscious level for the mass of the people who are the target of the histrionics of the actual ritual act. Horn (1981) distinguishes this as 'spirit possession and spirit mediumship'. The type associated with the performances described in this paper is the latter. It is a possession anchored on one or a few individuals who are seen as mere vessels of communication by the community in a system that redefines, renews and reengages the people collectively with their environment. Elsewhere, this phenomenon has been aptly dubbed environmental psychology by De Young (1999).

These performances are symbolic tokens that reassure the people of continued harmony and growth in the ecosystem. They can perhaps best be understood using Paul Ricoeur's ideal of symbols and resemblance and transference of meaning. In the words of Ricoeur, (2003) the place assigned to symbols among figures of signification is defined specifically by the relationship between the symbolic action or word and the resemblance and their ability to transfer signification from the initial idea to new idea. Ricoeur goes on to posit that pact with resemblance is not just an isolated trait, in the model underlying the theory of metaphors and other symbolic tokens but rather is intimately connected to the primacy of meaning. (204-205). Resemblance operates first between the ideas named by words or deeds (*in this case the indigenous performances*). Subsequently, the theme of resemblance is closely united with those of borrowing, deviation, substitution and selectivity (*the significance of the activity for the people*). Ricoeur concludes that resemblance motivates the borrowing and in the process the positive side of that activity is often highlighted by the process whose negative side is deviation. The positive side to these performances lies in their measured use of natural elements which highlight features of their ecosystem. The essence of these traditional performances will remain obscure if subjected, or approached with parameters that do not take cognizance of their dual and symbolic nature. Their significance will remain elusive if we fail to follow their dramaturgy through, in the process of evolving from what is performed to resembling the known ecological phenomenon imitated and finally to the final phase of substituting the symbolic act for the real and in this way attain a kind of communal awareness. This is a process that has often been tasking for the very rigid critic to comprehend. Below, I shall attempt to advance the

argument that scholars who have found it tasking to comprehend the cosmic efficacy and significance of these indigenous performances have not approached them from the perspective of substitution and resemblance. To appraise this view we must consider whether the conclusion these scholars are trying to force on these eco-friendly performances is indeed a logical one and whether they are being more rational than the African performer who does not strain for such logic.

The fascination that the scientific method has for us makes it easier for us to adopt its scientific form as a paradigm against which to measure the respectability and virtuosity of other modes of thinking and doing things. In the process, there is often the tendency to interpolate concepts, ideas and theories that significantly deviate from the true essence of the reality being defined or confronted. There are a lot of beliefs in traditional societies all over the world that are products of shared cosmic experiences that spans centuries. Perhaps some aspects of these primordial experiences are what Carl Jung highlighted as the collective unconscious. To an outsider who relies only on cognitive reasoning, the true signification of the three performances mentioned in this work may elude him. Equally their character as agents of ecology regeneration and stability may be tasking to comprehend. I shall go further to articulate some of the reasons which perhaps any serious scholar researching into these modes of traditional performances should approach them from the perspective of symbolic inference.

It is no sign of superior intellect that a Western oriented individual for instance, attributes rainfall to physical causes. Such a conclusion is often not as a result of superior scientific logic or great knowledge of meteorological process that leads to rain. He merely accepts what most people in his society believe in, namely that rain is due to natural physical forces. This particular idea formed part of his culture long over the ages and he was born into it. Thus, little more was required of him than sufficient linguistic ability to express it. Likewise, the ritual performer of the Kalabari Ekine or the Faro of the Bambara, who believes that under certain conditions, the rain can be influenced by use of appropriate ritual tokens, cannot then on account of this belief be considered inferior. He did not build up this belief from his own observations and inferences but adopted it in the same way as he adopted the rest of his cultural heritage. He and the individual from the West are

both thinking in patterns of thought provided them by the society in which they live. It would be unrealistic to say that the traditional performer is thinking mystically while the art or literary critic is thinking scientifically. I feel that the system of performance, like that of the Kalabari, the Bambara and the Xam, constitute a coherent universe of discourse like the rationalistic Western vision. They also have a good and intelligent grasp of the concept of reality and clear ways of deciding what beliefs are not in agreement with reality and those that are discernible and those that are not.

It is equally important to distinguish systems of beliefs and practices like that of the Kalabari, the Xam and the Bambara, which are part of the principal foundations of their whole social life and, on the other hand, the beliefs that might be held, and practiced, by persons belonging to the Western culture. For instance, when an African speaks of the supernatural, he does not speak of it from a Western perspective. The supernatural is a commonplace phenomenon in traditional Africa. A day seldom passes without tacit references or invocation of the supernatural. However to the West, such references and invocations may be seen as evidence of backwardness and savagery, while others see it as good pieces for the camera-wielding tourist to take home as evidence of a fitting and appropriate safari in Sub Saharan Africa. The difference here has to do with familiarity. The lack of familiarity with the cultural ethos that informs these African rites and performances coupled with the weight of their culture has tended to lead most Western scholars to discuss these performances as superstitious and irrational. Conversely, it might appear as though there is a good ground for arguing on the superior rationality of Western thought over indigenous African thought in so far as the latter involves what appears as contradiction which it makes no attempt to remove and does not even recognize; one, however, which is recognizable as such in the context of the Western ways of thinking (as Echeruo argues). But the question here is, does African thought on matters such as the ritual performances we described here really involve a contradiction? One would attempt to proffer an answer to this question by citing the views Picton (2002) expressed on masking in Africa.

The mask is for me as for anyone writing in the English language, a word, of course, and an idea and a metaphor, as well as an artifact, of

European culture; and yet even so obvious a thing as the 'mark' embodies taken for granted ideas about Africa and its arts that are informed by presuppositions hidden within the history of the ideas in Europe: the 'mask' is indeed, another of the problems of understanding and explanation that arises as a function of translation. (52).

What Picton tries to argue using masked performance as a model is that the forms in which rationality expresses itself in the culture of a human society cannot be elucidated merely in terms of the logical semantic coherence or according to the rules by which activities are carried out in some other society. It is important that we realize that there also comes a point where we are not even in a position to determine what is and what is not rational and coherent in such a context of rules, without raising questions about the point which following those roles has in the society.

Today, most Africans, still unconsciously yield to the nuances and spirit of the traditional performance. I have witnessed several instances where the spectators of modern day entertainment forms such as regular drama in an auditorium or in a football field are easily distracted and seduced by the subtlest sign of a passing traditional masquerade and its retinue of dancers and drummer. In most cases they (especially the children and adolescents) are willing to follow this traditional performer in its itinerary throughout the community abandoning other social and economic chores to satisfy their primordial desire. Schechner (2006) further lends credence to this phenomenon when he describes it as collective memories encoded into actions that help the people deal with everyday living (52).

I have tried to give this example of the itinerant African masquerade above, to show that for most Africans, even where the possibility of contradiction and lack of efficacy of the supernatural is pointed out to him, does not regard his old belief in the traditional performance as obsolete. They have no theoretical interest in the subject. This suggests strongly that for the native African, the context from which the idea about contradiction is made, the context of the scientific culture is not on the same level as the context in which the beliefs about the supernatural operate. The African notions of the supernatural do not constitute a theoretical system in terms of which Africans try to gain a quasi-scientific understanding of the world around them. This reality suggests

that it is the Western oriented scholars obsessed with analyzing the dynamics of African traditional performance using parameters that would not naturally yield familiar features similar to those found in the West that are guilty of contradictions.

Conclusion

The exigencies of colonization and present day globalization have led most African communities to abandon their traditional performances that appropriated the ecosystem as the defining spine of enactment. In the process they have lost a vital aspect of their culture which Morton (2007) terms “an ecological art” which is the tendency for a performance to produce personal and collective intimacy with the immediate environment. They have rather embraced the Western form of performance which Peter Brook (1980) aptly described as the “rough and the deadly theatre”. This is a theatre that thrives on a parasitic and plastic recreation of reality, with the ecosystem often painted in coloured flats and washed with stage lights and electronic music. Sadly today, some have with some measure of justification written the epitaph of the cultural milieu that created these eco-theatres in African as Brain (1980) evidences,

Economic and social change has caused a real break in cultural continuity in Africa. There has been a steady conversion to Christianity and Islam. Few villages lack a mosque or a church and only rare cases does the old religion flourish as before. More importantly, all over Africa the artist has been forced to turn away from his traditional preoccupations to a new world more and more frequently for tourists. The reasons are economic, rather than religious. The farmer and his wife and children no longer have time to attend long rites, since modern conditions demand that he works to pay taxes and that his children go to school. Ceremonies involving the great African masks often went on for months-nowadays if it exist they last for few days (Introduction).

The picture painted by Brain above runs the gamut of Sub Saharan Africa. However, there are still pockets of communities who have tenaciously held on to their traditional performances. We suggest these

societies should be studied and used as models. This is more so, given the fact that some of our conclusions here are tentative and thus need more research so as to make the performances more in tune with contemporary times while not losing their essence as symbiotic product of man and his ecosystem. One of the way scholars can approach the study of these performances perhaps is to examine them using Levi Strauss (1983) perspective on myth and ritual. Strauss stresses that myth does not explain the phenomenon of the natural and social world, he sees it however, as a precursor of science, not the science of the concrete as he terms it, but the science of the abstract relations (1-33) By the same token the true essence of these performances, lies not only in the fact that they celebrate the ecosystem, but also in highlighting the dualism that exists between man and his natural environment. Thus if one were to look for their social or economic significance one would have to go beyond the facile elements of conventional drama and find their essence in their ability to move the people to culturally-think, act and live in a way that protects the ecosystem.

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