Re/Negotiating Interculturalism: Africa in Caribbean Dance Performances

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Abstract

This paper examines the enduring influence of Africa on African-Caribbean culture and performance traditions, underscoring the need to recognize African-Caribbean culture as a unique cultural manifestation by drawing on Joseph Roach's concept of the *circum-Atlantic*. It attempts to renegotiate intercultural theory, vis-à-vis the cultural exchange between Africa and the Caribbean. At the same time, it examines how African-Caribbean performances challenge the notion of African *authenticity*, while retaining a genealogical link to its African past. It is hoped that the discussion of African dance in a trans-national context would clarify the treatment of the term *intercultural*, particularly ways in which trans-national dispersions of African forms have taken them in new directions. The paper underlines the compelling link between African and African-Caribbean performance aesthetics, but also presents a situation in which notions of *own* and *foreign* are both dispelled in performance. It also attempts to develop Osita Okagbue's vision of a new intercultural critical terminology that will be useful in describing the unique interaction between African and African-Caribbean performance cultures through a proposed notion of *interactional diffusion*.

Introduction

In her book on applied drama, Helen Nicholson recognizes that identity is not "constructed autonomously but in relation to others, through both language and other symbolic codes available in different cultural practices" (Nicholson, 2005: 65). In particular, Nicholson's

allusion to identity as being perceptible through "other symbolic codes" could be seen in the light of Diana Taylor's insistence that the cultural body is central to issues of identity (Taylor: 2003: 86). Identity is central to discussions about interculturalism and has continued to generate heated debates about the appropriateness of engaging with cultural practices recognized as being, in one shape or form, distant from one's own culture (for one such debate, see Barucha 1984a, 1984b and Schechner, 1984). Much of African-Caribbean performance and literature deal with the question of identity, usually through a continuous re/negotiation of the past, vis-à-vis cultural origin, geographic origin and the debilitating experience of trans-Atlantic slavery, in an effort to come to terms with, and make sense of present realities. Among many, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (1970) contains plays such as *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* by the Nobel Laureate, Derek Walcott that illustrates this commitment.

African culture features prominently in this process of continuous search for roots by the Caribbean people in the desire to, perhaps, escape the dehumanising experience of slavery and the persistent feeling of alienation due to their position as unwilling exiles in the land that has now become *home*, whether this is in the Caribbean, America, Europe, or any other part of the world to which erstwhile slaves settled. The desire to get away from the alienation of forced exile instinctively leads to the search for roots in Africa due to its position as the cultural and geographic origin of the African-Caribbean people. It is to the reinforcement of this link with Africa, shared by people of African descent, that pan-Africanism alludes. Robert Chrisman considers the pan-African vision as being hinged on the "basic premise that we the people of African descent throughout the globe constitute a common cultural and political community by virtue of our origin in Africa and our common racial, social and economic oppression" (1973: 2). Pan-Africanism expresses the idea that people of African descent have to unite (symbolically and politically) in order to challenge or overcome their sense of alienation and marginalization. Timothy Murithi considers pan-Africanism as "a recognition of the fragmented nature of the existence of Africans, their marginalization and alienation whether in their own continent or in the Diaspora" (2005: 7). Hence African-Caribbean people look to Africa for a reaffirmation of their identity, and as a means of dealing with their sense of alienation.

Okagbue goes further by suggesting that "the undying memory and presence of Africa in the consciousness of her children in the diaspora is

responsible for the persistent feeling of exile and rootlessness of the African-Caribbean, and that it is a feeling that, very often, is matched by a nostalgic longing to return home to mother Africa" (2001: 150). This longing to return home did not always signify a desire for a physical return to the African continent - the abolition of slavery meant that former *exiles* and their descendants could return physically to Africa, which some have done and continue to do - rather it is most often symbolic of the African-Caribbeans' recognition and commitment to the psychic and cultural connection to Africa. Writing about this pan-African feeling, Rupert Emerson declares;

> [...] all Africans have a spiritual affinity with each other and [a sense]
> that, having suffered together in the past, they must march together into
> a new and brighter future (cited in Kwame Nantambu, 1998: 562).

It is this psychic and cultural connection to Africa that forms the core of what Emerson refers to as "spiritual affinity." However, it is not unusual for physical returnees to Africa to compound their state of alienation and exile, since they in turn become *outsiders* in the context of the local communities that they encounter, often resulting in conflict. For instance, the civil war that ravaged Liberia between 1989 and 2004 started during the regime of Master Sergeant-President Samuel Doe, who was regarded as the first indigenous leader of Liberia, hitherto led by former exiles and returnees from North America.

It is intended that this paper will attempt to re-encode the parameters of intercultural theory in the context of a relation between African and the Caribbean, a problematic relation that becomes legible, in this case, through the practice of dance. In attempting to renegotiate intercultural theory, as it relates to the exchange between Africa and the Caribbean, vis-à-vis dancing techniques and styles, I will examine how African-Caribbean performance practice challenges the notion of African *authenticity*, while at the same time, retaining a genealogical link to its African past. Here, Joseph Roach's conception of *circum-Atlantic interculture* as the culture of modernity created out of what he terms the "diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas" (1996: 4) becomes useful in unpacking this embodied relationship between Africa and the Caribbean. It is hoped that the discussion of African dance in a trans-national context would open up my treatment of the term *intercultural*, particularly ways in which trans-national dispersions of the African forms have taken them in new directions.

Slavery, Survival and Subversion in African-Caribbean Performance

> In the period of Caribbean slavery, visible manifestations of African culture, where powerful forms of African-centered maleness were common, were considered a threat to colonial order and banned. A famous example of this is the silencing of the kalinda drums in Trinidad in 1881, leading to significant riots. If evident African theatricality was considered subversive and prevented, then a more subtle and more easily hidden form of theatricality had to be developed to give slaves and freed slaves an opportunity to practice subversion without discovery (Savory, 1999: 222-223).

Elaine Savory's submission, equally echoed in Yvonne Daniel's *Dancing Wisdom*, illustrates the difficulty experienced by the slaves during the plantation era, especially that of not being at liberty to publicly engage with aspects of the African culture such as ritual worship, which the slaves were familiar with, and from which they could derive a sense of identity.

African rituals were considered subversive because they not only reinforced a sense of dignity and identity in the slaves, but were means of articulating the unveiled cruelty of slavery to the ancestors, soliciting their comfort and intervention. Often, as in most traditional African communities, these rituals would lead to a state of super-physical intervention during which answers could come in the guise of a satirical performance, animatedly addressing the issues and stipulating a change. Super-physical intervention is used here to describe the bodily manifestation of spirit possession as witnessed in rituals such as the *bori* of the Hausa-Fulani people of northern Nigeria. A prominent feature of *bori* performance is spirit possession or entrancement. It is essentially a ritual of healing and an instrument of redress for an often marginalized Hausa female population in a patriarchal society. The outcome of these rituals was considered seditious and as a result ritual worship among the slaves was frowned upon and often punished, resulting in the tradition being driven underground. Alternatively, slave owners compelled their slaves to adopt the Christian religion with the hope of extinguishing interest in African ritual practices. Of this venture, Taylor observes, "indigenous performances, paradoxically, seem to be transferred and reproduced within the very symbolic system designed to eliminate them: Roman Catholicism" (Taylor: 2003: 44). Since the African slaves were *converted* and permitted to participate in Christian religious worship, they managed to perpetuate some of the African rituals with the guise of Christianity.

Religious affiliations in the Caribbean follow a pattern similar to the distribution of colonial languages in the region. Catholicism is predominant in the Spanish and French Caribbean, while Protestantism is dominant in the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Dutch territories. The influence of African religious worship on Christianity is particularly evident in Catholicism because of its devotion to numerous patron saints and their images. This development is aptly expounded in Gerardo Mosquera's study on the impact of the African culture in Latin America.

> Afro-American development was affected by colonial Catholicism, always ready to repress any creation of "idols." Ritual objects had to be disguised, and Catholic imagery was appropriated through syncretic representations of its saints and Virgins, who were then associated with the Yoruba and Ewe-Fon pantheons, a development coherent with the undercover polytheism of the devotion to Mary and the saints….it was obvious that if Saint Barbara was dressed in red, carried a weapon, and was associated with thunder, she must be Shango, the virile Yoruba god of thunder. The sexual contradiction was explained by saying that Shango was the "male Santa Barbara" (Mosquera, 1992: 32).

The African slaves needed a discreet but effective tool through which subversion could be carried out. The choice of dance as a viable medium of subversion during the slave era is perhaps not unconnected to the issue of deliberate dispersal of the slaves from same language groups. More directly, it relates to the role of dance, according to Taylor, as "embodied cultural memory," (2003: 86) possessing the capacity to generate and sustain communication at a different level to speech. To avoid detection and attendant retribution, dance gained ascendancy among the slaves as a medium of self-expression due to the perceived inability of these African slaves to communicate orally with each other in any language other than that of the colonial slave masters.

Since the masters exercised control over the spoken language, the slaves saw in dance the possibility for open subversion without the attendant risk of discovery and punishment. "African music, songs, and dances, on the other hand, were considered tolerable and even desirable entertainment, thus permitting the expansion of an activity that deeply affected both the ritual and the profane" (Mosquera, 1992: 32). Correspondingly, in her analysis of the historical precedent to black theatre in the New World, Genevieve Fabre comments on the seditious role of dance during the slave era, noting that white slave owners were derided in dances that seemed to praise or entertain them.

> Slaves were thus able to express their dissatisfaction and unhappiness without risking punishment for their insolence…Their rhyming form and accompanying melodies made the lampoons easy to remember, and they passed easily into popular wisdom. Dance and mime also played important roles; using precise gestures and minimum of direction, the performances took on the appearance of a show (1983: 4).

Dance, therefore, served as a powerful tool with which the slaves were able to keep in touch with their roots and through which subversion could be carried out under the watchful eyes of the slave masters without detection.

Savory also views masks in African culture "as a series of codes signifying multiple levels of the personality" (1999: 222), which she claims make it a powerful tool for subversion. That masking in Africa is connotative of multiple levels of personality and existence is apparent. In most instances, the donning of an African mask by a performer signifies the presence of an ancestral spirit which possesses the body of the masked individual, thus revealing a transitory self, separate from the performer, which uses the performer's body to make contact with the community. This view is supported by Carol Finley's observation that, "the purpose of the mask is not only to conceal the identity of the wearer. The mask actually creates a new identity – one from the spirit world"(1999: 13). It is however misleading to construe African masks as being used mainly for subversion.

Understandably, Savory's perception of the art of masking is ostensibly derived from western practices where masks are used as instruments of subversion and disguise, as opposed to the African tradition where masks are used, in Finley's words, "primarily for religious and ritual purposes that have no parallel in European-based societies" (1999: 61). In African performances involving the use of masks, it is not necessarily the masks that are subversive rather it is the performance itself. Masking in Africa is a medium through which the spirit-performer intervenes or carries out his role in the community. Based on his study of the *Igede* masquerade of the Benue people of Nigeria, Robert W. Nicholls writes that "as receptacle for supernatural forces, the mask invests the ceremony with ancestral authority" (1984: 70). In other words, the mask connotes authority or gives credence to what is being performed, but is not subversive in itself in African culture because, once you create a mask, the character or personality represented by that mask is invariably elevated to the position of an ancestor or god with vast authority over the living.

Re/Negotiating Interculturalism

Interface can be described as a medium of interaction, which in relation to the slave era would mean sets of instructions and arrangements relied on by indigenous West Indian populations of slaves, indentured workers and plantation owners to enable them to coexist. In this respect, interface would refer to a common language, institution, or institutional practice through which they could all relate. I am however disposed, on the other hand, to an exploration of interface as a verb. In which case, interface serves as an indicator of the actual interaction that takes place or exists between the cultures represented by these groups and the resultant aesthetic it generates. Even though African-Caribbean culture has its roots in Africa, its *forced* interaction with other cultures has invariably led to the emergence of a new cultural aesthetic. However, it is important to note that despite being a synthesis of African, Indigenous West Indian and European cultures, the African-Caribbean culture is a distinct culture in its own rights. To this end, I find Roach's notion of *circum-Atlantic interculture* useful to the discussion that I am set to unfold. Roach argues that this interculture, as he puts it, derives from the diversity of cultural contributions that shapes it. He goes on to affirm that "the scope of the circum-Atlantic interculture may be discerned most vividly by means of performance that it engendered" (Roach, 1996: 5). Continuing, Roach observes that this is true because "performances so often carry within them the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions - those that were rejected and, even more invisibly, those that have succeeded" (1996: 5).

Despite my classification of the African-Caribbean culture as a unique cultural manifestation, it is nonetheless problematic to speak of the *own* and *foreign* in relation to African and African-Caribbean performance practices. Surrounding the notions of own and foreign is that seemingly pervasive theory of interculturalism, which has come to represent a variety of things to different people as is evident in its disparate use and application in scholarship and artistic endeavours. For instance, performance theorist Richard Schechner is readily associated with the neo-liberalist perspective of interculturalism in which scholars and artists alike are presented with endless possibilities in their journey across national, international, and cultural boundaries, towards the elimination of cultural differences and the emergence of a global culture (See Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996: 9). On the other end of the continuum are yet other performance theorists' such as Rustom Bharucha, who

believes that Schechner's approach to interculturalism is flawed because it does not take indigenous contexts and the intricacies of contributory cultures adequately into account (See Barucha, 1984a: 220).

Since interculturalism is rooted in the notions of own and foreign, or *self* and *other*, it is susceptible to charges of ethnocentrism or oversimplification. An individual's perception and the appropriation of cultural materials belonging to the other can be fraught with personal or cultural prejudices such that this other culture is disadvantaged. Even where interculturalism is based on notions of the universality of performance, which presupposes the dissolution of boundaries between aspects of own and foreign as Richard Schechner would suggest, the danger still exists of surreptitious imposition of own canons on the foreign so that the own is privileged above the other even without seeming or intending to do so. This is the scenario painted by Gerardo Mosquera in which interculturally sensitive artists "slightly 'de-westernize' western culture – understood as the international culture of the contemporary world – by molding it according to non-western views, sensitivities, and contents" (1992: 35). A case in point is Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* which is typical of the form of interculturalism in which eastern cultures and traditions are appropriated and de-contextualized, with western performance culture and tradition being privileged upon it.

Interculturalism is usually evocative of the appropriation of non-western cultures by scholars and artists from the West. On the other hand, transculturation, a term devised by the Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, in 1940 is suggestive of the "transformative process undergone by a society in the acquisition of foreign cultural material – the loss or displacement of a society's culture due to the acquisition or imposition of foreign material, and the fusion of the indigenous and the foreign to create a new, original cultural product" (Taylor, 1991: 61). Apart from the transformation implied in the imposing of western cultures through colonisation, global media and commodities export have also impacted on non-western cultures to such an extent that various local cultures are now under considerable threats of extinction. This trend is aptly summed up in Weber's account of the impact of transculturation on non-western cultures.

> The trend labelled "transculturation" has, indeed, pervaded on a global scale through the media. "Western," which in this context means European or North American ideology, its values, structure, and contents are inscribed in the predominant models for performance accepted by most contemporary societies, models that partly ingest,

partly destroy indigenous cultural values and forms. Indeed, non-Western cultures have already been greatly changed by the process, as can be observed in many Asian and African nations… Or, to put it in historical perspective, a second colonization of the so-called third world (1991: 28).

The thrust of Weber's arguments seems to suggest that even though they are often used interchangeably by scholars like him, transculturation is intrinsically different from interculturalism. This is because interculturalism is to all intents and purposes, a western phenomenon, involving the artistic negotiation of cultural boundaries with the aim of producing a predominantly western cultural artefact mediated by eastern/ African cultures. And in performance, it is to this form of interculturalism, in which aspects of eastern/ African cultures are fused with western performance tradition that Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* lends itself. This is unlike what happens when African and African-Caribbean dances are fused together in performance. The attendant *borrowing* across these two related cultures does not evoke the same sentiments as intercultural borrowings and appropriations between the West and Africa because the notion of the circum-Atlantic interculture to which African-Caribbean performance lends itself. Circum-Atlantic interculture is akin to transculturation to the extent that they both refer to transformative encounters with foreign cultures. However, I find circum-Atlantic interculture more apt in describing the African-Caribbean culture because, unlike transculturation, it is "region-centered" (Roach, 1996: 5) and specific.

Taylor notes that transculturation, "affects the entire culture; it involves the shifting of socio-political, not just aesthetic, borders; it modifies collective and individual identity; it changes discourse, both verbal and symbolic" (1991: 60). Consequently, transculturation does not only imply the interaction of opposite cultures, but simultaneously denotes the product of that interface. Colonization in Africa, for instance, has produced local cultures that are not the same as indigenous ones, but which are at the same time, different from western or colonial cultures. These local cultures are usually the result of a direct imposition of western culture on eastern/ African indigenous cultures through colonization and in more recent times, through globalization by means of the ever-increasing western films and commodities exports and the advancement of Euro-American forms of democracy. This goes to show that theatrical hybrids such as Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* cannot be described as trans-cultural, contrary to Weber submission that "any

'trans-cultural' experiment will be traded as a device that employs exotic ingredients to make the product more palatable, i.e., marketable" (1991: 29). By attempting to draw a distinction between *inter* versus *trans*-cultural flows of culture, I wish to bring attention to the ways in which much dance and theatre scholarship has erroneously attributed the word *intercultural* to works that fail to fully interrogate each cultural form represented in a play or dance.

Transculturation is to Africa what interculturalism is to the West. In other words, transcultural performances occur within the context of eastern/ African cultures, where the imposition of western theatrical conventions are not necessarily seen as oppositional to the local cultures because of the transformative impact of colonization and globalization (or more appropriately westernization) on indigenous traditions. Intercultural performance, on the other hand, is selective of the foreign elements it draws on and the degree to which they are used, making sure it only incorporates or appropriates those aspects of the eastern/African culture that will enhance its western perspective. As it stands, interculturalism does not seem adequate as a theory for exploring the sort of interaction that takes place between African and African-Caribbean cultures'. This is the subject of Okagbue's thesis on intercultural exchange between African and Caribbean theatre, in which he argues that Euro-American intercultural theatre presupposes an interpretation of the foreign for own audiences or an outright appropriation of aspects of the foreign for the enhancement of the own. He advocates instead for a new intercultural critical terminology in describing the unique form of intercultural exchange between Africa and the Caribbean (See Okagbue, 1997: 120-129). In trying to extend Okagbue's vision of a new intercultural critical terminology that will best describe the cultural exchange between Africa and African-Caribbean performance traditions, I wish to propose *interactional diffusion* based on Roach's notion of circum-Atlantic interculture.

Interactional diffusion recognizes the negotiation across cultures that are deeply related to each other. Invariably, interactional diffusion supposes the intermingling of performance elements from various cultural sources based on a mutual interface. The areas of mutual interface can be determined on the basis of a shared commitment to specific forms and content or performance technique found in contributory cultures which makes it difficult to distinguish between the own and the foreign. As I have previously noted, one of the hallmarks of the phenomenon I refer to as interactional diffusion is the manifestation

of a new cultural reality. The evolved culture is thus *not the same* as those cultures from which it is derived. In essence, cultures that evolve through this process of interactional diffusion can be seen as being liminal cultures; that is, they do not conform perfectly to or belong entirely to the own cultures. Roach aptly contextualize observations made by the British-born American architect, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, about the product of this circum-Atlantic performance culture.

> What he had seen and heard was a convergence of dance and musical forms, clustered feats of daring and invention, which were deeply indebted to Africa yet no longer of it - living proofs of its impermanence and unforgettability. They emerged from the margins of circum-Atlantic performance culture, from "in back of the town," a displaced transmission, rising, phoenix-like, from the ashes of diaspora and genocide on wings of song (Roach, 1996: 66).

In essence, circum-Atlantic performance culture, what I refer to as evolved culture, is not liminal in the sense of being evanescent or fleeting, rather its liminal nature is as a result of its inherently unique quality which places it in perspective as being neither entirely true to its dominant root cultures nor too distant from the same. It is, therefore, not surprising to find African performance artists, choreographers, and directors who are adept at incorporating dance movements from African-Caribbean culture because of their acquiescent characteristics that makes it possible to do so without prejudicing any in favour of the other. An example is *Emi Ijo* (*The Heart of Dance*) - written by Olu Taiwo, choreographed and produced by Peter Badejo in July 2000 - which makes use of *kumina* dance from Jamaica to tell the story of the migration of black people to Britain from Africa and the Caribbean.

In *Emi Ijo*, *kumina* dance was used effectively to represent the worship and influence of *Olokun*, the Yoruba goddess of the sea on the migrant blacks who were transported to Britain aboard ships. The *kumina* dance was able to fill this role because it presents elements of spirit-possession or trance, in which the dancer's movements are dictated by drumming. Some of the most common movement variations in the *kumina* are intermittent dips, spins, swings, and stops which lend to its trance-inducing character. *Kumina* dance is usually associated with funerals, but is generally performed as a social dance. There are two types of *kumina*. These are *bailo*, which is a public performance with little or no spiritual undertone, and *country*, which is highly spiritual and involves a more serious form of possession. In its entirety, the movements involved in the

execution of the dance establish it as analogous to indigenous African dance forms. Writing in *Jamaica Gleaner*, Kesi Asher observes that *kumina* features, "a steady, but often subtle, forward-thrusting of the hip with the rib cage and arms moving against the hip, followed by wild spins and sudden breaks, signalled by the lead drum" (2005).

The *kumina* is typical of most African dance forms in its adoption of a flat-footed inching or shuffling of the feet. In it, the dancer's body vibrates in circular motions utilizing a forward thrusting of the pelvis. The torso and shoulders also rotate in cyclic motions, with the arms either bent at the elbow and held close to the body, or slightly extended. The arms, shoulders, rib cage, and hips are involved, offering the dancers ample opportunity for variations and interpretation of the associated polyrhythmic drumming. Because *kumina* is a spiritual dance in which the tempo of the movements is dictated by drumming, dancers often move in a cyclical pattern around the drummers and musicians, and are propelled forward by the action of the feet which inches along the ground with the toes as I already indicated. These are some of the qualities that lend African-Caribbean dance to the sort of *intercultural* exchange with African performance culture that I refer to as interactional diffusion. Bearing in mind my definition of interactional diffusion as the form of interface that recognizes the negotiation across cultures that are deeply related to each other, it is possible to see, as I have already indicated, why African artists, such as Peter Badejo, would invoke African-Caribbean dances in their productions without considering them foreign.

African dance in trans-national context

Evidently, African culture survived among the Caribbean people of African origin despite the enduring and methodical acculturation process which the Africa slaves endured. This thesis is expressed by most writers in Caribbean theatre and literature, who opine that Africa is vividly entrenched in the consciousness of the African-Caribbean people and that this is the basis for the continued retention and manifestation of their African cultural heritage (See Gaffney, 1979; Obiechina, 1986; Okagbue, 2004; and Savory, 1999). It is from this theoretical standpoint that one begins to come to terms with the complicated life of the African-Caribbean person, who has to continually negotiate his/her identity against the backdrop of slavery and forced interaction with other cultures. Most theses on African-Caribbean literature and theatre which deal with issues of identity, consider the existence of an interface as constituting a medium of interaction through which the incoming African

slaves, indentured Asian labour, indigenous West Indians and European plantation owners relate in order to co-exist and comprehend each other.

In the first instance, the slaves were confronted with the situation where they could not effectively engage verbally with other slaves who were brought in from the various ethnic nationalities in Africa. A situation aptly captured in Okagbue's observation that, "Africans speaking related, though not always mutually intelligible, languages of the Niger-Congo family were taken as slaves to the Caribbean and the Americas" (1996: 341). This is further compounded by the fact that punitive measures were also put in place to discourage any form of communication in African languages among slaves who might be able to speak the same language. This approach resulted in the creation of a *babel* society due to the inability of the various ethnic nationalities from Africa to speak the same language, therefore, making it necessary for them to learn colonial languages in order to re-establish communication. Even in hypothetical situations where slaves from a specific ethnic group were isolated on a plantation, the nature of their existence, coupled with the negotiation and affirmation of identities between the interfacing cultures in the slave era dictated the language spoken. This is because of the vital nature of language since it occupies a position of crucial importance in the organization of wealth and power in the society. Consequently, negotiations had to take place in the language of the slave masters and colonialists, and this perhaps accounts for why no African language survives or is spoken in the West Indies today. In fact, some African names and words still survive in the Caribbean today, but that is all they are - isolated words and names, some of which do not necessarily convey their full or original meanings. For instance, some Congolese words can be found in songs used for *Kumina* dance in Jamaica.

As I previously indicated, African cultures survived slavery in spite of acculturation and colonial resistance but these factors or circum-Atlantic influences, have invariably led to the emergence of Creole languages in the New World. Writing about the development of Creole languages, Gilbert and Tompkins point out that despite being based primarily on the vocabulary of European languages, "Creole and Pidgin languages also maintain significant pre-contact elements, particularly in their phonology, syntax, and lexico-semantic structures" (1996: 185). Gilbert and Tompkins' remark underline Okagbue's (1996) observation when he discusses the perceptible connection between Caribbean Creole languages and Nigerian Pidgin English. The "pre-contact elements" in Creole languages emphasize their subversive nature, helping to distort

imperial languages by subjecting them to the linguistic dictates of *other* languages. This notion is also expressed by Gilbert and Tompkins, who state that "the use of variant Englishes offers one effective means of refusing to uphold the privilege of the imperial language as it has dominated both the theatre and the wider social realm"(1996: 177). By privileging the foundational patterns of African languages over European languages of colonization, Caribbean Creole languages clearly identify with Africa without failing to acknowledge its *non-African* influences.

Gaffney's position that a "tendency in Latin and South America for slave dealers to keep African national and kinship groups together makes it somewhat easier to identify various African people who have been assimilated into those peculiar cultures"(1979: 100) is at odds with the situation described by Okagbue. Gaffney's remark appears to be built on a hypothetical situation such as I alluded to previously. This is because language is recognized as one of the "most basic markers of colonial authority" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996: 177). Morgan Dalphinis points out that African languages were "suppressed through a system of dividing speakers of the same languages, to make slave revolts more difficult, and a related system of punishments for using African languages including death, the whip, the chain-gang etc" (cited in Okagbue, 1996: 341). It seems more likely that what Gaffney refers to as kinship groups were in fact people belonging to similar language families such as the Niger-Congo as noted by Okagbue. It is equally imperative to note that other cultural rudiments survived slavery in the form of rituals, dances, songs, drumming and even a degree of culinary knowledge.

Theories of the deliberate distribution of African slaves in the Caribbean such that same language speakers were not allowed contact also informs Kole Omotoso's account of the evolution of the African-Caribbean culture.

> During this same period we need to remember that the slaves who were of African descent were attempting to put together from the multiplicity of their cultural backgrounds a new and unique "African" cultural manifestation. They were dancing to the rhythm of different drums from different tribal backgrounds. They were comparing stories and picking out of these what was most appropriate to their new situation, building up rituals, myths and folk tales with which they would tackle the new problems posed to them by plantation enslavement (1982: 15).

Perhaps it is the localization of specific African-derived practices in various African-Caribbean communities that inform Gaffney's remark

that national and kinship groups were kept together during slavery. John Mason notes, for instance, that "certain West African ethnic ideologies attained hegemony in places like Cuba, Haiti, and Bahia" (c2000: 5) due to the significant number of latter arrivals to the Caribbean from that part of Africa. Mason's theory shows how we can account for why certain performance practices are sustained in particular areas in the Caribbean. An example is *kumina* dance which is prevalent in St. Thomas, St. Mary, St. Catherine, St. Andrew, Portland and Kingston areas of Jamaica, and features Congolese (Bantu) words in some of its songs. The localization of this dance in these areas, coupled with the attendant retention of Bantu language influences, illustrate the predominance of Bantu-speaking peoples in those places.

Apart from an identifiable Yoruba presence in places like Brazil, Cuba, and Trinidad, it is often difficult to distinguish specific ethnic practices from Africa. Despite the fact that African languages did not survive in the West Indian society, Patois was evolved as a language of subversion with similar phraseology to the ones found in postcolonial African societies. Okagbue apparently recognizes this similarity when he indicates that the African-Caribbean lingo left him "fascinated by the strange yet familiar rhythm and resonance of its dialect which seemed an exotic version of the Pidgin English of my Nigerian Society" (1996: 339).

As I have begun to show, despite the demise of African languages and attendant radical acculturation, it was not possible to completely erode the African culture from the minds of the African slaves and their descendants. Certain African performance practices and forms survived this unpleasant transplantation and retained aspects of their dominant features. These features are most prominent in African-Caribbean dance expressions and include the following: the knees are bent at an angle with the body leaning slightly forward at the hips. This helps lower the dancer's centre of gravity away from his/her pelvis and extended to the front. There is a general tendency to dance on the flat of the feet as opposed to arched feet or pointed toes, thus the dancer's feet make full contact with the ground. Body isolation is another feature in which various parts of a dancer's body, such as the head, shoulders, arms, pelvis and feet are often isolated in movement. However, the reality and harshness of slavery has meant that some of the African dances that survive in the Caribbean have undergone some degree of transformation in order to be relevant in their new environment and continue to exist. Most of these dances offer a condensed synthesis of both African and European cultural aesthetics, coupled with influences from aboriginal

and other cultures found in the West Indies during the slave era and beyond. However, this sort of circum-Atlantic interculture could also lead to a distortion of the mythical implication and long-held beliefs central to African performances in their indigenous contexts.

A good example of such distortion is the *bata* dance as it is practiced today by the Afro-Cuban people of Central America. The *bata* which is the national dance of the Yoruba people was ostensibly passed on to the Afro-Cuban people from their forebears who were slaves taken from the West African port of Badagary. The *bata* dance was used primarily in Sango worship, and incorporates movements that are representative of Sango's temperament and mythical personality. Most prominent of these features are the sharp, angular and jerky arm and shoulder movement, and the shuffling and darting movement of the legs. In the Afro-Cuban version, the arm and shoulder movement which is symbolic of Sango's personality as the god of thunder and lightening is noticeably absent but the leg movement and body posture remain the same. The loss of this vital feature of the angular and jerky arm and shoulder movement in the Afro-Cuban *bata* that I suggest, distorts the mythical implication of the *bata* dance held by the Yoruba people. Some of the dances that originated from Africa and are found in the Caribbean today, have their origins in ancestral worship but were later transformed into avenues for subversion and resistance during slavery. This explains the presence of some necessary distortions or changes to gestures and movements, which are vital to the sustenance of these dances in their new environment.

Other African-Caribbean dances that retain an overwhelming imprint of Africa include the *dinki-mini* commonly found in Jamaica and the *tambú* from Curacao. *Dinki-mini* dance is usually performed during the lying in-state for the dead and is normally performed to enliven the family of the dead person. The movements focus on the pelvis which the dancers rotate energetically as a sign of defiance to death and a reaffirmation of their ability to reproduce. Similarly, the most prominent movements in the *tambú* originate from the pelvis, with the buttocks performing a continuous rolling, jerking or swaying action. This movement of the buttocks is accentuated by the adoption of the bent-knee position and stomping of the dancer's feet, which I have previously described as specific features of most African dances.

In exploring African dance in transnational context, perhaps, one of the most interesting products of circum-Atlantic interculture which continues to challenge the notion of an African *authenticity* while, simultaneously retaining a genealogical link to its African past is the

samba. Unlike the dance forms I mentioned earlier as retaining dominant indigenous African dance characteristics, the circum-Atlantic impact on the *samba* is such that it appears indigenous to Brazil, but with distinct African and European elements. Barbara Browning (1995) attests to the circum-Atlantic performance culture represented by *samba*, a point reiterated by Yvonne Daniel:

> Even without a wealth of literature to prove how traditions were carried forth, many native, European, and African dance/music traditions continued, as well as surfaced, in new "Brazilian" forms. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, social dance forms appeared that were primarily influenced by the experience of Europeans and Africans in the Americas (2005: 145).

Samba's newness does not necessarily enact what Roach implies as a kind of surrogation or conceptual erasure of indigenous forms (1996: 4), instead it opens up his treatment of the term circum-Atlantic interculture and, in particular, ways in which transnational dispersions of Brazilian, African and European forms have taken them in new directions.

Through its process of circum-Atlantic evolution, *samba* emerged as dance where, as Daniel puts it, "African creativity was applied to European music and dance structure" (2005: 109). Also, s*amba* developed as a form that took on European floor patterns and very ostensible upright body orientation of performers (see Daniel, 2005: 109). Even though *samba* is recognized as originating from a fusion of African, European and Brazilian elements, some of the postures adopted by dancers in the execution of the dance place it outside the scope of most African dance forms. Otherwise, as Daniel clarifies, dances such as the *samba* often manifest as "European courtly forms, although with definite African elements" (2005: 122).

It was, perhaps, in an attempt to recuperate African elements in the *samba* and bring it to the fore that the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) showcased a one-off special on African dance that was broadcast on BBC One on 9 July 2005 as part of the BBC's Africa Lives season. Each of the six celebrities of African and Caribbean origin were assigned to African dance troupes for training, before performing live on television. They were Tessa Sanderson who performed the *gome* dance from Ghana, Tupele Dorgu did the *koroso* dance of Northern Nigeria, and Antonia Okonma danced the *kuku* from Senegal. Others were Tunde Baiyewu who danced the *bata* from Nigeria, Robbie Earle, Zulu warrior dance of South Africa, and Louis Emerick with the *adzogbo* dance from Ghana. They had

to learn the cultural significance of the dances in the African communities from which they originate, and how to embody the dances; as a result each celebrity travelled to the African continent in order to experience these cultures and inquire about the origins of the dances. Essentially, each performer wanted to preserve the indigenous content of their chosen dance form, thus, they went to Africa to see and learn firsthand, how the dances are done within their indigenous settings.

BBC's production of *Strictly African Dancing* also featured a *samba* performance by professional dancers, Darren Bennett and Lilia Kopylova which they described as *African samba,* derived from West Africa dance. It is important to note that, in *samba*, some of the rudimentary features of African dance, vis-à-vis body postures, are overwhelmed by European and native Latin American movement aesthetics. For instance, the BBC's attempt to *recover* African elements of the *samba* was based on their belief that African *samba* involves a side to side movement with the chest pushed in, coupled with *dancing barefooted*. The Latin *samba,* on the other hand, would involve a back and forth movement, chest pushed out and high heels worn by the female dancer. However, the BBC programme team which had the London-based Nigerian choreographer, Peter Badejo as one of their expert judges, did not succeed in addressing the upright body posture in *samba* even though they linked the *samba* to a West African dancer performing an undulation dance movement in the classic bent knee position that has come to be associated with African dance.

Some features of the *samba* emphasize its European, rather than African, influence within the circum-Atlantic interculture it represents, and as a result, seem to situate it within a western dance paradigm. Despite this, the way movements are constructed in the *samba* helps to emphasize parts of the body in a way that is reminiscent of body isolation in African dance. The side to side movement of the pelvis occurs naturally as the weight of the body is transferred from one foot to the other. The isolated and increased roll of the pelvis is achieved by turning the feet out in a "V" shape with the heels coming close together, and then as one leg is straightened to carry the body weight, the other bends toward the straightened leg. While this is being done, the torso is held steady thus emphasizing the sideways swing of the waist. In essence, the dancers maintain an erect upper body as they dance, while the male dancer keeps a firm forward pressure on his partner. Both dancers also maintain sustained tension in their arms, while executing sharp angular movement with their arms. However, a key feature of African dance that has been diffused in the *samba* is the need to maintain a supple and

slightly relaxed posture, knees bent, feet placed slightly apart and planted firmly on the floor. The balance that the body attains in this position makes it easier to isolate the pelvis region thus producing variable movements of the waist, without it seeming to be stiff and angular.

The movement of the legs in the performance of the African *samba* is in such a way that the dancers take their first back step by pointing their toes and then transferring onto the balls of their feet, and finally resting the body weight on the leg as the heel is lowered and makes contact with the floor. Again, there is no overt attempt to bend the knees, instead as the dancers move their body weight from one leg to the other, the leg that is not carrying the body readily bends at the knee as the heel of the foot is raised with the toes pointing forward. In other words, the body weight is not completely diffused throughout the body, instead the body is pivoted in such a way that it runs through the foot that is on the ground, hence whenever one leg is bent, the other straightens to take the weight of the body. The fact that these dancers, in executing the African *samba,* start by pointing the toes and transferring to the balls of the feet immediately reveals another feature that emphasizes *samba's* European influence. African dances do not often incorporate points, instead the soles of the feet are used to make contact with the floor. Also, basic position in most African dances requires the dancer to maintain a bent knee position, with the body leaning slightly forward. This gives the impression of moving towards the floor and working with gravity, rather than moving away from it and trying to overcome it. Highlighting aspects of *samba's* performance aesthetic is useful in discerning the profound impact of circum-Atlantic interculture on this particular dance form. While it is true that African dance and culture contributed in shaping *samba*, it does not encourage the same kind of unmitigated borrowing possible with other African-Caribbean and African dance forms to which I have ascribed the term, interactional diffusion. Such borrowing, where it exists, often raises the issue of the own and foreign to some extent as a result of postures in *samba* which gives it the appearance of European court dance.

Conclusion

Starting with an exploration of the influence of African culture on African-Caribbean culture, I have argued that the African-Caribbean culture is a unique cultural manifestation which I have described as an evolved culture. There are obvious parallels that exist between African and African-Caribbean performance aesthetics which serves to indicate and uphold their shared identity and history. Both African and African-

Caribbean performances endorse the importance of form as well as content in the articulation of their world view. This is where the nostalgic longing and recognition of Africa as land of the forebears comes in as the dynamic incentive for the African-Caribbean to engage with those residual aesthetics that connect them to their African past.

I have also attempted to develop Okagbue's vision of a new intercultural critical terminology in describing the interaction between African and African-Caribbean performance cultures through the notion of interactional diffusion, which I have derived from Roach's notion of circum-Atlantic interculture. Although the examples used are of an African cultural aesthetic, I suggest that the proposed concept of interactional diffusion be tested against similar borrowings across deeply related cultures. Even though I have argued that Badejo's *Emi Ijo* in which he incorporates *kumina* dance from Jamaica, not only underlines the compelling link between African and African-Caribbean performance aesthetics, but also presents a situation in which notions of own and foreign are dispelled in performance; because of the *samba's* European appearance these notions are brought to the fore, despite its African influence.

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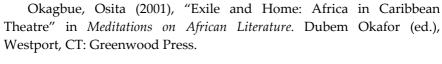
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