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## Form and Identity of Mohammed Ben Abdallah's the Fall of Kumbi

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**Abstract:**

*Drama is artistic when it depicts life. Drama deals with mans' everyday experiences to draw material for the playwright who is above all else as a member of the particular society. The playwright absorbs the culture of his immediate environment, takes in the language of the people, and observes the environment to discover the idiosyncrasies so as to reproduce them in his writings, especially in a format that connects with the aesthetics and social values of his audience. There is therefore the need to seek expressions that have the impetus of serving as the catalyst for identity and uniqueness which is peculiar and portrays the African in their performance arts and acts and mode of presentation. Mohammed Ben Abdallah is one such Ghanaian playwright who has tried to develop a unique dramatic technique called Abibigro that addresses both aesthetic and social yearnings of the Ghanaian and Africa for that matter. This paper attempts a cursory look at identifying and examining the dramatic form of Mohammed Ben Abdallah in his play "The Fall of Kumbi". It is demonstrated in the paper how the playwright uses the Abibigro technique to plunge his audiences into total African Theatre. The paper concludes on Abdallah as playwright and the influences that underpin his writings and what makes him a modern dramatist.*

**Keywords:** Form, identity, Abibigro, playwright, Abdallah, Kumbi

### 1. Introduction

A critical observation of the theatrical scene in Africa and especially Ghana, one may be struck by its varied complex form and pristine didactic concerns it carries to its audience. Considering that, the varied across African traditional rituals, festivals, ceremonies and among others are all theatrical in nature. These performances as it were telling the story and experiences of the people with the settings, costumes, properties and other adornments that are aesthetically artistic. Theatre permeates all facets and the various performance acts and arts of the African life. It gives the African a sense of belonging and unity which in turn provides an identity and pride. Arnold in his view asserted that, theatre is predominantly one essential part of human expression in almost all cultures (Arnold, 2004). However, with the invasion of the Westerners in Africa, traditional performance acts and arts which were theatrical in nature were somehow, relegated to the background and branded with names such as barbaric, fetish, sensual among many others. This attack on the African performance acts weakened the foundations of the arts and in effect the African identity was shirked.

Consequently, the wakeup calls for nationalistic forms of theatre across the African continent at independence or post-colonial era required of the African to take a critical stance to identify, explore and investigate and come out with the creation and development of the traditional performance arts in terms of the mode of presentation and staging into a kind of theatrical performance that is relevant to his society and will stand the test of time. Hitherto, the African perception of theatre in general was evident at the mission schools where simple Christian religious stories were dramatized and European nursery rhymes and folksongs recited. Again, at the secondary and colleges, set books for literature studies were put up under the direction of the teacher. Therefore, the African child knew nothing of theatre apart from his imitation of medieval and Elizabethan theatres.

In the light of the above, Ghanaian playwright and dramatist by name Efua Sutherland exemplified this in her concept of form in the creation of Anansegoro, which largely influenced many contemporary writers such as Yaw Asare, Martin Owusu, Efo Kodjo Mawugbe, Asiedu Yirenkyi, Joe Degraft among many others. These contemporaries who were all playwrights and dramatists asserted themselves in the creating of an identity in the theatre scene in Ghana. Apart from the contributions of

these personalities and their works, there was the deliberate attempt in the creation of a theatrical form in the direction reflecting perhaps their existence and being.

Notwithstanding the above, Abdallah (2008) contended that it was time for African playwrights to set their own standards richly drawing from their own cultural heritage, our rituals, our history and the totality of the African experience to create the criteria for judging our own work. Abdallah agreed to the fact that the African in a quest to fashion a theatre that is peculiar to the society from which he hails must largely draw from indigenous knowledge systems as source material. In view of this many attempts have been made and are still being made by playwrights in Ghana, Africa and other parts of the world through the medium of playwriting to help in the creation and development of a dramatic form that can be classified as truly African. Thus, there have been different tangents to form and thoughts of African playwrights in the development of drama of which Mohammed Ben Abdallah a Ghanaian playwright is a leading proponent. Mohammed Ben Abdallah in his particular contribution to form in the theatre saw the conceptualization of a drama which he termed as Abibigoro and which dramatic form and content is from the mine of indigenous knowledge systems.

## 2. An Overview of Drama in Africa

Africa as a continent has its varied distinctive cultures that defined each ethnic group, tribe and states before the colonial imposition. In the distinctive entities, they are characterized by their way of life and bounded by the horizon of their own capabilities. With all these, some scholars have speculated as to whether theatre did or did not exist in pre-colonial Africa. This illusion is what Mabweazara (2002) argued that, African theatre as it exists today has its roots embedded in the empirical evidences that the past provides through anthropologists and ethnographers. Among such evidences are the enactments of hunts, re-enactments of historical events, rites of passage and others. The explanation is clear in the evidence that, theatre in the African context is a performance and not in the Western classical tradition of stage performance and audience but in the more general form of representational or functional performances with symbolic images representing life through action (Graham-White, 1974; Hater, 2001; Mlana, 1983). Where the African might have gone astray in the telling of its story was maybe as a result of his consort with the European style of presenting their drama.

This was evident in the assertion made by Kerr (1995) as he suggested that much of the scruples are because of the terminology, that is, drama, theatre and rituals because they are not in the vocabulary of the African culture but rather the European. Thus, for the African to be cleared of all these misgivings, then it is incumbent on the African, as it developed or created his own model to describe pre-colonial arts by making use of indigenous aesthetic jargons. It is therefore not surprising for Finnegan (1984) to assert that theatre came to Africa with Europeans. This is because there was not enough collection of art forms to attest to the fact that theatre did exist in Africa. Additionally, drama went unrecognized due to the lack of interest of those who wrote about them. Kerr (1995) explained the reason being that many of the scholars who wrote about it did so with an understandable elegiac tone of regret for the passing of richly complex artistic forms.

The African in his attempt to assert himself in the telling of his story fashioned after the European standard of writing plays decided rather to conceptualize them into categories and forms by finding name rooted in traditions hence, abibigoro, anansesem, among others. This in effect gives credence to the assertion made by Fanon (1986) that: "colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonization came to enlighten their darkness" (P.2). Therefore, the relationship that did exist between the European and the African was not just political or social dominance but culture too. There is no denying the fact that literary theatre or drama was the creation of the coloniser. It had its root from the school drama, the drama clubs, and not forgetting the churches too. According to Hater and es Salaam (2001),

The fact that most of the traditional artistic reproductions were not written and so were unavailable for comparative purposes did not help either. These were powerful people with their texts, their schools, their churches, their guns, their colour and so on, with a people who talked only of having these things in their heads. Naturally, the bigger force would carry the day. (P.8)

Considering the submission of Hater and es Salaam (2001), it gives credence to the fact that to be able to have a sustaining culture proper documentation in written form is paramount as against the notion of having it in your head. The lapses created gave the coloniser the edge to impose what is best for their operations in Africa. Therefore, literary theatre or drama is any written play that conforms to lay down procedure that consist of form, structure, style and language which can be classified as literature.

Consequently, concerning African literature it appeared that the majority of its rich tradition and perhaps theatre were exclusively preserved orally which largely created a gap to ascertain its originality. It is because of this, that Emenyonu (1971) added his voice and stressed, that perhaps the literary world was not prepared for the emergence of African writing when it did. Those who posed as its judges knew little or nothing of the true roots of written African literature. Some of them were gaining their first insight into the African social scenes and approached African writing for its socio-logical rather than its literary interest.

This expresses the huge gap that has resulted in culminating that there was no history as to whether theatre did exist or not in pre-colonial Africa. The effect of this lapse is in the acculturation, assimilation and indoctrination of the African to accept the alien culture and endowed with beliefs and practices that unequivocally are designed to alienate the colonised from hitherto his or her culture and values through their system of education. These notwithstanding, many of the plays written were in the form of copying the western style and forms to the extent that African Playwrights adapted western and European

dramatic texts in content and form. Plays like *Edufa* by Efuwa T. Sutherland adapted from *Alcestis* a classical Greek drama, *The Gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi adapted from *Oedipus Rex* a classical Greek drama. Abdallah (2008) in his view: contended that it was about time the African asserted themselves and really set standards that guided them in their crafts visa-a-vis the totality of their own experiences. This connoted that the African must begin to experiment and draw ideas from indigenous knowledge systems in creating the theatre that was relevant to the society. Again, in creating a theatre Abdallah believed that it should be an all-encompassing interest of the people's culture and tradition such as music, dance, rituals, and proverbs among many others that uniquely identified the people. Abdallah (2008) in his quest and interest for the development of literary theatre and performance, hinged on the fact that, authenticity is very crucial and a necessity for self identity. Amponsah (2013) gave credence to the assertions made by Abdallah (2008) as he added that:

African writers should move towards charting a course to the creation of authentic theatres if not for Africa in general, at least for their specific motherland. These theatres should reflect their societies', remote past, present. (P.50)

In addition to the above discussion, the researchers agree with Wilson and Goldfarb (2000) who were of the opinion that early African societies had many traditional performances that were connected to ceremonies and rituals and used music, song and dance. African theatre artists in the 20th and beyond should use these traditional forms and subvert forms of popular western theatre in order to create a work that reflects anti-colonial struggles. By implication, the African is therefore empowered to have a new paradigm shift in thought and zeal of changing the old order and identity by charting this path of the anti-colonial struggle and again consider having a means of reaching larger audience beyond their native land. This would inevitably place Africa in a better position in the world literature of drama.

### 3. The Concept of Form in Drama

Form may be described as the way a piece of literature is presented. It has to do with the physical appeal of a piece of art, to the eye of the reader. Considering that drama or literature has much to do with communication through symbols as much as words to convey meaning, the shape or what an author carves or develops for his or her piece of work cannot be ignored. In effect, dramatic form which herein may be referred to as style must have the ingredients that appeal to all the sensory organs of the audience or readership. However, the interpretation of form is peculiar to the various literary genres that exist in literature.

Drama may be an enactment of a story which is composed within specific parameters that define, shape and distinguish its approach to the genre explored. Dramatic forms are often constituted on a design. It could be tragedy, comedy and or a blend of the two to achieve the set objectives canonized for the form. On the other hand, with the pursuit of a unique search into indigenous performing arts, Abdallah in his works has been able to build on the concept of *Anansegoro* by Efuwa Sutherland into *Abibigoro* a genre that pursue a broader scope of authenticating African theatre rather than the former which looks into Ghanaian society predominantly. The consequence has been largely influenced by his quest for identity, to reconstruct ritual and tradition which emulates re-interpretation and revalorization of the old and new respectively. This is not to really 'glorify' the past but to use it as a premise in the present to have a better future tomorrow. Thus, in the pursuit of this expedition, the researchers would want to venture into an analysis of his play to ascertain the canonization of *Abibigoro* in the play *The Fall of Kumbi*. To this end the analysis of his dramatic form is examined with reference to the text.

### 4. Abdallah's Dramatic Form

One of the fundamental attributes of Abdallah's dramatic form is the storytelling tradition. Mabweazara (2002) stated that the tradition of storytelling is ubiquitous and hinges on the oral transmission of the values and norms of the society to its recipients. Its interest has always been very didactic in nature. In the characteristic of story-telling tradition, the transmissions were done orally. In effect, the stories kept, reveals the values and the belief systems that are coded to the new generation. In addition, storytelling is an integration of dramatic art that consists of dialogue, music, dance, mime, role-playing or acting and active audience participation. Usually an elderly woman or man in the community leads the event at moonlit nights in an open space after all household chores are all completed. The seating is always circular. This style of seating in the round creates the atmosphere for intimacy. It is this element of oral tradition which is a unique incorporation of Abdallah's drama that narrates historical events as his source material. Abdallah (1989) in his work creatively weaves the features of storytelling to carry the play along by either making the storyteller alienated or conspicuously seen presenting it. In the play, *The Fall of Kumbi*, the story is founded on a storytelling structure projected by four storytellers in grandeur. At the beginning one storyteller appears on stage and tries to cut the chorus which is a unique phenomenon among Africans. It is to ensure that the attention of its audience is captured and arrested before the convener puts forward his or her message. A classic example is the use of the style of the age long West African travelling poet musicians or a story teller formerly referred to as griots in ancient times. A traditional griot could do everything from recounting history to composing music, to teaching students, to acting as diplomats to some ancient prominent Chiefs and Kings in some traditional West African Countries. Naturally, they are old and have gained much experience in their art of praise singing and recounting history of either kings or some societal feats chalked during an ethnic war, droughts or perhaps an event they were involved (Keita, 2014). In effect, they are the repository of the customs and traditions of their communities. These storytellers are believed to have an in-depth knowledge about their culture and history. In any case that is who they are. Abdallah uses the style of storytelling by engaging characters of

storytellers to begin the play by recounting and telling the audience what the story is about by recounting the origin, background and achievements of Kumbi Saleh. In addition, the storytellers are actively involved in the narrative. Abdallah (1989) furthermore, has a twist or divergent approach to the treatment of the characters. Unlike the Ghanaian traditional storytelling session, where the storyteller is the custodian of the story, in Abdallah's case the storyteller is a presenter. He or she presents the story as it is without any influence unlike the case of Anansegoro convention. Abdallah plays this part out cleverly in *The Fall of Kumbi* as he ensures that no sentiments or anything otherwise is suggested by the storytellers.

- Fourth Storyteller: Stop it! Stop it! Cut! Cut! Freeze! All freeze!
- Second Storyteller: What is wrong with the woman! Is she mad! Has she also gone insane like her daughter?
- First Storyteller: No! ... What is wrong with you?
- Second Storyteller: What is wrong with me?
- Fourth Storyteller: What is wrong with us? Did you hear the woman? Did you hear her? ...
- Second Storyteller: How can the Queen mother of Kumbi ... How can Astimalinke insult and disrespect the gods ...
- First Storyteller: How can you interfere with the story? Are you in the story? Remember we are just storytellers! We cannot change history ... (pp 64-65).

Moreover, the presentational frame is made to flow without intrusions or interference by storytellers to make both the narrative and dramatic action flow to a crescendo of aesthetic appreciation.

Consequently, storytelling as a unique technique employed by Abdallah is a convention that has received a lot of attempts by other contemporary writers in exploring how best they can unmask its purest form in new forms of drama (Deandrea, 2002). Abdallah in exploring this approach of narration, in his drama, doubles or quadruples the number from one to create a dramatic effect of building suspense, conflicts among others to make the fluidity of the plot as a unique whole. In other words, the fusion of the narrative and dramatic action makes the fluidity of Abdallah's plot a unique beauty (Agovi, 1989). Similarly, Abdallah ensures the story tellers appear to round off the narration with signal words for example in *The Fall of Kumbi*

First Storyteller: And so, it was that Kumbi Saleh, City of Gold, Jewel of the land of the Sudan fell!

Angmor (2010) observed that: besides he (storyteller) emphasizes the type of story a legend in the tradition of the 'old griots' in their conclusion, words of caution or the morals inherent in the story is passed on to its audience. That is the fundamental feature in the storytelling approach of Anansegoro where the playwright borrows the idea. Abdallah practically uses varied artistic forms that are creatively combined to make it as a functional part of the story. Abdallah's search of a new form of theatre sought to integrate music and dance. To him music and dance is central and there is the spirit of the African and for that matter the Ghanaian. This component is undoubtedly; his effort to achieve a total theatre experience.

As Agovi, (1989) opined that: traditional African society recognizes the importance of integrating all the senses in the communication process. This, Abdallah strived to make the very best out of by bodily and vocal expression. For instance, he integrated Ephraim Amu's *Akwaaba dwom* (welcome song) to usher in the performance.

Text in Akan Language	English Translation
Mo! Mo! Mo! Agyanom	Well done! Well done! Well done! Fathers
Mo! Mo! Mo! Agyanom!	Well done! Well done! Well done! Fathers
Mo! Mo! Mo'o mo mo!	Well done! Well done! Well done! Well done
Agyanom aniɔdenfoɔ	Fathers of Valour
Mo anya adepa agya nkyirimma	You have left a great legacy for your descendants
Yeda mo ase ma mo mo mo mo!	We thank you and say, well done!
Yeda mo ase ma mo mo mo mo	We thank you and say, well done!
Agyanom ee mmanimma!	Fathers! Sons of Men!
Akogyesaasefo ee aye!	Belligerents of the security of our Land
Agyanom ee yema mo akwaaba o	Fathers, you are welcome o!
Nea mmarima beye na mo aye yi o!	You have done all that men could do
Agyanom ee!	Fathers
Agyanom ee amamma!	Fathers, patriots!
Akonya' ahofadifo ee aye!	Ye men of war
Agyanom ee yema mo akwaaba oo!	Fathers, we welcome you
Ahofadi fata amamma oo!	Citizens deserve independence
Agyanom ee!	Fathers
Agyanom ee yema mo akwaaba oo!	Fathers, we welcome you
Agyanom ee yema mo akwaaba oo!	Fathers, we welcome you
ɔkom dee mo ara	You really hungered
Osuo hwee mo ara	You were beaten by rains

Text in Akan Language	English Translation
Owia hyee mo ara	You were scorched by the sun
Mo brɛ brɛɛ ara	You dearly suffered
Mo ama ye baabi agyina	You have positioned us well in life
Agyanom mo mo mo mo! Agyanom mo!	Fathers, well done! Fathers, well done!
Agyanom mo mo mo mo! Agyanom mo!	Fathers, well done! Fathers, well done!

Table 1

Besides, analyzing the content of the lyrics, it appeared more functional than just a background or a curtain raiser. The Akwaaba dwom though a welcome song, has the inherent message that suggests that our forebears did great to ensure and secure our future. Therefore, the needed respect and acknowledgement must be duly given to them. Deanderea (2002) gives credence to the functionality of music in Abdallah's drama as he stated that the musical element for instance was employed continuously by the author, not as a mere background but as a functional part of the story.

The functionality of music in the play *The Fall of Kumbi* becomes clearer prior to the demise of the High Priest of Kumbi and their struggle of moving from the north to the south. Abdallah herein depicts a typical Ghanaian shrine with the music that accompanied the ritual of showing reverence to the gods. This was made evident in the libation song sung by the Temple Attendant as:

Text in Akan Language	English Translation
<i>Agya ee! Yerugu nsa oo, nsao</i>	Father, we are making libation
<i>Agya Nyame yerugu nsa, oo! Nsa oo</i>	Father God, we are making libation
<i>Agya ee, Yerugu nsa oo! Nsa oo!</i>	Father, we are making libation
<i>Nana ee! Yerugu nsa oo! Nsa oo!</i>	Nana, we are making libation
<i>Asaase Yaa, Yerugu nsa oo, nsa oo!</i>	Yaa the Mother Earth, we are making libation
<i>Nana ee! Yerugu nsa oo, aye!</i>	Nana, we are making libation

Table 2

This was the libation ritual song observed during ceremonies at the shrine. The music here is very essential because, its value, message and meaning contribute largely to the aesthetic of the Ghanaian culture. It involved serenity, order and above all reverence to ones object of worship. Therefore, the playwright being conscious of his culture and its values derived, incorporated it in his creative piece. Perhaps this may also give credence to the playwright's belief in the values of African ancestral worship through lesser mediums and gods to the omnipotent and the Supreme God.

Another significant form of Abdallah's drama is the active participation of audience. Abdallah has full course to the fusion of borrowed art forms especially from popular theatre which makes his drama unique. It is realized in Abdallah's plays that his ultimate aim is to deviate from conventional style that makes audiences passive recipients of the action. The audience participation is a feature of the Ghanaian traditional drama. It is largely evident during storytelling sessions, festivals and the popular concert party events. Thus: any member of the audience could spontaneously jump into the circle and take up role of the character in the story (Asiedu, 1999). Role playing is achieved in his form of audience participation. It is an integral part of the Ghanaian traditional drama- *The Ananse stories*. Accordingly, the main objective of Abdallah's *Abibigoro* is to employ artistic and communicative mediums that can effectively appeal to the consciousness of the society. Hitherto, indigenous theatrical forms such as festivals, dance, and ritual ceremonies among others have capacity or the tendency to appeal for the relevance of its culture and the need to partake and cherish its performance (aesthetic truth) which is by them and for them. Thus, a democratic consensus is realized.

Abdallah as a playwright is conscious about the culture of its society and he would not renege on not satisfying them. This is because a playwright is supposed to mirror his society. The audiences are naturally the motivational factor for the enactment of the story. Therefore, having approved of the use of a narrator, the typical African or Ghanaian audience co-performs with him or her by getting along with questions and even with songs that either contributes to the story or to arouse their interest. Intrinsically, the traditional Ghanaian audience makes comments to somehow remove the vagueness of the playing roles to as it was ensured that the enactment of the story is carried to the expected end. The playwright makes the conscious effort to carry the enactment of the story through the shared experience between the actors and the audience. This he achieves by planting characters among the audience in the auditorium to ascertain a level of empathy and conviction. In one of Abdallahs plays, *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* a character by name, Mallam Ilya, in a state of quagmire and insisted on his right to defend himself by raising witnesses from the dead coupled with what he has heard and has come to him intuitively. A character in the play, Malwal in the auditorium called for a hand count to determine whether Ilya has the right. He orders in his place in the audience:

- Malwal: What do you say, Brothers? Show your fists if you think Mallam Ilya should be allowed to raise the dead in his defence. ("Brothers" in the audience, raise clenched fists).

Though, it is a fantasy many audience members would raise their hands as they empathize with the accused. Also, it is to create the mood for anxiousness of the audience to follow to ascertain the verdict of the trial. Therefore, by this approach the playwright is able to touch the collective conscience of his audience who critically analyses the issues raised in the performance. Ritual is another unique form that contributes to the form of the drama of Abdallah. In the pursuit of his total art, attention is given to ritual performances in his drama. Nketia (1993) gives credence to ritual drama as 'ceremonial drama' since it conveys the ethos of the society thus, a traditional form of theatre. A critical look at the drama of Abdallah appears that great reverence is attached to rituals. Abdallah virtually projects them at the face value without trying to undermine or modernize its received significance. Abdallah, with regards to rituals as an integral part of his drama declared to Jane Wilkinson (2002) in an interview that:

I can't think of a single play that I have written that doesn't have heavy ritual aspect. Maybe because for me the ritual – the mask and the dance which are all part of the ritual anyway – provides a very important medium for the regeneration of society. I don't believe in theatre purely for entertainment. (as cited by Deandrea, 2002).

The rituals are a dramatic expression which is often associated with dancing scenes. It sometimes comes with little or no dialogue. In the play *The Fall of Kumbi* there is mimed or danced reproduction of libation. A ritual that uses drink offering to honour and please the lesser gods, ancestral spirits, the environment and Supreme Creator. In the presentation of these acts, the playwright sought to promote the cosmic order of oneness and draw a balance between beings and things in the universe. Similarly, Abdallah in most stage directions for his plays depicts the sacred time and space. By implication the playwright sets the specific setting, atmosphere, mood and perhaps the seriousness of the assembly. This is summed up in the lines of a character Asakyiri, one of the seven priests of Kumbi:

Asakyiri: Kumbi is burning!  
The city of Gold is burning!  
It has been burning for three days and three nights.  
And for three days and three nights we have knelt at your feet!  
... We stayed behind on your orders!  
We have waited for the All-Powerful Father Twerediampon  
Husband of Asaase Yaa and Patriarch of the gods  
To speak to us through his servant.

This statement above depicts the gravity of their summons to the shrine. This is evident by the description of their outlook or appearance. (*Stage directions*: Before each stool kneels, a priest or priestess dressed in black raffia skirt, strings of cowries across the shoulder). In effect their costumes set the mood and atmosphere as very much serious. It must be noted that in all the ritual ceremonies, dance and drumming is an integral part that propels it to its crescendo and aesthetic effect. Abdallah also incorporates into scenes of his plays another Ghanaian traditional drama called dance drama. Dancing in the view of Abdallah is very central to almost all his plays. Khunata dances with all the women in a ceremony that she makes her mother Astimalinke to preside over.

Khunata: I was born for the gods  
And dedicated to the shrine of the gods.  
I was to be properly initiated at the right time.  
That time has now come!  
Mother!

Astimalinke: Yes, child of the Gods!

Khunata: Mother of Kumbi!

Astimalinke: Speak my daughter! I hear you!

Khunata: You must lead the initiation of Khunata  
Your daughter and daughter of the gods!  
You will lead us in the sacred Dance of Mumummey!  
To cleanse our people of all Msuo!

... Dance for Khunata and give to the gods what belongs to them!.

However, the dance of Khunnata's initiation which perhaps is a foreboding to her suicide is described in a detailed stage direction provided by the playwright in the play *The Fall of Kumbi*:

Khunnata joins the dancers and soon becomes the centre of the dance. The first part is slow, sacred and funeral, interspersed with sudden movements and gestures of pain, anger and defiance. The second part is lighter, faster and sexually charged. At the climax of the dance Khunnata is completely possessed. She is rooted in one spot, her movement violent and uncontrollable, mostly centered in her torso, waist and hips. (pp.75-76)

Abdallah in his particular interest in building a genre that encapsulate all the dramatic forms of theatre in Ghana and perhaps Africa seems to make his drama heavy, demanding and challenging in staging. This is because of the challenges that surround his dramatic form which perhaps was bequeathed to him by his predecessors. In addition, it appears that what can be in a dialogue is better enhanced and carried out through dancing and dance drama. The reason being that the fusion of the textual and sub textual forms has great impact in the presentation of the messages as unique unlike the western drama that relies heavily on dialogue.

The choice of his dramatis personae is another feature worth noting in Abdallah's *The Fall of Kumbi*. It centres on the creation of Islamic names and an anagram of some to read and sound as such. The question is that, is it because of the playwright's religious background or the quest to recount history? It seems obvious that the awareness of history of cultural encounters and sympathy with Islam might have influenced him in his choice of dramatis personae. The dramatis personae might appear to be trivial, however, but in his attempt to popularize and blend indigenous tradition with element from western tradition seems to be the fulcrum. Accordingly, the characters created have the tendency of creating the setting of the drama. For instance, the dramatis personae or character names such as Amu Diata, Astimalinke, Aklilu, Ibn Yacin among many others in *The Fall of Kumbi* transport one's mind to old Ghana. This is because of cross-cultural trade relationship between the people of Kumbi Saleh and the Tuaregs. In addition, the polytheist nature of the community might have contributed largely to this phenomenon. In effect their tolerance and perhaps marriage might have been the major denominator.

Similarly, Abdallah's form of drama dwells its source largely on documentary, history and indigenous knowledge of his society. Indigenous knowledge to a very large extent incorporates the total experiences of the people – beliefs, norms, ideologies, practices and traditions that reveal them as a peculiar group. Thus, the play *The Fall of Kumbi* charts the course of his drama. The creativity of Abdallah, dwells on indigenous knowledge, which particularly serves as an identity for him. This is because Abdallah believes that drama or theatre should be presented as a slice of life put on stage. In effect, Abdallah as a playwright in his attempt to mirror his society based on historical facts earns him this trait.

Furthermore, through his creative works, the dramatic telling of a true story appears to introduce the audience to the spirit of personality of the people involved and this is capable of uplifting the sentiments of its audience by the tale of courage or otherwise the woes of the personalities involved. Therefore, in the spirit of writing, the form of Abdallah's drama, seeks to reflect both his era and past experiences of his society. This is why the researchers would like to agree with Charles Darwin as cited by Brockett (1979) in his theory of evolution, propounded that people are largely controlled not only by heredity but most importantly by the environment. Consequently, the environment suggests the conditions that are peculiar to a specific society. It is worthy to note that realism as a form of drama hinges around this theory. It is therefore, the consequence of realist drama that has informed the form of Abdallah's drama.

Furthermore, Abdallah gives importance to staging. By insistence, thorough descriptions of stage instructions are given. It is to give a picturesque chronological breakdown of vivid stage directions of cultural and ritualistic action, choreography, props and characters. These stage directions are detailed that it overshadows the volume of dialogue in the plays. Therefore, in the creation of stage instructions, he has ensured that the play can be staged. It is also succinct on the general mood, atmosphere and the kind of conflict that the specific scenes can evoke to the empathy of the audience. This makes the audience or the readership have imageries of the stage without seeing it. Abdallah for instance expend more time and energy on instructional material describing scenes, movements, settings ritual and cultural processes and choreography of dances in both texts which include:

- The description of the shrine of Al-Ghaba in Kumbi Saleh. He gives a detailed description of the shrine, symbols and their positions in the place, position of characters, properties, costuming, mood, atmosphere, costumes and music among many others.
- The 'divination' ritual of the High Priest of Kumbi
- Khunata's initiation and ritual dances that led to her suicide at Sijilmasa.
- The hunt dance and the application of henna on Zainata by Alwanka.

All these staging directions are instances of immense audience appreciation and fascination in the plays. It then creates the sense of cultural genuineness of both the playwright and the audience.

## 5. Conclusion

The researchers in the foregoing discussions on the form of *The Fall of Kumbi* is evident about the focus and identity of Mohammed Ben Abdallah's drama. Certainly, Abdallah's dramatic form is aimed at to give impetus to the African presence with regards to what existed before the invasion of the European and post independence era while at the same time showing some elements from the European form of theatre. Ritual, music, songs and dances are highly projected in the drama of Abdallah which makes him a unique dramatis among his contemporaries. Similarly, he changes the classic stories because he does not narrate the story in the same old way but uses music, dance, dialogue and the iconography drawn from Africa and Europe.

## 6. Recommendation

In the pursuit of this textual analysis, we realized that there has not been playwrights' venturing into writing in this kind of Ghanaian drama. In view of that, the researchers suggest that the budding playwrights in our institutions of higher learning are encouraged writing in this genre as Abdallah and Yaw Asare proposed so as to draw from the vast plethora of materials from traditional sources and traditional themes to provide form and identity in couching our own understanding drawing from experiences of the Western ideologies. In so doing, writers will be telling our own stories from their own perspectives to consolidate the codes of African form.

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