

Title: The Ab'atachoni theatre: its aesthetics and social significance

Author: Karani, Solomon Kakai M

The aim of this study is to investigate the nature and character of the Ab'atachoni indigenous theatre forms as they are seen and observed today. At the core of this study is the search for viable definitions of the concepts of drama, theatre and performance. This study is further prompted by critical assumptions, which confine the concepts of drama and theatre to things like "script" and "a raised stage". The exploration of the Ab'atachoni theatre forms is an attempt to widen and deepen an awareness of the concepts of drama, theatre and performance beyond their "Tachonic" context. In other words, it is one of the key premises of this study that a good theory of art should have the potential of transcending its local or ethno-centric derivation. The central thesis of this study defines drama as a universal (abstract) human ability having a culture-specific elaboration. This central thesis, informed by a theatrical-linguistic model, also incorporates semiotic principles to study its object. This study is a product of observation and participation in actual performing situations. The study is structured as follows: Chapter One outlines the purpose and scope of the study. Chapter Two describes the social and aesthetic background of the Ab'atachoni community. Chapter Three examines the ritual-drama of okhusena omuse (herein referred to as omuse). This ritual-drama is analyzed as one of the genres of the Ab'atachoni theatre. In this performance, a ceremonial performer is invited to perform at the funeral ceremony of a Mutachoni elder on the second day after burial. Chapter Four describes and examines the dance-theatre of okhuuya. This dance-theatre is performed in honour of a Mutachoni elder on the first day after burial. Chapter Five describes and examines the narrative performance (olukano). A specific performance observed by this researcher is given to demonstrate how a performer selects from the narrative-matrix and gives the selected narrative theatrical uniqueness and liveliness. Chapter Six brings together the major arguments in this study. A link is established between the central thesis and the method of investigation. Three Appendices are provided. The First Appendix gives three narratives used as a part of the performances presented in Chapter Three (Omuse). The Second Appendix has two parts, the first part gives a sample of songs from the okhuuya ceremony referred to in Chapter Four and the second part has a selection of photographs taken at the okhuuya dance-theatre, performed in honour of Khisa King'asisa of Tongaren Division, Bungoma district. These reinforce specific points made in reference to this occasion in Chapter Four. The Third Appendix presents the narrative used as the basis for Chapter Five.