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Negotiation in Participatory Development Theatre: Interface of the "Static" and the "Dynamic"[9]

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Introduction

In this essay, I attempt to reassess the role of theatre facilitators in igniting community participation at all levels of theatre for education and awareness programmes in less-privileged communities. I argue that the task to fully initiate the community in such programmes lies with the theatre facilitator whose adequate management of theatre-making, analyses of problems and negotiation strategies is a prerequisite to conscientisation and possible change. In doing so, I will discuss "a-method-within-a-method"approach—negotiation—employed by theatre facilitators in a bid to obliterate hierarchies and binaries in awareness and transformation projects. I begin by briefly discussing the possible roots of such binaries and its emerging hierarchies and attempt to situate them within colonial and postcolonial discourse. I argue that negotiation is a procedure adopted by theatre facilitators to avoid superior/inferior relations that, generally, surface in local and state-wide media intervention. Further, negotiation, which to Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire is *diplomacy* and *dialogics* respectively, is a flexible and dynamic approach which negates the top-down method. I attempt to delineate its collaboration and inclusive characteristics and explore how its application encourages community participants to deal with their own predicaments withoutdepending wholly on an imposing and external-government factor; especially if government method of intervention in communities is, generally, known to

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be static in terms of its pre-packaged education materials and its top-bottom approach. My analyses will, in effect, highlight the fact that in many instances communities are alienated from the conception and implementation phases of state education and development programmes. At this rate the people's mores and customs are not integrated in such awareness-raising and development projects. Consequently, prepackaged procedures, methods, ideology, and practices are often imposed on the receiving community, making critical thinking, critical intervention and action on the part of the community almost non-existent.

Postcolonial Background to Negotiation

Postcolonial criticism rejects early assumptions by liberal humanists that literature depicts the universality of the human condition (Barry 2002). Distancing themselves from such assumptions, some postcolonialists argue that literature reflects concerns that are linked to specific regional, historical and social contexts, thereby privileging such contexts. Existing within cultural and social structures plagued by disease, unstable hierarchies, environmental destruction, and negative indigenous belief practices, some of these conditions perhaps echo fragmented and complex neocolonial realities, while others are basically local. The postcolonial, for instance, incorporates discourses on cultural and ideological superiority, as against inferiority which are well-known oppositional pairs, referred to in postcolonial discourse as binarism.

Binarity, a distinctive category in contemporary critical discourse, is often traced to the French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. In his early attempt to characterise language, he posited that the relationship between the sign, signifier and signified was arbitrary. As he emphasised, the relationship between the mentioned categories was only accepted by society via a convention. What is of particular interest in this essay is Saussure's argument that the meaning of linguistic units depended on what Barry calls "a paradigmatic structure" (2002: 42; see also Rivkin and Ryan 2004) and most of all on such units' binary framework. Saussure's establishing of sign meanings from binary relations, according to Bill Ashcroft, resulted in "... the most extreme form of difference possible-sun/moon; man/woman; ... black/white" (2013: 25). In a postcolonial context, binarism emerges from the history of colonialism during which models of conquest and suppression prevailed. During this period, "the dominance of every sphere of life by a minority [colonial power] characterized the emergent victors; forced dependence mirrored the silenced and the defeated" (Byam 1999:1). Also, colonialism and its aftermath cannot be read only at cross border relations, but it is a continuous practice that features

incredibly within regions and nations (Childs *et al* 2006 and Ashcroft *et al* 1989) and, as the case maybe, within post-colonial-states' education methods. This phenomenon features what has often been described as "internal colonialism" which takes a plethora of forms. If we, therefore, accede that postcolonialism is not the strict marking of a historical era, but also incorporates "internal colonialisms"—which is timeless and assumes different forms—then top-bottom education methods are fairly dominating in many ways.

The materialisation of binarity in local concientisation programmes in Cameroon is a concern that Emelda Ngufor Samba explored in her 2006 research on HIV/AIDS. Admitting that Cameroonian art and culture outline multifaceted ways of educating people about the prevention of HIV/AIDS, she however states that the problematics of such awareness programmes includes when what she calls "ready-made" plays are taken to communities and performed in buildings, without a participatory and intervention platform. Moreover, she underlines the failure of the National Aids Control Committee (N.A.C.C) and the Local Aids Control Committee (L.A.C.C)—all from government ministries—in their use of "the top-down method, which consists in health experts and social workers disseminating information to the people and telling them what to do to prevent HIV infection. This, to an extent, has influenced the lives of Cameroonians … especially women and youths, continue to be infected"[10]. Such an education format is what Paulo Freire has described as 'banking education' in which the teacher diffuses processed information into what he calls receptacles i.e. the students. According to Freire, banking education is a tool of suppression (Freire 2007). In effect, these conditions polarised social structures, engendering scepticism and societal imbalance. On such a dehumanising platform on which mutual participation is negated, binarisms such as the superior and the inferior, the centre and the periphery, the educated and un-educated, the literate and illiterate, emerge. Societies with dominant and imposing structures equally beget agents with similar methods of intervention, such as the role of the N.A.C.C and L.A.C.C above. In quoting Richard W. Hull, Roy Armes upholds the preceding argument, stating that "'behavior and status systems of the former colonialists have been adopted by African elites as their own,' while 'social stratification has increased since independence in nearly all African nations'" (2006: 4): According to Freire, such agents can

[10] Emelda Ngufor Samba, "The Arts, Culture and HIV/AIDS Victims: Meeting Community Needs through Theatre", TRANS, Nr.16, Juli 2006, http://www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/03_1/samba16.htm, accessed 05.01.17.

neither help the community to name nor to read their world. This is because their method of change is anti-dialogical and void of what he calls humility and love for the world. Only committed agents, facilitators in the context of this essay, could assist members of a community to challenge institutionalized education hierarchies in order to effectuate awareness in communities, via participatory education methods. To properly investigate and deconstruct community problems, therefore, community mobilisation and conscientisation activities are essential steps to adopt. This is only plausible if dialogics is employed as a major technique. This explains why the proliferation of people or participatory theatre practice in most Third World communities, is predicated on the binary reading of the world in which inferior status is accorded to the less privileged, which to Freire is the people's vocation. Also, the opportunity that participants in intervention theatre are given to express themselves and make major decisions as regards the process, subject or problem to be tackled in intervention projects is considered in this essay as a negotiation process. In effect, negotiation is the most appropriate means for arriving at conscientisation, which is one of the major objectives of intervention theatre, especially if such programmes are to help resolve unfavourable human conditions.

Negotiation as a Theatre Language

Scholars of negotiation theory and practice have highlighted the field of international relations, political science, anthropology, law, psychology, government and private policy as major areas that require negotiation practices (Breslin and Rubin 1995), but its usage could be extended to other disciplines based upon certain characteristics of negotiation. Although negotiations are also generally known to exist in conflict zones, it is a necessary component for people in participatory theatre workshops. It is a skill and/or a strategy that usually involves establishing understanding, shared aims and goals and compromise between two or more parties. In the case of intervention theatre, such parties stand in a subtle binary system which can be identified, at an initial stage, between theatre facilitators and workshop participants. The question arising would be how binarism could be tackled in the course of theatre cooperation and subsequent public shows in ways that obviate violent dominant hierarchies as those underscored in colonial and postcolonial discourses. Extensive and complex as the afore-mentioned disciplines may appear, participatory theatre therefore broadens the platform on which negotiation could be applied. Perhaps, because its objectives are equally directed towards community stability, growth, good governance, civil rights and

community plans for the future. To better understand the participating role of individuals on a negotiating platform, Rubin and Sander argue that:

> Although we typically conceive of negotiations occurring directly between two or more principals, often neglected in a thoughtful analysis are the many situations where negotiations take place indirectly, through the use of representatives or surrogates of the principals. A father who speaks to his child's teacher (at the child's request), two lawyers meeting on behalf of their respective clients, the foreign service officers of different nations meeting to negotiate the settlement of a border dispute […] each is an instance of negotiation through representatives (1995: 81).

Referring to the above quotation, a negotiation deal therefore requires more than one party. In the context of people in participatory theatre, three groups come into play. The first category includes what Rubin and Sander (1995) call agents; who are both direct and representative negotiators. As far as People Theatre is concerned, these agents are donor agencies. And in the case of Cameroon, The Swiss Association for International Cooperation (HELVETAS) and Association pour la Sauvegarde de Traditions et la Culture (ASTRAC) are known examples. Since, the mentioned donor agencies work in close collaboration with theatre facilitators, the latter constitute a second category. They are categorised in this essay as representative negotiators. The third category involves workshop participants; representatives of the wider community or the people and what August Boal calls the "Spect-Actors." Since "Spect-Acting" is not only pragmatic, but also a cogent term in applied theatre, it is worthy to offer a vivid picture of a Spect-Actor's place in practice, and in Boal's reading of course;

> I, Augusto Boal, want the Spectator to take on the role of Actor and invade the Character and the stage. I want him to occupy his own Space and offer solutions. By taking the stage the Spect-Actor is consciously performing a responsible act. The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the Spect-Actor is not fictional. He exists in the scene and outside of it, in a dual reality (200: xxi).

Imbibing Boal's understanding of a "spect-actor", the last group therefore incorporates community members who include the poor majority whose condition require attention and action and the major beneficiaries of the decision-makers' efforts and plans. Both the workshop

participants and the "spect-actors" could be the same persons of consist of different groups, both considered in this essay as direct negotiators.

Negotiation between the agents—both direct and representative—and the workshop participants embraces strategies that aim basically at involving the participants in the entire People Theatre process. This practice often generates both persuasive and integrative skills from the facilitator, such that the receiving party benefits more from the process. Negotiation at the third category is the phase at which workshop participants, after benefiting from the theatre process, engage with the larger community through public performances and post-performance discussions. Considered a form of negotiation, these discussions aim to clarify doubts, enable the public to understand causes of major problems in the community and seek solutions to these problems. The major purpose of employing this skill is to create awareness in a community that, often, ignorantly engenders social and cultural practices that degrades community resources. A specific example is the abandonment of an age-old practice in the Ake community which occurred during the Ake workshop on Children's Theatre for Environmental Education and Catchment Protection (April 25-May 1, 2003). It is worthy to mention that until the 2003 workshop, Ake had probably not received an intervention theatre project that was aimed at discussing societal concerns and which one could now chronicle historically in a strict postcolonial theatre discourse. Yet like in most communities of Cameroon, Ake is endowed with rich culture of indigenous performances that are publicly performed for different goals. On the third day of the workshop, participants paid a visit to Ake[11] water catchment and eventually to the palace of Ake Village ruler. Having been granted audience, the children "educated" the Fon—traditional leader—on what they had learnt during the workshop, focusing especially on those practices that were hazardous to the environment. Referring to the later, eucalyptus and cypress trees are widely cultivated in communities in the North West region of Cameroon because of the economic productivity they yield from timber, pulp, and fuel. The Fon of Ake, like many other Cameroonians from these parts, plants such trees in highly fertile areas like water catchments and on the farms. Since environmental

[11] Ake is located in the Fundong Sub-Division which belongs to the Boyo Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. Although Akeh is predominantly a Kom-speaking community, Oku, Hausa, Lamso, and Noni languages are also spoken. This is because this area is surrounded by the mentioned villages/communities, which inhabitants migrate and/or settle in Akeh.

protection was one of the key themes of the workshop, the participants learnt that although being a highly productive tree, eucalyptus cultivation also raised concerns about its water consumption rate and posed a potential danger to the community. The strategy with which the participants, led by a class six pupil, Roline Noelle, approached this subject during their meeting with the Fon, prompted him—the Fon—to take prompt action. He ordered his bodyguards to cut-down all the eucalyptus trees found on the Ake water catchment area. While his orders were being executed, the Fon confessed to participants and the workshop facilitators that "the children spoke in a manner that I almost had a heart attack".

An examination of forms of negotiation practices in People Theatre workshops in Cameroon elevates the process to the level of a language. This means that negotiation is an auxiliary to theatre which is equally employed as a communication strategy. Since community theatre subtly persuades the public to change their behavioural pattern, negotiation (within the process) equally persuades the participants to embrace theatre as a non-confrontational tool for exposing and attempting to solve problems that emerge in the community. Aimed at educating and encouraging disadvantaged communities or groups into participating in meaningful development, persuasion engenders integration, critical consciousness and eventually, the inculcation of self and community development skills in those involved. In this case, it acts as a catalytic feature in an entire development-oriented process. Since negotiation also requires communication skills, it is expected that, after a workshop, participants would go away with skills of persuasion, integration, and communication, earlier stimulated in them by theatre facilitators. Well-equipped with the skill, those trained eventually employ persuasion in order to initiate dialogue and development on a broader scale or create awareness in other underprivileged communities, thereby making the entire People Theatre process, cyclical. Therefore, in People Theatre workshops, negotiation is relevant during the process of dialoguing and breaking the ice, discussion and story creation, improvisation and role-play, performance and post-performance discussions; in fact, all stages of a People Theatre procedure.

Theatre Facilitators

Facilitators[12] employ People Theatre as a strategy to debunk education models that "bank" knowledge. Coming from outside and imposing "superior" ideas and practices about a people's problems, without as much as seeking their contribution, is in many ways similar to notions of superiority that are linked to one's racial, ethnic, academic, social and political background. Such circumstances often provoke superior theories that recall internal hierarchies that were the crucial reality in previously colonised communities. Perhaps participatory theatre activities have, therefore, prevailed in many societies as a critique of embedded hierarchies in colonial and postcolonial leaderships that increasingly alienate a majority of the community. And as far as impacting knowledge in the communities is concerned, superior and inferior postulations and relations between groups could feature in the interaction between the participants and community workers, especially if the latter are not equipped with what Freire calls love, humility, faith and hope.

Therefore, resource persons should reject top-bottom assumptions and present themselves in rural communities more as negotiators. They adopt this role because a) they are truly committed to community education and development, b), they are clearly ignorant of the people's sociopolitical structures, and most of all their problems c), they hope to successfully make the people employ theatre, together with their rituals, dances, stories, languages as medium to discuss their problems, and seek empowering solutions and d), they hope to leave the process with the people which will eventually serve as a tool for further education and sensitisation. To be able to achieve these in a People Theatre workshop, Kees Epskamp's advises that "the approach needs to be flexible and the activities relevant to the local people in terms of improving their quality of life, strengthening the experience of a growing identity or the local organisational infrastructure" (2006: 69). According to Epskamp, therefore, the facilitator must be "skilled, knowledgeable, motivated, respected in the community in order to be successful" (2006: 69). These points put together, denote that the theatre facilitators' task in achieving change in a community is immense. That is why s/he must pose as a negotiator in order to be able to facilitate all activities in an intervention theatre programme.

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[12] Also known as theatre resource persons, community workers, extension workers, catalysts, joker, to name just a few.

Itemising People Theatre as a negotiation space, therefore, presupposes that the community, in which a "stage" is set, is certainly faced with issues that require attention and have proper local procedures of address. Such issues could be real or imagined, philosophical or practical such as matters of the people versus their traditional ruler, the people versus its customary practices, the people versus government policy or the people versus the people. The subjects requiring attention could be environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS prevention, hygiene and sanitation. Whether a subject is determined by hard facts or by aspirations, imposing an externally-generated agenda in communities with inappropriate instruments of implementation, besides negotiation, usually results in suspicion, and eventual ejection and rejection of external agents by its members.

The above views seem to explain the backdrop against which theatre for development or people theatre was formulated, practised and revolutionised in Africa. Revolutionising it from the top-bottom approach to bottom-top, resulted in engaging participants in a process that allows them to control their own destiny. Agents of the bottom-top/outside-in approach, aimed at making the local participants to understand that as rural inhabitants, they possess wealth of information about themselves, about their immediate environment, and about their problems, that no outsider would claim profound knowledge of. In such workshops, resource persons clearly enunciate in their discourse that indigenous cultures of the people symbolise their identity and could clearly be employed in informal education to better understand their plights. Thus the facilitators do not invade the "body and space" of "the other" as colonisers might have done in the colonies to "civilise" what they called barbaric cultures of distant communities.

In order to put across a message that privileges indigenous forms and ideologies, resource persons must always refer participants to their cultural institutions and practices lurking in the background. Focusing on indigenous forms, several authors have observed that theatre originates from indigenous forms. These forms are continuously being integrated in people theatre practices to put across pertinent messages to the public and advocate for social change. Messages about environmental protection are definitely no exception. This form of theatre draws its participants from the community and involves them in all its stages. Researchers on community theatre (Mlama 1991, Mda 1993, Kerr 1995, Lihamba *et al* 1997, Breitinger 2003, Butake 2003, Aba 2003, Kesby 2004) have advanced similar views about this method as proficient in education and sensitisation. This approach encourages both "action research" and what Kalipeni *et al* (2004) describe as "less study and more action." As this essay argues,

facilitators should present themselves more as agents who favour the mores and practices of rural communities.

While acting as a negotiator, the facilitator demonstrates aptness in approaching workshop themes. His or her technique in engaging the workshop participants in discussions, impacts very much on the entire process of community education and sensitisation through performances. That is why Epskamp expounds that engaging the participants in a workshop activity is research through the process of communal identification of problems, critical analysis of the problems and community performances. Achieving this depends solely on the management skills of the theatre agent or facilitator.

Breaking the Ice as a Negotiation Model in Participatory Theatre

Lack of community participation and commitment to a negotiation process negates the goal of People Theatre. Based on workshops carried out in some villages and semi-urban areas — Bamendakwe, Nkor, Benakuma, Binka, Akeh — in the North West Province of Cameroon, participation is highlighted as a major element in People Theatre that envisages community awareness and development. Bearing in mind that these workshops were organised under the theme, "Children's Theatre for Environmental Education and Catchment Protection for Primary Schools", participants were drawn from some primary schools based in the above villages and their vicinities. They consisted of pupils between the ages of 10 and 14 years. Involving mainly children in the process presupposes that the latter had not engaged previously themselves in critical discussions and theatre performances that could change the destiny of their community. Besides, the enclave nature of some of these villages suggests that a cross-section of the pupils have, more or less, never participated in workshops that focused very much on their own awakening, learning and building on their negotiation skills. Their age group also implied that their eventual submergence in workshop activities would be uninhibited, so long as proper measures are undertaken by workshop facilitators to integrate them in the programme. This process is, of course, feasible through the practice of negotiation.

First encounters as experienced in People Theatre, is an initial step to breaking the ice. During workshops, Day One I, usually after dinner, is dedicated to introductory drills, relaxation exercises and theatre games. This forum generally carries a lively flare, as it is interspersed with jokes, anecdotes, dances, songs and nicknames by which participants want to be addressed. Integrating these elements rule out any assumption that the participants are not internally motivated to involve themselves in

workshop activities. This phase is aimed at creating a relaxed atmosphere which is hoped will excite the inner strength of participants. The resource persons who certainly act as moderators during this occasion, pay keen attention, not conspicuously, on participants who at initial encounter are timid. Continuous timidity often prompts initiators to go closer to these participants with encouraging steps, an effort to make them express themselves in one way or the other. Inviting participants to speak with the agents at initial encounter helps to construct the course for negotiation. Judged as a preliminary phase to participation, the children are generally initiated into informal conversation with resource persons. Certainly understood by the children as a non-event as far as workshop activities are concerned, the facilitators, however, consider initial conversations as a way to test the children's ability to talk eloquently. They particularly focus on how withdrawn or bold the children are in the face of people they have never encountered. This attempt corroborates and puts into practice theories that Boal (2000) underpins in his 'poetics of the oppressed'. He argues that one of the resources for producing theatre is man himself, which is affirmed as a difficult aspect to manage. Assuming that the resource persons fully understand the theories and practices of Boal and Freire that inform People Theatre, it is certainly not an irrelevant step when facilitators move towards participants with familiar and friendly gestures. This is in a bid to diffuse tension, incite certain expressive potentials and, most of all, stimulate creativity through theatre games and practices. Here, they negotiate with participants most of the time, through telling jokes, sharing experiences, songs or dances, yet persuading them to "say or do something." Therefore, introductory exercises and theatre games are not focused on entertainment per se, but are also employed as a medium for breaking inhibitions and relaxation. If this combination of ice-breakers and performance-oriented activities does not provide a model that could help participants to use their bodies to tell the people's story, which is the ultimate goal of participatory theatre, then facilitators may again review Boal's theory which states that;

> … to control the means of theatrical production, man must, first of all control his own body, know his own body, in order to be capable of making it more expressive. Then he will be able to practice theatrical forms in which stages he frees himself from his condition of spectator and takes on that of actor, in which he ceases to be object and becomes a subject, is changed from witness into protagonist (2000:126).

Transferring the means of theatrical production from the spectator to an "actor", a "subject" and a "protagonist" also implies that the

participants have not only been spectators before engaging in a theatre workshop, but have also been passive observers to negative practices that destroy their environment. In the case of Ake they have watched their forest being emptied and exported as timber abroad, while their traditional rulers, neighbours and parents cut down trees without replacement, burn bushes to clear areas for farming and hunting — shifting cultivation — plant eucalyptus trees on water catchment areas and carry out traditional farming methods; all practices which certainly accelerate environmental degradation.

The People Theatre workshop in Akeh village (April 25- May 1, 2003) registered thirty participants. Facilitators observed on the third day of the workshop that eighty per cent (80%) of the participants were still shy and withdrawn when it came to the phase of improvisation and role-play. To resolve this problem, participants were asked to engage in an independent session of theatre games, relaxation exercises, and rehearsal of the play i.e. without the supervision of the facilitators. This strategy helped to break the participants' inhibitions, improve on their creative skills, and consequently on the play that was being rehearsed for eventual performances. Through this process the participant who subsequently becomes the protagonist is integrated at the very beginning and throughout subsequent encounters. From these encounters, s/he learns how to delegate power to his body, to his character, to his action, and later, to his spectators. Boal documents the spectators as individuals who have in the past been "…passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon…" (2000:122). Power delegated to spectators enables them to participate in discussions at the end of the each performance. The success of any post-performance discussion depends on the animating skill of the participant who has been trained on how to use his body as a communication tool. Two participants; Bernadette Bangsi and Terence Afuma facilitated discussions that followed two performances during the workshop in Akeh. Encouraging the public to ask questions concerning issues raised in the play and clarifying for them the consequences of burning bushes, cutting down trees, and farming/hunting on water catchment areas, the two stated participants were already at the front of a negotiation deal. It was their skills in this practice that prompted the Akeh public to appeal for many of such workshops to be organised in their community. Thus engaging participants in a project to change the people, as the case is, is to transform them from spectators to actors. This is a step towards critical consciousness and eventual communal action for change.

Fig. 1. Public Performance, Binka Workshop (2002)

Aiming at workshop goals creates more strategies for negotiation. If ninety-five per cent of participants can now say their names, while looking at the resource person in the face, opt to teach new songs that fit the workshop theme, tell a story, scramble by show of hands to list elements that constitute the environment when asked, take up roles in a play and animate post-performance discussions, this is sufficient evidence that they have imbibed skills of negotiation through persuasion, integration and communication. It is through these skills that goals such as using theatre as an informal tool of educating children and adults on environmental protection, involving youngsters in activities that promote afforestation and awakening creativity in pupils are attained through theatre and practice. This outcome bears out Joan Mulholland's (1991) views that "every negotiation strategy" must be pursued with the use of appropriate language that impacts a great deal on the outcome of the deal. Although she dwells more on utterances as the basic tool for negotiation, action, dialogue, games, song, dance, gesture, and performance are forms of communication that galvanise a negotiation deal in People Theatre. Creativity and flexibility on the part of the participant are relevant at all the phases of negotiation in People Theatre.

Fig. 2. Theatre Games, Binka Workshop (2002)

Dialogue and Discussion in Participatory Theatre

According to Freire (2007), dialogue — the word — is authentic only when it is accompanied with action and reflection. Through dialogue and discussion, the facilitator sees that the ultimate aim of the workshop is attained. Since dialogue, which constitutes action and reflection, is required in any education forum, Freire advises that these aspects must be practised with humility, faith in the participants and love for the world and for the entire process. For he says that:

> Men and women [resource persons in this case] who lack humility cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world. Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be a mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know (2007:90).

Freire is encouraging resource persons to create insurmountable space for dialogue, and in this process privileges the contributions from "the Other". The other is applied here to describe workshop participants

(also the people) whom in Freire sense are the oppressed. Dialoguing with participants is to avoid ideologies of superiority associated with the banking concept of education. Dialogue was absent or not regarded as a key component in earlier community theatre performances. Christopher Odhiambo observes that theatre that was introduced by colonial health workers in rural areas in the 1930s was neither a problem-posing pedagogy nor was it aimed at participatory development. Rather it was a strategy to "entrench colonial policies and ideologies" (2008:42). Odhiambo further quotes Penina Mlama who states that the message during such programmes was "pre-packaged for the recipients and was communicated in an artistic and aesthetic mode that was far removed from the cultural expressions of its recipients" (42). Also the University Travelling Theatre in Uganda organised and took complete plays to rural communities for performances. These performances did not involve the community at the level of conception and performance, making them (the plays) insensitive to the plights of the community. The Makerere University (1960s) incorporated this theatre tradition in its program (see Epskamp 1989 and Odhiambo 2008), but also received extensive criticism from critics of community theatre for its audience's alienation. These criticisms highlight the fact that meaningful community participation is absent in programmes without negotiations and discussions. The community members are more or less passive observers, since dialogue is not initiated between them and the programme organisers/facilitators and the public. What is incorporated in such performances is geared more towards voyeurism (Aba 2003), entertainment, rather than a desire for a meaningful tool for social intervention and development. It is, by all means, a top-bottom initiative. The efficacy of People Theatre therefore could be found within the process of participation, dialogue and discussion; a process which transforms the participant and the audience into Boal's "spect-actors." Referring, therefore, to the importance of dialogue in any education milieu, People Theatre included, Freire states that:

> Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection […] word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words (2007: 88).

Dialogue that is initiated with workshop participants is therefore a prerequisite to transforming the world. In the Ake People Theatre programme and in similar negotiation and dialogue-oriented projects elsewhere, it is therefore the discussion of the destruction of the forest by

unscrupulous human practice that motivates the use of dialogue between all those who "wish to name the world" (Freire 88). The power of dialogue and discussion is seen in the success of a workshop that was organised in Bamendankwe (April 19-15, 2001). Some participants had attended previous workshops on environmental protection, thereby making the one in Bamendankwe (2001) more of a follow-up project for them. Statistics show that most of the thirty-five participants had engaged in tree-planting activities in their communities. This improvement in forest conservation was as a result of the fact that participants had been involved in an education process that fully integrated them and encouraged learning through dialogue and discussions. The success and learning registered in the follow-up project in Bamendankwe were different from the reality in the first workshop in Nkor (June 1-7, 2001) in which none of the participants had ever been part of a workshop that focused on environmental protection. Statistics indicate that most of the participants had not engaged in any tree planting exercise before attending the Nkor workshop. The number of trees planted by the children ranged from 0 to 2. But a follow-up visit showed that the pupils had begun planting trees in their farms and at school (through green sector clubs) after participating in the 2001 workshop. Commitment to the process, ably facilitated in participants through theatre and practice therefore, generates maximum contribution from the participants.

The peculiarity of People Theatre, as opposed to mainstream drama, is its participatory nature. As Boal says, a participatory approach to education, conscientisation and development involves "the human body" which is "the main source of sound and movement" (2000:125). The actor is bound to control his body in such ways that it responds to the need of the story he is recounting and the audience he is addressing. Being able to communicate with his body, the actor then employs other theatrical forms like dialogue, facial expression, dance and maybe costume to put emphasis on his message. This is true with mainstream performances, but is even more significant with People Theatre in which the spectator also takes up the role of the actor. Being involved in action, Boal talks of the spectator "knowing his body, making the body expressive" and using "theatre as a language and theatre as discourse" (126). These forms are deeply rooted in rural art forms, thus making it easy both for the actors and spectators to adopt. Participants in stated projects were drawn from the local community, the initiators of the project acted only as facilitators.

People Theatre is a powerful tool of communication and education. It has the potential to initiate change, especially as it involves the audience in seeking solutions to societal problems. The use of songs in this form of theatre as Gloria Jacques indicates "[…] helps initiate and provoke

thinking on the part of the audience. It assists in controlling their emotions and stimulates debate, dialogue, discussion, and questions" (2003:28). This approach, which is common in indigenous African and Cameroonian performances, is argued in this essay as the most appropriate approach in the fight against environmental degradation, as well as its usage in confronting other societal issues, such as HIV/AIDS, human rights, women's right, civic responsibility etc. It impels participants, who constitute people in the community, to become involved in the process of encouraging behavioural change. While mainstream theatre helps create awareness, People Theatre makes the people take action. This could be an appeal for policy makers in Cameroon to encourage such initiatives through funding, since it is an initiative that requires fieldwork with participants for two weeks at most.

Conclusion

Through strategic methods of persuasion, interaction and integration, participants in People Theatre are not only aware of the expressive potentials of their bodies, but they also employ elements—voice, action, dance, song—that make up the body to tell their rulers, their parents, neighbours and their peers to watch out for those practices that degrade the environment. Whether such practices are performed through ignorance or by design, the participants' motive is to make environmental protection a communal endeavour. Seeking to educate and sensitise the community on these issues is an act of negotiation in itself, since the participants employ subtle methods—games, theatre, song, and dance—to disseminate their messages. Having learnt from the facilitator about being open, expressive and creative during workshop activities, the participants eventually employ their bodies, (as actors) as an ultimate language of negotiation. Their aim is to sensitise their community to change their attitude towards their immediate environment, a facilitythat can easily be extended to an understanding and tackling of other social issues.

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