

**Editorial: Mobility, Identity and Change: African Peoples and Theatre Forms in
a Post Post-Colonial World** (Instituto Superior Politécnico Metropolitano De
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Mobility, Identity and Change: African Peoples and Theatre Forms in a Post Post-Colonial World provides an apt title for both local, pan-African, global as well as past and present interpretations of movement, time and space which continue to impact identities within African theatre. These topics not only outline but tackle larger themes surrounding both Africa and African theatre specifically, highlighted at AfTA's 2019 annual conference held at Instituto Superior Politécnico Metropolitano De Angola in Luanda, Angola (25-27 July 2019).

Osita Okagbue, in his keynote address spoke of "what Africa can offer the world ... intimating how ...every performance and indeed every work of art belongs to its age and its generation" (Okagbue 2019). This statement tacitly responds to a question posed later in the conference by a young audience member, 'What can the world learn from African theatre?' Linking Okagbue's statement with the student's question serves both to frame this introduction as well as the eclectic papers included in this edited volume, which offer a comprehensive sample of the diversity of presentations throughout this conference and its overarching seminal themes.

Demonstrating the mobility of African theatrical accomplishments through an array of presentations, roundtables, workshops and performances, the scope of African theatre and its local and global impact and affects were widely investigated. A simple idea alluding to our shared humanity, taken from the scholarship of Viktor Turner -'every culture has its own traditions, own focus and own forms of artistic expression,' (cited in Okagbue's keynote) intertwines the

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multivalent themes of the conference – mobility and learning through observation of our own and others’ cultures. This notion rang true in several interpretations of the conference themes throughout the intellectually stimulating three-day event.

Topical themes included the impact and importance of space in theatrical performance, colonial, post-colonial and post post-colonial interventions and the audience and its role in relation to the performers – both physically and conceptually figured as *community*. Masquerade as a platform was highlighted in several presentations at the conference as well. Examples included how traditions of masquerade within theatrical traditions bring together past, present and future cultural politics into spaces in which each of these individual elements are spectacularly showcased – displayed – understood – and enjoyed. Specific examples presented included the art of the *griots* of the Mande; Zulu *Ngoma* – dance and music which emerged out of colonization and apartheid in South Africa; and the Giant Puppets of Mozambique amongst others.

Inextricably bound within African performative traditions is theatre in the service of the community and the many different forms in which it has been enacted. This includes the impact of African theatre both within the European tradition and within indigenous realms, and how the notion of the Afropean (African European) was highlighted. Ways in which this emerged in conference papers and performative dance included traveling across time and space through investigations of South Africa’s ‘Rainbow Generation’; the body as an anchor which serves to conflate time and space as it is manipulated to record movement, sound and emotion; *Mandombe* as a scientific tool and its connectivity to the need for a united language for all Africans; and theatre as it is harnessed as a tool in which it travels to communities in crisis through Theatre for Development (TfD) in Uganda. Each of these temporal and spatial movements demonstrates how multi-faceted identities are omnipresent in a continually evolving intellectual climate within and outside of Africa.

In conclusion, the primary message of this conference theme based on *Mobility, Identity and Change: African Peoples and Theatre Forms in a Post Post-Colonial World*, underscored and presented through diverse platforms how intrinsically important to AfTA is its continuing goal to create a space where performers, practitioners and all interested in African theatre and performance may meet, learn from each other by sharing knowledge in order to understand why African theatre is truly unique. Furthermore, such conferences bringing together like-minded individuals further underscore the necessity of defining and continuing to redefine the notion of what is *African* and what it can offer the world.

Introduction to the published papers

Out of the many papers delivered in Luanda, some are made available in expanded form in this *APR* volume. First is Harclde Walcott’s paper “The

Human Journey: Migration, Identity and Performance". It was supposed to be one of the conference key notes, but ironically, unexpected reasons of mobility and weather prevented Walcott's presentation. His article covers different aspects and histories of migration, starting with the process of birth as migration, the long migratory history of humankind, and the more recent history of colonisation and enslavement. Walcott looks at migration and contemporary discourses on migration from the perspective of a citizen of Barbados. He addresses the current North American practice of substituting "Caribbean" or "Jamaican" for "Black" and counters this salient point with a list of West Indian performers and artists who claim a specifically West Indian identity. Walcott finally argues that the post post-colonial identity should look back to the pre-colonial and demands for his readers to imagine Africa without national borders and without traffic routes monitored by the Global North. His keynote answers well to the focus on migration, tradition and history which covered areas such as Serge Aimé Coulibaly's dance theatre production *Kirina*, the ceremony for the first female chancellor's installation at the University of Ghana at Legon, and Angola's history of documentary film.

A different approach to questions of mobility and decoloniality was chosen by researcher and dancer Rainy Demerson, who gave a dance performance and conducted an interactive workshop during the conference. Her essay, entitled "Listen, Watch, Move: Embodied Listening as Structured Improvisation in Decolonialist Research" makes us relive the performance situation and supplies the ideas that led to and accompanied her physical performance. Performed both in South Africa and in Angola, Demerson's *Not so long ago...not so far away* uses embodied listening "to hear and understand differently" (Demerson). The essay conjures up the performance space and situation at the Instituto Superior Politécnico Metropolitano and bridges two sites of performance, the performance itself being an inscription of mobility and memory.

The issue of inscription is at the forefront of "O que é o Mandombe" by Mbanza Hanza, the first ever contribution in Portuguese *APR* is printing and testimony to the fact that the Angola conference was presented as bi-lingually as possible. Yet Mbanza Hanza takes the issue of languages beyond the spoken word to the written and right to the dissemination of a new writing system, Mandombe. The script, invented in 1978, was made available as a computer font by Mbanza Hanza. His communication shows the use of the scripture and emphasises the importance of a writing system adapted to African languages and decolonial knowledge.

The focus on decolonial practices in dance and writing was continued in papers which emphasised genuine African performance traditions. Even though theatre for development is not genuinely African, African countries have been a major site for its practice. Two articles in this volume tackle such theatre practice and its

challenges. These challenges differ quite considerably in the two examples from Nigeria and Uganda. Charles E. Nwadike in "Of Place and Displaced: Mobility and Space in the Performance of Crises" addresses the difficulties participatory community projects meet with if these communities are internally displaced people living in camps. Even though theatre is supposed to be a place of healing and self-expression for them, the logistic demands of the IDP-camps work against any structured rehearsal processes. Nwadike discusses the importance of space – and the reliability of space – for the workings of the improvisation process and a participative production. Kenneth Bamuturaki's article "Changing Top-Down Neo-colonial Agitprop approaches in Theatre for Development" has a clearly pronounced agenda: Instead of TfD productions taken to the people, paid for and created elsewhere, presumably in the capital, Bamuturaki introduces a participatory project he conducted in Western Uganda with the aim of transforming gender injustice. Instead of bringing a worked-out play, the participants, after some community-building, devised a play themselves, with the help of a facilitator, and addressed the concerns of the community. Bamuturaki emphasises that this form of applied theatre is unusual in the Ugandan context. In other parts of Africa, notably in Burkina Faso, Prosper Kompaoré has been working with entire villages and conducted workshops with 200 to 500 people since 2006, with the aim of having the community articulate their specific problems and find solutions (Bühler-Dietrich forthcoming). The joy of such projects, mentioned by Kompaoré, can equally be seen in Bamuturaki's project and the many photographs which accompany his article.

Several months after the Angola conference Covid-19 put a stop to all mobility, and the topic of mobility, identity and change has itself been haunted by this crisis. In July 2019, the Angola conference had also been overshadowed by the death of one of the founding members of AfTA, colleague and friend Victor Ukaegbu (1959-2019), who passed only a few weeks before the conference. We remember him as we pay our tribute to Ama Ata Aidoo, distinct Ghanaian author, playwright and professor, who passed at the end of May 2023.

Works cited:

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