

Editorial

**African Theatre in Motion: Legacies, Fractures, and Futures Across the Twenty  
First Century<sup>1</sup>**

Sola Adeyemi

*University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK*

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This volume brings together a set of distinct yet deeply interconnected explorations of African theatre, performance, and cultural production, each illuminating the evolving landscapes of creativity, resistance, identity, and institutional transformation across the continent and its diasporas. Read together, the contributions trace a compelling intellectual arc: from landmark artistic legacies in South Africa, through postcolonial aesthetics and literary politics, feminist dramaturgy, cultural economics, and diasporic operatic innovation, culminating in a continental reflection on democracy and performance. What emerges is a panoramic view of African theatre's political, philosophical, and artistic vitality in the twenty-first century.

The volume opens with two *in memoriam* essays that honour South Africa's towering theatrical figures. Katlego Morobi and Janine Lewis's tribute to Athol Fugard revisits the life and work of a playwright whose dramaturgy exposed apartheid's moral fractures while shaping generations of theatre-makers. Fugard's collaborative ethos, minimalist aesthetic, and unwavering commitment to truth-telling continue to inform pedagogical and creative practices across the country. His plays remain touchstones for understanding the ethical responsibilities of theatre in times of political crisis. Sola Adeyemi's portrait of Mbongeni Ngema extends this reflection by presenting a richly layered account of a theatre-maker whose work, including *Woza Albert!*, *Asinamali!*, and *Sarafina!*, embodied the rhythms, contradictions, and political ferocity of township performance. Ngema's legacy, both celebrated and contested, underscores the entanglement of art, activism, and public memory in South African cultural life. Adeyemi's essay reminds us that the history of South African theatre is

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inseparable from the history of resistance, and that its most influential practitioners often occupy complex, sometimes uncomfortable, positions within the country's national narratives.

From these memorials, the volume shifts to broader theoretical terrains. Osita Okagbue's "Fractures and Fissures" offers a rigorous examination of postcolonial African drama's aesthetic strategies of redress. Through analyses of Ola Rotimi, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo, Wole Soyinka, and Werewere Liking, Okagbue demonstrates how African playwrights fracture colonial narratives, reclaim historical agency, and domesticate Western dramatic forms to articulate counter-histories and cultural affirmation. His essay situates African drama as a site of epistemic resistance, where inherited forms are reworked to challenge the distortions of colonial historiography and to restore dignity to Africa's cultural memory.

The volume then moves from political aesthetics to cultural economics. Carla W. Springer Hunte's "Lamming, Shakespeare and the Bank" interrogates the uneasy marriage between artistic creativity and economic viability in the Caribbean. Her reflections on cultural policy, creative entrepreneurship, and the tensions between artistic integrity and market demands resonate strongly with continental debates on sustainability in the arts. By placing Shakespeare and George Lamming in conversation with contemporary cultural-industry frameworks, Springer Hunte highlights the persistent challenge of building viable creative economies without sacrificing artistic autonomy or cultural specificity.

The next two contributions foreground women's agency and diasporic creativity. Annkatrin Votteler-Veit's study of Afi Gbegbi's *Soeurs d'ange* offers a feminist semiotic analysis of Togolese dramaturgy, revealing how Gbegbi's work challenges gendered hierarchies and expands the representational possibilities for women in West African theatre. Her reading highlights the ways in which Gbegbi's characters resist stereotypes, assert agency, and navigate the social and spiritual constraints of their patriarchal environment. The volume then turns to the diasporic reimagining of African performance. Samuel Kasule's interview with Zodwa Nyoni traces the emergence of *Tears Are Not Meant to Stay Inside*, the first African opera staged in the United Kingdom. Nyoni's reflections on ritual, diaspora, multilingualism, and ancestral aesthetics exemplify the transnational evolution of African performance today. Her work demonstrates how African artists in the diaspora negotiate linguistic inheritance, cultural memory, and artistic form to create new modes of operatic expression.

The volume concludes with M. C. Camara's report on the 2024 African Theatre Association (AfTA) conference in Côte d'Ivoire, a fitting final contribution that widens the lens back to the continent. Camara foregrounds theatre as a democratic tool and a site of epistemic encounter between Anglophone and

Francophone Africas. Her metaphor of *allico*—the Ivorian fried plantain dish—captures the spirit of the collection: African theatre as a space where cultural specificity, political urgency, and creative experimentation meet, transform, and nourish one another. Presented in both English and French, the report embodies the multilingual, cross-cultural ethos that AfTA champions and that this volume seeks to honour.

Collectively, these contributions illuminate a continent—and its diaspora—where theatre remains a crucible of memory, innovation, and cultural self-fashioning. They remind us that African performance is not merely an artistic practice but a dynamic intellectual tradition, continually reshaped by the urgencies of history, the demands of the present, and the imaginative possibilities of the future.