

Introduction

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Theatre for Development as a theatre form *sui generis* emerged in the 1970s out of different activities and under differing labels, a ‘confluence of cognate practices’ in Tim Prentki’s formulation (Prentki 2015: 15). It has been described variously as Community Theatre, Interventionist Theatre (Inyang 2016), Community Media (Carpentier, Lie and Servaes 2003), Popular Theatre (Mlama 1991), Applied Theatre (Mda 1993). Theatre in Education, Popular Theatre, Community Theatre all pre-existed TfD and either re-formed around the new term, Theatre for Development, or provided particular techniques or institutional contexts. Plastow (2014: 117) also includes ‘edutainment’ as an additional term. Tim Prentki, Kees Eskamp and Ross Kidd have each traced the narrative of this story: we are familiar with the common denominators and founding fathers and mothers: Michael Etherton, Zakes Mda, Ngūgĩ wa Thiongo, Rose Mbowa and Penina Mlama, to name only some. What is less well understood is how and why this particular configuration of people, places and practices coalesced to form such a powerful and influential movement that came to assume institutional characteristics. How did TfD come to be institutionalized in its current forms and practices?

From its early beginnings in the 1970s, TfD quickly transformed itself into a coherent organizational field capable of attracting significant governmental and NGO funding. It also brought about changes in the teaching and practice of theatre studies in many African countries. The argument could be made that the success of TfD in the Global South has contributed significantly to the emergence of Applied Theatre as a subdiscipline in many Global North countries.

In its reliance on expertise and the development paradigm TfD can also be considered a form of ‘technopolitics’, a term popularized by scholars of the Cold War and development politics alike (Mitchell 2002; Hecht 2011). It refers to the complex interdependence between political imperatives and the seemingly selfless goals of bringing expertise in

modern engineering, technology, and social science to help developing countries. The concept hinges on a critical interrogation of the very concept of expertise and its often-unquestioned structures of authority. The term enables an examination of the “unpredictable power effects of technical assemblages” (Hecht 2011: 3) which could refer to the introduction of pedagogical techniques such as workshops or the social engineering of Theatre for Development practices.

The research into socially engaged theatre and performance provides key entry points into a generation of theories and an archive of communal/developmental history that is embedded in the praxis of Theatre for Development (TfD). The TfD concept has evolved over the years and tries “to organize and synthesize existing knowledge in two fields of the humanities, that is, theatre and social science” (Asiama 2003: 136). The volume of research, practice and training provide avenues by which contemporary histories, experiences and theories can serve as a discourse towards creating an alternative livelihood and also for communicating social change and development.

Regardless of its context, TfD depicts a broader nexus of cultural practices. It becomes a site where cultural performances flourish, dialogue was initiated and aesthetics developed. The scope of this genre, as Kamlongera (2005) suggests, permeates community-based theatre, prison theatre, political theatre, drama/theatre in education, theatre for evangelism, new media and film, ethno-dramatics and drama therapy. It strives to provide a more comprehensive aesthetic, sociological and historical context for evaluating social change and development initiatives from the subjects’ perspective. The challenge however is that practitioners and academics either seldom or only intermittently document and theorize their practice. This stems from the fluidity of the approaches and practices. It is a truism, however, that we are at a point when new dynamics are emerging around the issues of the histories and theories of the Theatre for Development genre. These histories and theories need to be excavated, documented and reexamined for a clear understanding of the old and new paradigms.

Emerging in the 1970s in the wake of Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and influenced by the activism of adult educators such as Ross Kidd and Martin Byram as well as theatre scholars

and practitioners like Augusto Boal, Christopher Kamlongera, David Kerr, Steve Oga Abah, Michael Etherton, Theatre for Development has evolved into a global practice and resource tool for participatory research, advocacy, sensitization, education, empowerment and development in both urban and rural communities.

Drawing from wide-ranging research platforms, the concept, history and practice of Tfd has transcended transnational boundaries in its quest for conceptualizing and facilitating social transformation and raising critical issues of concern among ordinary people in disadvantaged communities or neighbourhoods around the world. The goals and methodology of Theatre for Development entail multi-level collaboration and networking between expert communities, philanthropic organizations, donor agencies, governmental agencies and organizations, nongovernmental organizations, facilitators, local practitioners and participants throughout and beyond the duration of projects. As these multilateral levels of interactions serve as the basis for accessibility to participating communities, concerns have frequently been raised about the process of selecting, structuring and presenting developmental issues, especially, as regards whether project objectives and contents reflect the desires of ordinary people or are controlled by and handed down from top to bottom by powerful bodies, government workers and community leaders. Since the Tfd paradigm is often adopted as the 'best fit' method in development communication by most international development organizations, several international and regional bodies including UNICEF, Union of African Performing Artists, African Council on Communication Education etc have made crucial attempts towards providing a viable platform where experts, practitioners, facilitators, governments, NGOs, donors, and partners could interact, coordinate, learn, network or share ideas from their experiences in the field.

This volume is designed to illuminate the historical and theoretical perspectives that informed Tfd as a global development practice as well as examine the layers of collaboration and networking behind cases, projects and/or contextual histories or backgrounds that shape Tfd practices in emerging countries. The contributions drawn from practitioners and researchers from across Africa interrogate the following research questions: (i) How technopolitics have influenced the con-

ception and development outcomes of TfD projects globally? (ii) How have the transnational growth and spread of TfD practice impacted operational and developmental goals in disadvantaged communities in Africa? (iii) How do international and regional organizations as well as governments shape and limit TfD practices in emerging countries? (iv) What cultural implications, transmutations or issues have emerged due to internationally-assisted development practices or interventions at urban/rural spaces, especially, in the Global South?

The book is divided into two sections. In the first part the term is discussed by leading practitioners and theorists with a focus on its conceptual underpinnings and its broader historical evolution. The second section presents country-specific case studies from Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria (including regional differences), and Tanzania. Prentki in the first chapter discusses the symbiotic relationship between theatre and development within the practice of TfD across the globe. He looks at various experiences documented by TfD practitioners, especially in Africa, that address the question which conjunction is most appropriate to link the two concepts: theatre and development. Whereas it seems most TfD rehearses the change it seeks to see in society, Prentki makes it clear it does not end there, as TfD in Africa serves as a springboard to acting out the change in society. In the second chapter, Steve Abah takes us through his over four-decade journey as a TfD practitioner in Africa using an element that is ever present in African folklore tradition: storytelling. Readers get to appreciate the genesis of TfD on the African continent and its contestation with power as it seeks to cater for the marginalised in society. He points out the impacts, challenges and trends of TfD in Africa. He aptly ends by eulogising some forerunners of the TfD practice, whom he terms “TfD ancestors” for their varied contributions to TfD.

In chapter three Penina Mlama examines the quest of TfD in Africa for empowering grassroots communities to engage in critical participation in development processes. She begins by exploring the socio-economic context of African communities and how their local performance modes, which fuel the practice of TfD in Africa, have interrogated the conditions and causes of the marginalised in society and the desire to effect change. In discussing TfD as a developmental model in Africa, Mlama delineates the concept and emergence of TfD,

acknowledges influences external to Tfd in Africa (like Boal's Forum Theatre technique), and juxtaposes Tfd with the top-down development model. Despite the apparent advantages of Tfd compared with the top-down development model, Mlama also highlights the pertinent challenges associated with using Tfd to empower marginalised communities. The enormity of challenges despite the work of the "animateur" should prompt Tfd practitioners not to relent in finding new ways to complement Tfd's quest to empower grassroots communities.

Critically examining some stories that originated from local community members' lived experiences, Banda and Mpolomoka discuss their experiences with Tfd within and outside academia. The four case studies they reflect on were Tfd projects carried out by students that treated substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, nutrition issues and perceptions of a male midwife. This chapter makes a strong case for local communities' importance when academic institutions carry out Tfd projects.

In his contribution Balme sets out to answer two-pronged question: how the emergence of Tfd was determined by broader transnational movements and pressures and how it came to be institutionalised in its current forms and practices. Balme's investigations spell out the seemingly coincident but symbiotic relationship between the Structural Adjustment Programmes African countries signed up to and the birth of Tfd. He also traces the history of the institutionalisation of Tfd in African universities and the active role played by foreign donations from former colonial powers (like France and Great Britain) and other western-based agencies (e.g. Rockefeller, The Carnegie Corporation and USAID). This has made it possible for the growth of Tfd as a fully-fledged academic field and has also developed into an organisational field.

Hakib examines the influences, contexts and changing narratives of Tfd practice in Ghana. He traces the history of Tfd in Ghana to the activities of the Concert Party travelling theatre tradition as well as the mass education and development campaigns by the colonial government. Hakib notes that the UNESCO puppet training and polyvalent workshop organised in eight of the then ten regions of Ghana in 1962–1963 also served as a catalyst for the emergence of Tfd there. He also touches on the significant contribution of Efua Sutherland in her experiments with the anansegoro dramaturgy both at the Drama Studio and Ekumfi Atwia.

Samba offers us a rare insight into the history of the practice of Tfd in Cameroon and its attendant consequences on formal and non-formal institutions. She clearly shows the progression and growth of Tfd in Cameroon from its beginnings in the 1980s through to the present by delineating some workshops and projects that took place as well as their impact on the local communities. The chapter also identifies the universities as the pivot around which Tfd has boomed in Cameroon and acknowledges the varied roles of NGOs and foreign embassies in employing Tfd in their activities. In search of an answer to the question what qualifies as Theatre for Development, Yankah takes a critical look at the varied styles of Tfd practice in Ghana. He references the various dimensions of Tfd praxis in Ghana and classifies them into two major categories, Structured and Unstructured. He further outlines the features of both typologies taking note of the similarities shared as well as differences.

Iyang and Iyang in their chapter undertake a historical survey of Tfd practice in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria, emphasising the state of the practice under the prevailing circumstances between the 1990s and the present. They also demonstrate the viability of employing indigenous cultural resources in Tfd projects carried out in the various states in South-South Nigeria. Finally, they highlight the positive impacts Tfd made in communities, not forgetting the challenges that came along with it.

Idebe examines the impact tertiary institutions in Nigeria have made in driving the Tfd model as a channel that offers local communities the opportunity to make their voices and inputs to community development count. He also takes note of the challenges that have been encountered by the tertiary institutions and concludes by suggesting some ways forward.

Igbaba takes on the issue of impact assessment of Tfd academic practice within the Niger-Benue Valley to ascertain its long-term feasibility. Using focus group discussions, interviews and community score cards, Igbaba assesses the impact of Tfd practice in local communities by six tertiary institutions in the Niger-Benue domain. Through descriptive analysis, the findings establish the sustainability of Tfd academic practice in Niger-Benue Valley.

In the last chapter, Sanga does a situational analysis of Tfd praxis in Tanzania in the context of the seemingly dwindling Theatre for Devel-

opment practice in the country. He walks readers through the vibrant practice of TfD from its inception in the 1970s until the first half of 2000. Sanga uncovers several factors spearheading the downturn of TfD in Tanzania, namely, lack of commitment of staff to write proposals, the structure of TfD courses and lack of ideology to guide actions. The chapter also brings the benefits the university and communities stand to gain with TfD practice.

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