

Theatre for Development: Reflections on a Pedagogy in Flux

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Abstract

This is an age full of challenges that are crying for attention and resolution. The plethora of issues that TfD can mine includes, but is not limited to, security, governance, climate change, health, gender-based violence, equity, and inclusion in all societies burdened by systemic discrimination. However, more needs to be done and more people need to get on board. I propose that we tell stories to contextualize the practice, reflect on what we have done and our achievements. Then we can assess and figure out a road map. Also, when we have told the stories of TfD journeys, we will know where TfD is going as well as what methods and strategies it needs to adopt in this digital age. My paper engages in a brief story of TfD's journey of learning and of crossing boundaries – from the indigenous performances through the academia and the NGO sectors.

Where We Started: Of genealogies and the crucible of indigenous wisdoms

In the beginning, our people sang
They chanted
They drummed
They danced
And they tranced

In the songs, they told stories and histories
In the chants, they evoked eulogies to ancestors and heroes
And the drums in their guttural sounds
Reached the ethereal
When seasoned performers tranced
They traversed the now and the unknown
To lay a bridge between what was and what is

The songs, the chants, the drums and dances, and the trance were means of communication – community members talking with each other; community members with other communities; the performers with ancestors and divinity. They were expressions of either joy or sorrow. They also supplicated greater powers for blessings and to lay a bridge between the many worlds invoked. The songs, the chants, the drums, the dances, and the occasional trance explained community philosophies; they educated and sustained culture. Indeed, the performances outlined aspirations, challenges, and attempted possible futures. The essence of ownership and the freedom to define self and community is what Augusto Boal (1970: 119) captured in his seminal book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. He wrote:

'In the beginning, the theatre was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast.' The dithyramb that Boal talked about expresses itself in many indigenous genres, such as storytelling and others.

Listen to this song:

Tortoise: Adagba Omomo w'onya ada ngeche!

Audience: Olobo cholobo! (2x)

Tortoise: Omomo nge che!

Audience: Olobo cholobo (2x)

Tortoise: Adagba omomo w'onny ada ngeche!

Olobo Cholobo tetete!

The elephant is the giant horse that I ride

Olobo cholobo!

The giant that I ride!

Olobo cholobo

Elephant is the giant horse that I ride

Olobo cholobo tetete!

The daughter of King Adam Ochancho is the most beautiful girl in the whole universe! The dream of every male in this kingdom is to marry her. But the princess has lots of criteria that define the qualities of the man she must marry – wealth, height, handsomeness, good character, etc. All those who deemed themselves qualified had tried and were rejected. Now, Tortoise stakes his claim to the princess by a crafty design of enlisting the support of the Elephant. He deceives him that he is going to visit his in-laws and implores the Elephant to accompany him. What the Elephant does not know is that Tortoise wants to demonstrate his wealth, pomp, and elegance when he rides on the back of the Elephant as his horse into the princess's compound! Tortoise makes an impressive entry, amidst pomp and pageantry. There is ululation, and the princess is excited! (*Olobo! Cholobo!!*) But the whole plan ends in disaster! At the height of the merriment, the earplugs that Tortoise craftily devised for Elephant to prevent him from hearing the song he sings and what the crowd is saying pop and fly off! There is commotion, and Tortoise runs for his life! The story above ends with Tortoise 'escaping' the wrath of Elephant by running to the riverside, and burrowing into the mud and deep water. And the story concludes, 'That is how it came to be that tortoise lives in water today.'

Aetiology of Escape and the Deductive Morality in Idoma Storytelling (Och'oocha)

As a child growing up in the village of Onyuwei in Benue State of Nigeria, two things excited me about the storytelling sessions that were held at night during the wet season. One was the groundnuts that were easily available to eat! The second was the ending of the stories, which taught me new knowledge. The months of July, August, and September, which were the peak of the rainy season in Nigeria, are also the time for serious farm work. This period usually asks for rest at the end of the day's work. Communities employed storytelling as one of the forms of relaxation. They also used this season as a time to educate the young ones and grow them into the cultural norms and practices of their communities. *Och'oocha* (storytelling) is also a practice to bring community members together for interaction and bonding. The men and women versed in the art demonstrated their mastery of telling and performance amidst friendly competition. In addition to enjoying all these, the accompaniment of groundnuts as refreshment was something I never wanted to miss! One of my favourite stories was, and continues to be, the beautiful princess who rejected all her suitors except...

I cite this story for two reasons. One is that storytelling in African cultures is a pedagogical approach for schooling children and adolescents into the cultures of their

communities. It allows them to learn the cultural practices and the philosophies embedded in the stories/performances (Abalogu, 1981). The stories also offer glimpses of the cosmological and ethical values of the people. Those same songs, drums, and dances that frame the picture, the mise-en-scene of the performances in many indigenous performances in the past are still relevant today. They are part of the performance arsenal from which TfD learned and borrowed. The second reason is how much I never cease to be intrigued by the aetiological ending of *Ocha* performances. And it concludes, 'That is how it came to be that tortoise lives in water today.' The how-things-came-to-be ending hides the moral contained in the story. However, every adult understands that there is more to the story than the aetiological ending. I believe that this ending challenges the listeners/audience to be deductive to understand the moral lessons embedded in the story/performance. The escape of Tortoise is, in fact, banishment. He has been deceptive, dishonest, and crosses moral boundaries as he abuses friendship and transgresses accepted norms. He does not escape punishment, as the surface of the aetiology suggests. Tortoise goes into exile because he disrupts the order of society in this story. Tortoise is the trickster figure in the Idoma *Ocha* tradition. He is a fictive character, yet representational of all the persons who transgress societal norms, who cheat, who are deceptive and who oppress. The young lady's celebration is also cut short, because her specifications of what a good husband should be are superlative, thereby overpricing herself, which leads Tortoise and herself into disrepute.

I am also intrigued by the contest that takes place between performers at *Ocha* sessions. Through interjection and takeover of the story, the teller/performer is deemed not to do justice to the story. In a good *Ocha* performance, you will experience the call and response, the interjection and intervention, all of which liven the show as well as testify to participation. I am tempted to say that we have, perhaps without understanding it, made use of the aetiological distancing in our third-person narrative in TfD to 'protect' community members, and if we dig deeper, we might see similarities to Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). I am tempted to say that we have, perhaps without understanding it, made use of the aetiological distancing in our third-person narrative in TfD to 'protect' community members. Let me provoke a debate here: *Are there elements of alienation effect in indigenous storytelling, and how do these operate to synchronize with the principle of participation?*

Beyond *Ocha*, there are several other indigenous performances in different parts of Africa such as Alarinjo, Kwagh-hir, Pungwe, etc. (Hagher, 2014) that have benefitted TfD. The cultural and performative traditions of African societies have been a knowledge trove for Theatre for Development. The pedagogical process of indigenous arts seems to be mostly informal. Yet the content, events, and the place/space all constitute the school offering educational lessons on indigenous wisdom, community building, and rehearsal of the craft of performances.

Learning from, complementing, and taking forward the indigenous performances, the practice of dialogue drama, comedy, invectives/diatribes, and radical literary theatre has supported the growth of TfD in Africa. In terms of the combination of the indigenous and dialogue drama, I recall Hubert Ogunde (Clark) and Kola Ogunmola, the fire-eating drama of Duro Ladipo (1972), and the comedy of Moses Olaiya Adejumo (alias Baba Sala). They moved from the rural to the urban with a digest of activism, social commentary, and entertainment. Interestingly, the attraction of these performances was partly their cultural content (songs, drumming, and dances). However, the themes were about freedom, liberation, and socio-economic issues. Hubert Ogunde saw the injustices of the British colonial administration from a vantage point of being a police officer in the colonial force. When, therefore, he resigned from the force to take the gauntlet against his erstwhile employer, he knew the weight of his decision. His play, *Bread and Bullet*, tells the story of the brutality and oppression of the poor in the hands of the colonial administration in Nigeria. When we see Ogun in Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso* (1972) as a fiery fire-eating god, the so-called tyranny of Ogun may be what catches the eye. But, behind that surface, could Ogun be cleansing ills and, in the process, recreating a better society in his foundry?

Add to the indigenous forms the radical plays of Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Tunde Fatunde, Bode Sowande, through to the later generation of Ahmed Yerima, Emmy Idegu, Irene Salami, Tracie Utoh-Ezeagu, etc. There are many more examples, but let these suffice. I believe that there are common points in many of the plays with the concerns that TfD has raised in its practice.

There is no doubt that the story of Theatre for Development (TfD) in Africa has its foundations in so many indigenous practices, and that it has borrowed, developed, appropriated, as well as updated some of those same practices. I know that the journey, which popularized Popular Theatre/Theatre for Development in Nigeria, and indeed all other African countries, was its experimentation and sojourn in the

academe. My involvement in TfD also tells me that it is a restless practice, and that it was not content to stop in the ivory tower. So, it sought partners in the third sector, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). And, the government institutions and international development agencies looked for TfD too! I am unable to go through narrating all the transformative journeys through the performative traditions that birthed TfD in Africa. Nonetheless, I cannot completely run away from telling some of those stories. The stories encompass the village, urban conurbation, and the ivory tower. Examples include: Laedza Batanani (Ross Kidd 1981), Chikwakwa (Etherton, 2011), Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria (Abah, 1986), Boal (1970), Kamiriithu (Ngugi Wathiong'o, 1977), Zimbabwe (Abah, 1984), Cameroon (Eyoh, 1985), etc.

It is clear that TfD is a genre of theatre looking to see how the stories from old, how histories and wisdom hidden in cultural forms, both from ancient times and now, speak to the present. Further, it makes us see how that information helps us to rework and they apply to our current exigencies. All of these realizations fired debates about the roles, nomenclatures, methodologies, etc. When this genre first emerged in the 1970s, it was called Popular Theatre. And we started to debate what this theatre does. Two words seemed to capture the essence: *development* and *change*. Then Oga Steve Abah (1989) says, 'Why do we not call it "Theatre for Integrated Development (TIDE)"?' Ndumbe Hansel Eyoh (1985) from Cameroon adds, 'Or "Community Theatre for Integrated Rural Development (CTHIRD)"?' In the ABU practice, 'Community Theatre' was popular while in the Asia sub-region, 'People's Theatre' was in vogue. In the United Kingdom and the United States of America, 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (TO) found its way into the vocabulary. To the best of my recollection, it was after the International Popular Theatre Workshop in Murewa District, Zimbabwe, that the debate was further ignited in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria before we finally settled for "Theatre for Development (TfD)". Now I hear new terms, such as "Theatre for Social Change", "Theatre for Change", and "Applied Theatre"! Are they different from what we have been doing for the past 55 years?

Pedagogy of Theatre for Development – From the Classroom to Underserved Locations

When TfD broke into academia in 1970, it was an inadvertent breakthrough. When Government officials went to the Department of Adult Education to solicit the assistance of Ross Kidd, Martin Byram, and their other colleagues, it was to help them mount a campaign to promote their development agenda so that the ordinary people of Botswana could accept and follow the plan. The government was not asking the

educators to develop a curriculum of Popular Theatre/Theatre for Development in the University, although eventually, it found space in the academe. The pedagogical approach of Laedza Batanani and Chikwakwa Theatre in Zambia (Etherton), which followed, was didactic, and the component of people's voices was weak. The excitement of the new phenomenon of theatre created for and playing to the people in communities was astounding. Kidd, Byram, Etherton, and many of us believed and named the practice as Freirean! But it was not, because with time, it became evidence to us all that it was pseudo-Freirean. A practice whose pedagogical intent was to pass information and ask for acceptance and adoption of unqueried 'truth' as *Laedza Batanani* did, can only be regarded as a non-liberational exercise.

The Drama Section of the Department of English and Drama at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Nigeria; the Kamiriithu Project in Limuru, Kenya; and the 'Mother Africa' series at Makerere University, Uganda, led by Rose Mbowa (2019), had significant contribution. Also, the participatory development approaches in the Jipemoyo projects in Tanzania, which was a platform on which TfD in the University in Dar es Salaam began the practice in Malawi. All these contributed to reviewing, challenging and directing TfD towards a pedagogy of liberation. Paul Freire's principle of conscientization (critical consciousness and action) provided the theoretical framework. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was the theoretical Bible, and August Boal's book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, was the theatre guide in the TfD practice. The interrogation challenged the theatre-for-the-people process, in which finished products were performed for communities and their participation was limited to the post-performance discussion. The gaps, of course, included a lack of community voice in the drama-making process, and the performance, which was in itself an act of occupying the driving seat, excluded the people. The perspectives and analyses in the drama were largely those of the animateurs. All of these were teething problems of the practice in the early days when it was learning. Although some of these issues, and new ones, still beleaguer Theatre for Development (TfD), the field has evolved in its practices to deal with some of the problems.

Pedagogy of Change and the Eschatology of Development

If we need to develop and/or deepen a pedagogy of change, instead of a pedagogy of rote and if Theatre for Development is a tool in this pedagogy, then what exactly is TfD? I am sure everyone here knows what TfD is, but just to refresh:

Theatre for Development is the theatre practice that addresses community issues and problems using the people's language and art forms as media of

expression. It also analyses such issues from the people's perspectives (at least in the first instance). It is from within that perspective that positions may be challenged and changed. (Abah, 2005)

TfD is the practice in which ordinary persons in disadvantaged communities (very often with the collaboration of amateurs) research and address their issues and problems to better understand them and to find solutions.

- TfD emanates from the lived experiences of the people
- TfD operates from within the cultural matrix of communities where it is practiced (songs, dances, proverbs, etc. Hence *perforaltics* (Abah, 2003)
- TfD is a meeting point of perspectives and methods, i.e., dialogue across various planes, disciplines, and with different groups (*methodological conversations*)
- It is a distillation of mores, facts, and experiences
- It is a celebration of new knowledge
- The quintessence of TfD is participation.

Within academia, we have operated the teaching of TfD in two stages. One is the theoretical journey we make with students, exploring theories ranging from Bertolt Brecht, Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, and the work of more recent practitioners, some of whom are at this conference (Abah, Hagher, Busby, Plastow, etc). After the theories and case studies, the real encounter and learning come from the practical engagement in communities where the realities of what TfD talks about are experienced. The application of the theoretical learning from academia and its reworking to speak to reality takes place in the dusty arenas of the villages and urban settings. This pedagogy demands respect for culture and authority. It requires that we research our facts in partnership with members of the community, analyze the facts with them, build scenarios together, and allow the communities to perform their lives.

Therefore, there are two 'development' destinations for TfD practice in Africa; namely, degrees and socio-economic betterment. The one is for students who are studying Theatre for degree purposes. The other is for community members who want improvement and better standards of living. Perhaps there is a third destination, and this is for scholars like all of us gathered here. We have been engaged in the enterprise of knowledge creation - of developing careers, of making publications and seeking promotion. All of these are valid quests. The question I always ask is "How do we apply the degrees, qualifications, experience and insights to strengthen, or indeed to renew, the pedagogy of TfD in support of development?" My second question is, "Are

we more interested in the romance of TfD or in the difficult exercise of getting our hands into the grit alongside millions of marginalized people in rural and urban communities? Are we prepared to be rebuffed by authorities, with whom you want to advocate on behalf of the underserved?"

TfD practitioners must be aware that development is a shielded industry. *It is eschatological* (My emphasis). To explain what I mean by this, allow me to quote from my Inaugural Lecture of 2021 thus:

There is an intriguing similarity between the preachment of religion and that of development. They both talk of prescribed ways or patterns of behaviour and action with attendant outcomes of reward or punishment, as the case may be. Whereas in theological terms, eschatology is about death, judgment and the destiny of the soul of humankind; in development, it is about paradigms and strategies, which, if followed, yield good results. In the eschatology of religion, you go to heaven or hell. In designing the paradigm of development to follow, you are either judged to adhere to rules (IMF, World Bank, Paris Club) – and you get a World Bank loan as a reward, or you are a development heretic/pariah and you become 'a failed state'!

This eschatology is implemented through paradigms of assistance and development loans. Also, away from the fiduciary strategies, which can be seen on the surface, there is a surreptitious, but constant strategy of pillage of indigenous knowledge, in which the custodians are denigrated, their knowledge appropriated and patented by transnational entities (alias corporate citizens) The result is that the original owners of knowledge are abandoned and, on many occasions, bypassed by the development path; and left to their fate in their communities of 'hell'. Herein lies the eschatological similarity.

The challenge before all of us in this matter is how to reverse this development eschatology of death of nations to an eschatology of life. I believe that we can contribute to the reversal of this system. As a matter of fact, we are already doing so. We only need to intensify and escalate what we are doing. Theatre is our craft, and it is also our tool to implement this change in eschatological thinking. We are scholars and teachers. We have thousands of students. So, our first strategy is to groom and grow them to understand the pedagogy of change and transformation. The classroom becomes a knowledge laboratory to understand what the true meaning of development is. It is a place to unpack and interrogate development thinking and practice. It is in this space that we begin to raise the consciousness of students to understand the relationship between TfD, development, and the Academy. The

second is the community arena. This is the site of application of theories to reality. This begins with knowing that development is not a destination-bound phenomenon, but a process-oriented one. I conceptualise development as a series of activities and actions in a process that leads to change and transformation in the lives of people. This process involves the surfacing of hitherto under-researched and unanalysed issues in communities, whether rural or urban, that have not allowed people to live fulfilled lives.

On its part, TfD is a constellation of practices working together to change or disrupt negative energies that have characterised development. It is a process of using participatory research (PLA, songs, dances, performance, etc.) to challenge the eschatology of development. It is this constellation of cooperation that I have characterised as ‘methodological conversation’ (Abah, 2003). The deployment of this constellation of methods operates in opposition to the eschatology of denigration of ordinary citizens. ‘I believe that TfD can operate from and with participatory learning and action (PLA), and that PLA can spring from TfD. Therefore, a symbiotic relationship, which in practice can support enlightenment, conscientization, and action for change, does exist.’ (Abah, 2003). This conversation of mutuality may be based on the fact that:

- PLA and TfD build pictures of issues, problems, and of life stories. While PLA may very often build such pictures on two-dimensional surfaces (on paper or in the sand), TfD pictures issues in songs, through storytelling, and the body(ies) in motion in the arenas of the village and urban settings.
- While PLA would generate participation through ‘writing’ (through transect, social mapping, etc.), TfD generates involvement through performative forms of participatory theatre, intervention and processing/facilitation.
- So, it is possible for the transect walk and the drawing of the social map to spring from within the drama. The experience of Birnin Kebbi tells me that the community map can be dynamised through performance for the issues to come to life as participants interrogate the map. I have also witnessed how the interrogation of the community map leads to new understanding (Anchau). (See Abah, PLA Notes, No.50)

These examples attest to the fact of the usefulness of mixed methods of researching society, that the cooperation between different disciplines; arts, social science, and the physical sciences, contributes to a better understanding of issues and can change perspectives.

The cooperation we have mostly explored in the Nigerian experience is between TfD and social science. This cooperation to address common agendas has been towards making potentials and possibilities realisable in a manner that research communities/beneficiaries gain new insights. The insights gained have been in many ways. As a researcher and practitioner in the field of TfD, I have seen benefits in the conversations between different disciplines and methods and in the harvest of cultural knowledge. I can attest to the role of culture in shaping the pedagogy of TfD. The blending, the integration of such cultural tools, is what I have cast as *perforaltics* (2005).

Perforaltics is the oral and gestural amalgamation of a community's cultural systems into a dramatic representation of their reality. The oral, which names and codifies the issues in this system of performance, does not only refer to dialogue. It is about the gamut of language, which includes speech, song, drum, and dance. They expound and locate the community's philosophy and ethos... Perforaltics in action, therefore, is the deployment of the oral and gestural instruments in the performance warehouse of the performer in the pursuit of creating a picture and in generating meaning. It is the practice in which a dramatic piece is created through an essentially oral process incorporating, if not entirely relying on, the performance modes of the community, giving such drama life and meaning... Perforaltics in operation defines the ethics and aesthetics of the community in which theatre for development (TfD) is operating. The performance expounds their worldview which can, of course, be challenged and reshaped within the performance. But their appreciation of all these emanates from their identification with the art forms they know belong to them (Abah, 2005).

I have seen the relevance and functionality of indigenous forms in speaking to people's development issues in Nigeria and different countries of Africa and elsewhere. For example, in Onyuwei, Nigeria (1989), and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (1978), a cavalcade of masquerades defined and set the agenda of the International Theatre for Development Workshop. In Turmi, Ethiopia (1985), the livelihood issues and tensions between the Hamar and Geleb over pasture were captured in songs and dance. These fed into a TfD drama that set the tone for the International Pastoralist Gathering. In Zimbabwe (1983), *Mbira* and *Jerusarema* songs and dances, which were forms from the *pungwe* tradition, were woven into the performances of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation in a new Zimbabwe struggling to understand the mechanics of bringing warring factions into nation-thinking.

I sat at the *Zokolo* (*public/village square*) in Oaxaca, Mexico (2003), with a glass of tequila and a grasshopper snack, and when I saw the indigenous people singing and selling their wares, I asked what the content of the songs was. I was told they sang of when they owned the land and about their eventual dispossession, and the need to reclaim their freedom.

All over Nigeria – from the Benue International Popular Theatre Workshop of 1981 in Yandev and Gboko, to the North, East, West, and South – I have witnessed performativity in action. Upon reflection, I realise that the defining moment for me in theorising performativity, which I had been part of for several decades, was the 1989 Theatre for Integrated Development (TIDE) workshop in Onyuwei, Adankari and Otobi, Benue State, Nigeria (see my book, *Performing Life: Case Studies in the Practice of Theatre for Development*). It was at that workshop that I saw the boundary between the fiction of theatre and the reality of life in the community collapse into one. It was then that I witnessed Etta, a virtuoso singer, compere the show, perform her drama from within the drama of the animateurs, urged members of the community to challenge the facilitators and to state their cases clearly, and differently from what they imagined. Etta's narrator/joker role operated in a contrapuntal direction to the main performance. And in response, Agboji, the real chief in the village, entered the fiction of the drama as the chief of the village to act himself. He confronted the Government official from Lagos, stating how neglected his community was, and he demanded action. He transformed the drama from fiction to reality. Ndumbe Eyoh howled, Ghonche Materego and Jenks Okwori debated from within the drama in front of everyone about the changing narrative and why the performance was in an unexpected flux. They had to cede control to the people. The true meaning of the people in the driving seat was exemplified here!

Perhaps, the pictures I have painted all sound and look familiar. But, believe me, the process of integrating indigenous performances in the field to make the discussion and performance the people's own story and drama is not cheap (c.f. Dombwe, Zimbabwe (Abah, 1983). The practitioner needs to know which forms are off-limits; they need to be able to manage the crowd and facilitate the event in the village square; the story must be nuanced, and the performance of it ought to resonate with community experience and aspirations. The performance needs to lead to the next stage of public debate and possibly, action planning. It should also be noted that a happily-ever-after ending, with all issues resolved, contradicts the TfD principle of constant interrogation, which makes the TfD play an unending one. The play never ends because one solution reveals associated issues and contradictions, which then

demand further interrogation and new action. And those issues and actions will ask for an extension of the performance, or a new one altogether. If development is a constant negotiation with forces of nature and authority, TfD practice must keep tracking and looking for solutions.

What We Have Achieved and the New Frontiers

- i. It may sound ordinary, but TFD has become a household name in academic institutions offering Theatre Studies all over Africa. The jerky beginning in the 1970s has made bold strides. It is difficult to find any Theatre programme in an African University that does not talk about TfD, even if it has not established it as a full course of study. In the Nigerian environment, Ahmadu Bello University set the pace, and it exported Popular Theatre/Theatre for Development to other Universities in the country.
- ii. TfD has established its lexicon of participation in the theoretical discourses of theatre studies, in which the erstwhile special performers *a la deus ex machina* were performing issues on behalf of the viewing audience has changed. In the new lexicon of theatre and performance, as TfD proposes, it is a language of people interrogating and performing issues together. In doing this, disciplinary boundaries have been transgressed from performance to development. As a matter of fact, it has been bridged. It is this disciplinary transgression that has allowed ‘*methodological conversations*’ to occur and has become an emerging theoretical consideration in TfD.
- iii. In these many years, the performative ethics in communities may have moved beyond serving as colouration and beautification of performances to becoming quintessential in the framing and narratology of TfD. How else would Etta in Onyuwei be able to set up an operatic narrative performance whose sub-text was contrapuntal to, and yet operating from within an existing performance ‘text’? This, and many other such experiences, are what gave rise to my thoughts on *perforaltics*.
- iv. The name of this practice/discipline is not *Theatre for Development* for nothing! The name already suggests a bridge between disciplinary boundaries. TfD has proven that it understands development, perhaps far more than many disciplines that have positioned themselves in the middle of development. In the 55 years of journeys across different countries of Africa, TfD has been able to shift the thinking and understanding of what development means. It has been shown that one of the

essential starting points is voice. Until and unless people are allowed to articulate their problems, their issues, and what they feel, development interventions take place in the void. From Samaru, Soba, Yandev, Katsina-Ala, Kwanga, Mazah, Onyuwei, and Ukalegwu (Nigeria); to Kamiriithu (Kenya); Murewa (Zimbabwe); Chalimbana (Zambia); Marotholi, (Lesotho); Malawi; Kumba (Cameroon); and Turmi (Ethiopia); among others - TfD has contributed to amplifying opening voices and shedding light on a meaning of development that supports livelihoods and is sustainable. It has done so through respect for indigenous wisdom and practices, even when it needs to challenge some of them. Conversation is at the heart of all these: conversation with people, methods, issues, etc. TfD has, therefore, learned methodological conversations. I dare say that the town and gown vision through which most tertiary institutions in Africa see themselves giving back to their catchment communities is partly fulfilled in the conversations and engagements that TfD undertakes in communities.

- v. The experience of TfD in academic sites has also led to the birth of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) taking the practice forward on a more regular and sustained basis. The Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA) and Youth Adolescent Reflection and Action Centre (YARAC) are good examples in Nigeria. NPTA will turn 36 years in March 2025 and has executed over 30 projects in different development sectors all over Nigeria. It has also shared methodologies in training with many communities, CBOs, and NGOs in Nigeria and other countries.
- vi. Perhaps the ability of TfD to stand astride the academia and community, as well as its ability to research, to tell stories, and to enthuse for change may have attracted international development agencies and international non-governmental agencies (INGOs) and private Foundations in their development work. Examples are DFID, ActionAid, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, SIDA, and CUSO in Nigeria in addition to UNICEF and some intergovernmental agencies in different countries. It is evident that engagement with these agencies raises concerns in a number of ways including whether we are being co-opted. My answer is that we are coaching and discussing with them about the development processes of which they may be unaware.

Just as the target of development shifts, and as the practice and methodology of TfD are constantly evolving and being remodeled, the focus and targets also shift. The first query is who TfD addresses. Students in Universities seeking to obtain degrees for their personal development form the first line of focus. The twin purpose here is mentoring in preparation for field work (e.g., Samaru Project and Community

Theatre), and personal development. The group we categorise as the poor, the marginalised, the vulnerable form the second line. The third are the people in power (PIP) or the oppressors! On the basis of this categorisation, we can say that TfD has several locations in which it should be active. However, it has so far been active in the academic campuses and among the vulnerable in rural and urban settings. The PIP space has been elusive and perhaps nebulous. This group would hardly be present to watch the performances in the rural or urban communities. At best, we see representatives who are sent by the Boss we would have preferred to be in the field, or it is limited to the advocacy visits before and after the project. This space requires re-strategizing and ‘invasion’!

Provocation Three: What strategies and approaches do we engineer to break boundaries and broaden our reach?

As we make efforts to close the gaps that we have noticed in the TfD practice in the terrestrial zone, we now also have to add cyberspace and artificial intelligence (AI). We need to be part of it, and we will understand it and conquer it. We hear so much about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and that this is the new world. Some of us may be feeling out of place in this rapid takeover of the world by science, and we think that the Arts and Humanities may no longer have a place on the table of development. There is no need to be afraid. Geographical information systems (GIS) can map a whole country and tell us where minerals are hiding, where oil may be found next; robots are cooking and assembling cars, and even serving as CEOs, etc. But there are areas that STEM has so far not reached. The human and social sides of life may, for now, not yet be fully invaded. Therefore, I suggest that scholars and practitioners of TfD should make no mistake about the relevance of our craft even in this technological age of STEM. We are the storytellers of the needs of society; we are the explorers in the dusty footpaths that science flies over. Our engineering work is in the crafting of voiced stories and needs from the margins. How a TfD play is constructed by the people in their communities remain a technology that the physical sciences do not understand yet. And, I dare say that when amateurs construct a skit balloon and communities perform a counter story to demonstrate freedom, TfD may be dealing with our own type of simultaneous equation! When Arts enter the acronym, it is called STEAM – science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics! Do you know why? STEM must have a story to respond to; it must have an issue to address. Our responsibility is to tell the story. We must create a society in which STEM needs to operate. In addition, we can perform in space. What if we create

a virtual/cyber theatre so that performances and discussions are hosted in that environment? (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2022) intersection performance)

I want to end with an observation: it looks like we have returned to the early days of nomenclature war again! Popular Theatre; Theatre of the Oppressed; Theatre for Integrated Development; Community Theatre for Integrated Development; Theatre for Development; Theatre for Social Change; now Applied Theatre. I believe that we struggled through this in the early years, partly because the term 'popular' was so misunderstood. The meaning of popular to be cheap stuck with the word despite the evocation of Bertolt Brecht when he said: "Our understanding of 'popular' is the people taking over their development." (Willet, 1970) We then anchored our choice on what this genre of theatre does – development in all dimensions, from the human person through social and economic issues, and the spiritual. Secondly, we made this our own in Africa, and we theorised it, we propagated it on the world stage. And it was accepted. Why are we changing to a new terminology now? Is Applied Theatre any different from TfD? I think not because what TfD has always done is to apply theatre to discussing, analysing, and problematising development, with the people. I argue that there is an identity to nomenclature. When I hear Theatre of the Oppressed, I locate it in Europe and America; when I hear People's Theatre, it is Asia and Latin America, and when I hear Theatre for Development, it is Africa.

This conference is about connecting with others and sharing ideas; it is about conversations with practitioners outside Africa. It is also about pushing the boundaries to new frontiers. I implore all the budding scholars and the established ones here that we should renew our identity by stamping TfD as our own in Africa. When you are in Europe, talk TO and Applied Theatre; when in the USA, talk TO and Applied Theatre. I remind you all that this is like 'When in Rome, do as the Romans.' Despite all of these different terminologies and identities, however, what binds all of them together is the concern to deploy participatory approaches (theatre and other forms) in the hands of ordinary people to make a better sense of their environment. It is those meeting points of the practice in Africa, the USA, the UK, and other parts of the world that this conference should focus on. That is why in our discussions, we should pay tribute to the many scholars and practitioners who lit the fire, and those who have kept the fire of TfD burning. You can choose any one of the terminologies when it suits your purpose. But allow the essences of interrogation, raising consciousness, engaging people for change and transformation to remain constant.

Finally, I eulogize those who have passed on: Abraham Ajene Idoko , who passed away one day after the conference, Michael Etherton, Jenks Okwori, Samuel Kafewo, Martins Ayegba, Tar Ahura, Ndumbe Eyoh, Mapopa Mtonga, Eberhard Chambulikazi, Ngugi wa Mirii, Augusto Boal, Chris Kamlongera, and the many other TfD practitioners in the ancestor world, whom I have not listed here.

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