

A Phenomenological Investigation into the Revitalization of Theatre for Development (TfD).

Keynote Address by Amb.Prof. Iyorwuese Hagher OON

Abstract:

After more than 40 years of TfD practice on the African continent, the return of TfD to one of its roots in Nigeria signifies the need for new momentum. Drawing from my experience as a performer-animateur (Perfani), storyteller, and critic, this keynote address revisits the past origins and practices of TfD and its prospects and challenges. The address calls for an end to complacency, domestication, and careerism and sets out a new agenda for greater efficacy.

Introduction

Theatre for Development (TFD) has emerged as a powerful tool for political resistance, mass mobilization, and consciousness-raising across much of Africa and beyond, within academic circles and theatre organizations. It employs various voices and textures to juxtapose the flow of thought and feeling with the progression of the narrative.

A phenomenological investigation into the revitalization of Tfd will examine indigenous systems, cultural practices, and local wisdom. Since its inception as a form of theatre in Africa in the 1970s, Tfd has contextualized knowledge by involving communities in disseminating relevant, accessible, and empowering information. Ultimately, Tfd challenges dominant Western theatrical epistemologies, and as it expands its practices globally, it will manifest in various forms. Wherever Tfd is practiced, it will be theatre rooted in the community.

Tfd is a process of recognition and misrecognition; of seeing reality and of seeing past reality. It is not sufficiently theorized because it is still evolving. However, it has broken away from the Western Theatre practices of well-made plays for fee-paying audiences, where the actors and spectators remain separated. The task is enormous, the field is expansive, and the Tfd practitioners are excited and motivated to discover the power of hitherto marginal voices that are mainstream today.

I propose to express my experience of Tfd emergence and practice in Nigeria as a participant storyteller, animateur, and actionist.

My Tfd roots were found in Kwagh-hir storytelling events. The Tiv are described in anthropology as a classless, egalitarian society. They told stories and

sang songs that ridiculed or attacked oppressors within the community. The hare, the traditional hero of animal tales, always defeated the elephants, leopards, and other powerful creatures in contests. The hare often used its wits to overcome kings, who were rendered ineffective by the hare's sharp intelligence. My experience in *Kwagh-hir* storytelling began at the age of five. Every evening, except when it rained, storytelling and enactments took place. I recall retelling stories and creating my own. It is not easy to convey the euphoria and breakthroughs in Tiv knowledge systems and cosmology that I experienced as a child performer. Storytelling was the equivalent of today's films, television, and social media, now accessible on handheld devices. It was the early 50s, and there was no television or film. A Grundig radio my father owned was mostly used for decoration, except when he listened to BBC news early in the morning.

In 1975, I worked as a graduate assistant at the Centre for Nigerian Cultural Studies at Ahmadu Bello University, becoming part of the newly formed professional theatre group alongside Duro Oni, Peter Badejo (now knighted in England for his choreography), Umaru Ladan, Yakubu Nasidi, and Ziky Kofoworola. At the same time, I was a postgraduate student in the new Drama section of the English Department. My time at ABU marked a long journey from M.A. studies to Ph.D. I directed and acted in plays, utilizing new forms of dance-drama drawn from folklore. I was a dancer and lead character in the *Fadakarwa* repertory. We researched the stories, dances, and music of Nigeria's Indigenous cultures. We developed a fresh, dramatic language, music, and dance that conveyed urgent narratives reflective of Nigeria's recent independence, having experienced a civil war, and living under military rule. Our unique dance dramas were so popular that we were invited to perform at the World's Youth Orchestra Festival in the summer of 1976 in Aberdeen. We performed the *Fadakarwa dance drama* at the prestigious Sadler's Wells in London at the same time.

In 1975, my master's and Ph.D. supervisor, Michael Etherton, introduced a course on popular theatre, and we brought drama to Samaru and its surrounding areas, including Soba, Maska, and Tudun Sarki. In 1974, Etherton, Ross Kidd, and Martin Byram participated in Botswana's *Laidza Batanini* popular theatre experiments. He imported the styles of Bertolt Brecht and Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed to Nigeria.

We experimented with a theatrical form inspired by the educational principles of Paulo Freire's pedagogy. We advocated for an educational system that includes marginalized voices from below.

We did not have an art theater building, but as we continued our popular theater workshops, we created a drama village that mirrored the structure of a village arena. This theorization was fueled by local content and wisdom as we engaged with the communities. Our students also offered critical insights into their cultural forms. We justified the experiments in Samaru and Bomo to the University projects as community extension services, similar to how the Faculty of Agriculture had expanded its agricultural extension services to nearby villages.

In 1977, I was appointed chairman of the Benue State Council for Arts and Culture. Nigeria was hosting the world's first Black African Festival of Arts and Culture, making it an exciting time. I participated in *Langbodo*, Nigeria's entry for the festival. This play was written by Wale Ogunyemi and directed by Dapo Adelugba, and I served as the assistant stage manager. The same year, all 19 northern states established their own arts councils. I assisted them in creating performing arts

departments and encouraged them to initiate dance dramas instead of dialogue plays to enhance the flow of information in multicultural and multilingual settings.

We toured extensively across the nation and collaborated with the renowned Hubert Ogunde. In my official role as chair of the Benue Arts Council, I became fascinated by the *Kwagh-hir* Theatre of the Tiv people. I focused my Ph.D. research on the *Tiv Kwagh-hir*.

While studying the *Kwagh-hir* Theatre, I realized I had firsthand experience of the theatre rehearsing revolutions, which had staged revolutions three times. Tiv performers placed the people in harm's way to confront their colonial and post-colonial oppressors. In 1937, the Nyambuan revolts expressed the Tiv grievances against colonial impositions and unjust laws. From 1946 to 1949, their songs and dances served as a precursor to the bloody clashes with the Muslim establishment to reject the imposition of an Islamic Emirate that unjustly represented the Tiv in the Northern House of Chiefs.

Between 1960 and 1964, the *Kwagh-hir* reestablished itself as the theatrical mode of revolution when the actors were imprisoned en masse as rioters by the Northern People's Congress administration.

In 1980, I theorized that our search for a theater of greater relevance to our development needs should be named Theater for Development. This name, I argued, better captured all the other names that did not reasonably describe our efforts to create a theater whose practice would be rooted in the people's customs but whose focus would be to raise consciousness for change like the *Kwagh-hir*. Paulo Freire's

pedagogy of the oppressed inspired a desire to theorize a new theatre. He influenced *Laidza Batani* in Botswana and our work at Ahmadu Bello University.

In 1981, after advocating for Theatre for Development as the new theatrical form in my PhD thesis the previous year, the 1st International Theatre for Development Workshop was held in Makurdi, Benue State – the conference aimed to validate Theatre for Development as the new theatre of social action. The successful merger of theory and praxis at the 1st Benue International Theatre for Development Conference, with *Kwagh-hir* performances popularized TfD as the nomenclature. In the same year that the Theatre for Development was established in Nigeria, Augusto Boal also had his first Conference of “Theatre of the Oppressed” in Paris in 1981. We established TfD in the University Curriculum and trained TfD trainers as lecturers at the College of Education, Katsina-Ala. Our university students and lecturers introduced TfD courses in their various arts faculties in the Theatre Arts, Drama, and English Departments.

From 1982 to 1983, the Katsina-Ala projects in Benue State further expanded the scope of the Benue International TfD Workshop. Steve Oga Abah and James Alachi, Tor-Iorapuu, alumni of Ahmadu Bello University, the University of Jos, and Katsina-Ala College of Education respectively, became the foremost pedagogues of TfD practice.

Paulo Freire’s influence through the Pedagogy of the Oppressed shaped the theoretical framework for the emergence of popular theatre, community theatre, and Theatre for Development (TfD) in Africa. The convergence of the Theater of the Oppressed and Theatre for Development methodologies into formal educational systems led to the expansion of Theatre for Development across Africa. The

interface with the government began with the Benue State Government and expanded throughout Nigeria and the West African coast.

The concept of development emerged from colonial interaction with the West. African nations viewed development as a form of Westernization and modernization synonymous with Western ideals. Western governments, aid agencies, merchants, and donors promoted a growing sense of the need for equality and the right to develop. However, modernization was a top-down process that included a subtle element of racism, compelling Africa to adopt the banking system of education. Although there was considerable discussion and momentum surrounding development, little progress was evident.

Theatre for Development's (TfD's) participatory approaches to information gathering, prioritization of problems through storytelling, basic qualitative research methods, data analysis, improvisation, and performances broadened its mass appeal. It evolved into an eclectic theatrical form, swollen like a flooded river, carrying various theatrical styles, particularly the stories and myths of Africa, to become a potent weapon for change. This approach served as an ideal platform to mediate between the needs of African and foreign nations, including donors for development interventions, and the rights and needs of African communities to be heard and to contribute to their development.

The challenge facing Benue and Nigeria at that time was Governor Aper Aku's invitation to the Theatre for Development initiative at Ahmadu Bello, where development partners were sought to adopt TfD as a new means to foster nuanced and accurate discussions aimed at countering the misleading narratives deeply ingrained in rural cultures that resisted change. The governor, a sincere and

honorable man, needed to accelerate development by reorganizing the settlement patterns of the Benue people, who lived in scattered homesteads and struggled to access centralized amenities such as water, schools, health centers, and community halls. Citizens' lives were complicated, short, and harsh. The two-week workshop and festival emerged as a pivotal moment in the evolution of Tfd.

The conference concluded with positive outcomes. The Tfd successfully fostered a more informed, empathetic, and critically thinking public capable of navigating challenging circumstances and improving their situations. Another outcome of the workshop was the introduction of Tfd programs at the College of Education in Katsina-Ala. The Benue International Conference initiated the intentional application of the Tfd technique to government programs and the self-reflective adjustments of the Tfd system that ABU had begun in Nigeria. James Alachi played a crucial role in introducing Tfd to the College of Education Katsina-Ala, where his students, including Tor Iorapuu, emerged. I returned to the University of Jos, led the Theatre Arts department, and introduced Tfd courses and practices, resulting in several notable practitioners such as Saint Gbilekaa, Sam Kafewo, Victor Dugga, Dan Daura Samu, Umar Buratai, and Tor Iorapuu, as well as a wave of second-generation Tfd practitioners and advocates who emerged as professors and leading voices of Tfd.

The *Kwagh-hir* festival, the climax of the two-week celebration, introduced a new and challenging element to TFD practice. How could we teach improvisation techniques to cultures already engaged in performing arts as instruments of change? It also prompted us to seek integration rather than merely focusing on our expertise. We felt humbled as Tfd practitioners to participate in the *Kwagh-hir* festivals, and to accept that transitioning from the Tfd performance to the *Kwagh-hir* achieves the

same transcendence of artistic inspiration across historical and cultural contexts and speaks to our shared humanity despite differences.

In 1987, I was privileged to train 36 National Directorate for Social Mobilization officers in self-reliance and economic recovery through MAMSER. I conducted train-the-trainer workshops for MAMSER to educate social mobilization officers nationwide. The Dafo, Mbar, and Bokkos seminars enhanced the Tfd skills of their zonal officers, who subsequently trained other officers across the country.

My former colleague from Zaria and the Nigerian Senate, Jerry Gana, was responsible for this all-purpose development initiative. MAMSER established a community theatre unit and had a historical mandate to inform citizens about taking individual responsibility for improving their lives by refusing to bribe government officials for services that should be free. Citizens were also expected to enhance their work ethic by arriving on time for work and meetings—the mandate aimed to improve their quality of life.

In 1987, I collaborated with the Bondo Society in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone, specifically in the Kailahun District, in a rural village near Segbwema. We explored mask traditions as traditional theatrical forms, including dance and song. Our goal was to persuade the Bondo Society, an exclusive women's organization that regulated married life and prepared young women for marriage—including female circumcision (FGM)—to abandon this practice.

After a two-week homestead sojourn in this situation, we had to modify our message. We became better educated about this female society as a progressive

group of women that regulated and accommodated female roles within a regimented patriarchal context.

Our play on female circumcision featured two endings. After the first ending, we presented a “but what if” scenario: What if female circumcision offered more psycho-social benefits? What if all the medical risks were eliminated and the procedure was conducted in a hospital under strict safety conditions? What if the circumcision was purely ceremonial and symbolic, involving only minimal tissue removal? And finally, what about all the hullabaloo surrounding women's circumcision? What about men? Why don't we advocate for men to cease male circumcision? Who told us that circumcised women enjoy less sex?

In 1980, I served as the Minister of State for Health. At that time, Nigeria was facing a very high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. My state, Benue State, reported the highest rate in the country. We introduced TfD to Ogobia town, which had the highest prevalence and mortality rates. This town had already embraced its HIV/AIDS victims, unlike other communities that rejected, stigmatized, and cast them aside.

The town of Ogobia welcomed us warmly, and we showcased their example so that the nation could consider adopting their homestead integration policy with family members. Shortly thereafter, I was no longer Minister of Health, and the Ogobia project suffered neglect without TfD follow-up interventions.

Still, as a Minister of Health charged with the scourging of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, I searched helplessly around the various shades of TfD. I realized that until we transferred the TfD process to the end-users - the spectators and the downtrodden, we could only wallow in our academic careerism and chest-thumping fallacy.

HIV/AIDS was claiming lives, and people wove wild myths about the virus, asserting that only women could transmit it and that it could be cured with amulets and powerful juju rituals. Benue State had the highest prevalence rate in Nigeria. This was my state, so I left my titles, ranks, and privileges behind to venture into the remote village of Mesaje with the Anor Gyura carvers and composers of songs and dances. After two weeks of trials and rehearsals, we successfully carved an extraordinary puppet, the "Anakande," which conveyed a message of death in full-body dimensions, embodying the HIV/AIDS virus that kills without fail unless one protects oneself with a "raincoat" condom.

The wooden puppet Anakande succeeded much more than actors on stage and in films. The puppetry tradition became entrenched as an art form of Theatre for Development.

The recourse to Tfd stemmed from a desperate desire for new styles of human cognition to address people's discontent with their social conditions. The latest political realism associated with decolonization and de-neo-colonization from the West and local military juntas called for a new language to bridge the gap between reality and ideas as well as between politics, propaganda, and the allusiveness of art.

Augusto Boal: Theater of the Oppressed.

When TFD was inaugurated at the International Tfd Conference in Nigeria later that same year, the 1st International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed took place in Paris in 1981. As the world's cultural center, Paris attracted global attention and recognition for the Theatre of the Oppressed movement. It was no longer merely a fringe movement that began in Brazil under the influence of Paulo Freire. Augusto Boal's collaboration with John Gassner, Langston Hughes's Black

literature, and the Black Theatre of Harlem in New York helped establish The Pedagogy of the Oppressed as a significant global theater movement. Similarly, Tfd developed into a powerful theater movement in Africa and beyond.

Augusto Boal's "*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*," like Brecht's "*Short Organum for the Theater* " (1948), makes a compelling case against the Aristotelian, Shakespearean, and Western theater, particularly regarding how it robs spectators of social action. However, it presents the history of theater from a limited perspective, implying a progression from Greek dithyramb rituals to the Theater of the Oppressed. In reality, the history of theater should demonstrate how various theaters worldwide evolved alongside the social changes that influenced them. For example, the Hausa masses, who had never heard of Shakespeare or Aristotle, possessed a perfect cathartic device in the *Wawan Sarki*, the King's court jester, who had not only the license but also the audacity to insult the King (Emir) during the annual Sallah Celebrations. The poor masses relished these insults, celebrating the *Wawan sarki* for speaking the truth that no one dared to voice. Their cathartic experience diminished their desire to revolt against the monarch's misrule. The theater, by its nature, is ubiquitous in style and meaning. More work is needed to theorize the world's theater for social action, considering the methodology to utilize local content and wisdom.

As we move forward, a significant gestalt has occurred. Our collective experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of Tfd, by whatever name it is called at this conference's narrative progressions and conclusions, should have a far-reaching influence on applied theatre globally. They are the ideas, concepts, and principles that have driven Tfd practice in Nigeria and the rest of Africa.

Challenges.

1. We faced a significant ideological challenge while collaborating with MAMSER in the Bokkos, Dafo, and Mbar districts of Plateau State. Ordinary people were underdeveloped and impoverished mainly due to their lack of access to decision-making, which affected their lives. Traditional rulers regarded them as mere quislings. They were unaware of their human rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 seemed not to apply to them.

How can we progress when our ideological instincts inspire them to revolt and demand change instead of settling for accommodation within the trickle-down effects of traditional and local government systems? I believe the duty of TfD is not to pacify but to amplify and empower the underdogs among the victims by giving them a voice to cry out when they are oppressed.

2. Recent events in Nigeria call for an escalation of TfD practice. There is a pressing need to revitalize TfD practice in Nigeria and Africa, where the conditions of ordinary people are dire and disheartening. The issues necessitate a TfD agenda that does not merely cater to African governments, development agencies and NGOs.
3. The primary criticism of TfD, which I previously mentioned, has proven prescient as the meta-problems I identified in the 1980s continue to hinder its effectiveness; we are indeed at a crossroads. We must shift our approach from ongoing attempts to span the ever-widening chasm between the expectations of a better life for citizens and the reality that the African elite is compromised.

Even when we raise the masses' consciousness, we only elevate their expectations, which ultimately go unfulfilled. The corrupt officials who steal, misappropriate, or misuse funds meant for development represent the main problem. These individuals, too, need to be addressed by TfD. Foreign donors have become fatigued, and in the case of the USA, where President Trump has rejected further support for USAID and other generous contributions, politicians and the elite should become the central focus of TfD in Nigeria. The promotion of the donor agenda by TfD actionists is to become unwitting accomplices who perpetuate poverty, corruption, and dependency in Africa. In her excellent book, *Dead Aid*, Dambissa Moyo argues that aid benefits the donor countries rather than the recipient countries.

The practice of TfD is serious business. We can only partner with progressive individuals, organizations, and governments. At the inception of TfD in Brazil, Nigeria, Ghana, and Botswana were productions that arose from struggles against the system, employing socially engaged, life-affirming theaters in environments of extreme repression.

4. In the seventies at Ahmadu Bello University, we held workshops on the outskirts of Samaru under the leadership of Michael Etherton, Tony Humphreys, Brian Crow, and me, alongside our beloved students like Steve Abah, James Alachi, John Illah, Andrea Jogo, Elizabeth Alewa, and many other pioneering students of drama in 1975. These students became giants and principal educators of TfD. I was convinced that we were igniting revolutionary fervor among the masses. Yet, we pressed on, being part of the

university and witnessing the genuine dedication of our staff and students toward the Samaru experiments made a significant difference.

Furthermore, the Hausa participant “spect-actors” shielded us—both staff and students—from arrest or detention. In 1964, Boal’s mentor, Paulo Freire, was imprisoned and branded a traitor for his literacy efforts in Brazil, which were considered a threat to the ruling military junta. Augusto Boal subsequently went into exile. In East Africa, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, and Ngugi Wa Mirii faced bans during their Kamirithu experiments, and their theater structures were destroyed.

Complacency or regression

The spread of TfD in Nigerian universities and colleges of education has impacted society, where TfD practice continues to expand and improve. However, since 1999, there appears to have been complacency in the dynamism of TfD nationwide. Instead of dynamic progress in development, there is a regression in the quality of life of our people. While the need for engagement expands, TfD practitioners have become complacent and resigned.

The political elite has captured the treasuries of various governments in Africa. Cases of corruption abound, reemphasizing the ubiquitous nature of neo-imperialism. Ethnic wars have resurfaced. African countries must deal with security issues, some of which are foreign-sponsored. Meanwhile, many of the bandits that control rural areas operate without much challenge due to the absence of government in these ungoverned spaces. How can TfD reach these ungoverned spaces without being targeted?

TfD is needed in internal peacebuilding as a soft power to provide the military with cultural intelligence to win minds through peaceful suasion rather than armed combat. How can the bandits and criminal gangs operating in rural areas be persuaded to participate in TfD exercises that allow people to tell their stories? The amalgamation of the communities and cultural systems into a dramatic representation of their reality makes it the ideal weapon to reach and disarm warring factions who have become pawns used by politicians for political victories. It is a daunting challenge; however, TfD is a critical necessity and a medium through which the content and contexts of human rights and peaceful development will become more organic and effective for the subjugated.

Another challenge facing TfD practitioners is engaging the minds of local artists, to whom TfD will ultimately cede control and ownership. The perspectives of artists and local communities are crucial drivers of development. The intangible mind represents cultural control and emotional predispositions that influence the acceptance or rejection of change. A theatrical form can be identified and harnessed in nearly all local communities where development is determined. It might be as simple as the Inuit throat singers of Sanikiluaq in Canada, whose songs are unintelligible to outsiders but understood by the Inuit with resonating clarity. While working in rural Nigeria, I have not identified any community devoid of art forms to incorporate into TfD practice. Insistence on practicing TfD with the aim of play improvisation without incorporating local theater forms is an act of cultural invasion.

A transparent methodology is needed to measure the success or failure of TfD interventions. If success or failure cannot be quantified, assessments become more complicated. Since TfD is a multidisciplinary operation, statisticians and other

assessors must work together with the main animateur and actionists to evaluate the degrees of success or failure.

Writing Tfd plays

Professor Michael Etherton, co-founder of Tfd practices in Nigeria and mentor to all of us - Nigerian Tfd practitioners, has drawn attention to the other significant challenges of Tfd. He advocated translating and transcribing improvised dramas, often lost without a record or a ripple. Let me illustrate the challenge:

From November 29 to December 4, 1998, I served as the chief coordinator of the Tfd workshop in Iseyin Town, near Ibadan, Nigeria. UNICEF sponsored the project and we collaboratively crafted the storyline. We improvised a play from the storyline that effectively transmitted new knowledge and raised awareness. We handed the Tfd operation to the village and returned to our homes and campuses. I wrote a play inspired by that workshop - the characters and outline of *Lifetimes* (different title) stemmed from that experience, akin to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugas' play *I Will Marry When I Want*, performed at the Kamiriithu community in Kenya. A scripted Tfd play, *Lifetimes*, was my second play inspired by a TFD workshop event.

I regretted that while UNICEF Project Director Bartilloi Warratay was pleased with the written play that captured the workshop experience, some participants grumbled, despite my acknowledgments, that it was inappropriate to assume authorship of the entire group's collective creation. I remain proud of that play, as it reminds me of my other efforts to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Shortly after the Sierra Leone Tfd experience, I found myself in a West End theater in London, watching a live production of Lope de Vega's play, *Fuente Ovejuna*.
The

play's central message reflects political upheaval and the power of collective action. My spirit may have returned to Segbwema, a small village engulfed in chaos, which shared its meals of cassava leaves and paddy rice with me for two weeks. I drafted the outline for a play titled *The Camps of Segbwema*, which I later directed with my acting students at the University of Jos, Nigeria. In my written play, *The Camps of Segbwema*, I aligned myself with the Bondo Mother and the Bondo Society against the IMF's conditionalities, which threatened to dismantle the only sustainable indigenous women's organization. The Tfd experience serves as a crucial resource for writing plays.

The future of Tfd is to cultivate it with talented writers who can enhance the storyline, create plays to document, and bring the script to life across various spaces and media. Tor Iorapuu has also written two remarkable plays from his Tfd workshops: *April 1421* and *Had I Known*. Both plays have received critical acclaim, although they originated from the Tfd workshop premise.

A written play is not vastly different from improvised Tfd scripts. Over twenty plays with different titles can be inspired by one successful improvisation. Tfd improvisation is a valuable precursor to a well-crafted play. This written play is also a valid form of language; it aligns with the expectations for subsequent improvisations. Therefore, Tfd can be described as a continuing story, a never-ending drama, and an ongoing conversation.

Frustrated by the spread of the HIV virus, we spent two weeks in the bush with the *Kwagh-hir* group of Anor Gyura to co-create the popular *Kwagh-hir: Anakande* HIV/AIDS puppets, songs, and dances. This followed our collaboration with the ABU collective, led by Steve Abah, to produce a short film about the dangers of HIV/AIDS. While the film's message was clear, its social consequences were

disastrous. The actors faced immediate stigma, and the actress who played the lead role was mistakenly believed to be actually infected by HIV/AIDS rather than merely acting. The film proved too direct as a medium; a puppetry performance could have established a necessary distance between the actors, audience, and spectators. Our *Anakande* puppetry worked wonders, leading to a significant drop in the virus's prevalence rate.

Training TfD experience as workshops for playwriting is desirable and should be included in the process. After all, there is little difference between the storyline, the characterization, and the message. In the written plays, the message is more nuanced, and there is greater depth in the characterization, mainly when attention is focused on the depth of the characters and their motivations and curves. Each TfD experience should be a space for multi-disciplinary cooperation or contestation: playwrights, directors, videographers, historians, sociologists, and even statisticians.

TfD is fraught with Perils.

TfD practice is dangerous. It aims to uproot the undesirable status quo. This often exposes the TfD practitioners to powerful entities within the status quo, such as politicians, drug barons, traditional authorities, or simply a hostile environment. In 1987, following a successful TfD Conference at the University of Sierra Leone in Freetown, I led a two-week homestead TfD campaign in the eastern province of Sierra Leone at Segbwema, in a remote village twenty miles northeast of Kenema, the nearest town, and about 230 miles southeast of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. At that time, Sierra Leone was governed by President Momoh.

The country was unstable, and fear permeated the air as Segbwema bordered Liberia, where Samuel Doe's regime engaged in unimaginable human rights abuses. Being

confined to this remote village for Tfd was a frightening experience. However, the villagers eagerly participated in our investigation into the essence of the secret Bondo Society, a fascinating women's organization that regarded female genital mutilation as sacred. The return journey to Freetown after two weeks became grim as soldiers established checkpoints every few miles. The rickety bus carrying us had to stop and unload everyone as the military searched us and the vehicles for weapons and rough diamonds. The 230-mile journey stretched over two days, filled with dramatic encounters with an even more dramatic military.

Tfd is the theater for the committed, those seeking to make a difference. It represents a theatrical practice filled with risks and challenges. However, it also presents a rewarding adventure to extend understanding to the less fortunate, uplift the downtrodden, and give them a voice to be seen and heard.

TFD: New Frontiers.

The new frontiers for Tfd are exciting. The theater must prioritize, centralize, and amplify the cries and voices of our marginalized communities in the pursuit of justice and equity. The time demands a reimagining of the theater to chart a path of self-determination that challenges the global concerns of unipolarity in a world where the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israeli-Hamas conflict have demonstrated the fragility of democracies and peace. At the same time, in Africa, we should be concerned with the violence inflicted by ethnic militias, religious extremists, and the economic ravages of corruption.

Here are the new frontiers to focus on,

1. Social media

The global democratization of media space presents an appealing opportunity for situating TfD short dramas designed to raise awareness. These dramas can be rapidly shared on Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, and WhatsApp, reaching target audiences and communities. This option is enticing, and we should consider it further.

2. The radio and short videos

TfD can effectively reach bandit enclaves and develop a message to speak truth to power on crucial issues such as insecurity, banditry, drug abuse, corruption, and peace-building. TfD should explore new opportunities, such as participating in leadership and management training. There is currently a demand for TfD practitioners to create short videos, ranging from 15 to 30 minutes, illustrating different aspects of leadership training.

3. Peace building

There is a proliferation of violence and community crises in Africa. Hundreds of lives have been lost in unavoidable conflicts. This is an opportunity for TfD workers to apply their skills to bring peace to war-torn areas. The future of TfD involves revisiting missed opportunities. Peacekeeping and conflict resolution should focus on de-escalating conflicts and wars across the continent. More significant efforts must be dedicated to exposing corruption and ethnic racism that hinder development in Africa. TfD has not been effectively used to raise awareness about corruption and promote transparency.

4. There is an increased need for greater integration of Theatre for Development within the educational curriculum to develop skills for social integration among the youth. However, it is insufficient for Tfd to act merely as a domesticating tool, playing a complementary role in supporting government, quasi-government, and foreign donor organizations. This role has limited potential for driving meaningful change.
5. There is a significant need to explore how Tfd can bridge the gap in understanding Africa's diverse cultures and foster respect for these cultures. The military has often been deployed to intervene in conflicts requiring soft power for resolution rather than bullets. Therefore, military academies must integrate the cultural intelligence developed in the Tfd process to reorient soldiers toward solutions focused on building consensus, collective empowerment, tolerance, and empathy.
6. We can revisit our TFD campaigns to confront the troubling issue of out-of-school children, which, if not addressed now, appears likely to result in greater chaos in the future. Equally important is the need to address climate change.
7. Collaborating with civil society organizations, community groups, and government agencies remains essential and beneficial for amplifying Tfd's impact. Tfd practitioners must advance and innovate the practice while exploring new, creative ways to incorporate technology, social media, and other digital platforms.
8. As we envision the future of Tfd, we must acknowledge the dynamics of decolonizing development. We must explore TFD's immersive and

exploratory process to foster belonging, identity, and healing. To revitalize TFD, we must reclaim its radical roots, revisit its origins and principles, and embrace its potential to drive social change.

Conclusion

Theater for Development is poised to enter its most exciting phase, as the agenda for future engagement has already been established. TFD is a theater born from the struggle to liberate ordinary people: the oppressed, the poor, the downtrodden, and the great unwashed. It must continue the unfinished battles for our freedom from hunger, poverty, destitution, dispossession, and expropriation.

Let's reaffirm our commitment to its core principles and our willingness to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances. By reconnecting with its radical roots, innovating, and forming strategic partnerships, TFD can once again become a powerful catalyst for social change.

Iyorwuese Hagher

Dayton Ohio.

February 2025.