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Embodiment, Intellect and Emotion: Thinking about possible impacts of Theatre for Development in three projects in Africa

Jane Plastow

The context

The performance form now known most commonly in Africa as Theatre for Development (TfD) was pioneered by a group of radical scholars and artists in the 1970s and 80s, (notably Steve Oga Abah in Nigeria (Abah, 2005), Michael Etherton in Zambia and Nigeria (Etherton, 1982), David Kerr in Malawi (Kerr, 1995 and Magalasi, 2012), Ross Kidd in Botswana (Kidd & Byram, 1982), Zakes Mda in Lesotho (Mda, 1993) and Penina Muhando Mlama in Tanzania (Muhando Mlama, 1991)) with the intention of enabling marginalised people to discuss issues of importance to them, either among themselves or with ‘experts’, to resolve community difficulties and/or to critique power: familial, local or national. While some work with this broad set of intentions has continued, after the International Monetary Fund-imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes which swept Africa in the 1980s leading to drastic cutbacks in many social and liberal community-based programmes, Theatre for Development has largely been taken over and re-imagined by its funders, usually International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) or state organs. Our techniques, and sadly all too often our facilitators, have been co-opted, and in some cases I would argue corrupted, to either simply promulgate messages pre-determined by funders or to offer a spectacle to impress dignitaries and provide good pictures for publicity purposes. I would estimate that 80 to 90% of TfD work today across the continent does not prioritise a truly dialogic mode in either process or performance: though paying lip service in the form of a post show discussion, a radio phone in, or even a forum theatre style presentation is common. It is rare that the subject of the performance has been determined by the community with or for whom the work is made, and similarly unusual for that performance to challenge the status quo. Rather results are commonly judged solely quantitatively by numbers who have witnessed a performance. In HIV/AIDS plays, plays warning against alcohol abuse, or urging careful use of water resources, to name some of the subjects repeatedly raised in TfD productions, blame is placed on the poor, and the solution is almost always seen to be individual behaviour change rather than any more fundamental challenge to how society is organised¹.

As a UK-based academic with a secure income and at least occasional access to funding which allows a non-instrumental approach to making socially engaged performance work I am enormously privileged. Because I have worked extensively in East Africa over many years and have numerous relatively high level contacts in arts and government in a number of countries, I also have unusual freedom to operate outside the constraints experienced by many who feel compelled simply to service the requirements of funding bodies². I have sought to use this position of privilege in part to conduct a number of theatrical experiments. A major focus of these has been to explore a range of modes of theatrical production in order to learn - and subsequently disseminate - information about how theatre can be truly be a means of dialogic learning, and a tool to empower communities of the poor.

This chapter looks at three projects with which I have been involved, in Ethiopia,

Eritrea and Uganda, in order to interrogate just how an arts-based approach may dialogically promote embodied, emotional and intellectual understanding amongst participants and witnesses; and how that work may be utilised to challenge oppressive power structures.

The Projects

Ethiopia - Adugna Community Dance Theatre Company

Adugna (Spark in Amharic, the dominant language of Ethiopia) is a dance theatre company composed of eighteen young people who had been living and/or working on the streets of the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. The group came out of a larger community dance project involving a hundred young people who made a performance over eighteen days in 1996 to raise awareness about the plight of street dwellers being dumped on the edge of the city in order to prevent them being seen by delegates to a major Organisation of African Unity meeting. Under the aegis of local NGO, The Ethiopian Gemini Trust, and international dance training company Dance United, and funded mostly by Comic Relief, a programme originally envisaged to run for eighteen months eventually extended to five years, and turned these young people from a group of vulnerable, marginal children into international prize winning, confident, community advocates, dance trainers and performers (Plastow, 2004). The company continues to work and perform today in Ethiopia and internationally and runs training programmes for a range of community groups. I was involved with Adugna primarily from 1998-2001 as evaluator for the programme and advisor on theatre work and community outreach strategies. I most recently visited the company in February 2013.

Eritrea - Primary Schools Pupil-Centred Training Project

This small scale pilot project took place in two locations, the highland village of She'eb and at a lowland school in Bogu, funded by the Eritrea Ministry of Education and The British Academy in 2005-6. While my colleague, educationalist John Holmes, ran in-service training weeks for teachers from groups of local primary schools with the national teacher Training College on child-centred learning, which was just beginning to be rolled out across the country, I worked with a Year 6 group of primary school students (11-14 year olds). We explored children's attitudes to the learning and teaching process they had experienced, through the making of short plays to show to the teachers groups, discussing issues the children felt to be of particular importance in their educational experience (Plastow, 2007). The pilot project was not continued due to the sudden death - unrelated to Eritrea - of my colleague.

Uganda - The Women's Intergenerational Theatre Project

The Uganda project came out of work over a number of years with Ugandan women postgraduate students studying with me at Leeds University³. Repeated conversations about significant gendered inequality among the Buganda of Uganda, oppression of women and divisions among women resulting from societal barriers to open conversation across the generations, led to a Nuffield Foundation funded pilot project (Kiguli et al, forthcoming, 2014). Two Ugandan and two British women facilitators led the project working with three groups of women: senior school girls from Nabiswera Progressive Secondary School, female university students from Makerere

University, and women aged 20-70 from an amateur women's theatre group, Namukozi, in the town of Mitiyana. Using a multi-arts approach, the women's groups each made a number of short pieces utilising a variety of performance forms, about their experiences of being female in contemporary Buganda society. The groups then came together, shared their work, discussed it, re-worked it according to shared perspectives and presented a variety style performance to an invited audience of some five hundred people to illustrate their wide-ranging views of issues of importance to Bugandan women. Popular request at the end of the project was for a further stage of work which would also involve men's groups, and this work will commence in 2014⁴.

Modes of learning

There is often a tendency to generalisations in discourse about theatre as an 'effective' form for working with poor communities. At its most banal writers talk about how theatre is good because it allows illiterate people to learn and participate, and how live performance can reach communities which do not have access to media for reasons of poverty, illiteracy, or lack of penetration. There is of course some truth in these statements, particularly if the priority is simply dissemination of information. However if we are to understand how dialogic learning may occur in theatrical performance operating under the rubric of Theatre for Development it must be important to consider what, beyond subject matter, allows this learning to take place. This article is therefore examining, from the perspective of my experience with the three projects discussed, specific instances of embodied, intellectual and emotional learning; for participants, audiences and/or facilitators. Whilst recognising that it is impossible to fully separate these categories, and that conclusions are inevitably influenced by my subjective reactions to involvement in the projects concerned, it seems to me worthwhile to attempt to analyse how impact may occur and in relation to whom. The hope is that such detailed analysis may begin to allow others to consider how dialogic approaches to theatre making with and for communities of the marginalised may make actual as opposed to simply hoped for or asserted impact. The following discussion privileges experiential rather than theoretical learning.

Embodied learning

It has long been known by theatre practitioners that performing even a 'fictional' action can lead to the experience of understanding what it feels like to, for instance, be aggressive. Constantin Stanislavski, at the turn of the 20th century used these action-based techniques to help actors 'become' their role (Stanislavski, 1936). More recently Augusto Boal, working on his Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979), devised a whole series of games to allow the marginalised to experience, for example, the embodying of the role of a powerful man, as part of the process of challenging oppression (Boal, 1992).

I first became notably interested in how powerful embodied learning might be, particularly for project participants, when working with the Ethiopian Adugna dancers. Since dance is all about embodiment this is perhaps not surprising, but dance has been often somewhat neglected in Theatre for Development discussion because it is not seen as an obvious medium for message transmission or debate. When researching the experience of those involved with Adugna I talked extensively with their primary contemporary dance trainer, Royston Muldoom. He argues as follows:

When you work with others with low self-esteem they only take the space they think they are worth. They can't stretch or raise their heads. Through controlled pleasurable experience they can control and take space. They are unlikely to go back. Dance affects their idea of self and place in the world.

Dance means extending yourself to others - giving examples of good practice in life. Lifting and supporting are equally valuable. Mutual support is necessary. It becomes harder to be violent to other bodies, hard to maintain prejudice when you are involved in the intimate, physical, emotional process of problem solving with another human being.
(Plastow, 2004, 134)

Performance is all about taking space; assuming a right to place one's body meaningfully in front of an audience, and therefore asserting the value of the embodied being. This is perhaps clearest in contemporary dance where the body is the object of attention, often unobscured by a detailed character portrayal. The body in space is what must hold our attention and therefore the dancer cannot hide behind the notion of 'acting'. I saw a transformation in the embodied being of the Adugna dancers over the five year period of their training, and on into the present day. My first work with the trainees was just with the young women. In an intensely hierarchical and sexist society it was particularly difficult for these dancers to accept and assert a right to take space. Their embodied presentation of themselves initially had much in common with how I have seen other groups of poor women and children present themselves in public, and mirrors how the children first behaved in workshops in the projects I am discussing in Eritrea and Uganda. These young women huddled in as obscure a corner as a dance studio could provide. They hunched their bodies to take up minimum space, tended to drop their heads towards the floor, and when they spoke held their hands in front of their mouths. Their body language pictured erasure and belief that they were not worthy of being seen or heard in public.

The dance training process - coupled with the long involvement with adults who found them worthy of attention and supported their education more broadly - transformed these dancers' sense of their bodily right to exist and of their humanity. At the end of the five year training period one of those young women I first met crouched in a corner told me:

When we came here we had to work with the boys. And after a lot of pressure from our teachers and performing with boys, and lifting boys, which amazed audiences, I realised we are all humans.
(Guenet in Plastow 2004, 142)

The youngest of the male students, who has become an esteemed international dancer while continuing to work periodically with Adugna, went even further in describing his experience of embodied transformation:

Junaid number 1 has gone. I have gone through a lot of Junaids. [...] My bones, joints, skin, mentally and physically - all move in contemporary dance. I can create and say anything. Sometimes I feel like God, creating through contemporary dance. (Junaid in Plastow 2004, 125)

The 'pleasurable experience' of controlling and taking space appears key to the assertion of humanity and equality for participants in performance training programmes, quite separately from any ostensibly message-laden content in the

performance. But the question remains as to how embodied performance may have a particular affect on audiences.

I can demonstrate this most clearly in an instance where audience members, in keeping with Augusto Boal's idea of the spectator⁵, were encouraged to intervene in action on stage. My example is drawn from the final public performance of the Uganda Intergenerational Women's Theatre Project. A major trope which emerged from the work of all three groups was the crucial importance of better education for girls, not for education's sake, but as a means of either evading the demand for early marriage from parents and/or to enhance income, status and possibilities for independence. The school girls' group had developed a piece of image theatre, derived directly from Boalian ideas, where they showed a teenage girl who wished to pursue her education but was being told by her parents that she had to abandon her books and get married. The still image included four characters, the girl clasped her books, had her head down and was turned away from her parents and the prospective bridegroom who made a solid group behind her, looking stern and with the father holding one of her arms as if to drag her backwards into conformity with family desires. Because so many participants were interested in this issue the final image incorporated performers from all three groups, with the older women taking on the parental roles.

Having established the image a group member, Lilian, playing the facilitator, or in Boalian terms, the 'joker' role, explained to the audience that they were being invited to come up on stage and physically transform the image from one which group discussion had established was an image of oppression, to a more desirable outcome according to their individual perceptions. A number of interventions took place but the one I will single out here was made by a male student. He came on stage and moved the 'bridegroom' figure forward, parallel with the girl, holding her hand supportively. Her other hand, holding the books, was raised triumphantly as she looked upwards towards them. The parents remained behind this new twosome but looked on benevolently. Here was a relationship which was encouraging, not repressing, female empowerment. In classic Boal terms this image is called 'the image of the ideal' as opposed to the earlier image of oppression, and is usually subsequently 'tested' by images of transition where living sculptures are made to show how realistic steps towards the ideal might be made (Boal, 1979, 138-9). In our public performance we did not have time to go through all these steps, though the participants in workshop time had experienced the wider process. Instead we chose to ask audiences to interrogate widely held views about the desirability of early marriage for girls and to think about what an ideal might be for such a young woman.

The importance of the episode in relation to embodied impact on audiences was that in a shared moment they had all seen and broadly concurred with the idea that the first image was oppressive, and from the reaction of cheers and applause elicited by the male student's intervention, they then moved on to support a picture of female educational progress. Of course there could be a host of questions raised about the achievability of the desired outcome, or the 'truth' of support offered by the audience in a forum which was quite obviously advocating women's empowerment in various spheres of Bugandan life. Nonetheless the clarity of these embodied images meant that the women's wishes could not be denied in relation to education, and at least some male witnesses were, in that moment, moved to act in support of them.

Speaking to power

My final example of embodied learning relates to the work with Eritrean school children. Here the evidence of embodied learning is not as 'pure' as in the other instances described, but embodiment was certainly a major element in the efficacy of the intervention.

My example comes from the highland, Tigrinya speaking, village of She'eb, where I worked with a group of twenty children, both girls and boys, all in the final year of primary school, and aged between 11 and 14. My aim with this workshop was to elicit children's reactions to their educational experience to date, both positive and negative. In all societies I have encountered children are unused to being asked to reflect on their educational experience. In highland Eritrea, where children are taught to defer to adults and where they were being asked to work with two Eritreans from the capital and a white woman, to perform at the end of the week in front of an audience of their and other teachers and educational officials and trainers, it is hardly surprising that the children were initially almost paralysed by shyness. Asking questions was never going to be a way of breaking the ice, so as is usual in my practice, we began with games, and then asked the children to draw pictures of things they liked and disliked about school. Among the dislikes we noticed a number of pictures of violence: one of a child hitting another, and another of a child being hit by a teacher. However what the children vocalised when we did begin to discuss issues were less controversial questions about which subjects they liked and difficulties with homework. When we moved on to image theatre we were again given, amongst other living sculptures, pictures of violence: between children, between adult staff and by staff on children. By this stage some mutual trust was being built, and in small group debate sessions the children began to tell us some extreme stories of violence going on in the school, and of punishments, which at their most excessive had led to a student having a miscarriage.

The stories were shocking to me and to my Eritrean co-facilitators. But what was also interesting was that this subject, which we eventually chose to dramatise, had not been the initial focus of children's complaints. It is not possible to know exactly why this was, but I would surmise that a level of violence had been normalised in society. Children did see some of what happened in school as excessive, but not as something they could affect or were allowed to criticise. Certainly this was not a topic any of us facilitating the workshop had supposed would arise, and to me this is always interesting and positive, because it demonstrates that the facilitators are not imposing their ideas or agenda on the subject group.

After more exercises and discussion the children agreed they wanted to make a short play about unjust punishments; seen by them as those where they felt they were not being listened to when they tried to offer an explanation for supposed misdeeds. Corporal punishment per se was not the main focus of complaint. Our play looked at a common locus of punishment, that meted out when children were late for school, and at what children saw as excessively painful and humiliating punishment. The facilitation group decided not to include demonstration of the most extreme punishments and violence we had been told about as we did not want to alienate teachers from the outset. The final ten minute playlet showed four short scenes of

children arriving late to school, in one instance because they had been playing on the way, but in the other cases because of circumstances over which they had no control. In each case the child was not listened to by the teacher waiting at the school entrance but was given one of a variety of the corporal punishments we had been told about.

The performance was given on the last day of the week long workshop for teachers to staff from three local schools, regional educational officials and staff from the national teacher training college. Children were not asked to contribute to the post play discussion as this would have been too much to expect of their only just rising levels of confidence. Making the play was quite a large challenge for the group, but at least here they could shelter from any individual responsibility behind the group, the 'fiction' of the play, and the responsibility for its production of myself and the Eritrean facilitators.

The performance gave rise to lengthy, excited and deeply engaged discussion. Few challenged the 'reality' of the events shown, but debate about corporal punishment was extensive. We found this was not a matter raised in teacher training. We also found that teachers were amazed how much children showed that they valued positive teacher feedback, something again not discussed in training. Undoubtedly it was the seeing of the violence 'fictionalised' on stage by usually quiet, submissive children, which electrified the debate. I know of two concrete outcomes of this workshop. Firstly the teacher trainers were deeply interested in how punishment and praise were seen by the children and talked extensively about how this was something they wished to take back to the teacher training college. Secondly, the story of the truly extraordinary levels of violence on-going at the school came out in discussion and led to an investigation by regional education officials. When I went back to the school the following year I was told that the head teacher had been found to have embezzled significant school funds which had led to great strain in running the school. A new head teacher was in place and we were told, though I was not there long enough to verify for myself, that excessive violence was now not a problem in school.

Authenticity and dialogic intellectual learning

It might be noted that the examples I have so far given have involved extensive use of theatrical concepts imported by international trainer/facilitators. There are two issues to be discussed in relation to such introductions. Firstly a number of practitioners and observers across Africa have repeatedly raised the vexed question of authenticity in relation to performance forms. Secondly in relation to the issue of dialogic learning one might ask who is doing the learning and how: vis-a-vis the participants/audiences and the facilitator/observer (in this case myself).

In relation to authenticity it is important to know that in both Ethiopia and Uganda indigenous as well as imported performance forms were used. The dancers learned Ethiopian dance forms from Ethiopian teachers as well as contemporary dance from Europeans. The performance forms utilised by the Ugandan women included Ugandan dance-drama, oral poetry and song. However, the authenticity issue certainly troubled some observers.

As the training of Adugna progressed many of the trainees moved from being simply grateful for the opportunity given by the training programme to challenging their on-

going situation, both financially and in relation to how they might be expected to behave. Initially in addition to dance training the Adugna members were given meals, access to showers, training clothes, and educational support. However, they were not given any money. Since many had previously engaged in a range of petty trading activities on the street they, and in some cases their families, lost out on an important source of income. Some families wished their children to withdraw from the programme because of this issue. After discussions with students and family members the dancers were given a small stipend to compensate for loss of earnings. A more knotty question arose in relation to trainees' changing attitude to the adults who surrounded them in the training environment. In my discussions with adult staff members of the Ethiopian Gemini Trust some complained that as time went on the trainees were no longer showing what was expressed as proper 'Ethiopian' respect for elders. There were also concerns that the girls were taking on European attitudes about how women should behave, not only in relation to dance - amazing audiences by lifting boys and taking centre stage - but also in believing that they could and should embody equality in everyday life. It is undoubted that there was a radical change in both how the young women presented themselves, standing tall, taking space and speaking openly, and how they saw themselves as women in the world rather than as just poor Ethiopian street girls. This learning involved reflection on social and gendered positioning taking into account cultural constructs from Ethiopian and Western knowledges.

Meseret explained to me the change in her perception of how she should behave as a woman, directly affected by European influence:

Although the lessons were equally for boys and girls, usually the girls were retreating behind. And later I noticed that because of bad training in Ethiopia I was in a bad way. I have to throw that away. I started to listen and to see on video European women, and I thought, 'They are women, why not us!' And I started to compete with the boys and now I have no problem. (Meseret in Plastow, 2004, 142)

Meseret's change was undoubtedly radical and brought about by contact with, and through encouragement by, a range of European trainers. However, her perception is very much that she decided on the change she wished to make based on her changed understanding of the position of women in the world. The idea that a form of knowledge is in itself inappropriate to being accessed by a particular community must be highly problematic, and this extends to artistic knowledges. As the Nigerian Olu Oguibe recently argued:

The issue of authenticity and its attendant anxieties are of course not matters over which contemporary African artists are likely to be found losing any sleep. On the contrary, it is those who construct authenticities and fabricate identities for them who are constantly plagued with worries. ... such anxieties have less to do with facts of authenticity and the relevance of tradition, as with a desire to force African artists behind the confines of manufactured identities aimed to place a distance between their practice and the purloined identity of contemporary Caucasian art. In other words, the introduction of the question of authenticity is only a demand for identity, a demand for the signs of difference, a demand for cultural distance (2010: 352).

I would argue that making knowledges available is only problematic when that information is presented as inherently superior or is used to manipulate understanding as opposed to facilitating thought and creativity. This is indeed a problem in relation to many coercive Theatre for Development programmes. A prime example might be the carefully designed manipulation of poor communities in dozens of developing nations under the rubric of edutainment by the US based Population Media Centre. This organisation takes it upon itself to persuade large numbers of people in the political South to have less children, and uses carefully researched, techniques, notably melodramatic radio serials, to manipulate people into accepting their viewpoint without ever telling those audiences that this is what they are setting out to do⁶. Knowledge, I would argue, is neutral and international. The problem lies with how it is conveyed and whether both sides have a debate or whether one side, in the above case the rich and powerful West, uses undisclosed and manipulative means to bring communities of the poor to accede to an agenda decided thousands of miles away.

The work in Uganda also featured tensions between competing cultural codes. One scene we made, 'The Culture Machine', was originally created by the university students, but as with the image theatre described above, this resonated with all three participants groups and was eventually performed with women from each organisation. The Culture Machine showed a young woman being literally pulled in two directions as she sought to satisfy both her own, and her societies' demands that she be an exemplary Bugandan woman - illustrated through actors pulling her towards her mother, towards maternity, and to honouring elders and behaving modestly - and a modern 'world' citizen - holding down a good job, wearing fashionable clothes, going out and behaving independently. In such scenes and in conversation it became apparent that uncritically seeking to satisfy both demand groups was, at least figuratively, but possibly also psychologically, tearing many Bugandan women apart. Their cultural identity was hugely important to almost all these women what ever their age, but when this involved submission and erasure as independently active, thinking women it was experienced as dangerously oppressive. The theatre could show this dichotomy, but it was quite difficult to begin to extrapolate from to debate what action might be taken to empower the women and their audiences to begin to meaningfully engage with their conflicted selves.

My work, like that of Boal and many radical community-based theatre makers, has been hugely influenced by the arguments of Paulo Freire as set out in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire repeatedly speaks of the need for praxis, where action and reflection interact in an on-going process, in order to humanise and empower the oppressed. With *The Culture Machine* we had theatrical action, but it was hard to move this forward to reflection. Eventually I came up with an experiment for the project participants. I laid out a number of sheets of paper on the ground, numbered 1 to 10. I then read out a number of statements relating to Bugandan and Western culture which seemed to me to resonate with the issues shown in our performance pieces and asked the women to place themselves on the number which most closely correlated with how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the given statement. The two I give as examples here were: 'My Bugandan culture is very important to me', and 'Bugandan culture is oppressive towards women'. Of the thirty four women present during this exercise for the first question just over half stood on number 10 - notably the older women; for the second only five did not stand on number 10. The

visual illustration of what so evidently contained at least elements of contradiction for the first time opened up a space for interrogative discussion of how women might begin to engage with dual cultural pressures. As an outsider what I found particularly interesting was discussion of how one might be able to pick and chose elements from each cultural 'package'. It seemed that previously many women had experienced conflicting cultural demands as very difficult to disaggregate, and the idea that one might question each offering and make choices from them without imperilling either Bugandaness or modernist individuality was experienced by a number of women as a radical concept. Notably this discussion was only able to emerge after we had been working together in various groupings intensively over a month long period. It is my experience that meaningful action and reflection is an ongoing process that takes time.

Emotional learning

Emotional learning is probably the hardest of the areas I am concerned with to pin down and to verify. At times practitioners concerned with provoking intellectual engagement have shied away from the emotional, seeing it as linked too heavily to Aristotelian notions of catharsis or to sentimentality. So Bertolt Brecht in his early Lehrstücke wrote plays which denied audiences any room for emotional identification and relied rigidly on dialectical debate. Unsurprisingly these plays are seldom put on these days, and in his later years Brecht acknowledged a space for emotion alongside intellect (Brecht, 1954).

A problem in discussing emotional learning in this article is that it is not an area I specifically discussed with either audiences or participants. The only certainty I can offer is in relation to my own emotional learning as a facilitator. Both my examples are drawn from the Uganda Women's Intergenerational Theatre Project, and both are primarily concerned with the group of older women from Namukozi Theatre Group.

During the week we worked with this group alone we explored many forms of production and a range of possible topics. Half way through the week we experimented with individual story telling, not a mode of production common to this generally ensemble performance group. One of the older women in the company was a Muganda princess⁷, and what I was unaware of at the start of the day was that the previous night there had been a major fire at the Kasubi Tombs which house the remains of the ancestral kings of the Buganda. Our princess offered up the story of her night after she had learned on the radio of this fire. Prior to witnessing this event I had been struggling with making any kind of connection with the palpable importance so many of our participants ascribed to their Buganda culture, an identity which seemed to me to offer little positive to women. Indeed over several preceding years of working with Buganda PhD students in Leeds I had always been somewhat baffled by the depth of their attachment to the idea of Bugandaness. Our princess did not help me understand the connection any better intellectually, but as she graphically illustrated her distress and sleepless night after hearing of the fire, and as I saw her emotion reflected and confirmed through murmured confirmatory exclamations by many of those witnessing the story, I for the first time understood in an emotional manner something of the power of the identification with this culture and its history. The story telling was so compelling and obviously struck such deep resonances with many of our group that it was retained as part of the final 'variety' performance.

The other element of our final performance which I not only found deeply moving but which gave me what I would identify as emotional learning was a group poem developed communally by the five oldest women in the group. In a culture where age still expects respect, and where stoicism is required of senior members of the community, much of our early work did not allow us access to the deeper experiences and perspectives of these women. However, one of my co-facilitators, Susan Kiguli, is not only an academic but also a leading national poet, and moreover one who has conducted extensive research into oral Buganda poetic and song forms. Susan was involved specifically to experiment with using poetry within our wider work, and she agreed to work with the older women to help them create a joint poem about their lives. The group normally had a single 'poet' who created works for the group, but the women agreed that they would try to make a poem so long as they could work together. Their technique was to seclude themselves with Susan for some hours while they shared stories from their lives. These would form the basis of the poem, which in a series of stanzas told of various stages in the life of a Buganda woman of a certain age. The poem would be jointly created with Susan's help, and then performed as a chanted group piece.

I give below the translation by Susan Kiguli (the poem was made in Luganda) of the first stanza:

In the times gone by, the times of the past
Parents sat together and agreed that
The girl child should be sent to the paternal aunt
On arrival at the paternal aunt's home, the paternal aunt works you to the bone
You are in the garden; you are herding cattle in the grassland
The same person in the forest and the kitchen would be waiting.

The paternal aunt or senga is a figure of huge importance in traditional Buganda culture, and many young girls might be sent for a period to live with this female representative of patriarchal power. The poem shows how the common experience in this setting was of unrelenting, loveless, hard work for the girl child. Each of the subsequent stanzas detailed similar hardships in relation to marriage, work and aging. The picture of sustained endurance in the face of repeated disappointment and exploitation presented as five middle aged and elderly women chanted the commonly agreed story of their lives, gave me new insights in to a group of dignified and often reserved ladies, and enabled a marked growth of sympathy and respect in my dealings with them. This better understanding, I hope, also made me a more sensitive facilitator for the rest of our time together.

Learning to see humanness

While I think it is a useful exercise to try to work out how impacts are made through an appeal to different elements of human experience and understanding, we must simultaneously recognise that it is impossible to systematically disaggregate embodied, intellectual and emotional learning; indeed theatre's strength is that it can appeal to makers and audiences at many levels, if not simultaneously, then in the totality of a performance. At its best theatre for development can reach across boundaries of status, ethnicity, age and gender to enable us realise the humanity of others which is the pre-requisite for engaging in meaningful dialogue. After witnessing the very first production by the group which went on to be come Adugna,

an Ethiopian woman who became a Board member for the Ethiopia Gemini Trust, Venus Aswaram, was recorded giving her reaction:

Before this show I always thought, OK, yeah, we need to help street children - give them some used clothes and help them - some charity. But this has changed my whole attitude. Because I see something deeper within the beings of street children. They're just like us. They can learn and they can move on. And actually, you know, they can entertain us. That was a very good performance tonight. (Quoted in Plastow, 2004, 130)

This quote seems to me evidence both intellectual and emotional learning, accessed through the embodiment of the medium of contemporary dance, which has allowed the speaker to include a new group of people in her idea of who might be considered fully human. Paulo Friere frequently refers to the need for the oppressed to access dialogical, meaningful learning in order to 'become' more human, so that they will feel significant enough to realise they have the right to demand change. I think I have seen this growth in belief in one's humanity often in work I have undertaken with marginalised people: in Junaid feeling like 'God' making dance, the Eritrean children gaining the courage to present their perspectives on school life to their teachers, and in students like Doreen from the Uganda project, who told me at the end of the process: "I have found my inner independence... I view women as people who are willing to change their attitude and improve their image given the opportunity to learn." But it is particularly powerful to hear a woman who might conventionally be constructed as part of an 'oppressor' elite, enabled through performance to recognise a fundamental equality with a group she had obviously previously seen as significantly less human than herself.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that I did not want Theatre for Development to always put the onus on poor individuals to make change, when in reality so many of the causes of their disempowerment are beyond their control. And yet throughout this piece Instances of impact and change have been shown to be predominantly at an individual level. Partly this is to do with the nature of theatre which is simultaneously an individual and a communal experience. When I witness a performance I am undoubtedly influenced by the responses of those around me, but I am not a member of a mob, and I retain the right and ability to respond individually.

What I think these experiences show is that dialogic performance work has its heart an engagement with people which promotes a sense in those taking part of being a human with an ability and right to think, to embody and to feel. This, I would argue is the essential precursor to challenging individuals and societies to make meaningful change. If we do not value our individual and collective humanity the powerful will always seek to manipulate, to control and to oppress, and the oppressed will either simply accede to these oppressions and/or seek to in turn become oppressive over those yet weaker than themselves.

My examples show something I have seen repeatedly in both my own practice and that of others I have researched. The group on whom Theatre for Development is likely to make the biggest impact is those who participate in the process, facilitators and theatre makers alike. A one off performance will almost never lead to meaningful change in audience members. Only when theatre is incorporated as part of a larger programme, as in the instance of the work with teachers, education officials and

children at She'eb, does it have any chance of resulting in social action, and only then when it is not conceived as a simple add on, illustrating the message of a particular programme, as so often happens in NGO-initiated theatre productions, but is allowed to contribute to the thinking of the programme.

Bad Theatre for Development is often message-laden, overtly didactic and boring. Far too often conveying a message is seen as overwhelmingly more important than making good art. But boring performance is never going to influence anyone. Much more cleverly high level edutainment such as that broadcast by the soap operas of The Population Media Centre seeks to influence through sustained emotional manipulation. This approach is controlling and opposed to real human development. Emotion will be evoked in any really good piece of theatre and can be a great help in understanding different perspectives, as I hope I demonstrated in recounting my own experiences above, but to rely on emotion as the main driver for a performance is never going to promote debate and understanding of wider societal issues.

The intellectual learning I show was only verifiably manifested when it was part of a process, and where the experience of witnessing or taking part in a performance was then tested in subsequent debate. Freire talks of the necessary praxis between action and reflection, involved in his work with adult learners in Brazil. The making of the performances in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda were all process driven with ideas discussed, theatricalised, debated, re-presented in modified form, and so on until the performances tallied with what the making groups felt best represented their experiences and the ideas they wanted to convey. Where I can show audience impact, in Eritrea and Uganda in the examples given here, those audiences were also asked to reflect on and debate what they had just seen. All too often I have seen supposed discussion with audiences manipulated by a facilitator, but this can never be permitted in a process which wishes to respect and empower those watching a dialogic Theatre for Development performance.

For me the most interesting part of writing this chapter has been realising just how valuable it is to reflect on the importance of embodiment in arts for development. The street girl, after five years dance training, can amaze audiences by lifting boys and at the same time prove to herself that she is in no way inferior because of her gender. The school girl can show us precisely how she feels about enforced marriage in a single carefully crafted image. And primary school children can demonstrate powerfully their pain and humiliation in the face of unjust corporal punishment. To achieve an impact all the performers had first to transform their sense of themselves as humble and unworthy. They had to embody their humanity as public 'actors', and then they had to show us that they were significant beings whose work we would want to witness. Taking space, particularly public space, is in itself an assertion of the human self which marginalised people are seldom allowed. When that person can also demonstrate artistry then they, like Junaid, can begin to know they can 'create and say anything' - and then, maybe, they can begin to change the world.

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1. On the common theme of AIDS plays in Tfd see, for example, many of the case studies given in Louise Bourgault's, *Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS*, (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press) 2003. Or the example of an AIDS play warning

against promiscuous behaviour made by ZACT, the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre in 1991 in L. Dale Byam, *Community in Motion. Theatre for Development in Africa*, (London: Bergin & Garvey) 1999, pp156-161. Wider health issues are discussed in David Kerr's, "'You just made the blueprint to suit yourselves". A theatre-based health research project in Lungwena, Malawi', in eds Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, *The Applied Theatre Reader*, (Abingdon: Routledge) 2009, pp100-107 but here too the writer discusses the tendency 'to impose modernising health messages on the rural communities' p106.

2. For a clear example of problems encountered when transgressing the parameters laid down by a funding agency see Michael Etherton, 'South Asia's Child Rights Theatre For Development: the empowerment of children who are marginalised, disadvantaged and excluded', pp 188-219, in eds, Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, *Theatre and Empowerment. Community Drama on the World Stage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.) 2004.

The article discusses the reaction by a Save the Children member of staff when a child rights play ventures into the area of drug abuse. "Oh no" she says, "Not drugs! Please not drugs! Save the Children won't allow us to tackle the drugs problem". (Etherton, 2004, 200)

3. These were Susan Kiguli (*Oral Poetry and Popular Songs in Post-Apartheid South Africa and Post-Civil War Uganda: A Comparative Study of Contemporary Performance*, unpublished PhD, University of Leeds, 2004) and Evelyn Lutwama-Rukundo, *Communication for Development: Community Theatre and Women's Rights in Buganda (Uganda)*, (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic publishing), 2010, but also Alison Lloyd-Williams, a British woman who studied for an MA with me and had spent time working with youth groups in Uganda.

4. Funding secured from the Arts and Humanities Research Commission will enable further intergenerational theatre work to take place from 2014-17.

5. The spectator is the audience member who at the invitation of the facilitator, or in Boalian language the 'joker', comes on stage to attempt to positively intervene in the action of the play to enable the 'oppressed' subject to change his/her situation for the better.

6. The Population Media Centre was established by William Ryerson in 1998 to use melodramatic soap operas according to the Sabido method to promote birth control in order to reduce world population. At present the organisation works in sixteen nations, though it has at various times worked in up to forty, overwhelmingly in the political South. It has been highly successful in attracting state and international NGO funding to promote its ideas apparently very effectively via edutainment among the worlds' poorest populations. See

www.populationmedia.org

7. There are many Muganda princesses since all female descendents of a king are entitled to the title. Ours was by no means rich or powerful though she did have high status among the group.

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