

Nic Leonhardt and Christopher B. Balme (eds), *Developing Theatre in the Global South: Institutions, Networks, Experts*. London: UCL Press (hb £55 – 978 1 80008 576 3; pb £30 – 978 1 80008 575 6). 2024, xiii + 262 pp.

This edited collection was developed from papers from a research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC). One of the editors was the principal investigator. It is no accident that of the fourteen chapters in the collection, eight were either written or co-authored by the editors, Nic Leonhardt and Christopher Balme. While, no doubt, all the chapters are rich in theatre history, the volume reads more as a work about the editors' contribution to global South theatre rather than a more objective analysis of a range of contributions from multiple perspectives.

Indeed, each of the three parts of the collection historicizes the role played by international organizations and aid agencies in promoting theatre in the global South. However, it was a promotion with a caveat: advancing Eurocentric theatre in spaces that had different conceptions of theatre. While in some countries, in the near and Middle East (Turkey and Syria), this Eurocentrism was embraced, in others, some of which are in Africa, the agenda of decolonization did not quite agree with the ideals of the funders and it created theatre that reflected local conditions. The collection, therefore, makes an argument that international organizations and aid agencies paradoxically promoted both neocolonialism and decolonization. What is clear in the collection is the glorification of international aid agencies and the immortalization of their history in shaping theatre and discourse in the global South. While this collection may be soothing to Western funders, showing them as being successful in displaying the soft power of Europe and the USA to thwart Soviet Union influence during the post-World War Two period, it may be an irritant to postcolonial government officials. With the benefit of hindsight, the findings in this collection reveal that the funding of theatre was not an innocent act of philanthropy; rather, it was designed to advance the foreign policy of Western powers.

This volume is made up of three parts, each touching on a specific niche in the role of global capital. Part 1 has four chapters focusing on the theme of '(Un)sustainable institutions: building a theatrical epistemic community'. The opening chapter by Viviana Iacob and Rebecca Sturm sets the stage for understanding the globalization agenda through historicizing the formation and role of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and the International Union for Puppetry Arts (UNIMA). These assisted in the circulation of expertise and practices that favoured Eurocentric methods even after some global South countries gained independence. Chapter 2, by Gideon Morison and Judith Rottenburg, turns the gaze on Africa and captures the festivals hosted by African countries that had gained independence. While, at first, these festivals were bankrolled by African governments, the demands of the Bretton Woods institutions – the World Bank and International Monetary Fund – to cut social spending as a precondition for getting lines of credit deprived African theatre of the necessary support. This vacuum was then occupied by international aid agencies and NGOs, which turned theatre into a message machine while emasculating its development on African terms. Chapter 3, by Abdul Karim Hakib, puts Zimbabwe centre stage as a space where the term 'theatre for development' gained global currency after the Murewa workshop. The role of ITI and UNESCO in funding the workshop is valorized by the author

to advance the goals of the research project. The festivals mentioned in Chapter 2 and the workshops invariably allowed the circulation of techniques between African countries, which contributed to an African aesthetic that I have called elsewhere *Afroskenology*.¹ While Africans had space to craft their own aesthetic, even in the face of global capital, the story is messy in Palestine. Rashna Darius Nicholson in Chapter 4 asserts that global capital prevented Palestinian theatre from engaging with the politics of Israeli occupation. The focus was on human rights and at times attacking Islamic culture for its grip on the freedoms of women.

Part 2 delves into the theme of technopolitics and has a collection of four chapters. Technopolitics is the development of technology for political purposes. In Chapter 5, Balme focuses on national theatres in Africa, with Uganda as a case study. The same issues that decimated support for African festivals also affected government support to national theatres, allowing neoliberal support to replace government finance. While Westernization of theatre happened through aid money in some contexts, Ziad Adwan in Chapter 6 advances the argument that the Syrian dictatorship preferred Western theatre in the academies it funded as it offered little room for critiquing its excesses. The history of the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Syria evidenced that. The same argument is raised in Chapter 8 by Gustavo Guenzburger and Bernado Fonseca Machado about the genre of musical theatre in Brazil. Probably owing to the relatively higher number of white people of Portuguese descent, this Westernization of musical theatre was made possible.

Part 3, with six chapters, focuses on expert networks and narrows its focus to individuals who advanced specific goals and/or practices. We learn of the activities of Severino Montano through the agency of Leonhardt in Chapter 9. He was headhunted by the Rockefeller Foundation, trained, and deployed in his home country of the Philippines to advance theatre training programmes. Leonhardt does not highlight the specificities of theatre that emerged from this funding. Hasibe Kalkan in Chapter 10 is very specific on the outcomes of the work of Metin And in Turkey. The goal was to draw Turkey to the Western world through NATO membership and Westernization of its culture and to delink it from the old Islamic Ottoman Empire culture. Through theatre training, research and documentation funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, both goals were achieved. In Chapter 11, Clara de Andrade and Christopher Balme historicize the contribution of Augusto Boal in theorizing the theatre of the oppressed through the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, funded by the Ford Foundation. The goal here was not to expand Eurocentrism but to be associated with a renowned theatre practitioner and theoretician who could be used to counter the argument that international funders are more interested in advancing Western culture and human rights. In this case, the aesthetic was at a tangent with Western practice. Sturm, in Chapter 12, draws our attention to Cecile Guidote, who founded the Philippine Educational Theatre Association with the support of ITI, UNESCO and the Rockefeller Foundation. In Chapter 13, Balme historicizes the contribution of Robert W. July to the funding of theatre in African universities. He travelled broadly, headhunting talent and upskilling handpicked individuals such as Wole Soyinka. Hakib follows the activities of Robert W. July in Ghana and the support his organization gave to Efua Sutherland at the University of Ghana and the

¹ S. Ravengai (2024) *Decolonising African Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ghana Drama Studio. Despite this funding, Sutherland did not compromise on crafting a Ghanaian aesthetic based on African storytelling, which she called Anansegoro.

The volume covers what it calls 'theatre in the global South'. The global South is such a vast geographical expanse that fourteen chapters obviously will not cover it exhaustively. I would imagine that the goal was not to cover every space suggested by the epithet, but to record the activities of international organizations and aid agencies in a sample of countries. To that end, the volume succeeds, but it fails to satisfy the geographical space suggested by the title.

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Carola Lentz and Isidore Lobnibe, *Imagining Futures: Memory and Belonging in an African Family*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (hb US\$90 – 978 0 2530 6021 1; pb US\$40 – 978 0 2530 6020 4). 2022, xvi + 296 pp.

Imagining Futures: Memory and Belonging in an African Family is a highly original and exciting book by fellow anthropologists Carola Lentz and Isidore Lobnibe about their shared extended family, which they belong to by adoption and birth respectively. Confirming the importance of mobility for West Africa's social history, they trace the trajectories of family members from northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso around the turn of the twentieth century to Accra, Ouagadougou, Lagos, Germany and the USA in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The book's substantial introduction explains that the authors draw on interviews, fieldnotes and recordings collected over many decades as well as personal memories and insights. In addition to setting out the book's key arguments, it also highlights the challenges and difficulties that surrounded its production. This allows the book to make an important contribution to Ghanaian, and indeed West African, social history and historiography.

Central to the book are the lives, narratives and perspectives on the family life of members of different generations and occupations. Thus, we learn about Gabriel and Jonas, born into the family then living in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso around the turn of the twentieth century. While labour migration to southern Ghana in the 1920s and 1930s offered members of their generation the chance to assert their independence and see the world for themselves, most migration was seasonal and on return these men spent their lives close to the fathers and elders who controlled cattle and farmwork. But we also encounter their near-contemporary Anselmy, by his own reckoning the family's earliest convert to Christianity, whose work as a catechist, civil servant and politician allowed him and his wife Catherine to live at some distance from the extended family and to invest significant resources in the education of their children. The close, though occasionally prickly, relationships between Anselmy and his rural relatives, and the fact that the educational success of