



Seasons

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Editing this edition of *Seasons* reminded me why I write plays, and why I have been drawn into teaching and mentoring playwrights, and dramaturgy: there are so many voices that need to be heard. I was overwhelmed at the response, and I am thrilled to be able to share such a collection of academic thought, creativity, honesty, openness.

To be editing this, alongside reading the devastating rape statistics emerging from the Congo, gives me hope. That we can find form for our suffering, and our joy. That we can speak a language of performance which can be heard around the world. That in expressing ourselves, we are taking the first step. As an African, as an African playwright, I am delighted to be joining a choir of voices speaking about and to African playwrights, and women in African theatre.

My profound thanks to those who contributed to this anthology, to Patricia Olwoch for her amazing co-editorship, and to Margaret McSeveney, ICWP President, for her constant nurturing of *Seasons*.

Karen Jeynes, South Africa



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AFTER THAT, THEN

Funmi Adewole Kruczkowska, England/Nigeria

I had forgotten what Eternity was like
Loitering as I have at the door posts of Time.
I had forgotten Eternity because Time is so much louder.
The force of Time is the force of realisation. Eternity
Is like trust. She moves subtlety in spheres
Like a planet in orbit. Time moves sharply
Like arrows piercing the heart. My mother told me
in the space of my life time

She had squashed my great-grandfather's coronation
her father's festivities, Several farmsteads
And hope crystallised by ritual into two
two bedroom flats between Lagos and London
South of the river. This caused Ghosts
To press against our window panes
To beckoning me beyond the balcony
Only to fall silent when I reached the edge. Anyhow

The legacies and genealogies are now written.
No more fear of forgetting them. No more need
Of remembering them. Empire becomes hamlet
becomes highway, becomes hallway. This morphing landscape
Spans Benin, Rome, Mali, Samaria, all.

The sun is rising above our garden. Let us have breakfast.
After that we will take a walk. Then we will work. Then
we will help each other. After that we will ease ourselves. Then
we will sing and dance and worship. We will laugh and chat. Then
sleep.
After that, then...

AN EXCERPT FROM "SOMEBODY GOTTA' RISE"

*A Social Drama in Twelve Scenes
by Patricia R. Love, England/Turkey*

Scene 6

(Scrim lights come up on prison cells. GOMEZ, JUDE,
and SPIDER can be seen in silhouette. The scene
begins with a brief silence.)

GOMEZ
Listen...
(two beats)

SPIDER
I don't hear nothing.

GOMEZ
Nothing is something else. Now tell me - what is
it?

SPIDER
(Listening - another beat)
It's... I don't know... Peace?

JUDE
I don't hear no birdie's singing. How 'bout you,
Gomez? You hear the sweet sound of Tweetie's
lending you 'the peace'?

GOMEZ
Nothing under my pillow. So, what's the answer?

SPIDER
We playing a game?

GOMEZ
What you say, Jude - we playing games?

JUDE
Me and Ona, we don't play games. No girl, this is
what you call the real.

SPIDER
The quiet?

JUDE
(quickly)
This bitch is getting on my last nerve. She is just
too damn stupid.

GOMEZ
And uuuuugly! Now get to the crust and name it.
Name it!

SPIDER
Bucky -

GOMEZ
Wrong answer.

SPIDER
Bucky -

GOMEZ
She can't hear you.

JUDE
Bucky's out for the night, sugar. She ain't up to
your whining.

GOMEZ
That's right. Out for the night; maybe longer. Her
line 'been temporarily disconnected.

SPIDER
Why? Where is Bucky? What's happened to her?

GOMEZ
Sensibility hit her mind. Like a rock.

JUDE
More like a jolt of some kind.

SPIDER
Wha-- ... what...

JUDE
Kinda' like the feel you're beginning to remember.
Listen to it.

GOMEZ
Closing in like ice. Now say it.

SPIDER
Stop.

JUDE
The name...

SPIDER
Shut up!

GOMEZ
Come up with it fast, or you get the hot iron in the morning.

SPIDER
I'm... it's...

GOMEZ
Spider must be forward to sitting the saddle side-wise a couple of days... what do you hear, girl?

SPIDER
(Blurts it out)

Fear.

JUDE
Say again?

SPIDER
The... silence.
(pause; 4 beats)
I hear it. It's... fear.

GOMEZ
Little girl, you just gave yourself one fine moment.
(Silence)

JUDE
In your bones...

SPIDER
Down, lower.

GOMEZ
Shutting you down, from mouth to what makes it roll.

JUDE
Know it.

GOMEZ
Trust it.

SPIDER
(quietly)
Bucky...

JUDE
No.

SPIDER
Bucky?

GOMEZ
The man, he make it...

SPIDER
Jefferson. Jefferson?
(No response)

JUDE
And the man, he take it away.

SPIDER
No...

JUDE
Gone...

SPIDER
... voice.

GOMEZ
Now you're hearing right.
(There is a long silence, followed by)

Lights slowly fading into a sulphuric yellow; then black.

WOMB TIDE

Carla Lever, South Africa

Body Play: Small Thoughts on a Growing South African Physical Theatre Tradition

It's not unusual for the creative process to be referred to in terms of pregnancy, generally by disgruntled would-be parents with the creative equivalent of swollen ankles and a bad back. This aside, it is a particularly apt metaphor when it comes to describing the burgeoning physical theatre tradition that's currently growing in strength and influence in Cape Town.

Pregnancy is, of course, about new beginnings and growth, but it is also about using the body as a holder of life and, at another level, story. The body becomes a carrier of much more than just a

physical entity and the narrative development is quite apparent to anyone who chooses – and knows how – to read it.

Cape Town's Baxter Theatre recently saw a run of the curiously-titled *Womb Tide* – a beautiful piece of work from the exciting local physical theatre company From the Hip: Khulumakhale (FTH:K). FTH:K is the company who brought *Pictures of You, Gumbo* and, most recently, the Afro-Gothic *Quack* to South African audiences. The company has a progressive ethos of inclusion – it is fully integrated between Deaf¹ and hearing

¹ The company director, Tanya Surtees, stresses why it's important to capitalize the word 'Deaf' in this context, since it differentiates between a disability and a cultural identification.

performers, with a strong education wing ensuring their up-and-coming talent is properly developed and channeled – and a history of producing excellent, innovative works that constantly push the bounds of South African physical theatre.

Adapted from a short story by Lara Foot, *Womb Tide* traces one couple's story from the beautiful agonies of courtship to the very different kind of agony of childlessness. It's a story imbued in equal measures with deep pain and deep joy. It's also a very South African story, touching on the hotbed of racial prejudices and social inequalities that are still, sadly, pertinent in a post-Apartheid context as a couple, desperate for a child of their own, adopt what appears to be a homeless street orphan... or is he?

Womb Tide deals with the human side of social issues, the relationship between the colder outer world and the unique inner realms we create as reactions to, or fortresses against, that world. It's a love story – between partners, between parents, between families. We meet hugely sympathetic, yet flawed, characters. The introduction of a puppet as the central figure around whose presence much of the drama unfolds adds another magical layer to the compelling visual complexity of the production. Whilst there are many stylistic and superficial plot similarities to FTH:K's previous production *Pictures of You* (a couple's relationship suffers under the weight of a violent attack on the life they have made for themselves), the stories stand on their own as unique expressions.

Womb Tide is, for several reasons, captivating and important theatre. It has interesting things to say about parenthood and identity as well as normativity – both physical and social – in a South African context. Not only this, but it says them in creative ways – not solely through the mouth (though inarticulate murmurs from the characters certainly convey much emotion throughout), but through the body, which is the primary carrier of the narrative and emotion.

The fact that *Womb Tide* is physical theatre with only the barest hint of recognizable words only heightens the characters' tangible sense of distress and helplessness at the limits of their bodies. Words are justly celebrated vessels for conveying emotion. At times though, some things are most eloquently expressed without them. The most gut-wrenching moments in the play for me were the ones communicated in a single gesture or look.

Far from being solely an „imported' Western form, physical theatre has strong resonance in an African performative context. Ritual traditions of storytelling through dance and mime hold narrative as something told through the body. Certainly, there is a distinction to be made between traditional African dance forms and a Western theatre tradition, but the base principle remains: the body as site of story as opposed to the mouth.

South Africa has, of course, a peculiar anxiety around body identity. Coming from a fraught history of seeing physicality as a

(potentially damning) narrative determinant of one's life story, the body has picked up such static buzz of meaning and taboo that it has become an extreme site of anxiety, a story in itself. Against this backdrop, I think physical theatre picks up an added resonance – and deserves critical and popular attention alike. Festivals like “Out the Box” (an annual festival of puppetry and physical performance) and individual companies like FTH:K and Magnet Theatre are making great headway in developing (predominantly) physical works of quality – the Magnet Theatre company is particularly committed to a touring program that brings its work to communities often marginalized by a combination of location, economic circumstance or language. (Incidentally, I have watched a Magnet Theatre performance where I have felt entirely sidelined both linguistically and culturally – when narrative is used it is in isiXhosa – but have been able to connect with the performance on a non-linguistic level to such an extent that I left convinced that I had experienced one of my theatre highlights of the year)

With this history in mind, I believe that in South Africa – a country of so many different languages, so many different stories, and so many different bodies/abilities – physical theatre is a form that really deserves to be explored. The focus on the body as site of anxiety helps to transcend the superficial differences between race, culture and language and opens us into a new way of communicating – and, as audience members, experiencing. Indeed, because words do not automatically spell out the plot, the audience carries the responsibility of actively creating meaning in a way that more standard theatre forms do not require, or even allow. It may – as the African proverb goes – take a village to raise a child, but in physical theatre, it takes an audience to raise a narrative.

Perhaps physical performances are often so successful (artistically, if not financially) because they lend themselves to cutting across demographics. Language barriers fall away (though cultural barriers are of course much trickier to navigate). It is often when dealing with the vocabulary of the body that performers are at their most eloquent. Not every actor is a natural wordsmith and lines often have to be assimilated – with varying degrees of success – before they can be comfortably delivered, but much physical theatre is devised within the company – born from a direct marriage between body and story and an authentic expression of each performer's understanding and feeling of the story's shape.

If we look to a broader scale, though, nowhere has the concept of physical performance been honed and elevated with such successful cross-cultural mass appeal as on the sports field. When it comes to visual spectacle, navigating progressive power shifts, audience investment in narrative arc and catharsis, sport as mass physical entertainment has been successful in a way that theatre can only dream of – stadiums are filled to capacity even as theatres sit empty. The amphitheatre has given way to the

coliseum – and South Africans certainly do not hesitate to collectively worship its heroes. Sporting events have undoubtedly moved more and more in a performance direction – one only has to look to the evolution of the five day cricket test, through one day international and, finally, 20/20 (complete with scantily clad dancers and backing tracks for boundaries and wickets) to see this. In the same manner, the Americans have perhaps always understood the link between sport and performance, with live music, cheerleaders and even pyrotechnics having been a part of their mass sporting culture long before they were embraced by the rest of the world.

It is interesting to note that, whilst no-one questions the unifying power of sport, the centrality to a country's culture, the personal and collective catharsis and development potential that it provides, theatre remains suspiciously sidelined, physical theatre even more so than its mainstream standard textual counterpart. Perhaps artists, with a dramatic shudder at the thought of mass commercial appeal, would have it no other way. Then again, perhaps producers, with an anxious glance at empty auditoriums and bank accounts, might give some thought to exploring the psychology around it.

Although clashing cast booking schedules mean that there are no immediate plans to re-stage Womb Tide, FTH:K company members will be performing two new pieces in South Africa for 2011: Kardivale – intriguingly billed as ‘cabaret clown noir’ – and Benchmarks.

WOMEN AND ETHIOPIAN THEATRE

Meaza Worku, Ethiopia

Performing arts like music, dance and drama have accompanied various aspects of traditional life and festivities in which both male and female participants have been active, using them as a form of human self-expression. In modern forms of art, especially theatre, however, the participation of women in the male-dominated industry has been very limited, and history has a big role to play in that.

Theatre is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopia. It started in the early 20th century with the emergence of modern educational systems of western concept in the country. Though art in general was not imported as a part of modern schooling packages, it has recently been introduced by Ethiopians who were sent abroad for a higher education.

*Bejrond Teklehawariat Teklemariam, (*A title for a government position equivalent to Finance Minister), was one of those Ethiopians who was sent abroad for a military course but instead studied and attended theatre performances during his stay in Europe. Once back in the country, Teklemariam wrote and

produced a comedy play based on the fables of *La Fontain* called *Fabula (1913)*, which was considered the first play in the history of modern theatre.

After *Fabula*, plays were produced and staged in schools for special events like National holidays and particular school days, which were written and directed by a few Ethiopian teachers and performed by male students. Though theatre had not yet been developed as a serious profession, there was still no record of women participation in Ethiopian theatre history. Women's participation had been very limited and to some extent their contribution had been denied. The followings are a few examples which made it into the recent history books.

In 1932, a girls' school called Etege Menen*, (named after the wife of emperor Haileselassie I), was established in Addis Ababa which was a step forward for girls to get an education as well as get involved in art. As the boys' were known to perform in schools, the same is true also for students in **Etege Mennen** girls' high school where play productions during school days and National holidays were being staged. This was mostly done by a lady teacher and school mistress Sindu Gebrou who initiated, supervised and directed the plays with students who were all women.

Sindu Gebrou was known for her plays which were produced in Hager Fikir Theatre. It was the first theatre in Ethiopia opened in 1935. She had her plays published in 1947. Sindu wrote more than 20 plays in her lifetime. This particular woman playwright and director had been consulting and closely working together with the well-known Playwright and Director as well as teacher Yoftahe Nigussie, who is a prominent figure in Ethiopian theatre. The Ethiopian school of Theatre arts was named after him.

The existing Ethiopian theatre history has not only reflected parts of theatre history, but also created a controversy around who the first actress in Ethiopia was. Most argue that Asnakech Worku, a singer, dancer and actress, was the first actress who performed in plays which are considered to be “theatre in a modern sense” (1952). On the other hand, it is also argued that Selamawit Gebre Selassie was the first actress in Ethiopia (1952) who used to, solely, participate in acting. The two actresses were the first to join the male performers at the same or in different times and places; however there were women performers, actresses, directors, and theatre sound designers in the early stages of professional Theatre in Ethiopia but who were not recorded in history.

Here is an example; there was a play production by the students of Etege Mennen girls' High school called “Yeyekatit Eilkit”(the February Massacre), based on a true and sad historical event during the Italian Invasion in which many civilians in Addis Ababa were brutally killed by the Fascist Troops. The play was written and directed by the then school Mistress of Etege Mennene girl's high school, Sindu Gebrou. A special music piece for the play

was composed and performed live by pianist Yewubdar Gebru (a sister of Sindu). Since the school was only for girls, it was very difficult to get boys to act, as a result females were forced to imitate male characters. This particular play was staged in 1946 in Etege Mennen high school in the presence of Haileselassie I.

The same play was later produced by Hager Fikir theatre, but this time it was performed by men, because women artistes had not yet joined theatre profession, according to historians. But in actual fact, there were actresses in schools who performed out of their own preference, of which a few did continue to work in the theatre profession. For instance; Ferehiwot Tekleargay, Zenebech Tesfaye, Askale Amneshewa, Beletu Atnafu, Aselefech Bekele and Yeshe Teklewold. All these were amazing actresses and theatre practitioners.

Although women's participation in acting has been increasing, they did not dare involve themselves in the field of directing and playwriting. The challenges for the early woman artists were many, but lack of basic education, training in theatre as well as proper recognition and encouragement can be factors for the inadequate number of women in Ethiopian theatre.

The late 50s and early 60s were considered a golden time for Ethiopian theatre in which different well written, produced and read plays by well educated male playwrights became prominent. No women playwrights have been discovered in theatre history that can be mentioned as role models even in this 21st century, however, there were those few mentioned above who did write plays in the theatre history but never were encouraged or acknowledged by historians.

In recent times, women have started to emerge in Ethiopian theatre as playwrights and directors. But after a hundred years life course of theatre, each is treated as a „first' in the field.

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TRUST, SENSITIVITY AND RESPECT

Terri L. Atkins Febuary, USA

To write plays with scenes of slavery requires trust from the actors and audience, sensitivity to the emotional histories and complete respect for all aspects of the subject, the culture, language, people and time period. Perhaps more than any other: respect for those who perform the harsh reality of their historic past.

Working with the subject of slavery started as a very challenging topic within the confines of a play, "Village on the Red"; which was written as a historical play of the founding of Alexandria, Louisiana from 1790 to 1830.

Research pulled up only one name of a slave, but there was a plethora of information regarding the people who owned slaves. It didn't take much to connect the dots, but the question was: How to connect them without one group of audience members thinking I was "white-washing" the subject and others thinking I was trying to start a riot?

The answer is perhaps, because I am a white woman from Illinois, (Land of Lincoln) and my perspective came from a clear conscience or because I had been on stage with the actors who were available for the parts or because I didn't relish alienating anyone in the community where I lived. Regardless, the scenes requiring black actors to look and work on stage as slaves required sensitivity. The entrances, exits, reason for their appearance and especially the dialogue and phrasing of each sentence had to be handled with respect.

Excerpt from the Slave Quarters scene:

FEMALE SLAVE 2: *Missus don't know the hurt of breakin' up families when de be sellin' the children, wife or husband...Some slave owners don't think 'bout it no more'n sellin' livestock. Freedom...It be a deep hurt not to be free...freedom is always on the mind of us slaves. Those who can, take a chance to run. Freedom? It be in us jus' the same as in them.*

FEMALE SLAVE 1: *I heard Dr. Sibley tell Missus dat no sick slave gonna do anybody any good. He say hurtin' one a us is like killin' a good mule hooked to a plow...*

MALE SLAVE 1: *...Yeah, well, you see how de' whip a ole mule dat ain't in mind to plow...*

FEMALE SLAVE 1: *...he say tenin' to da health a dat mule make him want ta work cause he be workin' for a carin' Masser.*

FEMALE SLAVE 2: *Dey says lots a things ta keep us from runnin' I still say a slave is a slave...*

FEMALE SLAVE 3: *...Yeah, an wit out his own papers he not any better 'n a ole mule to talk about.*



So many aspects of slavery needed to be known; the “good masters”; the “bad masters”; Jim Bowie’s actions as a slave trader; religion; marriage; freedom. Then there is the question of: How many African-American actors could we find?

I was not only the playwright for this play, but also the designated producer. Writing any scene for any play requiring black male actors was going to be a casting problem. The men who would perform were professionals. That first year I had to edit the script to fit women into the men’s roles. One of my actresses told me that her part didn’t seem right. She was following the Master around on stage and talking to him as a confidant rather than a slave. It was an important role, but it was a man’s role. The next year, we found a young man who could play the role. He missed most of the rehearsals because of sports and work, but he came through for us.

The actresses were willing to perform as slaves because they knew me and trusted me. They knew and trusted the director. The trouble came backstage with other performers creating an atmosphere where the women truly felt they were being treated as slaves. This deepened the performances of the black actresses, but they felt the heat of their ancestor’s breath, the pain of inhumanity and they refused to perform the roles the following year.

One of the actresses told a friend that, “Terri did a good job with the slave’s parts. She was sensitive and fair.” I repeat this not to pat myself on the back, but to relay the importance of being sensitive when writing.

The dialogue from Village on the Red—the Slave Quarters, rose out of the research and mental crafting a possible evening in the quarters. Recently, I was asked to write a slave history for a reading for the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. This honor required accurate, verbatim discourse for the sole Black History Event in our area. The title of the reading was, “Before the Freedom”.

I read many “ex-slave interviews” recorded by the WPA in the 1930’s; with respect to the material, I kept the dialect and language they used. Respecting the readers, committee leaders and audience, I carefully substituted the word, “nigger” with other names used by the interviewees, where possible. (I could not use the denigrating word easily because of my own feelings about it as well.)

I asked the readers specifically to comment on the script and the readers said that it was up to me as the writer. They accepted whatever was written. The wife and mother of two of the readers commented before the readings took place, “I have never been on a plantation and I never want to”, she said. Afterward she felt it learnt the perfect backdrop as it was the place where slaves had been in bondage before the freedom.

“Because you are from the North and have lived here in the south over thirty years, you bring a different perspective to the history of our people. You respect it.”, she told me.



Excerpt from —Before the Freedom”:

MAN 2: *One day before the freedom, I heard something that sounded like-*

ALL (In Unison): *Thunder.*

WOMAN 1: *The war was begun and there were stories of fights and freedom. The news went from plantation to plantation. All the while the slaves acted natural and some even more polite than usual. They prayed for-*

ALL (In Unison): *Freedom.*

MAN -2: *Was I happy? Lord! You can take anything. No matter how good you treat it—it wants to be—*

ALL (In Unison): *FREE!*

WOMAN 1: —..While equality has not reached the hearts and minds of all men in our country, those who will, press forward to establish respect for all mankind in each generation of black and white Americans. Recognition of the past and reconciliation in the present is the journey toward a truly free America.”

Terri Atkins, February

Slave Narrative collection at the Library of Congress:
<http://memory.loc.gov:8081/ammem/snhome.html/>

When I Was a Slave
Memoirs from the Slave Narrative collection
Edited by: Norman R. Yetman
www.Doverpublications.com

NO CAUSE

Patricia Olwoch (USA/Uganda)

An excerpt from a play *No Cause* about the plight of a boy caught up in the war in Northern Uganda, by Achiro Patricia Olwoch.

The boy narrates his ordeal in the bush when he was captured by the rebels.

There was a line of young children aged between 5-14 and they all have heavy loads on their heads or backs. They were all being guarded by armed men on either side as they walked...

One of the young boys aged 7 stopped walking out of exhaustion and fell to the ground and dropped his luggage in the process.

The rest of the children stopped moving and stood still... they were all scared...one of the armed men walks up to little boy and kicked him hard.

'Get up!' he screamed at him...the child was very motionless and very weak... the man just picked up a big club and raised it above his head and hit the boy on the head...there was a scream... and then... silence... that little boy was dead.

Pinto speaks slowly...

I knew that boy... he was my cousin on my mother's side...and there was nothing I could do to help him. I watched him die like a dog... What was I to do? Challenge the man to a duel?

The three of us started to make our escape plan... Lapoya was not too supportive of the plan but we all agreed to do it in the cover of night. Little did we know that our plan was going to turn sour...

Pinto stands and faces the audience...the drumming gets louder and faster...then comes to a stop.

Lapoya, reported us to the leaders!

That could only mean one thing... the blood of a traitor had to be shed. We should have listened to Lapoya... we should not have insisted on our plan...

He walks across the stage...the drum is beating slowly... loudly...

We were made to watch as he was cut up into little pieces.

They made him suffer... as far as they were concerned he was more of a traitor than we were... and they made an example of him.

They said that people like him would report us to the government army!

I knew that I and Ojok were going to be killed too. We had to get away. Lapoya was dead and we were next...

The drums beat faster... softly...Pinto looks like he is about to take flight... he looks about him... the drumming gets louder as his voice rises with it...

We started to run as fast as we could... there was no looking back... we could hear them chasing us the whole time... they were shouting for us to stop.

We just kept running until we came to an army base where the soldiers rescued us and the rebels went back into the bush.

The drumming stops at the end of his talk...then starts again slowly and softly...

We were taken to the office where the former child soldiers are screened before being returned to our villages.

My whole family was dead... that is how I came to be living here... alone in my hut... nobody else wants me around.

I fall asleep every night and I am so afraid that the rebels will come and pick me in the night. Even when I do sleep, I see Lapoya and all the other dead people we were forced to kill.

I cannot tell anyone what I am feeling because people do not want to hear those stories...

Sometimes I think that they are still afraid of me... maybe they are afraid that I am still a rebel.

Pinto breaks down...falls to his knees... the drumming stops and there is complete silence...he speaks slowly to the audience...

I did not know why I was fighting... yet I was forced to fight. All I want is to go back to school and be a normal boy... I am so sorry and I want to be forgiven...

Please... please forgive me...

AS THE CURTAINS DROP

THE END

KATUNTU

Alude Mahali and Injairu Kulundu, South Africa/Kenya

Katuntu (... and you too): A performance happening in 4 movements (2009)

A 45minute site-specific performance was developed in a collaboration between South African born Alude Mahali and Kenyan born Injairu Kulundu. Katuntu (...and you too) is written, devised and performed by Alude Mahali and Injairu Kulundu under the direction of Alude Mahali.

Katuntu is a story of loss and journeying. A figure has banished herself to an open unidentified landscape in a desperate attempt to find what she has lost. She is probing, calling, hearing, searching in hopes of fixing, of repairing and most importantly in hopes of healing- she is in exile, albeit in her mind. *Katuntu* as a process also serves as a sense of renewal, acceptance and forgiveness seen through the eyes of the girlfriend „other’ that is also so much the self. In *Katuntu*, as the audience you enter a gendered world where the voices belong to black girls and women, with vocality forming the primary performance modality. We play ourselves as well as each other, seemingly like each other and then very different, seeing each others „selves’ around us, in us and through us.

In collaboration with Injairu Kulundu, we journeyed though the various paths of nostalgic memory in a collage of sound, visual and narrative passage. All this through the use of song performance, old photographs and letters, childhood images and iconography, written and spoken text, practical exercises, language and „girl friendship’. Through incantatory call and response, the voice of memory, although fragmented, is summoned into being.

In *Katuntu*, we see how shifting identities occur. This is black girlhood; we are multiple bits working against loaded historical signifiers, omnipresent influences, as well as, each other, whilst furiously battling to piece together and re-construct a composite whole. We take turns with play, at times vacillating between play and reality. Whether we are mocking one another playfully through song, engaged in a dance with one another, at once becoming the exhumed spirit of the alternate other, screaming in agony or hollering with laughter or becoming the witnesses of each other’s purging.

Here, language is at times non-verbal, gestural, seldom uses a recognizable vocabulary all integrating the call and response pattern perpetuated by „girlfriend play’. These calls and responses include murmurs, muttering gibberish, melodious harmonies, screeching cries, piercing laughter, shattering wails, sporadic uttering, screams, grunts, panting and heavy breathing. Sometimes the language is held in a look, a sideways glance, a penetrating stare, a rolling of the eyes, eyes open wide that cannot see or just vacant eyes. There is something fierce about the vocal and gestural language, almost feral- where fierce protective love is coupled with fierce unacceptable hate. We become sound-makers, barely understood, except by each other. We are bits for so long that we are only whole when we are together and, even then; the strain of this dichotomous relationship becomes almost too overwhelming to tolerate.

Landscape is an important word throughout *Katuntu* mainly because the piece is site-responsive and takes place outside. The audience is required to shift location three times during *Katuntu*, creating a sense of discontinuity, disruption and motion that is necessary not only for the movement of the piece but also as a device for reinforcing the sense of discord, disconnectedness and disorder experienced by the ever-shifting figures.

Katuntu takes place in four movements; I would like to share extracts of text from each movement.

1st Movement

Katuntu begins in front of a building where towering white pillars serve as a backdrop to the action. A white sheet hangs across the pillars and casts shadows as the figures move in the space, while a single follow spot light enhances the play on shadow- creating a sense of presence and absence, of the figure’s merging and splitting. There is a feeling of expectation, an anxiety triggered by the feeling of being confronted with the familiar, a thing, an emotion, a feeling of the past that has long since been forgotten.

Sometimes when I was quiet in the open air, I could hear her. I could hear her say all the things that I wanted to say to myself in ways that I struggled to articulate, formulate, propagate. My eyes would open wide listening to her, my ears would tingle seeing her, my whole body would react. What strange and comforting sensations? And so it was with this figure dangling from my hair, clinging to my leg, pouring out of eye when I wept that I learned to walk, to make imprints, to make impressions, to see and to be seen. Where would I be without the comfort of the hum in my head, the itch in my sole that reminds me to keep walking, sometimes run?

But once, I no longer saw or heard her. My face froze, my body paralyzed, how I felt the tears well up in my eye, held out my hands, my palm so that the tears might land in them. I waited to make her out, I waited to see her, I waited for the windy breeze to

brush against my cheek, how I waited for her to make herself known, then... nothing.

I marched; I clicked my heels, I stomped my feet, I kicked at nothing in the air, I rubbed one foot against the other, I shook my head violently as though I were shaking my thoughts, my words, my very conscious being away. I thrust back and forth, I tore at my hair, I searched, I scratched, I scraped, I threw myself with fury to the ground, spitting and shouting what must have gibberish, writhing in agony, tongue-tied, wordless, my palate on my teeth, my jaws on my gums, my tongue stuck to the insides of my cheeks, my whole mouth twisted, unrecognizable, not what it was, I shut up, I kept quiet.

I wanted to die, I wanted to die. I looked to the sky with furrowed brow. For the first time I was completely alone...and then...I could not see.

2nd Movement

The action then commences in a large tree. This tree, much like the girlfriend other, comes to represent a holder of memory, a container in which all memories are stored and erupt upon discovery. There is something magical about the tree; there are yellow light bulbs in it that illuminate the figures faces in a beautifully dreamy way. There are all kinds of fabrics and materials draped in and around the tree, raffia, Hessian, rope, wool and various cloths from around Africa. In the tree hang wind chimes, shoes, bells, buckets, pots, tins and pans, tens upon tens of white dolls with red fabric accents and various other objects and talismans. The tree becomes alive with memory particularly when the two figures occupy the tree, managing to climb to the very top. It is a place of childhood games, dreams and dangerous nightmares.

There is a woman, sometimes a child, sometimes a woman. She's grown weary, you see? There is a clang-clanging of bells in the landscape, the landscape is dry. No moisture, she's grown weary you see? An ashen emissary sent flying into a cacophony of language she doesn't understand. These pale creatures stare at her with their disinterested eyes, staring over the disruption that she creates, she's grown weary you see. Heavy tongue stuck stumped. She's grown weary you see.

(Figure screams into the open night air) Bring back my things. Do you hear me? Bring back my things, I want my things!

3rd Movement

This movement moves into an alley leading to a small white building (outside a narrow dilapidated janitor's old toilet). This space creates a sense of captivity, of decline, being trapped and unable to move forward, juxtaposed with a feeling of having traveled far and for a long time (a literal interpretation of the audiences' journey and a metaphoric passing of time for the figures).

Keep walking...the journey does not stop for her, all the time she is unsettled, unrooted, moved to a new place. She is compelled to move...sometimes run, I cannot catch up with myself; I cannot take all my things. I collect what my feet land on...I collect the earth under my feet. You must move with me.

I muttered and mumbled to myself in a way I imagined to be awkward in anyone where around to hear. I had no place. I sometimes sensed that I was revisiting spaces that I had been to before already alone, and with her. I had no way of knowing but there was something strangely familiar about these places. My feet felt a kind of warmth when they made contact with the earth and the gravel and the mud but still...I could not see.

4th Movement

The final space is trench-like; there are many nooks and alcoves in this space and the figures alternate between being up top amongst the audience to down below in the pit. This section represents emancipation from this girlfriend „other“: this is the nature of this relationship as girlfriend subjectivity fluctuates between states of claim and abjection of union and hysteria.

I find her, after searching, I find her.

She will not leave me now.

I find her haggard, tired...fire!

What has she got to be angry about?

Has she suffered what I have suffered?

Has she held up a mirror to find no one there?

Is she not the deserter?

Does she suffer what I suffer?

I cannot care, I will not care.

She had promised refuge, security and then nothing.

It is settled then.

I will live in her!

She holds my language and home in her.

I will live in her.

She must avail herself.

The time for court is over, I will live in her!

I will set up home in her.

Bring me my things.

Build with me.

The time for journeying is over.

I will live in you.

You have been reified.

I can see and I can see you.

Edifice, holder of my place.

Edifice, container of my thoughts, dreams, memories.

Reason for my nostalgia.

I will live in you and you in me.

Do you hear me?

JWABI

Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, Puerto Rico USA

The master walks around us, Jwaabi
here we are, Jwaabi
two slaves
two similar with distant color skin
with different lenguas
do not know why he called me Teresa, Jwaabi
do not know why he called you Juana, Jwaabi
my mother use to sing my name
me, Tshanwe
yo
esa soy
as it was the tambora
as it was the rain over my head
while my continent is screaming
rain sticks open their mouths
kalimba drums dancing
marimba ankle shaker
as there is no kingdom warrior after us
to capture me and my sisters
my brothers
my little ladies to play with
djembe doum doum
bougarabou hand percussion
while looking for giraffes and turtles
my little lionesses
my pets
my weak ones
those who cry even if they are strong
even if they are tall
my dark muscles
like mangrove monsters

the master walks around us, Jwaabi
yo soy Teresa
or Therese
tú eres Juana
or Jane
he desenfunda his penis
it's my time to wait
until he's finished with you
you're not crying this time
brave guerrera
the sound of my voice is no maraca
no flute
there is no sound, actually
ngoma moropa balapho power
nada de voz
and you look in my eyes
I look in yours
I remember middle passage
I recall the waves
the saltwater vomits
the excretory pains
while my fingers play with the maderos of the boat
I remember el tumbaquetumba
the girl next to me who touched my elbow
and died the next morning
the mother who committed asphyxia to her baby boy
those two women
friends from the same village
glitter in four pupils
magic in four eyebrows
they make a promise to each other
barabtubembón
the light skinned one
bit the other in the neck
both closed their eyes

SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW (NATION)

Penny Youngleson, *South Africa*

Writing to the “New” South Africa, about the “New South Africa”... in South Africa.

In conversation Spalding Gray wondered:

Could I stop acting, and what was it I actually did when I acted? Was I, in fact, acting all the time, and was my acting in the theatre the surface showing of that? Was my theatre acting a confession of my constant state of feeling my life as an act? Now there was the new space between the timeless poetic me (the me in quotes, the self as poem) and the real-time self in the world (the time-bound, mortal self; the self as prose). The ongoing ‘play’ became a play about theatrical transcendence.

(Callens 2004: 118 – 119)¹

Gray’s performance was a theatre of identity, of a personal politics premised on the unearthing of stories that had hitherto seemed too lacking in significance to be told to paying strangers.

In my practical work there has been a deliberate dislocation between the constructions of identity within “real” time and the succumbing to escalating rapidity of the physical, emotional, spiritual and sensory unravelling of the self and identity. During a series of one-woman shows written and performed over the last three years; I was made fully aware of a great deal of discomfort I feel in my own body, in my personal “homelessness” that is, I believe, a legacy of the lack of accountability in white female identity over the last twenty-five years in this country. The sense that “I don’t know how to work upon my skin from within.” (Barthes, R. 1984)²

This was highlighted for me during January 2008 when I was involved in the *Infecting the City Festival* in Cape Town, South Africa. Whilst conducting ethnographic interviews with volunteers in the midst of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa (the theme that year was *Home Affairs*) I was struck by the number of white women in their mid to early forties who had volunteered hours of their time to help the victims of civic violence reconstitute their lives. Whilst this sacrifice was admirable (and I am, in no way, attempting to negate the importance of their contribution or to question the conscious motives of their involvement) their fervor felt almost too violent. Their sense of injustice and betrayal too personal. Their interest in the victims could almost be read as self-pivoting. Many of these women had been active in protesting against Apartheid in their twenties (during the late 1980s to early 1990s State of Emergency in this country) – and felt a renewed

sense of importance, and identity, to have found a cause to “fight” for again. And it was because of their zeal that I recognized that this “homelessness” or invisibility that I felt was not something that was exclusive to me. It was a recurring void that I observed in many of my acquaintances and colleagues.

White women have necessarily occupied an uneasy space, falling somewhere between the phallogocentricity³ of Cartesian subjectivity and the iconographic other of “Western” Imperialism. (West, M. 2009:4)⁴

This inquiry inevitably took my writing into Whiteness Studies, an area of research dedicated to understanding the social construction of epidermal ethnicities (with those categorised as “white” being a particular focus) and the resulting effect these constructions have on interactions of status, socio-political dynamics and wealth distribution – amongst others. Because of South Africa’s particular history, Whiteness Studies in this country is an extremely rich site for both academic rhetoric and discourse as well as creative prose.

Autobiography, or ‘autoperformance’ (Freeman 2007: 95)⁵, does more than provide artists with the opportunity to make themselves subjects to be seen by spectators; it allows them to see themselves in the process of being seen. Lacan described a state wherein ‘the visible me is determined by the look that is outside me’ (Lacan 1977: 49)⁶. A questioning of self through self’s construction, the self as subject does not, we see, amount to the self as given. Autoperformative identity is under constant challenge from selective memory and an oscillation between self-mirroring, self-questioning and self-inventing – and there are distinctions between the terms “identity”, “person”, “self” and “autobiography”. Barthes writes about this as the ‘self who writes, the self who was and the self who is’ (Barthes 1977: 56). Likewise, Peter Brook asserts that ‘in everyday life “if” is a fiction... In everyday life “if” is an evasion; in the theatre “if” is the truth’ (Brook 1968: 157)⁷.

Another “problem” inherent in the writing I was doing was the method of reconciling the practicalities of gender, the female, femininity and my understanding of what it meant to be a woman (and a white woman in South Africa) with the liberal philosophies and theories I purported to subscribe to. In this vein the idea of the inscription of gender on the body became more and more important in exploring what it was to write for and about my country.

¹ Callens, J (ed.) 2004. *The Wooster Group and its Traditions*. Brussels: Peter Lang

² Barthes, R. 1984. *Camera Lucida*. London: Fontana Paperbacks

³ A concept that gained currency in l’écriture féminine, associated with French Feminists, namely Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, to denote the centrality of the phallus and logos in the Lacanian symbolic order.

⁴ West, M. 2009. *White Women writing White*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers

⁵ Lacan, J. 1977. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Alan Sheridan (trans.) London: Hogarth Press

⁷ Brook, P. 1968. *The Empty Space*. London: Macgibbon & Kee



Archival photo from *Expectant*, a one-woman show discussing themes of gendered guilt and ethnic representation – with specific reference to “White Gilt”⁸

Sartre associates the feminine with the ambiguous hybridity of slime:

I want to let go of the slimy and it sticks to me, it draws me, it sucks at me. Its mode of being is neither the reassuring inertia of the solid nor a dynamism like that in water which is exhausted in feeling from me. It is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking, it lives obscurely under my fingers, and I sense it like a dizziness; it draws me to it as the bottom of a precipice might draw me (Sartre 1956: 609)⁹.

Twenty-three years later, Carolee Schneemann reiterates the unfortunate truism that this point posits (and her frustration with the indoctrination and engendered notion of the female understanding of the self in performance and everyday life):

The living beast of their flesh embarrasses them; they are trained to shame... blood, mucus, juices, odours of their flesh fill them with fear. They have some abstracted wish for pristine, immaculate sex... cardboard soaked in perfume. (Schneemann 1979: 58)¹⁰.

There is an intricacy and an intimacy to the female form (particularly in this country) that remains undetected and undiscussed. And it is through readings of Ruth Frankenberg’s identification of a “masquerade” (influenced by Joan Riviere’s well-known psychoanalytic essay „Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929)) and Georgina Horrell’s work „A Whiter Shade of Pale”

⁸ “White Gilt” is a term used by Penelope Youngleson in reference to the thin layer of power and privilege (akin to epidermal ethnicity) that cleaves the wealthy liberal and allows a position of patronage. In *Expectant* Youngleson covered herself in gold leaf and gold powder, creating a new “ethnicity” for white women in the “New” South Africa.

⁹ Sartre, J. 1956. *Being and Nothingness: an essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library

¹⁰ Schneemann, C. 1979. *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings*. Bruce McPherson (Ed). New York: Documentext.

(speaking to femininity as a masquerade in white women’s writing in South Africa) that as practitioners we can start to unravel the points of intersection, through a Butlerian lens, of the “performance” of Whiteness and gender.

As South Africans, we are subject to external factors including, but not exclusive to, globalization, free trade, post-colonial expression and current social philosophy, gender, race, occupation, social rituals, lifestyle, language, religious faith, economic class, political beliefs, educational background, family relationships and our environment. „We can never see reality just as it is... Any act of seeing is an interpretation: a process of giving meaning to what we see’ (Holloway, Kane, Roos and Titlestad 1999:169)¹¹. We often define ourselves in relation to others, with a logical legacy of “othering”. I hope that by continuing to write back to these topics we can begin to demystify some of the haze surrounding our understanding of our selves and people who have been classified as “White like Me”¹². As a female. As a South African. As a white, English-speaking, female, South African. As all of these facets and their associated fabrications. There is no end to the construction that informs and deforms me. And there is no more exciting time to be writing about it.

GRAFFITI ON THE HOUSEHOLD WALL

Funmi Adewole Kruczkowska, England/Nigeria

A scene from „Graffiti on the Household Wall”

Chief Jonathan Kolandi is a popular, well respected and extremely naive philanthropist that decides to go into politics and run for governor. He goes to Ayeka for help. He is an old friend and a politician. Ayeka suggests he partners with Minosa whose followers vote Jonathan as party candidate. As they begin to prepare their election campaign ulterior motives emerge. The play is set in a fictitious African country. It was written as part of a Talawa women’s writer project.

(Minosa’s office. Ayeka and Jonathan are ill at ease. Jonathan breaks the silence.)

Jonathan: Why did you introduce me to Minosa? Did you believe in anything we spoke about?

Ayeka: Your problem my friend is that you take everything personally.

Jonathan: You lied to me. How else am I to take a lie, if not personally?

Ayeka: I am not your „yes man” Jonathan...

¹¹ Holloway, M, Kane, G, Roos, R & Titlestad, M. 1999. *Selves and Others: Exploring Language and Identity*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press

¹² Brett Murray. *Standard Bank Young Artist Awardee*. 2002

Jonathan: I have never considered you such...

Ayeka: Then why do you expect me to act only in favour of your ambitions?

Jonathan: I am lost. It was our dream. Changing the status quo was always OUR dream.

Ayeka: If you are lost I will help you find yourself. In a matter of weeks you will be standing for election. I have helped you get that opportunity by introducing you to Minosa. Now, don't stand in my way as I reach for what I want. You said it was my success as well as your fulfilment, did you not?

(Enter Minosa)

Minosa: Sorry gentlemen. My secretary isn't very good at keeping busybodies out when she knows that I am in reach. Why don't we continue this discussion elsewhere. Over lunch?

Ayeka: We are here now.

Minosa: Jonathan? (Jonathan shakes his head) Comrades, we shall always have trouble so we had better learn to relax in the midst of it.

Ayeka: As the creator of the trouble Minosa, you are well aware that it is not lunch that will solve it.

Minosa: I have promised you...

Ayeka: I have reason to believe that the promise will be broken.

Minosa: Hearsay.

Jonathan: (trying to take Ayeka aside and speak to him personally) I have assured you that you when I get into office I will give you a foreign office....

Ayeka: (with a raised voice) You! Minosa is promising places to his cronies left, right and centre and you don't even know it.

Jonathan: Minosa has recommended several persons to me, why should that bother you (quietly) I do not forget my own.

Minosa: Tell him Chief. We are in discussions. It is too early in the day to apportion portfolios.

Ayeka: Rubbish.

Minosa: Let us maintain an attitude of flexibility and cooperation here. No contracts are signed on agreements such as these. You have no choice but to trust me.

Jonathan: (to Ayeka) Trust me. We were going to beat them at their game.

Ayeka: You are the golden calf. The philanthropist with the messianic reputation. He needs you. I however need to secure my position in the scheme of things.

Jonathan: I have given my word. I am sure Minosa does to.

Minosa: At the end of the day, he will get his dues.

Ayeka: I want a position that matters...you understand me. And I want proof that I will get it and I want that proof now.

Jonathan: Calm down.

Ayeka: When I stepped down for you to take my place beside Jonathan it wasn't so that you walk all over me. I have increased in value. The opposition has approached me to take up a high position in their ranks. I could take their offer. And when the press asks me why I have switched camps, I could tell them in intricate name-naming detail what is going on here.

Jonathan: (through clenched teeth) Betrayal, now Blackmail.

Ayeka: (to Minosa) I am not bluffing so put my mind at rest. Of course no contracts are signed on agreements such as these. But there are a number of things that you could do. You could forecast my position in a press interview. An announcement to the house. A few opportunities for me to speak at the campaigns. You know how things work. The ball is in your court.

Minosa: No the ball is in your court.

Jonathan: All this is unnecessary. Ayeka is more than qualified...

Minosa: ...no, no, no Chief. We cannot allow ourselves to be bullied into compromising our stand.

Jonathan: Our stand?

Minosa: It is not good that we launch our government under the banner of favouritism. There are other worthy men who have made contributions to get us where we are today. How will they feel if one man is singled out for press coverage and speaking engagements?

Jonathan: If he has the track record...

Ayeka: You forget Minosa that to the man on the street your name is meaningless unless attached to Jonathan's. Make up your mind. The ball is in your court.

Minosa: (laughs shortly) it would be ridiculous for me to argue with you over the value of my name. I was sitting down when Chief came to speak to me and If he walks out on me I will return to where I was and take my seat. (Pause) Does the man on the street vote in party candidates? You have the ball.

Jonathan: (suddenly bursts out laughing). So who has got the ball? Own up. Who has it? Or it is that both of you have balls and I do not.

Ayeka: Well Minosa, we will definitely be meeting out there.

Jonathan: Is this how our undergraduate dream of freedom and equality will end?

Ayeka: I will dream when I am free and equal. My father was a blacksmith who sold his tools to survive. Sold his tools and survived by his wits. Your lack of self knowledge sickens me. Can you give what it takes?

Jonathan: We agreed. We had a plan. Leave me you throw me to the dogs and you throw our dream of change to the dogs.

Ayeka: My head will not be the one that cracks the coconut and does not eat of it.

Minosa: (laughing) Yes, you keep that coconut head intact, you hear.

Ayeka: You have not heard the last of me, Minosa (He exits to Jonathan shouting his name.)

Minosa: Forget him Chief. He is a loser... a fake man. Your allies from now on will be proper men. None of my men would a walk out on me. People say as a group we are bound by tradition and fatalism but as a result

our fate is in our hands. Have a seat... My secretary has got a message from one of our campaign organisers. The chief of one of the nearby villages says he will be sending representatives to our opening rally.

Jonathan: Aren't you worried by Ayeka's threats to go to the press?

Minosa: No. He changes parties and accuses us of planning to ransack state coffers!?! Planning to! Perhaps we found out that he was planning too and we kicked him out.

Jonathan: Will anyone believe that?

Minosa: Our aim will not be to make people believe us but to ensure they do not believe any of us. In which case the populace will be free to base their voting decisions on other criteria...so as I was saying. There is a great opportunity here. Listen to this (as Minosa reads the lights begin to fade and Jonathan bewildered sits down)...'In appreciation to Chief Jonathan Kolandi for the agricultural project he set up in our village we will be coming to the 'Kolandi for Governor Rally'. Our young men on the mechanised farming project have volunteered to present a cultural dance. Victory for Chief Jonathan Kolandi is victory for us all.'

SOFT, STRONG VOICE

Lauren Bies, USA

Long Branch, Azeke- Intercultural relations provides even to the novice a general understanding that from ones earliest recollections, some form of the performing arts exists, to entertain, teach or to motivate. In the rich cultural country of Nigeria, religion and culture mesh the two halves of the whole to complete one beautifully spoken ambassador of dignity, Dr. Mercy O. Azeke who epitomizes a nation of women who embrace the performing arts, while maintaining personal dignity without compromising their femininity or contributing to gender inequality.

Dr. Mercy O. Azeke, Ed.D, Dean of the Center for Student Success at Monmouth University, Long Branch, New Jersey, (U.S.A.), is Nigerian by birth, now resides with her husband and three daughters' as an American citizen, in New Jersey (U.S.A.). Dr. Azeke had come to the United States in the 1980's on her husband's student visa, and with no friends or extended family to tend to, she sought counsel from her father by telephone while he resided in Nigeria. His wisdom sent her armed with her Nigerian Bachelor's degree, straight to Temple University for a graduate study admission application. Years later, Dr. Azeke, subsequently graduated with a master's and doctorate degree as well as a career rich in education and publishing as an accomplished writer.

A song, or a dance taught to us by a parent, or a teacher, usually are our early recollections few of us can ever forget. As we enter adulthood, and if we reside in a western culture, media drives our consumption-on-demand and, our artistic indoctrination relies on automaticity. If the work performed is negative, it can wound the core of who we are. Countries, such as Nigeria, co-mingled in culture and religion provide for their people the opportunity to question the harmful effects of a negative artistic performance, which affects harm to our essential selves as women. Nigerian women have fostered the means to preserve this dignity to self. They have achieved this while maintaining their femininity and in the midst of it, have been able for generations to recognize and be comfortable in their own sexually. They need not make excuses for ill-fated behaviors, resulting from ill-fated choices presented before them.

Dr. Azeke reflects upon her earliest memories of Nigerian women in the Performing Arts in an interview held at Monmouth University on Mays 5, 2011. From her earliest recollections dance has been a present art form utilized in Nigerian culture for celebratory purposes such as festivals, weddings, coronations, births, religious holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, national days of remembrance, and even funerals. Dr. Azeke refers to Nigerian Dance as “high-life.” Not the sort of high-life defined as in the European Classicism, but a highlife indicative of fun yet very dignifying-dancing to the rhythm of musicians like Fela Ransome-Kuti, Sade, Victor Uwaifo, Obeniza Obe, Sonny Okosun to mention a few. In the rural communities there are cultural dances, “The sort of dance you would see during Mardi Gras in New Orleans” and other varied forms based on the particular tribe. But what of other forms of dance? The western dances are available in clubs, bars, although mainly for the young adults and not what you will find in the aforementioned festivities listed above. Apparently, dance for young girls was and still is not, considered academic enough to be chosen in a scholastic activity or as a future career choice based on one’s exceptional talent, or just a desire to perform. As girls in Nigeria grow to become women, dance is still not encouraged as a career choice. Could we now suppose that current gender inequality issues that affects the African nations is apparent now? Dr. Azeke explains, no. It is the nature of dance environment that causes the breakdown of culture and religion. In effect, dance, signifies the deterioration of a woman’s femininity, and destroys the true nature of her being comfortable with her sexuality by revealing too much bare skin, and possible exposure to drugs and alcohol. How could dancing contribute to the breakdown of one’s moral compass? Dr. Azeke explains it in this manner “It matriculates into every aspect of society when you don’t maintain your dignity. Your dignity is what you hold yourself up to.” No one is forcing Nigerian women to believe in this manner. There is a comforting thought to realize that for Nigerian women who value their feminine side, they can feel extremely sexual wearing a long skirt, all the while knowing they have maintained their dignity. In fact, Dr. Azeke is quick to point out, that for Nigerians, you cannot separate a woman’s religion from her culture.

Nigerian history has its roots deep within religious missionary instruction. The Nigerian people learned to read and write from the Bible, and learned their lessons of decency born from religious aesthetics too. Dr. Azeke recalls much stage plays where at the curtains closing, audience members would cheer for either the Christian, or non-Christian side. Though Nigeria is predominately a Muslim country, the early missionary Christian teachings remain today. In the painted art form, women are strongly encouraged to partake. So in sculpture, ceramics, music and the theater have Nigerian women found success as artists. However, in respect to dancing, it is the general trappings associated with dance, which Nigerian women find objectify-able.

To sit and speak with Dr. Azeke and listen to her soft, musical accent, one needs reminding that this highly intelligent and accomplished woman, could perhaps anger a public with her talk of dignified dressing and church-like behavior. Therefore, this playwright must pose this question. Should Non-Western women avoid forms of artistic expression that compromise their dignity and ability to remain true to their culture and religion to avoid exploitation? Alternatively, as in Western Cultures, should women welcome all forms of artistic interpretation and lose their dignity..., how remiss. Women are exploited in the West. Everyday.

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The next issue of Seasons - We will be inviting Guest Editors to co-ordinate future issues. If you would like to volunteer as a Guest Editor, please contact Chief Editor Karen Jeynes at seasonseditor@womenplaywrights.org

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Chief Editor

Karen Jeynes

Online Version -WordPress

Mags McSeveney

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