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## Image Theatre as a Conduit for Academic Research

Felicia Owusu-Ansah

University of Ghana, Accra, fowusu-ansah@ug.edu.gh

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## Image Theatre as a Conduit for Academic Research

### Cover Page Footnote

F. Owusu-Ansah (Ph.D. University of Ghana,2017). She is a lecturer at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ghana.



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## **Image Theatre as a Conduit for Academic Research**

Felicia Owusu-Ansah<sup>1</sup>

*In the last few decades Africa has seen an upsurge in the use of Applied Theatre to address individual and community issues in diverse contexts. However, few studies have examined its potential beyond sensitization, awareness creation, and general education. This paper considers performance as research and discusses how some aspects of Applied Theatre were used for data gathering in academic research about Irregular Migration in Ghana. I base the discussion on how I used Applied Theatre, specifically Augusto Boal's Image built on the platform of Testimonial Theatre, as an investigation tool. The paper also shows the ripple effect of breaking the silence among irregular migrants who have returned to Ghana. The findings reveal that Applied Theatre has a high potential of serving a larger purpose in eliciting underlying information in academic research.*

Theatre researchers and practitioners in Europe, the UK, USA, Canada, and Brazil among others have used applied theatre to address community issues. In Africa, countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Ghana employ Applied Theatre, especially Theatre for Development, as an interventionist tool to address issues of war, oppression, sanitation, population control and migration among others. However, in Ghana, few projects have examined the potential of Applied Theatre beyond sensitization, awareness creation campaigns, and general education. This report documents the use of Augusto Boal's Image Theatre in tandem with Testimonial Theatre for gathering information about the underlying causes of irregular migration<sup>2</sup> from Ghana to Libya. I call the process Cocktail Testimonial Theatre.

The paper is segmented into three sections beginning with the researcher's exposure to the subject matter and a theoretical overview of the use of applied theatre as an interventionist tool. The second section looks at the process of using TO as a devising tool, while the final section talks about how that process elicited information on the persistence of irregular migration.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Owusu-Ansah (Ph.D. University of Ghana, 2017) is a lecturer at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ghana.

<sup>2</sup> Irregular Migration is defined as an act of migration that is carried out against legal provisions of entry and residence in a country other than one's own.

## **Section 1: My exposure to Irregular Migration**

In 2007, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) contracted me to create and organize ten theatre productions to do education, sensitization, and awareness creation about irregular migration and its effects in three regions of Ghana: Greater-Accra, Western, and the Brong Ahafo. That was a great opening to explore the usage of theatre for community education in an extensive manner in Ghana.

My involvement and passion for dealing with issues of migration deepened when other organizations like the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), British High Commission (BHC), and Ministry of Interior (MoI) gave me other opportunities to use theatre for sensitization and educational programming in some other parts of these Regions to help curb irregular migration in Ghana.

During these sensitization programs we discovered that Nkoranza was where most aspiring irregular migrants of the sub region congregate for orientation and training on surviving the desert. It is the main point of contact for the clandestine migrants to Libya, where all travel documents including passports and Travel Certificates needed to travel by trekking through the desert are prepared. Therefore, most of the awareness and educational campaigns aiming at curbing irregular migration in Ghana, in terms of geographical space, focused on Nkoranza.

TfD had some success transforming these communities to reduce irregular migration (Sika-Anim, 2009). Yet it persisted irrespective of the horrifying experiences of traveling through the Sahara Desert and on the high seas and wars in Libya. I wanted to conduct a deeper and wider investigation into the underlying factors motivating irregular migration.

In my search for methods, I came across John Beverly's statement that Testimonial Theatre invokes "a trace of the real...which is inexpressible" (1993, 82). My choice of exploring testimonials as one of the approaches was informed by their potential to collect narratives leading to discovery and encouraging radical "dispositioning of power" by both the researcher and the community.

### ***Applied Theatre as an Interventionist Tool***

Paulo Freire was committed to harnessing the human potential to transform the limited resources, situations, and strictures within oppressed peoples. Prentki and Preston (2009) in support of this initiative, emphasize that there is the need to modify the mode of community education, as Freire puts it, from 'Cultural Invasion' to 'Cultural Synthesis.'<sup>3</sup> This means the teaching and learning approach must be

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<sup>3</sup> 2004, Chapter 4.

transformed from one in which one party assumes the power to transform the other to a condition where the learning environment is one of dialogue to enable learners to realize their own transformative possibilities. With this intervention, the concept of transformation will not be forced upon the indigenes of a target community.

Prentki and Preston make a vital point of caution here that “any applied theatre process is likely to involve multiple border crossing in which the facilitators assist participants in making the transition without falling foul of the border guards whether actual or in the head” (Prentki and Preston, 2009: 253). Their usage of the figurative expression “border crossing” meaning the anticipated change of life is virtually like moving from one world to the other or country to the other. Their reference to “border guards,” which echoes Boal’s “cops in the head,” refers to mental blocks that prevent people from achieving their desires in life and so points to the need for emancipation.

This is of particular interest to me. Border crossing and border guards are the very issues the irregular migrants in my case study had to deal with. Thus, it is a significant image with a double meaning. Boal explains that “cops in the head” signifies the internalized voices of the society that oppress and command people on what they should or should not do. “Cops” can also prevent people from stepping into the unknown. “But they could also refer to some stubborn social myths one might have acquired unknowingly” (Boal, 2003, pp. 7). The concept of Cops in the Head was vital in this investigation and was connected to Image Theatre. Image Theatre, as Boal expresses, is meant to confront oppression through the art of theatre in a way that encourages participants to improvise true situations of their lives and analyze them for understanding of their personal and social role in a more nuanced manner (1979).

This kind of theatre, as an art form, reveals a unique paradigm of theatre which exposes truths. Boal expresses that “Art is the search for truths by means of our sensory equipment... rather than only using the symbolic language of words dissociated from the concrete, sensible realities, to which they refer” (2006:5). For this reason, participants in Image Theatre create ‘sculptures’ using their own or each other’s bodies to portray certain attitudes and emotions. These human sculptures are then brought together to form a living motionless picture of a striking incidental scene from a story or from history – a technique used to discover internalized paradigms, unconscious attitudes, emotions, and feelings – i.e., the Cops in our heads.

Image Theatre was chosen for its flexibility as a tool for exploring issues, attitudes, and emotions both with groups who are confident with drama and those with little or no experience. This technique enabled participants to explore their own feelings and experiences in a more comfortable manner. The

concept of Image Theatre was very crucial in drawing information from my respondents. This became necessary because in order to find the reasons for the persistence of irregular migration in Ghana, there was the need to find out what driving force is behind the decisions and actions of the people involved. In other words, what were the influences in their psyche that the members of the community were battling with, which perhaps sometimes over-powered them and drove them to embark on the journey which they claimed they did not desire to undertake and yet did anyway. I wanted to find out both at the individual level and as a community how their struggles for social justice might have affected their motivation (Boal 2009), resulting in the practice of irregular migration even in the face of trauma and sometimes untimely death.

The struggles within the people and their social justice, in this context, are physical and emotional and often unspoken – “instincts” that stimulate and provoke the people to take such actions. It was, therefore, necessary to deploy an approach that could create a platform for discussion of both the external and internal monologues of their lives (Diamond 2009). Finding the monologues was made possible through the use of Image Theatre. One of the attributes of Image works that helped in this study was its component of speaking out one’s internal monologue. My goal in using this activity was to elicit participants’ aspirations and desires, their fears, their emotional upheavals, their satisfactions, and their disappointments (Diamond 2009).

The following theoretical concepts were considered in my choice of approach: Paulo Freire’s Education Theory of Cultural Sensitivity, Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, and Teya Sepinuck’s Testimonial Theatre, specifically Theatre of Witness. Freire asserts that education should be devoid of banking<sup>4</sup>. He proposes Cultural Sensitivity education which he believes must involve mutually respectful dialogue between the educator and the learner. This, according to Freire, motivates the learner to deliver information from their own consciousness without coercion from the teacher or the interventionist (Freire, 2004). Freire’s theory was used along with Applied Theatre in a collaborative work of experts (Snyder-Young, 2013) to solicit information from research participants. The expertise of the target community was their lived experience while my expertise was knowledge and understanding about the use of theatre for community engagement. A Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) model was crucial in this research. The thrust of my use of TO is to inspire passive persons into ‘actors’ in a theatrical demonstration (Boal 2009). I used Cops in the Head and Image Theatre to give the target community a space to actively engage in a dialogue about irregular migration, a pertinent issue affecting the Nkoranza community of Ghana in various ways.

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<sup>4</sup> Banking type of Education: This is whereby the learner or the target is treated like an empty vessel that will only imbibe whatever ideas the educationist impacts to the learner without any form of learner contribution (Paulo Freire, 1995).

## **Section 2: The Process**

Merging Testimonial Theatre with TO through Freire's Model of Cultural Sensitivity, I devised a platform I called "Cocktail Testimonial Theatre" which was used as an investigation tool for this research. I define Cocktail Testimonial Theatre as a skillful hybridization of diverse concepts and activities of theatrical approaches. It merges concepts from other applied theatre techniques on a testimonial platform responsive to the subject and community under study. There are five major parts: Group Reminiscence Witnessing, One-on-one Verbatim Witnessing, Rehearsals, Testimonial Play Performance, and Post-Performance Discussion. This paper particularly focuses on the way I used Group Reminiscence Witnessing (GRW) as a technique for gathering information on the persistence of irregular migration at Nkoranza in Ghana.

### ***Group Reminiscence Witnessing (GRW)***

Group Reminiscence Witnessing was the first part of the improvisational process. GRW is an adaptation of focus group discussion modified to suit my community of research during data collection. I define it as a group discussion approach that makes use of diverse theatrical activities and games to encourage movement from passivity into active participation. Sourcing from the idea of Reminiscence Theatre<sup>5</sup>, the concept was fashioned to allow participants enough space to negotiate their will in sharing of their stories – offering the gift of their life stories to humanity.

The GRW session on the second day relied mostly on Image Theatre to elicit information. The venue was chosen by agreement between the participants and I for familiarity sake (Sepinuck, 2012) so that all would feel comfortable participating. I called it Group Reminiscence Witnessing because participants had the choice to pick which part of their story they would want to share – as happens in Pam Schweizer's Reminiscence Theatre. This was necessary because in the initial stages participants were not prepared yet to speak openly.

The workshop began with blind and trust games to foster a healthy relationship and trust between participants and researchers. With their high capability of exposing people's behavior (Diamond 2007), the theatre games were not used only as warm-ups but also to elicit information on why irregular migration persisted. Image Theatre was used as a conduit to begin the story-telling activities. Participants used their bodies and the bodies of co-participants in their groups to create images to tell their stories for discussion:

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<sup>5</sup> Reminiscence theatre is a kind of theatre which uses verbatim memories and experiences of (older) people shared as the basis for theatre scripts as a source of artistic productions and therapeutic creativity. It allows participants to tell which part of their story they would be comfortable sharing. (Schweitzer, 2006)

this activity elicited lots of humor and laughter in the initial stages, which created a convivial atmosphere in which people felt free to be more vulnerable. The images were interpreted by the participants as illustrating poverty, lack of jobs in their community, and loss of individual dignity and respect. These admittedly are real in the community in question, however the amount of money paid by those who go to Libya to work makes it difficult to believe that those who emigrate illegally are all poor and jobless. For instance, Opong, (pseudo name) an irregular migration “facilitator” says that he charges between \$4,000 and \$6,000 USD to arrange an individual’s travel to from Ghana to Morocco.

The next activity of the day was “activation of the intelligent clay”<sup>6</sup> (Diamond, 2010). Participants were asked to get back into their images hereafter called the intelligent clay. They were asked to reminisce about childhood and other experiences of life before, during, and after their travels. This stimulated a lot of emotions, generating pin-drop-silence in the workshop hall. At this point the intelligent clays were asked to close their eyes and speak out their deepest thoughts at the clap of the researcher’s hands while they remained inside their intelligent sculpture. Next, when I touched their shoulders, they responded with their most secret thought. At this stage, some of the participants broke down, being overcome with emotions, but managed to recompose themselves (or were given a break until they could recompose themselves). It is important to note here that whenever the participants went deep in thoughts or get more serious, they spoke in proverbs which is a clear reflection of the Ghanaian psyche. The following are examples of some of the responses for secret thoughts: “Epo koraa nsuo to gum” (even the ocean accepts rainfall), “Ansu koraa anya sika sei na me” (even Sarpong has become richer than me), “Me pe se meye Shaman” (Irregular Migration facilitator), “anomaa antu obuada” (the bird that does not fly around sleeps on an empty stomach), “kuro dooso a yentena faako nnye animguasee” (one does not stay put in one town to face disgrace when there is another). At the end of the session participants and the researcher sat in a circle and discussed all that had transpired.

### ***The Use of Cops in the Head***

On the third day we used Cops in the Head, a TO technique which addresses the issue of internalized voices of people or institutions which oppress people. All eighteen participants arrived before 9.30am even though the reporting time was to be 10am – very unusual given the average Ghanaian behavior in terms of

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<sup>6</sup> Encouraging the images created to speak. It was agreed with participants that the human body in use for the image works is imaginary clay which we called “intelligent clay,” a term coined by David Diamond (2021), Director of Theatre for Living.

punctuality. The discussion below presents the use of the activity and the resultant unveiling of a theme we labelled “the Woman Factor.”

As part of the process, three volunteers were invited to the front space of the room, one after the other, to sculpt with their body, as much as they could capture, an image that represented the loudest ‘voice’ within themselves which motivated them to decide to travel through the desert without the required documentation. The other participants were asked to join the image that best described the loudest voice in their heads that pushed them to irregular migration. Two out of the three groups had eight members each, while the third had just two. It was agreed that we would look into the issues presented by the two larger groups. When the participants were asked to interpret M’s sculpted image, all the eighteen agreed that it was a posture of an angry woman. Nine of them said it was a wife and six that it was a mother. One said it was a “woman-boss” and the remaining three said it could be a landlady or an angry sister. When this image was discussed, the consensus was that women of the Nkoranza and its suburbs give a lot more regard to the Libya returnee-men than their compatriots who have not travelled. According to the participants, the women see the “been-tos”<sup>7</sup> as most serious, noble, and caring, who would put their own lives on the line for their families. M, during reflection with the group explained, “as for Nkoranza women, they believe that a ‘real man’ must try his luck abroad dreading the ill consequences. Meanwhile, when they get to know that you are ready to dare, they cry.” This statement generated a lot of laughter and applause of approval. I tagged this “The Woman Factor.”

During the discussion it was revealed that an appreciable number of the men felt oppressed directly or indirectly by the women in their lives: wives, mothers, fiancées, and girlfriends. The participants unanimously agreed that the women compared their husbands and their adult male offspring to the Libya been-tos who had returned. The signs of their perceived progress – a new house or new car purchased by the returnee or the fact that he has established a trade for his wife or a family member – incited the women with envy or jealousy to claim that their men are lazy. That might compel her to put undue pressure upon her husband to also prove himself as a man by trekking across the desert to Libya and beyond.

At Another discussion in a suburb of Nkoranza called Nkwaben this sentiment was again raised. A participant said, “sometimes, for some guys, oh Sister! Their wives force them to go to Libya by blackmailing them with denial of sex or would threaten to divorce them.” It seemed quite evident in that case that sometimes the decision to go to Libya by any means necessary is a reaction to their wives’ provocation, especially when their egos are touched. In his frozen image a been-to said that the most

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<sup>7</sup> Migrants who have returned home after journeying abroad.

oppressive pressure that had driven him to go to Libya was when his wife said to him, “if you were a man, you would by now be trekking on the desert with men to Libya. Are you a man?” He said “I had to prove to my wife and all those who heard my wife disgracing me publicly that I am better than what they perceive me to be. So sometimes, it is the women.” When he said this there was an instantaneous chorus of resounding hail and uproar of approval by the participants in the room of men and one woman, supporting the motion that the women in their lives do drive them to take decision on irregular migration.

However, one participant clarified that “the women do not ask us to do irregular migration per say; rather, they want us to go to Libya. However, from this part of the world, to go to Libya means to travel through the desert with the help of a “pusher’s travel documents.”<sup>8</sup> This assertion was explained by another participant who said that they go to Libya when they feel oppressed and therefore cannot go through the legal process which they consider to be ‘time wasting.’ Another participant made the same assertion but from a different perspective. He emphasized that going through the normal process means getting an invitation from the destination country, which is a requirement by almost all the high commissions. During a “what’s in there for you”<sup>9</sup> session a participant in the group discussion also explained that the problem becomes more complex and compelling when they are nudged by their mothers. Sharing his experience, he quoted his mother: “Are you not a man? Don’t I deserve to wear Meba wo abrokyire<sup>10</sup> before I die?” He became emotional when he said,

I looked at my mother and said to her, Maame<sup>11</sup>, people are dying on the desert on daily basis, have I not tried the desert before? I saw my own friends dying of thirst and snake bites right before my eyes. But my mother’s response to that was untroubled. She said, Esono akokɔ kra, ena, esono Obrekuo dee (The soul of the rooster is different from that of the cockerel. In other words, no two people have the same destiny). ... so, you see, my mother’s remarks filled me with passion to want to make another trip to Libya. It was as if I had woken up to the duty to honor my mother before she died; and the only way to achieve that was to go to Libya and through the desert by all means.

It was expressed fervently by the participants of both groups witnessing sessions at Nkoranza and its suburb Nkwaben that, although they may have other ulterior motivations, sometimes their wives and mother’s pressure was the immediate ignition for their irregular migration. It is, therefore, not surprising that

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<sup>8</sup> The facilitator’s travel document prepared for their aspirants which are normally legally unapproved.

<sup>9</sup> Reflections

<sup>10</sup> Meba wo Abrokyire is a name given to a brand of an expensive cloth in Ghana. The term means I have a child. abroad.

<sup>11</sup> Mother.

another participant in one-on-one verbatim interviews told us that in spite of the numerous stories in the community about deaths on the desert, it was his mother who took him to a “Connection Man” and paid a sum of Ghc6,000 (equivalent of \$1,200) on his behalf for his first trip to Libya.

These claims seem to suggest that some of the men get involved in journey due to the oppression they experience from the women in their lives. Oppression, as bell hooks explains, is the absence of choices (hooks, 1984). The men felt that they were left with no choice except to prove to their wives and mothers that they also possess those qualities of a man, if they want to maintain their relationships and their self-esteem. In more direct terms, Augusto Boal asserts that, oppression is when a person is dominated by the ‘monologue of another’ and is given no chance to respond. In the view of the research participants their wives and mothers would not take any explanation or any excuse for not trying their luck in the Libya journey. In their view, the women of the community would certainly look down upon the men who are not Been-tos. For this reason, the men prefer to suffer on the desert to keep intact their self-esteem rather than to be humiliated and bear discomfiting conditions daily at the hands of the women. To consider themselves as “real men,” they needed to prove to themselves and to their wives that they are not “afraid men.”<sup>12</sup>

Through image work and Cops in the Head it became clear that for community members migrating through the hostile desert to Libya and beyond offers them a sense of connectedness with themselves as men. Traveling to Libya and trying their luck in Europe and other parts of the world by irregular means was seen as the most “appropriate gate” opened to them for the past three decades.

The session, importantly, revealed that migrating to Libya through irregular means was in large part a psychological journey to fulfill the emotional need, to be certified as a mature and responsible “man” or as an adult by community members. It must be emphasized that the issue of women pushing their husbands and sons to travel abroad by any means necessary featured more significantly in the group testimonial witnessing session.

In the subsequent days of the 5-day workshop, participants got more enthused about theatrical activities and were quick to volunteer to create images for discussion. When a participant who volunteered to offer an image was asked to visualize the innermost voices in him that most strongly prompted him to travel illegally, he created two images. First he created an image which he interpreted as showing how he was indebted to people in the community before traveling for the first time to Libya. (Figure 1)

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<sup>12</sup> A coward.

His second image showed an answer to questions about the persistence of irregular migration in the community. It was about why, if given a second chance, he would still prefer to travel abroad illegally. (Figure 2)

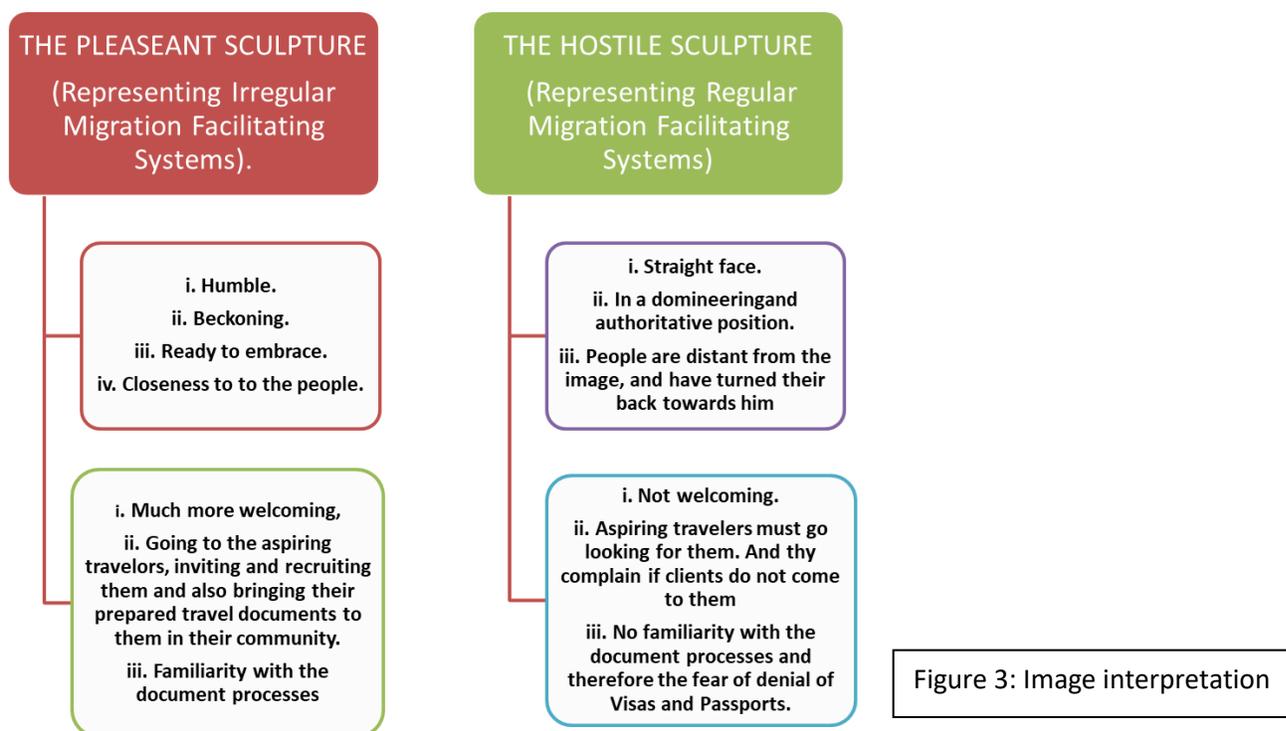


Figure 1: Image of a participant showing how indebted he was at Nkoranza before traveling to Libya.



Figure 2: Image explaining the persistence of irregular migration

During the discussion of these images, it came out that the two images represented more than motivations that propel people to irregular migration. Image 1 (beckoning posture with people around him) also represents the irregular migration facilitating folks; Image 2 (hands thrown in the air and people turning their backs) represents regular migration systems, government officials who process travel documents, and the representatives of destination countries who process visas. The participants were very excited about the images and the meanings they gave to them. Figure 3 indicates the reasons why almost all the returnees endorsed these sculptures. The diagram details the dynamics of the features of the two images which represented voices, thoughts, and perceptions about the system of travel document processing.



I must emphasize that the level to which Image Theatre achieved results depended on sufficient time for the exercises. This process provided multiple perspectives about the persistence of irregular migration for exploration and deliberation during creation and discussion of the images. The explanation and analysis of these images and their divergent interpretations provided new insights and learning in the study of the motivations for irregular migration.

### ***The Rehearsals***

The rehearsal process consisted of theatre laboratories in which different approaches to interpreting the original testimonies shared by the participating returnee-migrants were developed into a theatre performance. Some participants were organized into the *Adehyema*<sup>13</sup> Drama Troup for the play performance. The rehearsal process was broken into three segments: warm-up activities, reliving the stories, and rehearsal post-mortem. For three weeks we met for rehearsals every evening except the weekends which made it possible for us to try different ways of reliving their past experiences and those of others.

This rehearsal process was contextualized to situate all activities into the lives of the participants and the process of constructing an embodiment in images created by participants in character building. For

<sup>13</sup> Royals.

instance, during the warm-up period, community games were played alongside theatrical games. This propelled a more practicable rehearsal making participants more eager to partake. Although rehearsing the play did not reveal new factors causing irregular migration, it gave more insightful information, clarification, and confirmation of the earlier gathered data.

### ***The Play***

The play was created with the use of transcripts from interviews of the participating returnee-migrants. This site-specific play entitled Akwantu Domfo-kumfo<sup>14</sup> was based on a composite of different individual stories. The beauty and amazement in this fusion was that each part of the story was not owned by an individual but resonated with almost all participants. The selected stories with which the play was woven were testimonies that supported the objective of the study to create a platform on which the community itself could initiate discussion to solicit information on why irregular migration persists irrespective of its horrifying repercussions.

The play, although it had a main character running through to the end, was episodic. It portrayed the life of hardships of the returnee-migrants before, during and after their travels to and from Libya and Europe. It also portrayed the inner feelings of the participants, gathered during the Group and One-on-One Witnessing workshops, as representatives of the community. The data-supported, testimonial play was performed by the participating returnee-migrants, interspersed with enactments of some of the narratives of the participants. Some important experiences of their lives that could not be enacted on stage but needed to be shown were made visible through projection of video and photo slides.

The play depicted the struggles, regrets, confusion, and pain of the been-to as well as their resilience and tenacity before they made decisions on whether to travel or not. Questions and concerns such as why they migrate illegally and what prompts them to repeat irregular migration again and again were raised in the play. The 35-minute testimonial play displayed the participating witnesses of “Libya burgers.” They told their stories with boldness and eloquence using their own language (Bono), embellished with their traditional nuances, norms, and jargons. Although the play had a tragic theme, it was fused with humor and loaded with provocation about migration issues meant to goad audience members talk and share their perspectives on the issues during the post-performance discussion. The style of the play was an appropriate conduit for dissemination of information for the next activity – the Post-Performance Discussion.

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<sup>14</sup> A journey of life and death. A title coined by the participating returnee migrants for the play.

### **Section 3: Gathering Information through Post-Performance Discussion**

At the end of the performance, we held a Post-Performance Discussion (PPD) for deliberation of the issues raised by the testimonies and enactments. Facilitated by the researcher, the discussion, which lasted about one-hour, brought about lots of diverse and interesting perspectives on why most of the people of the municipality choose to travel using such irregular means. The contributions offered by the audience indicated that many were aware of the traumatic experiences and the atrocities that really happen in the desert during such trips. This was evident in a statement made by an elderly member of the community in the audience:

Although the trip to Libya have been very dangerous, especially traveling through the desert, and we all know, one should also not lose sight of its benefits to the survived – that it had really helped the youth and many families at Nkoranza and the surrounding villages. Today many young men have their own houses and vehicles to boast of. What job can one do in Ghana that will enable them build a five-bedroom house in two years?

Another shouted out a question in answering him. “Do you know the number of them that die for one to survive?” This caused muttering of divergent views in the hall. While some focused on financial prospects – earning more in two years in Libya than they could earn in all their life at Nkoranza no matter what jobs they did – others considered human mortality while some others looked at the fact that the youth do not see the prospects around them in their community which they could explore. This point was reinforced by most of the returnee migrants who said that they thought that greener pastures could only be accessed abroad until they returned to see how well some of the people they left behind are doing financially. This illustrates Boal’s Cops in the Head, the mental blocks which do not allow the people to see the fertile and greener pasture around them – the land that grows well Cocoa, Cola, Cashew, Teak, Palm among others. This became the direction of discussion at the PPD where compatriots who did not illegally migrate, but stayed with farming and other local businesses, took the opportunity to express themselves and laid before the gathering the prospects in taking to their kind of businesses.

The resource persons present from the Ghana Immigration Service, the Ministry of Interior, International Organization for Migration among others did not only seize the occasion to educate on the pros and cons of irregular migration; they were also informed of the situation on the ground for policy update purposes.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has articulated that a skillful hybridization of diverse concepts of applied theatre's interactive techniques fused with narratives could break the silence among irregular migration returnees and thereby serve the larger purpose of eliciting underlying information. The discussion has shown how the sharing of testimonies and life stories through image works resulted in accessibility of enormous and valuable data. It has also shown how the platform was able to reveal inconsistencies in the accounts shared by the participating irregular migrants and community members. Although the general claim of the reason for irregular migration in Ghana has been poverty and unemployment, the use of Boal's Image works on the testimonial platform did reveal more underlying factors – subtle but important motivations for irregular migration. Inherent factors that would not usually be declared in public to avoid shaming were shared and confirmed revealing that the general claim of poverty as the main motivation for irregular migration was more cosmetic than factual.

Disclosures from participants in this research using Group Reminiscence Witnessing and Theatre of the Oppressed revealed that there were multiple financial and cultural motivations for persistent irregular migration. They include: praise and respect surrounding the been-tos; retaining or reclaiming respect from women; pressure to be seen as a man and show bravery; the desire for more money even when they are doing well financially (summed up by participants in the proverb “Epo koraa nsuo to gu mu” (Even the ocean accepts more rainfall)); familiarity with the Libya journey and its perceived prospects; the slow and rigid nature of legally acquiring travel documents; illiteracy which some assert embarrasses them when they are asked to fill out forms for travel documents; and the involvement of some high authorities as a way of doing business. The nuanced depth of these revelations makes it clear that Theatre of the Oppressed developed on a testimonial platform is a valuable conduit for community-based research.

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