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Re-Examining, Re-Empowering: The Effect of Contextualizing Testimonial Theatre on Spect-actors

Felicia Owusu-Ansah¹

To be empowered, freed from rejection, silence and trauma, one may have no choice but to speak up. But how does the silenced speak in the presence of the oppressor? At this point, theatre (of testimony) became the most useful tool to break the silence among irregular returnees in Akuma, Ghana. This qualitative study article reports on the healing and empowering effects of Testimonial Theatre on spect-actors during its use for dissemination of research findings to the researched community. It aims to show how Testimonial Theatre's effects of compassion and empathy led to the resilience of human essence, breaking silence, and emancipating its participants. The study finds that Testimonial Theatre, when contextualized, is a remarkable tool for breaking silence through non-coercive self-examination, thereby empowering participants.

Introduction

¹ Felicia Owusu-Ansah is an Applied Theatre scholar who holds a Ph.D. in Theatre Studies. from the University of Ghana. Felicia's Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree was obtained from the afore mentioned university where she is currently lecturer in the Applied Theatre unit. Her research interests include developing new approaches to teaching and research, achieving social justice for the marginalized through applied theatre, theatre for development, Augusto Boal's theatre approaches and exploring indigenous knowledge for critical thinking and education. Felicia has done extensive work in organizing and facilitating Theatre for Development programs to campaign against social issues such as 'Irregular Migration' in Ghana with support from Ghana Immigration Service, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Ghana, Ministry of Interior, and British High Commission Accra. She has also worked proficiently with the use of theatre to address other social issues like 'Care and Support for people living with HIV/AIDS' and some health-related issues in Ghana with support from Care International-Ghana (Obuasi). Her other research interests include abuse prevention, skills training for women and teen-mom empowerment. She is a member of International Federation of Theatre Research, Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed and African Theatre Association. Dr. Felicia Owusu-Ansah is the founder and artistic director of Akuaba Theatre Productions (An NGO that employs Applied Theatre for Community empowerment and individual development).

This qualitative study article reports on the healing and empowering effects of Testimonial Theatre on both viewers and players during its use for dissemination of research findings in the community of my research, namely on the persistence of irregular migration at Akuma in Ghana. Irregular migration, as expounded by Frank Lackp, is an act of emigration that is carried out against legal provisions of entry, and subsequent residence in a country other than one's own (2006). Irregular migrants comprise two groups of persons. First, there are those who enter a country covertly, through a "green" frontier, crossing an ocean between - for instance, the northern part of Africa and European Union member states - sometimes with tragic consequences. The second group is those who arrive in the recipient country legally, for example with tourist or student visas, and overstay the period for which their visas are valid (2006). This description of Irregular Migration is further supported by Anna Triandafyllidou, who sums it up as a violation, a border-crossing without authorization by emigrants, and/or living beyond their entry visa permit in a destination country (2010). This paper focuses on the manifestations of some new paradigms and the empowering effects of Testimonial Theatre on spect-actors when contextualized.

This paper is segmented into three sections, opening with a theoretical overview of the state of the arts in connection with testimonial theatre and its therapeutic effect. The second segment describes the phenomenal improvisation practices I used as tools in my research among returnee-irregular migrants during rehearsals. Finally, I conclude by discussing the effects of contextualizing Testimonial Theatre for participants' context in the Ghanaian setting.

Testimonial Theatre as an Interventionist Tool

Testimonial theatre is a form of applied theatre that involves a process in which people who have stakes in a subject, or a people about whom an issue revolves, respond for themselves. In this case, the facilitator and their grassroots participants use storytelling to facilitate the process of this artmaking. Here,

the true-life stories of those who have been marginalized by society are enacted by the storytellers themselves to allow the audience the opportunity of witnessing and discussing important social issues.²

Over the last decade, there has been a remarkable proliferation of theatrical works utilizing testimony. An increasing number of articles have appeared in professional journals directly aimed at the use of testimonial theatre (Forsyth 2014). Some other articles are also found establishing correlations between kinds of testimonial theatre with some aspects bordering around truth discovery on stage (Forsyth 2014). This shows that awareness of the importance of testimonial theatre is now growing. Although there has not been any one agreed-on definition of the term testimonial theatre, Forsyth defines testimonial as “the intentional expression of an individual’s memories and recollections about a given event in the past” that is usually associated within the context of the courtroom (Forsyth, 2014, pp.4). Leshu Torchin adds that testimony is “historically understood as truthful first-person narration that transforms the world” (Tochin, 2012, p.5).

From these references one can deduce that testimonial theatre process offers a platform for its participants to go into the realms of their subconscious until they are poised to release the hidden memory, the truth or the suppressed subconscious in them. Therefore, Testimonial theatre and catharsis seem linked simply by the very act of telling the story. Human understanding and communication essentially come down to the narrative organization of experience. Constructing the meaning of life in terms of narrative, and appropriating one’s own past for storytelling, can draw people closer to themselves and others. Understanding narratives helps people to understand each other, and therefore by witnessing to one another, we offer one another deep insights into our own personality. The idea is that if one is able to tell their story, then, to some extent, they understand themselves. And even when they do not, the narrative offers them a chance to understand themselves. This shows that, by testifying, one finds opportunities to know and understand themselves better, and to enable a productive construction of meaning in their life, while also purging themselves of the past in a kind of catharsis as well. My choice

² This is not done in all situations where testimonial theatre is employed. Other types of testimonial theatre bring actors to represent the stories of others, as in the case of verbatim theatre.

of exploring testimonials as method for this research stems from its potential to provide a platform for collecting and compiling narratives, leading to new discoveries and I was further inspired by testimonial theatre's flexibility in application.

Testimonial theatre has been used in various ways, including pedagogy and therapy. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in their therapeutic processes, describe testimony as 'a speech act which occasions beneficial change' (2007). To be silent about one's problem almost always denies one the remedy to the problem; and on the other hand, giving vent to one's bottled-up feelings or problems is therapeutic. Jan Cohen-Cruz posits that incorporating narratives to facilitate an art-making process, the goal of which is addressing community issues, has a great impact on the lives of people most adversely affected, both through their own effort and through shared experiences from storytelling to performance (2012). She observes that what marginalized people need are spaces to discuss the vital issues that are central to their communities and arenas. This, according to her, will enable them to gain visibility in staging their identity (Cohen-Cruz 2012). The beauty of it is: this model of theatre does not perform what is already known; it therefore brings to the fore new paradigms, ideas, and revelations.

'Testimonials' in the Theatre as Interventionist Tool: Documentaries

Activists, theatre and media artists have used various forms of testimonial approaches to address community issues. Documentaries are no exception. When it comes to an interventionist testimonial approach, testimonials have played a major role in an appreciable number of fields through the use of video. The use of film, video, and theatre have been very advantageous in Ghana as far as access to political attention is concerned; and catching political attention is crucial in Ghana. Since Ghana's "national cake"³ is not even enough to cover the country's need for infrastructure, like clean water, sanitation, and roads, the struggle to secure aid is highly competitive. In Ghana a community can remain less assisted for the fact that they are unable to 'cry loud enough to catch' political attention, and for that

³ The "national cake" is a popular term among Ghanaians that refers to the country's resources.

reason will remain less privileged. This reality encouraged my use of testimonials as platform for eliciting concerns from stakeholders in the issue of irregular migration, for discussing those concerns and for finding possible solutions.

One instance of a testimonial play being used to do similar work is a testimonial play based on verbatim monologues on Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) for migrants, dubbed *Nanay* (Johnson and Pratt 2013). The testimonial play premiered at the PuShPerforming Arts Festival of Vancouver, British Columbia. This creative testimonial drama brought together people about whom an issue revolves, and caste them as performers to play their own experiences through storytelling. Caleb Pratt and Geraldine Johnston, in collaboration with theatre director Alex Ferguson, staged these stories to spark a public debate on LCP and the plight and experiences of migrant Filipinos who work as domestic care-givers in Canada. Johnston and Pratt hold that *Nanay* was a very useful tool for investigation. They conclude that the testimonial theatre approach served as an effective way of disseminating conventional social science research as well as inspiring them to reflect on new paradigms through their conventional academic writing (2013). According to them, they chose to work with this form of theatre in order to explore the ways in which they could enable participants and audiences to think and feel differently about their world, to suspend judgment, and therefore to extend political discussions in a productive manner (2003).

In the same vein, my use of testimonial theatre has been a crucial tool in my attempts to understand and help address the impacts in recent trends involving irregular migration from Ghana, which has become a thorny issue in the last few decades. The use of this testimonial intervention created opportunities for stakeholders in the issue of irregular migration, including returnee irregular migrants (who already feel judged and sidelined), to be part of the discussion, considerations, and decisions on how to address relevant issues.

When an actor becomes a prime vehicle for communicating the necessary but impossible fiction of the self, as a vehicle for the finding of truths, and for leading to the root cause of the issues at hand,

there is a presence of self. David Kornhaber throws light on the presence of the self in theatre performance, wherein a character measures themselves against another possible self, which provides the audience some access to human truths (2013). He emphatically notes that although the performative process is on stage, and therefore public, the inherent learning is personal. In sharing Kornhaber's assertion and extending it, I believe that when participants share their experiences, the public witnessing these stories also shares in an inherent lesson: that conversations expand the terrain of knowledge (2013). From the above review, I consider my working definition for testimonial theatre as an art of putting oneself on stage before one's self for re-examination, and to facilitate truth discovery. It is a process through which a participating witness is privileged with an opportunity to explore their own consciousness in an intensely personal way.

Method/Approach

I employed theatre-as-research as a qualitative research method for my investigation. This approach involved techniques and strategies of Applied Theatre processes, which helped respondents generate recollections of their experiences of the issue under study: the persistence of irregular migration from Ghana. The process culminated in a theatrical performance staged by members of my research community⁴ and a post-performance discussion conducted to gain more insightful information from attendees and participants. However, this article's interest is particularly in the results of the use of testimonial tool for this intervention.

To suit the research community's culture, in order to make the research instrument of testimonial theatre more familiar to them and achieve better results, the instrument had to be adapted, especially the part of telling one's own story. This adaptation became necessary as a result of a pilot study at Akuma township in Ghana. I realized that the instrument would not be accepted immediately in the community, because the extended family systems in Ghana does not lend itself to participants "washing their dirty

⁴ The research community is comprised of both irregular migrant returnees who participated in the research and those impacted by the issue of irregular migration.

linen in public.”⁵ In Ghanaian society, a family member’s story is the story of the whole extended family, thus making it difficult for people to share their own stories openly.

The Effects of Contextualizing/Acculturating Testimonial Theatre during Rehearsals

During rehearsals, we explored several cultural elements. First, we utilized traditional songs, which are mostly call-and-response. The moment two people arrived they started singing; their compatriots joined them in singing when they entered the rehearsal grounds, until enough participants were present to start the day’s action. This activity helped in bonding participants for a cordial relationship, kicking out shyness and inward behavior, among other positive effects. The next thing we did was for each person to say an adage or proverb that inspired or motivated them in life. We sometimes had a competition of wise sayings,⁶ which always brought an uproar of sharing of wisdom and interpretation of the community and what they stand for. Moments like these enabling me to have more insight into the cultural system and the life of my research community, Akuma of the Bono Region of Ghana.

On the first day of trying roles, thus, in improvisational manner towards the testimonial play performance, the participants were eager to be on stage. When the first scene was spelt out two volunteers stepped up to accept roles using a story generously shared by one of the participants, Yaw Annor.⁷ After about three minutes, Yaw Annor popped up with a proverb in his local parlance: *Obi nse trodoo mma toa*, meaning: a person cannot tell another’s story better. With this, he rose up from his seat and asked if I could allow him to take up the role, playing himself in his own story.

This explosive moment was the first time I experienced the effect of contextualizing testimonial theatre. Yaw Annor is an irregular migrant returnee, whose one-on-one interview with me gradually morphed into a group interview as some members of the neighborhood joined. He is a quiet person with a charisma that draws people to him without effort. According to him, when he returned home safely from

⁵ A popular adage in the community - meaning, one does not share their embarrassing private experiences in public.

⁶ A “competition of wise sayings” is a local game predominant among the Akans of the Akuma, especially in rural areas, where participants compete to see who can recite more wise sayings.

⁷ To protect participant anonymity, all names in this article are pseudonyms, including Yaw Annor.

Libya he was welcomed formally by his extended family, led by his elder uncle (as practiced in their community). The following is a turn of phrase from his story that he did not share in his initial interview.

Rather, it came up in an impromptu manner when he told his story on stage during a rehearsal:

Uncle: Eha de bokoo, na ekwan so? (We have peace here. How was the journey?)

Yaw Annor: Ekwan so de bokoo te se awoo. (the journey was as smooth as pregnancy and labour).

This statement from Yaw Annor took me to Joseph Campbell's and Bill Moyers' *The Power of Myths*, in which they refer to pregnancy as a journey: "when you come back from your journey, with the child, you have brought something for the world" (1988: 152). When I asked him why he aligned labour to the desert journey, he made the following statement, which is also quite similar to Campbell's and Moyer's statement above: "I travelled not to gain anything for myself alone, but for all the people around me. [...] Just imagine, Madam, how much food could I eat and how much clothing could I wear? So, you see, I travelled not for only myself, the family and even the community also benefit."⁸

The import and essence in both statements are parallel because society benefits from both actions. It is true that after the nine months of pregnancy the newborn child not only benefits the mother and the family into which they are born, but also benefits society as well. In the same way when a migrant return from abroad with acquired wealth, if they do, it benefits not only the returnee but the family and the society. One important aspect of this analogy of the expectant mother and the desert traveler (the irregular migrant), is that they both go through excruciating pain, and when they survive it, the results can be beneficial and cause for joy. Desire for this result motivates people to repeat this arduous journey. The houses built by the returnee-migrants for their families, and those they rent out, the jobs they create by building hotels and schools, among other investments, are all beneficial to society. Yaw Annor compares the joy that can come as a result of the irregular migrant surviving agony, to that of pain of labour that a mother endures in childbirth.

⁸ All quotations from the research in this paper come from the author's research field notes, 2014-2019, unless otherwise specified.

The agonizing conditions of pain that a woman goes through when bearing a child should not be underemphasized; the mother shares the food she eats for her own nourishment with the baby in her tummy; she carries an extra weight she is not used to; then she has to bear the insufferable pain of labour itself, which sometimes leads to death. The beauty at the end of all these painful conditions, after successfully giving birth, while lactating and nurturing their child, the mother need only to lift the baby into her arms, look into its eyes, and she may be motivated to have another. This is something that is common to many new mothers, including myself.

Similarly, when irregular migrants survive the ordeal of the desert journey, as expressed in their shared stories, and return home with newly attained wealth, they are celebrated as when one returns home with a baby after delivery. It is a joy. In the case of returnees, for them to maintain their newfound societal respect and wealthy lifestyle, as their money is depleted, they must return to Libya, Italy, or Spain, as they may not find opportunity in the local labour market. This is how Clint, one of the participants put it: "There is a lot of life-threatening danger on the route to Libya... but when I got the chance to enter Libya, wow!!!"

The joy and ecstasy with which Clint expressed the last part of his statement made such an indescribable scene. In the same vein, Agnes, another participant, expressed her experience as a mother who has experienced labour: "I have been through labour four times, and in each case I felt like I was close to death. When I went through this experience for the first time, just like many first timers in terms of labour, I vowed not to venture this baby-making enterprise again; but the moment I saw the baby, just like other women, joy took over and I knew it was worth the pain."

Quite apart from the visible bodily transformation a woman goes through when she gets pregnant, the dangers associated with child expectancy are well-known. Women can die bringing a pregnancy to term, as well as during childbirth. In a similar vein, many clandestine travelers die during their journey, as reflected in the following statement by an interviewee: "My sister, believe you me, when we say people die on the desert, it is not a joke. You see your own brother dying of thirst but you cannot

help; not that you do not have water for him but you will find yourself in his situation if you give him your last water, and you do not know how long you have to go before you get more water.”

Many irregular travelers die during the journey, and only some survive. However, the wealth that many acquired after they survive their journey creates a strong bond between the migrants and their destination countries, as expressed by participants in interviews and rehearsals. If we follow the analogy to childbirth, the relationship between returnees and their host countries can be compared to the strong bonds and almost non-negotiable love that develops between mothers and their children. A mother's bond with her child often leaves her thinking about her children all the time. This is also the case of returnee irregular migrants, who continuously think about their host countries and maintain a deep connection to that experience, and that land.

On the question of irregular migrants who pursue the dangerous desert route to find a better life in Libya, if a 9-month, childbearing activity could be described as a transformative journey, though figuratively (Campbell and Moyers 1988), it makes sense to describe the trip to Libya as a transformative journey. Irregular migrants actually embark on a transformative literal, and also mental journey. This offshoot, yet relevant point, throws more light on the question of the persistence of irregular migration in the subregion.

Effects of Contextualization During Performance

With their endorsement and participation, we turned the stories of the people of Akuma - deep, painful stories and secrets, along with shared joys and successes – into a play. We fused the data of participants' stories with this research communities' culture and put it all on stage at Akuma Township of the Bono Region (Bonos) of Ghana. The play consisted solely of shared testimonies from project participants, who addressed the question of the persistence of irregular migration in the subregion, and offered possible solutions.

The first scene began with a character called Maame (mother), whose son returned from Libya and had survived multiple gunshot wounds during the Libya uprising in 2012/2013. The day before the performance, the Akuma community (in a real-life situation) received news that members of their community had met their untimely death in a boat wreck as they tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea, from Libya to Italy. On stage, Maame referred to this incident as though it was part of the planned performance: “Eii! Hmmm, I was so traumatized by the report of yesterday that I couldn’t sleep the whole night.” This illustrates the performer’s understanding of the “testimonial play,” and her personal involvement in the process. Since most of the community members were already aware of the incident, Maame’s statement made the audience more attentive and receptive. When her returnee son, Boakye (the war survivor), appeared on the scene, he was limping, supported by a friend so he could walk, with blood-stained bandages around his arm and head. The emotional reaction of his mother, Maame, seemed to make the audience more attached to, and interested in the play, looking forward to what was going to happen in the subsequent scenes, evidenced by almost complete silence in the auditorium.

In his third appearance, Boakye opened the scene with a statement: “*Hmmm, akwantuo mu nsem, ye ka no nea onim*” (Matters of migration are shared with migrants). This statement echoed a statement made by another participant, Noel, during our one-on-one interview. It is a popular saying in the community that means, it is those who have experienced something who can understand another’s story of a similar experience. Noel made that statement in response to my question: “Do you tell stories about the ordeals you go through in the deserts to those who have the desire to make such journeys?” When I asked him to explain his statement, he responded with the following: “Because no sympathizer feels the same pain as the injured, though they may empathize with the victim, they cannot fully understand the situation they had to grapple with. Therefore, such discussions are held among people who share similar experiences, because they would better appreciate such immigrant challenges and issues.”

Noel's explanation gives insight as to why Boakye used the same statement, "Matters of migration are shared with migrants," at the beginning of his scene. As the scene progressed, he saw his friends, who had also returned from Libya, and he began telling them his story in detail. He only began to share his experience when he met people who could appreciate his suffering better, through their own, similar experiences.

Among the five main testimony-givers on stage in the testimonial play, two played the stories of other returnee irregular migrants, even though they themselves were returnees. We found that the participants who performed their own experiences were able to more successfully move the audience emotionally - evoking more emotional displays like weeping, cheering, and clapping - than those who represented others on stage.

For instance, in the first and second scenes, containing Maame's short statement and Boakye's narration on his experience in Tripoli, Adwoa Ohenkye (a real-life returnee migrant) narrated another woman's ordeals, including her presence at the traumatic event of the loss of her own brother in the desert. That story was taken from my earlier research file; it was told by a young woman returnee, who was about 20 years old, at a post-performance discussion after a performance on irregular migration at Nkoranza. It was a very sensitive part for the young woman to play. The story moved almost everyone at the post-performance discussion to tears. When I invited her to perform her story with us, she did not want to be on stage to tell her story, and said that instead, she would like to have another person represent her story. When Adwoa told the story during rehearsals even the returnee-migrants got emotional, but she did not move the audience of this play during the performance.

Several instances in the performance gave me the impression that testimonies are more powerful when played by the one who has experienced it. The players who gave another person's testimony could not affect the audiences to my expectation, as the other enactments of self-representations did. In the case of the teller who followed Adwoa, who also told the story of another participant, the audiences could easily realize that the teller was detached from the story. This was revealed by the reaction of the

audience members. Although the teller was narrating an excruciating account, some of the audiences were giggling, with smiles on their faces. It was different than in the case of Gasco, a returnee who told his own story. The moment Gasco entered and started talking, though he did not reveal that the story was his own, many in the audience were moved to tears.

In that same scene (scene 3), Dofoa, sister of Boakye, entered the stage calling to their other brother – a “none-been-to,” meaning he had never migrated – to come home and help her with house chores. The disrespect with which she called him, an action that was interspersed with slight humor, elicited mixed emotions from the audience. I observed that while most of the women were giggling and laughing, the men looked very quiet and stern - some shaking their legs, some changing their sitting posture, and others sitting quietly with their hands supporting their chins. There was an exhibition of uneasiness among the male audience in this seemingly serene short moment, reflecting the shared reality of disrespect directed against “none-been tos” portrayed in that enactment. This is a community where gender role stereotype seems entrenched in its cultural background and social norms. Particularly in the family context it is disrespectful and demeaning towards a man when asked to attend to house chores. The role of men in the society is to be economically empowered to take care of their family – both nuclear and extended. For this reason, it is problematic in the traditional societal context for a male to be drawn into so-called domestic duties, especially in the presence of other people. It is seen as an affront and a dishonour, and is usually directed, with derision, toward men who are lazy, foolish, unable to provide for their family, or otherwise unable to meet their responsibilities.

For this reason, the reaction of the men while watching that action of scene three somehow confirms the concern that men raised during the preperformance activities. The men claimed that the pressure from women to get their men travel to acquire wealth is an issue of concern. They expressed that the main reasons why they would travel abroad by any means necessary, repeatedly, or until they achieve success, is to gain their dignity as men. The “none-been-to” brother’s response to Dofoa’s insults

was: “If you would not treat us with some respect, we will go again and again” - after which some smiles and sniggering were evident in a few of the men, showing that the “none-been-to” had said it all for them. Another observation I made was that because the play was not strictly scripted for players to learn their lines and act accordingly, there were “double-mouth” statements in their accounts. For example, in Boakye’s lines in the first scene, he tells his friends that he was stabbed by several Arabs in Libya. Later, in the third scene, he said that he sustained these injuries from gunshots. In this case, I realized that he mixed his own story with that of another returnee who had shared his experience at a group interview.

Unplanned Interruption 1

In the performance I realized that although a testimonial play could be structured according to how many scenes, and which stories would be shared by the players, there can still be unplanned interruptions and surprises that could change the focus, or even the theme of the play, as was the case with our performance. This became evident in the testimonial play performance when Adwoa Ohenekye entered a scene well after her own. She burst onto the stage in the middle of the performance and grabbed the microphone to share an experience with the audience, without permission or acknowledging that she was breaking any protocols. Here is her story:

When my brother was leaving for Libya I was so young, just about 8 years old. My parents said no, they would not allow my brother go. But my brother argued that, if he goes to Libya, he would get money to come and take care of my schooling. He was able to convince them and so they allowed him to go. [Interspersed with weeping, which elicited shedding of tears from some of the spectators]. Look at me, how old I am, nineteen years old now, but till today I do not know if my brother is alive or dead. Our parents gave birth to only the two of us. Now, as it is, I am alone on this earth. I have no one to help me or turn to even when I have a challenge... [she sobs]. What kind of journey is this? [She turns to the direction of the men in the auditorium] Why do you do that to us? [She starts sobbing again as she leaves the scene.]



Adwoa Ohenekye in an unplanned interruption of the play at Akuma in the Bono Region of Ghana: March 2015

This situation was important to me as an applied theatre researcher with my particular theme and focus. This is because the interruption scene nearly geared the theme of the performance toward education, or toward a sensitization against irregular migration, instead of raising the question as to why the persistence of irregular migration.

Although Jonathan Fox (1999) sounds a caution about unexpected actions in Playback Theatre, which is a kind of testimonial performance practice, I least expected it to happen in my kind of play, which had been planned with fixed scenes and not in the spontaneous form of Playback Theatre. However, my experience confirms what Amanda Stuart-Fisher says about trauma in Prentki and Preston (2013): that the impact of trauma upon the victim is inexpressible, and therefore they are unable to share the complete experience. Adwoa had shared stories of how irregular migration had affected her, but not this one. In an interview with Adwoa after the performance, she said:

[...] It was difficult to talk about it to anyone. I did not know where to start off or end it. When you interviewed me in the earlier stages when we met, I wanted to tell you to caution the people who perpetuate this kind of journey but I didn't know how. I don't know what happened to me after my assigned role. I felt like [bursting onstage] I'm sorry about that behaviour, but I thank you for the opportunity, because I feel relieved after pouring out what I have harboured in pain for years.

Adwoa's Ohenekye's behaviour illustrates Stuart-Fisher's assertion of the inexpressible nature of trauma. Stuart-Fisher explains that traumatic experience eludes understanding and communicability, and therefore cautions that trauma should not be confused with distress or suffering (2013). Our performance was not just a story of trauma. But we do deal with topics related to trauma. And, as Stuart-Fisher warns, the absence of the restitutive narrative categories of beginning, middle, and end in the recounting of traumatic experience means that theatre like ours must engage with what is incomplete and incomprehensible.

Unplanned Interruption 2

In the fifth scene, Odeneho, a player and a returnee, interrupted Boakye on stage to educate the audience on the importance of legal document as an immigrant in Libya, even though he was not initially supposed to be a part of that scene. Despite the importance of legal documents, he extolled the audience to be wary of the value of such documents should they find themselves in Libya. He continued, recounting that genuine documents appear to be unimportant to some Libyan security officials. He added that even if one has genuine Stay Permit or Immigrant Permit documents, officers who seem to have no respect for foreigners could tear up the passport, along with visas and Stay Permit right before the owner, and even assault them for no apparent reason. The message from this unplanned interruption may also explain why many migrants prefer fake passports and travel certificates to government-approved ones, and hence, irregular migration. If migrants can travel with fake passports and can pay their way through to their destination, and also do not need genuine documents in their destination country or on the high seas to Italy or Spain, then there is probably no use to them, and getting real travel documents will be inconsequential.

Boal considers liberation as labor and thus, a painful process; a process that requires serious engagement of the mind to bring forth latent and repressed truths (Boal 2003). And as Dani Snyder-Young tells us, testimonial theatre is one such kind of labor, as it focuses on rethinking and remembering,

lending itself to learning such truths (Snyder-Young 2013). The only requirement, as Ralph Waldo Emerson articulates and Boal affirms, is bravery, in order to achieve the liberation we always seek (Boal, 2003). He writes that if we have the courage, and not faint as we step forward to enter this region of the mind, we can discover who we are and who we could become. This assertion seems to lead us into the corridors of psychological therapy. However, Boal cautions that applied theatre is a kind of theatre. It is not therapy, it is therapeutic. He further clarifies that therapy assumes that one is a patient and has a medical condition or psychological problem and needs treatment. For Boal, those who elect to participate in applied theatre performances ought not to be regarded as patients, just as the practitioner ought not to be regarded as a medical doctor who imposes a healing method on their patient. Although the results could be therapeutic, such results cannot be guaranteed with empirical evidence, as it were (Boal, 2003). The objective of my use of testimonial theatre as an approach was to offer participants in this research a platform to step into the nether regions of their mind to recap their life experiences for purposes of liberation.

The South African novelist and playwright, Zakes Mda, makes it clear that for theatre to play a role in development issues that impact marginalized communities, a carefully thought-out methodology combining intervention and participation is necessary. He advocates for the use of methodologies that provide two-way communication and incorporate people's own forms of cultural expression to achieve a successful project (1993).

From this standpoint, and continuing the thread I began with Snyder-Young above, "theatre makers must identify the intended spectators and appropriate action, the right tone and the potential impact, knowledge of a range of performative possibilities and the critical capacity, not simply to repeat methodology but to shape and adapt it to fit the circumstances" (Snyder-Young, 2013, pp.10). It is when people realize that they can learn with and from each other that they begin to emancipate and liberate themselves as a people; the circumstances of communities are not simply one-size-fits-all. There are intricacies and varying situations although issues may be similar.

Conclusion

My study of irregular migration in Akuma, Ghana demonstrates that the efficacy of the practice of testimonial theatre as an investigative tool lies in creating conditions in which new knowledge can emerge from the experiences of participants. Such efficacy requires a delicate balance between providing a safe environment while also not imposing so much structure and control that it reduces the potential for emergent learning to take place. In order to support the learner gaining ownership of their own learning, they must be comfortable in operating in a space of uncertainty. The eruptions of unplanned interruptions in scenes during performance, as specified in this article, has confirmed that testimonial theatre, when contextualized in local contexts and practices, offers remarkable and concrete hope for breaking silence through non-coercive self-examination, thereby empowering participants.

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