At the opening of Ghana’s 2009 Pan African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST) on 25 July, Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, the omanhen or paramount chief of host city Cape Coast, proclaimed that this year’s weeklong festival was momentous because it followed on the heels of US President Barack Obama’s 11 July visit to the city’s historic slave castle dungeons with his wife, Michelle. Indeed, many festival activities—royal durbars, music and dance performances, theatre, healing and renaming ceremonies—unfurled against a backdrop of brightly colored state billboards boasting the profiles of Obama and Ghanaian President John Atta Mills (fig. 1). Obama’s visit functioned as a publicity boon to PANAFEST, whose major collaborator was Ghana’s Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations.

PANAFEST 2009’s use of the Obama “name-brand,” as well as its theme of “Uniting the African Family: Communicating the African Reality,” fit snugly into a Ghanaian tourism agenda that capitalizes on the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade to foster sentiments of kinship among peoples of African descent worldwide (Richards 2005). A development impulse drives this campaign, in which PANAFEST, a nearly biannual international festival held since 1992, openly participates.

As scholars attending an African Studies conference, “Revisiting Modernization,” held at the University of Ghana-Legon in late July, our scrutiny of PANAFEST’s theatrical events was haunted by days of debating the pitfalls of development agendas in Africa historically. Thorny issues cropped up in the festival’s performance landscape, which encompassed events at rivers, castles, sacred grounds, and forts dotting Ghana’s Central Region. What power dynamics guided interactions among festival orators, performance troupes, and the roughly 2,500 spectators from Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Côte d’Ivoire, the Caribbean, Germany, the UK, and the US? To what extent

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Opening of PANAFEST and Grand Durbar of Chiefs

Saturday, 25 July, Cape Coast Slave Castle

PANAFEST’s opening spotlighted a durbar of chiefs wherein traditional leaders from Cape Coast adorned themselves in their finest regalia to welcome formally diasporans from overseas and visiting state dignitaries. In colonial Ghana, ceremonial durbars created a ritualized public sphere that affirmed oppositional relations among colonial masters, chiefs, and their followers. Today, durbars have been popularized as a cultural idiom used to celebrate Ghanaian and, more recently, Pan-African identity (Apter 2005:167). In customary durbar fashion, the spatial orchestration of PANAFEST’s opening ceremony facilitated a meeting among distinct players: local chiefs, did appeals to affluent diasporan visitors drive PANAFEST’s schema, and how might that schema have marginalized local Ghanaians?

Although PANAFEST’s impetus was a “Proposal for a Historical Drama Festival in Cape Coast” written by Ghanaian playwright Efua Sutherland in 1980, conventional theatre has receded into the background of PANAFEST in recent years. Festival organizers now call PANAFEST a “multidisciplinary arts festival,” adding that it is more difficult to find sponsorship for visiting theatre troupes than for the musical bands who play at the PANAFEST main stage in downtown Cape Coast during the festival (Haley 2009). Yet performances in the broader sense of ceremonial exchanges and dynamic orations graced PANAFEST’s many stages, revealing a veritable tug-of-war for discursive control over the festival’s cultural cachet. Chief among the events that laid bare the web of authority entangling the festival’s various constituencies were PANAFEST’s official opening ceremony, the Reverential Evening at Cape Coast Slave Castle, and the closing Emancipation Day celebrations.

Figure 1. Ama Benyiwa-Doe, Minister of the Central Region, addresses crowds at the opening of PANAFEST 2009 and Grand Durbar of Chiefs, with a billboard of Presidents Barack Obama and John Atta Mills in the background, 25 July 2009. (Photo by Kofi El Shabaz, courtesy of the PANAFEST Foundation)

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state dignitaries, and diasporans from abroad. While each sought to impose their divergent agendas into the festival’s framework, the structure of the durbar provided an ideal context for the central government to perform its political and economic agenda.

At the entrance of the Cape Coast Slave Castle, a stylized rectangular arrangement of rugs, chairs, and shade structures symbolically positioned the event’s primary participants. Each section of the durbar’s four sides designated seating assignments reserved variously for chiefs, members of the state, and diasporans from the United States and the Caribbean. First, chiefs arrived on foot, wearing abundant gold regalia, brilliantly colored hand-woven and printed cloth, and displaying symbols of local political power such as gold-leafed staffs and colorful umbrellas. The traditional leaders were directed toward a cluster of plastic chairs across from a more formal seating arrangement reserved for members of the central government. Diasporans were the next group to arrive, collectively disembarking from tour buses that transported them from upscale hotels in neighboring Elmina. Soon after, Ghanaian officials disembarked from state-owned SUVs and took seats on an uplifted stage covered with red rugs and equipped with formal wooden chairs and a podium clad with multiple microphones.

Interspersed throughout the durbar were performances by community groups such as the Oguaa Choir and an asafo dancer. Well-groomed in matching blue-and-white uniforms made from Ghanaian printed cloth, the 12-member Oguaa Choir performed side by side in a neat row, singing two hymns in the Fante language. The first praised Cape Coast residents and pleaded for their continued spiritual guidance, while the second linked the spiritual protection of the town to God and the paramount chief. Next, an asafo dancer took the stage wearing a multicolored patchwork cloth that hung loosely around his body. Closely following commands from talking drums, he moved his arms in rapid circular movements, his bare feet close to the earth as he glided across the pavement, often drifting toward the paramount chief to demonstrate his intent to offer the chief physical protection. Staged performances provided a space for locals to privilege Cape Coasters’ social and political concerns over transatlantic African connections. Yet overall, these local appeals were subordinated to the prominence of the state within the durbar ceremony.

The choice to stage the durbar in front of the Castle rather than Cape Coast’s official durbar grounds at nearby Victoria Park was an attempt to transform diasporans’ spatial alienation from the “motherland” into a long-term relation hinging on investments of economic capital (Hasty 2002). State representatives gave speeches promoting the significance of Pan-Africanism on practical, economic terms that aimed to bolster Ghana’s development. Ama Benyiwa-Doe, Minister of the Central Region, called PANAFEST a “pot of gold” as she pled with diasporans to “spare a few cedis, dollars, pounds, sterling, et cetera, here in Ghana in the spirit of African emancipation.” Similarly, Minister of Tourism Juliana Azumah-Mensah boldly argued for the need to “sell African Emancipation on the world market.” Government officials interpreted the goals of PANAFEST as a project explicitly aimed at the nation’s economic betterment. However, PANAFEST executive secretary Rabbi Kohain Haleyi, a member of Ghana’s community of African American ex-pats, portrayed the festival as a cultural and historic pathway to spiritual, not economic, returns.

Beyond the featured local performers, Cape Coast residents were liminal in the durbar’s social topography. Throughout the program, local onlookers crowded behind shade structures under the midday sun, straining to glimpse the high-ranking state dignitaries and traditional leaders (fig. 2). Osabarima Kwesi Atta II, Cape Coast’s paramount chief and chairman of PANAFEST’s National Executive Committee, gave a speech urging diasporans to engage culturally with Ghanaians and “reawaken the whole world to know who the African really is.” However, I wondered how PANAFEST’s theme, “Uniting the African Family,” could take shape when the role of ordinary Ghanaians in the event wavered between featured performer and marginal spectator. While PANAFEST organizers used the performative idiom of the durbar to unite aims of diasporans, chiefs, and state officials on local

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The naming ceremony is the single performance event on PANAFEST’s program that explicitly aims to forge connections between Ghanaians and people of African descent. Although these meetings are set in motion by economic transactions such as preregistration fees, the staging of tradition for purposes of cultural exchange refashions ritual practice into a site for local and transnational interconnection.

The River Crossing Reenactment, which took place on 29 July, provided a contrasting example. This was the culmination of diasporans’ two-day pilgrimage to the Salaga slave market in the north of Ghana. On the return journey, PANAFEST participants stopped in the village of Assin Praso, just north of Cape Coast. There, at the river’s narrow corridor, a local troupe reenacted the crossing of the River Pra, an important stop on the old slave route along which captured Africans were transported to Cape Coast. Actors playing slave masters bound the hands of those playing captives, leading them across a shallow point to the other side in canoes.

Assin Praso’s Heritage Village developed this tourist re-enactment to bolster the town’s economic development year-round. Its incorporation into the PANAFEST program highlighted the deep economic divides between local Ghanaians who take on the role of laboring performers for visiting diasporans, the primary consumers of festival events.

—theuren Adrover and Christina McMahon

Reverential Night

Friday, 31 July, Cape Coast Slave Castle

On the eve of Emancipation Day, PANAFEST celebrants memorialized the atrocities of the slave trade with ritualistic performances in the Cape Coast castle dungeon, a labyrinthine edifice dating from the 17th century and a pillar of European trafficking in human lives. Gathering
at dusk at Mfantsipim Junction in the city center, PANAFEST participants wove a candlelit path up the steep incline to the castle, where local elders greeted them. Collectively, they laid wreaths in the stygian dungeon where chained male captives once awaited ships bound for the new world.

Aboveground in the Castle's sprawling seaside courtyard, diasporans and Ghanaian dignitaries occupied the dozen long rows of chairs prominently placed in front of an improvised center stage area. Crowded on the stairwells hugging the courtyard's margins were Cape Coast locals and street vendors. To kick off the evening's performances, a priestess sprinkled white corn on the ground as sacrifice to the ancestors.

One of the program's highlights was an original spoken-word piece performed by Imahkus Okofo Ababio, an African American woman who resides in Ghana and works in tourism, and visiting diasporan Daveed Nelson, founding member of the Last Poets, a hallmark of the Black Arts Movement often credited as the genesis for contemporary US hip-hop. The poem alternated a liturgical chanting of the phrase “For the Millions” with rap-beat-infused stanzas that moved swiftly from renderings of trauma (“for the millions who jumped overboard / who were tarred and feathered”) to gratitude to African ancestors for the “start of civilization, the pyramids, inventions we never got credit for.” While the piece's unabashed Afrocentrism seemed consonant with the festival's goal of valorizing African innovation, I wondered why neither the evening's program nor Ababio's introduction contextualized the Last Poets within African American history, which might have facilitated cultural dialogue with local Ghanaians crammed into the courtyard's peripheries.

A Ghanaian performance raised other questions about the transmission of Africana history. The Plain Truth, a play by Cape Coast theatre troupe Central Resurgent, narrated the birth of the European slave trade in Ghana (fig. 3). Clad in bright yellow cloth, actors entered twirling a parasol signifying chiefly status and

Figure 3. The Cape Coast theatre troupe Central Resurgent performs the play The Plain Truth for the Reverential Night ceremonies, as local Ghanaians peer out at the performance space from castle stairways and walls, 31 July 2009. (Photo by Christina McMahon)
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The suited European men then beckoned a Ghanaian into hushed conversations with them. Mobilizing tropes of African conviviality, the narrator stated, “We were just exercising our African hospitality. We didn’t know.” This segment of the performance illustrates the rocky terrain underlying discursive negotiations of African participation in the slave trade, long a source of tension between Ghanaians and African American tourists (see Bruner 1996; Hartman 2007; Hasty 2002). When three river-bound Ghanaian women later entered the scene draped in amber fabric and balancing water jugs on their heads, the Ghanaian in cahoots with the Europeans stood off in the shadows with his employers, whispering in their ears and sneaking them closer to the women. The men then slung the women over their backs and hauled them offstage, while the women’s howling voices echoed through the playing space. Some

Figure 4. A senior chief on his palanquin, 1 August 2009. (Photo by David Donkor)

Figure 5. Kukyekukyeku, a dancer in a Cape Coast Asafo company, performs a solo for the Emancipation Day durbar at Assin Manso, 1 August 2009. (Photo by Christina McMahon)
Ghanaians watching from the stairs began to laugh, including two young men on my left. An older woman began reprimanding them: “Please don’t laugh: it makes the African Americans angry. Such wickedness: aren’t you ashamed? Wickedness came from elsewhere, not Africa. Because we are on the continent, we don’t see how sad it is. But they cry!”

As I gazed out at the stony faces of the seated diasporans witnessing both the scene of gender violence and the inexplicable laughter it provoked, I sensed the persisting disquiet that pervades tourist reenactments of slavery in Ghana. The play closed with the Europeans leading away a row of stooped-over, chained Africans, as the narrator intoned, “This is the Plain Truth.” Yet divergent spectator responses to the drama implied that performances of contested histories could never be “plain” or uncomplicated. Written into the program distributed at the Reverential Night was the event’s concluding activity: “All Embrace.” Thus, African/diasporan unity seemed more like a strained stage direction than something that sprang organically from the evening’s performances.

—Christina McMahon

**Emancipation Day: Grand Durbar and Wreath Laying**

*Saturday, 1 August, Reverential Gardens and Donkor Niwu*

Ghana first celebrated Emancipation Day in 1998 when former President Jerry Rawlings, after attending Jamaica’s commemoration of freed colonial slaves, inaugurated a version to help heal “wounds brought about by chattel slavery” (Opoku 1998). Emancipation Day 2009 happened at Assin Manso, near Cape Coast, and comprised a durbar, a wreath laying ceremony, and a ritual-symbolic commemoration of slaves’ baths. At Assin Manso’s Emancipation Grounds, I found a spot by the dais of government officials to catch the durbar’s opening parade of local chiefs and their retinues of helmeted pages, staff-bearing linguists, palanquin holders, twirling dancers, and drummers. Junior chiefs strode under modest-size umbrellas while senior chiefs perched on palanquins under large twirling umbrellas, making drum-accompanied gestures of authority (fig. 4). A brass band struck the anthem *Yen Ara Y’asese Ni* (This Land Is Ours). Afterward, troupes performed one Ghanaian regional dance after another to portray unity-in-diversity: a *kete* dancer-courtier displayed well-toned muscles above a woman’s bosom-high, waist-tied piece of cloth—a crowd favorite for his enthralling dexterity and flaunted androgyny; pin-juggling/fire-eating acrobats raised the thrill and spectacle another notch to disclose an Afro-Asian confluence in Ghana’s popular culture heritage (figs. 5 and 6). Lastly, speeches by representatives of govern-

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*Figure 6. An acrobat from the Atipimhene’s Kete troupe entertains crowds at Assin Manso’s Emancipation Grounds, 1 August 2009. (Photo by Christina McMahon)*
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one could pay to have the name of an ancestor engraved.

We trooped under the inscription “Welcome to the Slave River,” through a tunnel with portraits of past chiefs, and into a wide path through a woodland park. The procession stopped when we came upon the Donkor Nsuo, or Slave River. Under the canopy of foliage, the river meandered two ways past the embankment on which we stood. Here, slaves were offered a final bath before being dragged to notorious dungeons beneath Cape Coast and Elmina’s Forts. PANAFEST front man Rabbi Haleyi and Dr. Verene Shepherd of the Jamaican National Heritage Trust led a ritual-symbolic commemoration of the final bath by scooping river water in their hands and onto their arms. More people—mostly members of the diaspora—joined them wading, washing faces, or simply stirring the waters with their feet. More observed from atop the embankment. A young local woman told me that when the river rises after heavy rains, it sounds like the cries of the slaves who once bathed there. A TV reporter pulled Dr. Shepherd aside for an interview in which she stated she was sad yet happy to be on sacred grounds, a place of “resistance and collaboration.” When asked about “modern-day slavery,” she replied that any form of slavery is an abomination, but today’s world leaders sometimes use modern-day slavery as a distraction from the need to apologize and make reparations for the historical slave trade. She concluded the interview boldly by proclaiming, “I say: reparations now!”

In effect, Emancipation Day 2009 was inescapably the site of multiple interests—local-traditional, state-national, and diasporic-international. Think of how chiefs staked claims to regional power by flaunting their local authority before government officials. Think also of the slippery distinction created between “guest”
and “host” that marked the confluence of—and contest between—tourists’ purchasing power and the proverbial “Ghanaian hospitality.” Consider also how a diasporan dignitary seized the power/privilege of broadcast media access to make a pointed statement about reparations (a point that may not have been decorous to make at the durbar given local complicity in the African slave trade). Finally, think of the story of the Donkor Nsuo making crying sounds with the rising of its waters. This story discloses the integral position locals give to the heritage of slavery in their own experiences, and to deep local feelings and imaginations marginalized in the culture economy of tourism.

—David Donkor

Conclusion

PANAFEST 2009 channeled multiple flows of social and political power to promote a shared African heritage that, perhaps inadvertently, pitted the economic and cultural dimensions of emancipation against each other. While organizers must navigate the array of interests represented by the festival’s cast of participants, perhaps the most pressing issue they now confront is economic. When questioned about PANAFEST’s future, the event’s Executive Secretary did not articulate the contours of an ideological mission built on a foundation of Pan-African unity. Rather, he emphasized the need to “build bridges” among local businesses, the national government, corporate sponsors, diasporans, and international political organizations such as the African Union, in order to ensure financial support for forthcoming celebrations (Haleyi 2009). Ghana’s neoliberal economic terrain continues to shape the packaging of African heritage in ways that imbue it with commodity value. Following the diverging channels that structure the planning and production of PANAFEST is a productive endeavor that could lead scholars to reevaluate how linkages between performance and heritage are constituted, contested, and publicly assessed through spectacles of art and culture.

References


**Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz**

**Nancy Lee Ruyter**

Thursday, 16 October 2008, 8:00 pm. We have settled into our seats at one of the two small theatres in the Baluarte de la Candelaria (the Bastion of the Candlemas), which also includes galleries, studios, offices, and a coffee bar. Located in the upper, “Old City” (Casco

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Figure 1. KAY PUNKU by Yuyachkani, created, directed, and performed by Ana and Débora Correa. Sala Batillo, FIT, 2008. (Photo courtesy of Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz)

Antiguo) of Cádiz, Spain, the Baluarte overlooks the Bahía de Cádiz and is an important center of the arts. We are there to witness KAY PUNKU (Esta Puerta, Ayer, Hoy, Mañana) (KAY PUNKU [This Door, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow]), a work of the Peruvian group Yuyachkani, created and performed by Ana and Débora Correa, and presented at the 2008 Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz (FIT de Cádiz) which ran from 14 to 25 October.

As the lights come up, we see 35 small rocks on the floor, in front of a free-standing door frame with the door closed. A woman stands on each side of the door; a bell is suspended from the flies, with a string hanging down. A small stool is set stage-right of the door frame. The women circle the door counterclockwise. One stays behind it for the moment, and the other, while ringing the bell, calls out: “Toque de Penitencia, Toque de Bautizo, Toque de Urgencia” (Chime [or Trial] of Penitence, of Baptism [or Naming], of Urgency). She picks up a massive book from the pile of rocks, sits on the stool, and reads from the book. The book is a testimonial about the suffering of women during the civil war in Peru (1980–2000)—how women were detained on a military base, held for months, beaten, and sexually abused. Those who dared to tell of their experiences were abandoned by their husbands, marked by their communities, and accused of provoking the abuse. There were 35 children known to have been born of the rapes—represented by the 35 stones. In 40 minutes, the work progresses from depicting the agony of those women to the cleansing and transformation of that pain, symbolized by ritual bathing and the changing of clothes. It ends with the actors bringing baskets of sweet oranges to stage front and playfully handing and tossing them to audience members—images of health and well-being bringing us together as a community. We all laugh joyfully. After it is over, they speak to us about the situation of the women and show a film with sections of a street theatre piece on the same theme that was performed in Lima.

1. Cádiz is on a long and narrow strip of land surrounded on three sides by water. The upper town or “Old City,” within the ancient city walls, is the northwest end of the peninsula and comprises historic neighborhoods and sites.

2. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
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Yuyachkani has been working since the early 1970s. As described in the 2008 FIT program, Yuyachkani is “a collective of artists that conceive of theatre as a political action and an investigation of the culture.” They engage in “workshops in marginalized communities [...] and drink in the rich corporeal and theatrical diversity that exists in popular Peruvian culture, producing texts and publications and are committed to furthering the rights of citizens” (Diéguez 2008; see also www.yuyachkani.org). This company’s productions have been presented at FIT seven times since 1986.

Yuyachkani is not alone in its theatrical experimentation and commitment to social goals. In recent decades, many theatre and dance artists of Spain, Portugal, and Latin America, as well as other parts of the world, have been experimenting—sometimes radically—with both form and content. And many are dedicated to addressing critical social and political issues and thereby, hopefully, contributing to the betterment of their societies. Since its beginning in 1986, FIT has featured experimental and groundbreaking works by companies such as Atalaya, La Zaranda, and Xarxa Teatre of Spain; Teatro de los Andes of Bolivia; L’Explose of Colombia; Grupo de Danza Primeiro Ato of Brazil; and many others that have been invited frequently to Cádiz.

The Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz takes place each year for 9 to 12 days toward the end of October in this port city on southern Spain’s Atlantic coast. Cádiz has a variety of venues for festival performances. The most formal is the Gran Teatro Falla, an impressive 19th-century facility in what is termed the Moorish revival style. It has a fully equipped proscenium stage, orchestra seating, and balcony tiers of boxes around the three sides of the orchestra level. It is named in honor of the composer Manuel de Falla and is located in the Old City on the small Plaza Fragela, which is surrounded by restaurants and public buildings and is often the site of street performances. Productions are also set in various small theatre spaces that can be configured in different ways, as well as in gymnasiums, plazas, courtyards—and on the streets. During the festival there may be as many as seven performances in different theatre and outdoor locations on any one day. And, while it is termed a “theatre” festival, FIT is not limited to dramatic productions, but also includes dance companies and sometimes music performances.

The idea of organizing an Ibero-American festival began to develop during the mid-20th century as Latin American and Spanish directors, performers, critics, and scholars recognized comparable and related interests in the work of their counterparts on each side of the Atlantic. Beginning in the late 1970s, Spanish companies and writers were invited to participate in theatre festivals in Colombia, Venezuela, and other Latin American countries, and in the early 1980s, various Latin American performing groups were presented in at least 12 Spanish cities. In 1985, José (Pepe) Bablé, director of Tía Norica, a noted puppet theatre in Cádiz (also located in the Baluarte), and Enrique del Álamo, director of the organization Cultura de Cádiz, began planning for what became FIT de Cádiz, the first festival in Europe dedicated to Ibero-American theatre (Portillo 1995:13, 18; Ortega Cerpa 2005:11–13). Since its beginning, the festival has enjoyed the support of local and regional educational, arts, and business organizations and also of government figures and agencies of the city of Cádiz, the region of Andalucía, and the nation of Spain, as it brings national and international attention to Cádiz and the culture of Spain as well as to theatre and dance from throughout the Ibero-American world.

The first FIT ran from 18 to 26 October 1986. According to the 10th anniversary publication, it included performances of 29 groups from 20 countries (Portillo 1995:16–18). The 20th anniversary publication of 2005 lists 28 groups from 15 countries for 1986, and over the entire 20 years, 351 groups from 25 countries. If data from the programs of 2006, 2007, and 2008 is added to the 2005 figures, there have been more than 400 companies at the festival performing close to 600 different works. Not surprisingly, the largest number (148) have been Spanish. Other countries that have had significant representation include Argentina (45), Brazil (28), Chile (18), Colombia (24), Cuba (19), Mexico (22), and
Venezuela (16). Seen less frequently have been groups from Bolivia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Venezuela—and some of these, such as Yuyachkani, have had a great impact on the festival by introducing innovative directions in thematic material, performance forms, and staging strategies. Additionally, performers from the United States, Turkey, or other parts of Europe have also been occasionally included in the program—often in a collaborative work between groups from two (or more) countries (Ortega Cerpa 2005:107–21; Patronato 2006; Patronato 2007; Patronato 2008). Each year the festival shows a representative variety of the genres, themes, expressive vocabularies, choreography, design, etc., that are being explored and developed in the Ibero-American world. Some years the festival has featured, although not been limited to, work from a geographical area such as Colombia (1996), Mexico (1997), Cuba and Puerto Rico (1998); or work around a specific theme. For example, the 2005 FIT celebrated the 400-year anniversary of the publication of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* and many of the productions were based on or related to that.

Professor Emeritus Juan Villegas, Latin American theatre scholar, has characterized FIT de Cádiz as “a dream for the researcher of Latin American and Spanish theatre” (Villegas 2007). He notes in an earlier article that while one can study literature such as poetry and fiction from written texts, one must “see theatre” in order to understand it, analyze it, and write about it—especially theatre since the mid-20th century—and FIT de Cádiz provides the opportunity to study theatrical endeavors from this vast Ibero-American world in one place rather than having to travel to the many cities in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America whose theatre and dance companies, schools, artists, productions, critics, and scholars FIT presents (Villegas 2005:39).

I have been to FIT nine times, from 1996 to 2009, witnessing and filming productions, participating in the almost daily panel discussions held with visiting artists and scholars, and occasionally attending or presenting a paper at one of the festival conferences. For a number of years I went as a member of the Irvine Hispanic Theater Research Group (IHTRG), an ongoing project directed by Villegas at the University of California, Irvine. At FIT we would organize and lead panel discussions on works presented, interview directors and performers, and later develop articles on various aspects of the works and companies for
In the programs and promotional information, the performing groups that appear in FIT are usually identified as “theatre” or “dance” groups, but the distinction is by no means clear-cut. Since my main research is in dance studies, I am, of course, very interested in the dance performances—but equally in the ways that movement is integral to the practice of so many of the companies that identify their work as “theatre,” three of which—No Ordinary Angels (Brazil), Atalaya (Spain), and Teatro de los Andes (Bolivia)—I will discuss in some detail. The productions of such companies often use dance or dancelike components as part of their overall expressive landscapes and they are performed by artists trained in one or more of the movement techniques from various world dance genres, martial arts forms, or circus work—as well as in traditional movement for actors. They feature the choreographic presentation of bodies in time and space rather than, or along with, realistic blocking; and often the use of props and other scenic elements serve to extend the body into space and increase its expressive potential. In the Yuyachkani work, for example, the two actresses danced, sang, and played musical instruments, which combined with the manipulation of props and the verbal text to create an effective and moving theatrical statement.

Most of the works I have seen at FIT have demonstrated this strong commitment to a type of theatre in which the physical score equally shares the stage with the verbal text—or even is the major expressive element in the realization of the drama. An example of the latter is the 1998 production of *Deadly* by No Ordinary Angels, a small Brazilian company that had been in existence since the early 1990s. First presented in Brazil in 1997, *Deadly* was directed by Brazilian dancer and choreographer Sandro Borelli and performed by Rodrigo Matheus of Brazil and Deborah Pope of New Zealand, both trained in trapeze work and acrobatics as well as in acting techniques. The sections were performed to various genres of recorded music, including pop, operatic, blues, and others. Unfortunately, none of the music used is identified in the program. At FIT, the work was presented in the Sala Central Lechera, an intimate black box theatre located on the Plaza Argüelles in the upper Old City.

*Deadly* takes off from images of the “seven deadly sins” (gluttony, wrath, lust, greed, pride, envy, and sloth) to explore the relationship between a man and a woman—or one could say its continual fluctuations. *Deadly* is not a literal representation and is almost totally nonverbal. It begins with the two characters downstage right, close to the audience, glutonously gnawing on each other to the sounds of an operatic aria. We see the trapeze and a rope hanging passively behind them. After satisfying their wild and shocking hunger, they begin to wash their hands and pour water on each other’s heads. This soon develops into an explosive scene of anger, with each trying to drown the other in the water bowl. Then the man climbs on the rope, shouting and going into extreme contortions, while the woman watches silently. When he descends, however, they seem to make up and begin to remove their clothing above the waist. They approach the trapeze, and mount it. There they come together in lust, which they depict sensually and spectacularly in the air, climbing on and over each other, embracing, letting one part of the body fall and hang as if in a swoon. From that point on, the couple moves through other scenes to a final irreversible separation. At the end, the man is upstage left, sitting at a table, reading a newspaper and ignoring the woman, who traumatically manipulates an empty bottle to satisfy herself sexually, while she twitches and lurches down center on the stage floor. As described by critic Alberto Guzik, the characters “live the story of a couple that love and hate each other, from an anthropophagic passion to an intolerable indifference” (Guzik 1997). The director combined acting techniques, prop manipulation, acrobatics, trapeze work, and fighting forms with sparse scenic elements and the varied musical accompaniment to create a riveting (and sometimes disturbing) experience for the audience (Patronato 1998:34–37).

A Spanish company that has a long history of performing at FIT, and in many other international venues, is Atalaya (now identified as
Critical Acts

Iniesta, are obviously based on classical mythology and literature, but also include elements from other sources. For the Elektra text Iniesta used writings of Heiner Müller and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal as well as Aeschylus and Sophocles; and for Ariadna, Nietzsche, von Hoffmannsthal, Catullus, Ovid, and others (Patronato 1996 and 2008; Iniesta García 1996). Both productions combined nontraditional settings, costumes, and staging with strong components of music, movement, and dance. Neither program gives specific credit for “choreography,” but in some of the programs for other Atalaya works, the choreography is attributed to “Actores de Atalaya,” suggesting that the actors also contributed to the movement scores of Elektra and Ariadna. Between 1996 and 2004, Atalaya presented their production of Elektra in more than 150 cities in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas (boleTiNT 2004).

I have seen two Atalaya works in Cádiz: its production of Elektra in 1996 (which was also presented in Seville during the 2004 ISTA) and Ariadna in 2008—both at the Gran Teatro Falla and both directed by Ricardo Iniesta (as are most if not all of Atalaya’s productions). The texts, as developed by Ricardo’s brother Carlos Iniesta, are obviously based on classical mythology and literature, but also include elements from other sources. For the Elektra text Iniesta used writings of Heiner Müller and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal as well as Aeschylus and Sophocles; and for Ariadna, Nietzsche, von Hoffmannsthal, Catullus, Ovid, and others (Patronato 1996 and 2008; Iniesta García 1996). Both productions combined nontraditional settings, costumes, and staging with strong components of music, movement, and dance. Neither program gives specific credit for “choreography,” but in some of the programs for other Atalaya works, the choreography is attributed to “Actores de Atalaya,” suggesting that the actors also contributed to the movement scores of Elektra and Ariadna. Between 1996 and 2004, Atalaya presented their production of Elektra in more than 150 cities in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas (boleTiNT 2004).

In Elektra, 40 stationary plastic bathtubs form the back wall of the stage, while 12 metal ones are moved by the actors into different

Figure 3. Elektra presented by Atalaya, directed by Ricardo Iniesta. Gran Teatro Falla, FIT, 1996. Adaptation by Carlos Iniesta. (Photo courtesy of Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz)
horizontal and vertical positions as the play progresses. Single actors or chorus members variously sit, stand, lie down in, or peer out of the tubs. As noted by theatre scholar Ernesto Pierre Silva, at different times in the play, the bathtub functions as an image in reference to a cradle, a coffin, a baptismal font, a uterus, a sepulchre, etc. (1997:133). When these metal tubs are moved, they add percussive sounds to the chanting and music, and at times chorus members also rhythmically pound sticks on the floor. The staging includes everything from more-or-less realistic movement in relation to character and text to obviously choreographed passages for both individuals and the chorus. In the last scene, the cast enters carrying tall flaming torches with which they enact movement patterns reminiscent of Greek folk dancing as they speak the final passages of text. The torches are by now extinguished, and the play ends with all the actors endlessly whirling in the manner of Sufi dervishes. This finale to the tragedy functions somewhat like the distribution of oranges in the Yuyachkani work—it creates a feeling of transcendence and joy.

Teatro de los Andes is a distinguished company from Bolivia that has presented six works at FIT between 1996 and 2009. It was founded in 1991 by actor, director, and writer César Brie. In an interview of 1992, Brie relates—without providing any details—that in 1974, he and a politically oriented theatre group he had been working with were exiled from Argentina, his birth country, and he settled in Milan. There he met Iben Nagel Rasmussen, and as a result of that contact, moved to Denmark and spent the next 10 years with Odin Teatret (Muñoz 1995:140–41). He acknowledges in this interview that his main teachers were “the people of Odin and the theater of Eugenio Barba” (143), but according to a later statement, he has not tried to use their work as a model for Teatro de los Andes. In fact, in Brie’s view, his own aesthetics, ideas, and the kind of theatre he creates are all very different from those of Barba and Odin, but he does not specify in what way they differ (Villegas 1997:154).

The Teatro de los Andes lives and works on a combination farm and theatre in Yotala, a small community in the Andean mountains near the city of Sucre. There they train, rehearse, present their own performances and those of other artists, and offer workshops and conferences. While they perform in prestigious international venues such as FIT, their mission is very much focused on nontraditional audiences. As they’ve stated,

We are professionals in the old sense of professing our motivations or “confessing them in public.” And it is the relation with the public that determines our task: to take the theatre out of the theatres and carry it to where the people are, to universities, plazas, neighborhoods, towns, work places, communities. To seek a new public for the theatre and create a new theatre for this public. (Patronato 1996:23)

Under Brie’s direction, the group’s productions include elements of the local Bolivian culture as well as of cultures from Europe, other parts of Latin America, and Asia in their texts, music, dance, song, and staging strategies.

In the first two works that this company presented at FIT, Ubú en Bolivia (1996) and La Ilíada (2000), Brie adapted the texts and directed and performed in both productions. Despite Brie’s disclaimer, in both I found significant similarities to the work of Barba and Odin Teatret: in the choice of performance space and its configuration, in staging, in the actors playing a multitude of roles, and in the use of movement and music. Both works were performed in nontheatrical venues: Ubú in a school gymnasium and La Ilíada in a gym-like facility. In each location, as in some Odin productions, the audience was seated on the two long sides of a large rectangular playing area with offstage space at each end; the audience could watch the action and see the other audience section beyond it as well. In Ubú, 5 actors played the various characters in this adaptation of Alfred Jarry’s late 19th-century Ubu-roi, and in La Ilíada, 9 actors played 31 roles; and both works included instrumental music on traditional Bolivian instruments, Bolivian folk songs, other musical forms, and dance and martial arts movement from other parts of the world. Casting multiple actors in the same role and using international move-
ment and music are practices similar to those used by Barba in some of his productions.

Along with many other artists and art groups in Latin America, Brie and the members of Teatro de los Andes demonstrate awareness of political and social problems and a fervent commitment to address such problems through their art. Brie’s wild and savage dictator in Ubú en Bolivia, for example, referred to the Bolivian dictator, Mariano Melgarejo, whom Brie saw as the perfect model for Jarry’s Ubu (Angeles Robles 1996:43). The next production this company presented at FIT tackled the universal tragedy of war, and it was dedicated to two writers: a Bolivian, Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, and an Argentinian, Rodolfo Walsh, who had been assassinated as a result of political conflicts (Patronato 2000:26). As Brie discussed in an interview:

Our work is dedicated to stimulating the memory, because the violence can return if we call it, if we continue the corruption, the injustice, and the poor use of democracy. [...] Our idea is to move (or touch, disturb, shake), to stimulate thought and to touch those sensitive fibers that are between the head and the heart. (in Collantes 2000:58)

The La Iliada text is based on Homer’s epic and also includes passages from Aeschylus’s Agamemnon, Euripides’ Hecuba and The Trojan Women, and Cassandra by Christa Wolf (Patronato 2000:26). While La Iliada basically follows Homer’s story, it differs significantly in that it emphasizes the effects of war on women. It opens and closes with scenes of women and their experiences of loss as a result of war; and women are prominent throughout, even in battle scenes—accompanying soldiers as they die, expressing their grief, and asking who is to blame.

The humans in the drama are serious and tragic figures while the gods, except for Athena and Apollo, are portrayed as ridiculous

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3. See Ruyter (2001) for a more detailed discussion of this work.
buffoons. The performers play a variety of roles, each of which requires sometimes vastly different vocal and movement techniques and qualities. For example, in the FIT performance, Alice Guimaraes played the jaunty, smoking, and Bharatanatyam-dancing Athena, the tragic Hecuba, and the comic, pseudo-sexy Thetis; and Brie, the dignified and tragic Priam as well as the ludicrous Zeus. At times, actors in this production served as stagehands in black garb—moving props, carrying lights that they flashed on and off, and cleaning up messes. As part of their character portrayals the actors sang, performed other kinds of vocal expression, played musical instruments, and demonstrated martial arts, acrobatics, and dance from a variety of cultures.

The width of the performing area and the variety of ways that the characters inhabited it and moved through it necessitated physical involvement of the audience members. We could not sit passively and just look forward or across a limited stage span; to follow the action, we had to be active, shifting our focus to the front, to the left or the right—at different levels of speed and energy. For example, when Cassandra was traveling extremely slowly from one end of the area to the other, the distance from left to right seemed endless as we slowly followed her progression. In contrast, when the entire space was filled with soldiers racing here and there and vigorously attacking or running from each other, this huge space seemed small, restricted, with no escape—and the frenzy of trying to follow all that was happening allowed us to experience some of the frustrated frenzy of the action. Brie, like Barba, has the ability to use space in extremely expressive and effective ways that involve the audience’s physical—and not only visual and mental—attention. In a way similar to the experience of watching a dance performance, I felt a kinesthetic response to what was before my eyes.

While normally FIT includes fewer performances designated as “dance” rather than “theatre,” each year there have been notable companies performing a variety of significant and groundbreaking works; and dance was particularly featured in the 2007 FIT, paralleling the theme of that year’s Encuentro de Mujeres de Iberoamérica en las Artes Escénicas, which has been held annually since 1997. The 2007 performances included four groups that identified themselves as “dance companies”: from Costa Rica, the Compañía Nacional de Danza; and from Spain, the Gelabert-Azzopardi Companya de Dansa, Teresa Nieto en Compañía, and Producciones Imperdibles. Dance was featured in many of the other productions as well—as always in the FIT programs. Dance at FIT has included works based on or incorporating recognizable techniques of flamenco, jazz, hip-hop, break dancing, tango, other social dance forms, ritual dance forms, modern dance, circus, or martial arts; and some have featured various kinds of new and creative explorations or the merging of two or more genres or techniques.

Additionally, a number of locations in Cádiz, mainly but not solely in the Old City, are used each year for works designed for “found space” presentation. These include the grand Plaza de la Catedral near the southern shoreline of the Old City, several other plazas, the patio of the Baluarte de la Candelaria, and the spectacular Parque Genovés on the northwest shore with its imaginatively sculpted giant trees. Many productions also travel through the narrow streets from one location to another with the audience following and interacting with the artists until the next stationary performance area is reached. Often the performances include live music, fantastic costumes and masks, imaginative props, dance, circus and gymnasticwork, and moving in and out of the audience areas, or inviting audience members to participate. Some of the companies invited to FIT only do outdoor work, while others work both indoors and out. In 2008, for example, besides their theatre production discussed above, Yuyachkani’s Rosa Cuchillo (about a mother’s quest for information about her disappeared son) took place in the Plaza del Palillero.

The 2009 FIT ran from 20 to 31 October and featured performances of 28 groups from 12 countries: Spain (9), Argentina (3), Peru (3), Mexico (3), and one each from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Some companies, such as La Zaranda and Centro Andaluz de Teatro de...
Spain, Teatro de los Andes, and Yuyachkani, have frequently performed at the festival, while others appeared for the first time.

As usual, about one-third of the works were in the very formal Teatro Falla, one-third in plazas, patios and streets, and the remaining third in the various small theatre spaces. While this festival had no designated focus or theme, several of the productions were representations or adaptations of noted non-Hispanic works. These included The Doll’s House and Hedda Gabler by Henrik Ibsen (Compañía Daniel Veronese, Argentina); The Odyssey of Homer (Teatro de los Andes, Bolivia); Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift (in a puppet version by Compañía Viaje Inmóvil, Chile); Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet (in a street theatre version with giant puppets by Cornisa 20 Agrupación Teatral, Mexico); Samuel Beckett’s Endgame (Grupo Actoral 80, Venezuela); Albert Camus’ Caligula (L’Om Imprebis, Spain); and two Molière works: Tartuffe (Alquibla Teatro, Spain) and The Imaginary Invalid (El Carromato, Spain).

There were two dance companies on the program. L’Explose of Colombia, which has appeared at three prior festivals, explored the mental illness schizophrenia; and Spain’s Compañía Nacional de Danza presented three works by the internationally renowned Spanish choreographer, Nacho Duato. As usual, the festival featured a number of “actos complementarios.” These included the XIII Encuentro de Mujeres de Iberoamérica en las Artes Escénicas, a four-day women’s conference on theatrical arts; various exhibitions, workshops, and commemorations; the foros (forums, or panel discussions) with the directors, performing artists, critics, and researchers who were present; and, under the direction of Eberto García Abreu, theatre scholar at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Cuba, there were two conference sessions for scholars and critics to discuss various issues in relation to Latin American theatre and theatre in general.

Each year the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz brings together a broad range of artists, productions, conferences, presentations, discussions, and exhibitions to literally serve as a window on the world of theatrical activity, conceptual and practical experimentation, training methods, and scholarly and critical analysis in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. For those in attendance, it provides a breadth and depth of knowledge about not only theatre in those parts of the world, but also about the social, political, and artistic issues and concerns of each culture—which result in theatrical experimentation and a range of productions. What FIT offers is a significant addition to the scant information about the Ibero-American performing arts that is provided at many international theatre and dance conferences. And, of course, one must not ignore the great pleasures and insights one enjoys at FIT. Just as the oranges tossed to the audience by the Correa sisters in KAY PUNKU represent nourishment and renewal, the productions at FIT move viewers through a range of emotions to a deeper understanding of the individual communities the performers represent and our shared world community.
References
"We Need More Lumumbas"

**Castillo and Youth Onstage! Organize A Season in the Congo**

**Brian Mullin**

Youth Onstage! is the youth branch of the Castillo Theatre. As has been much discussed and debated in previous issues of *TDR*, Castillo is a theatre where theatrical performances are viewed first and foremost as organizing activities (see Newman 1992; Brenner 1992; Cook 2003; Friedman 2003). Founded by a collective of artists and activists with the intention of bringing cutting-edge culture to working-class communities, Castillo’s most impressive (and longest-running) performance has been the process of building and sustaining its remarkably diverse community of audiences, donors, and volunteers; one that ranges across every demographic of race, age, and economic background. This constant and self-conscious organizing began 25 years ago when Castillo’s founders spent countless hours on the streets in both working-class and affluent neighborhoods, soliciting donations to fund the theatre while also building its audiences. Today, Castillo’s work is made possible not by government or foundation grants (increasingly scarce in our recessionary economy) but by a dedicated community of individual donors and by hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life—and all levels of experience—who act in Castillo’s plays and also work behind the scenes or on our house and box office staff. I am a member of that community: a young, Yale-educated theatre director who started volunteering with Youth Onstage! and eventually became the program’s full-time manager.

Youth Onstage! is six years old. It grew out of both Castillo’s work and decades of additional organizing by Castillo’s sister program, the All Stars Talent Show Network, which produces community talent shows in New York and several other cities, involving thousands of inner-city young people every year.1 Under the leadership of Artistic Director Dan Friedman, Youth Onstage! has drawn from this very same demographic of young people—mostly black and Latino from New York’s poorest neighborhoods, many of whom have never seen a live theatrical performance—to produce aesthetically and politically sophisticated performances on 42nd Street, in the heart of New York’s commercial theatre district. These young people are initially organized through free conservatory-style theatre classes, taught by a growing roster of professionally trained theatre artists who, as I did, volunteer their time to train the young people in movement, vocal work, improvisation, and other theatre skills. Our primary aim, however, is not to groom our students for careers as professional actors. Rather, by introducing them to the discipline and ensemble-building skills inherent in theatre work, we hope to support their development as young leaders who can use performance to play with the political ideas that circumscribe their communities and their lives. Youth Onstage! is training a new generation of artist-activists to continue in Castillo’s tradition of community organizing, both on and off the stage.

**A Production Revisited**

While Youth Onstage! has produced many different types of performances with its young...
actors (including devised plays, political hip-hop shows, and evenings of spoken-word poetry), perhaps no other production demonstrates as clearly the theatre's organizing work as our latest and, to date, most ambitious project: this past season's production of *A Season in the Congo* by Aimé Césaire, which I directed. This rarely performed play by the late Surrealist poet and political leader from Martinique chronicles, with truly Shakespearean scope, the Congo's transition from a colony of Belgium into an independent nation, focusing on the brief tenure of its first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, who was overthrown and assassinated by a conspiracy of his political rivals with the aid of Western governments and business interests.²

Deborah Green, a longtime member of the theatre community and also the Political Director of the Rainbow Lobby, a grassroots lobbying effort involved in supporting pro-democracy efforts in opposition to Mobutu Sese Seko, the Congolese dictator who had seized power after Lumumba's death, brought the script of *A Season in the Congo* to Castillo's attention 14 years ago. Castillo's original 1995 production of the play was thus part of a larger organizing effort in support of democratic forces in the Congo. Many of that production's actors and audience members were actively working at the time to raise awareness of the situation in the Congo and to create pressure for reform, and the production of the play furthered those efforts.

Castillo's history with both the play and with the Congolese democracy movement offered a rich legacy for the 2009 Youth Onstage! production, but it also raised a number of questions. What did it mean for this play to be remounted by a cast made up primarily of young performers who, while they came mostly from African American and Caribbean backgrounds, had almost no knowledge of or direct connection to Lumumba and his movement? What did it mean to reenact the story of the Congo's martyred independence leader at a time when the crisis in that country has become indisputably more severe than it was in 1995?³

The direct connection, it seemed to me, between these young adults of the 21st century and Lumumba's independence movement in the middle of the 20th was the shared experience of political organizing. Our young cast of 14- to 22-year-olds was coming into political consciousness at a time when an unprecedented grassroots organizing effort had just resulted in the election of America's first African American president. More directly, through their involvement with Castillo and its sister youth programs, these young people interacted daily with longtime organizers and activists and were getting firsthand experience of what it meant to organize and mobilize their communities to create social change. As Christina Marie Tapia, a young cast member raised in the Bronx and a veteran of multiple productions at Castillo, put it: “My interaction with grassroots organizers has led me to believe in the power of the people [...] The revolutionary bug is contagious and I have truly and deeply been affected by it, thanks to this program” (2010).

The practice of community organizing provided me, as a director, with more than a thematic through line for this production; it also offered itself as a method for bringing the show itself into being. Featuring a cast of 17 working-class youths from all five boroughs of New York City, with dancers and drummers from an African dance class at a public school in Brooklyn’s impoverished Brownsville neighborhood, and staffed by no fewer than 45 adult volunteers (with widely varying levels of theatre experience) who worked as stage managers, production assistants, set painters, costume and wardrobe assistants, and running crew, this entire production was a massive, and somewhat improbable, organizing effort in its own right.

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2. For a thorough account of this conspiracy, see Ludo de Witte (2003).
3. In a 2007 report, the International Rescue Committee declared that “the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo is arguably the world’s most deadly crisis since World War II” and estimated that 5.4 million people had died there since 1998. To this figure must be added the estimated tens of thousands of women and girls who have endured rape and sexual violence used as a strategic weapon of war. More information can be found at www.theirc.org/special-report/congo-forgotten-crisis.html.
Organizing the Audience

The first scene of *A Season in the Congo* depicts Lumumba before independence, working as the Sales Director for Polar Brewery. Despite the Belgians’ prohibition of political organizing among the Congolese, the historical Lumumba used his travels around the country selling beer as a covert method of establishing his political base. As Césaire’s Lumumba memorably (and ironically) puts it: “Yes, you could say that here in the Congo, a mug of beer is a symbol of all our rights and liberties” (1969:1–2). Césaire’s Lumumba is many things—a poet, a prophet, a polemicist—but the first time that we see him, he is a man of the people, organizing.

When, after pressure from below, formal political organizing was finally allowed in the Congo in 1956, the pent-up energies of the colonial population exploded into the formation of over 100 individual parties, one for every different region and tribe in the vast country. Political agitation and popular revolt would force the Belgian authorities to hand over control of the country to their subjects a mere four years later.

It was this volatile moment of transition and formation that our production sought to dramatize. Building upon Césaire’s text and supported by dramaturgical research, we sought to bring this political organizing, this jockeying among newly formed parties and groups, to the foreground of the story. We attempted to represent a moment of change as it happened, a nation in the process of becoming, in which old structures were being reorganized. In the play, Lumumba’s associate Mpolo puts it best when he tells a crowd, “We’ve got to stop being Bengalas, Bakongos, and Batetelas. From now on we’re all just plain Congolese, free, united, and organized” (14–15). There was a powerful resonance in watching this ensemble of young performers, all of them so noticeably still in the process of becoming—becoming adults, becoming confident performers, becoming politically conscious citizens—enact a nascent democracy that was similarly coming-into-being.

Our production began in the lobby of the All Stars Project’s performing arts center on 42nd Street. As the audience milled around waiting for the play to start, a young black actor representing Lumumba entered carrying a case of Polar beer and started “working the crowd,” delivering the play’s opening speech (quoted above), while other young actors playing Belgian cops looked on suspiciously. The start of the play, like any effective political demonstration, inevitably drew lots of attention: people from all over the building, whether they were there to see the show or not, stopped to look and listen, as did passersby outside on 42nd Street who could observe the action through the lobby’s street-level plate-glass window.
From there, actors ushered the crowd into the Demonstration Room, a 2,250-square-foot multipurpose space that had been arranged with multiple playing spaces and entrances for the actors, allowing the action of the play to surround the audience at all times. The central feature of the set design, created by a team of volunteers under the direction of Castillo’s resident designer, Joseph Spirito, was a 14’ × 67’ mural that featured a dizzying jumble of Congolese art, political portraits, and a map of the Congo (fig. 1), offering a visual analog to the shifting, still unformed political structures in this transitional period. Across it were scrawled graffiti and political slogans (“Tears, fire, and blood!”; “Nous ne sommes plus vos singes!” (“We are no longer your monkeys!”)), while over it were plastered handbills for the Mouvement Nationale Congolaise (MNC), which was Lumumba’s party, and for several other Congolese parties of the time (fig. 2).

As the audience entered this environment and took their seats, costumed actors passed out political flyers, urging them to vote for the MNC, or for ABAKO (the party of Lumumba’s rival Joseph Kasa-Vubu), or for the right-wing religious party Conscience Africaine.6 Coming from the experience of Lumumba’s politicking in the lobby, audience members were now being bombarded by many more, often contradictory, lobbying efforts all around them. Thus thoroughly immersed in the tumultuous political climate of the Congo, they took their seats as a boisterous Congolese dance accompanied by live drumming filled the room and set the fast-paced action of the play in motion.7

**Multiplying Lumumba**

All these choices were intended to represent the struggle for Congolese independence as an activity both experienced and produced by a collective. In this emphasis, our production was often self-consciously resisting certain tendencies in Césaire’s script. Though the author has called the play “a slice of life in the history of a people” and has stated that his theatre “always represents some sort of collectivity” (Césaire 1967:13),8 Patrice Lumumba the individual often seems to dominate the script of *A Season in the Congo*. He appears in all but eight of the play’s 26 scenes, especially in the second and third acts, and delivers all of its most prominent speeches. Césaire’s plot structure borrows noticeably from Christian passion plays, which can lend his Lumumba the air of a martyred messiah. Our production strove to avoid this kind of historical hagiography; we had no interest in commemorating a great leader who was dead and gone, but aimed instead to present “Lumumba” as a role that anyone and

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6. Kasa-Vubu ran against Lumumba in the 1960 election; he was eventually installed, in a sort of power-sharing arrangement, as President of the newly formed Congolese Republic, with Lumumba as Prime Minister. The group behind the Catholic journal *Conscience Africaine* supported a more gradual approach to Congolese independence, having endorsed in 1956 a 30-year plan for the colony’s self-determination.

7. Choreography was provided by Hanan Hameen, with drumming and dancing performed by her students from Brownsville Academy High School in Brooklyn.

8. This is my own translation from the original French.
everyone, including our young people, could and should take on in the 21st century.

Our most significant break, therefore, with both Césaire’s text and with Castillo’s 1995 production was the decision to cast four different performers—two young men and two young women—as Lumumba. Though Césaire had given us Lumumba as an individual, we made him into a collective. This bifurcation of the character first occurred in the pivotal Independence Day scene. At a certain point, while the first actor (who had played Lumumba in the lobby) was delivering his stirring anti-colonialist speech from the stage platform, three other actors emerged out of the crowd on the floor, each wearing Lumumba’s trademark horn-rimmed glasses. The lines of the speech passed rapidly among the four of them, as they addressed different parts of the crowd and of the theatre audience.

From that point on, interplay among the different Lumumbas was a running feature of the performance. In the next scene, the young man who’d played the first Lumumba passed his glasses off to a young female actor (of considerably smaller stature), who took over the role for the next five scenes before passing it on to the third, and so on. At various points, particularly when Césaire provided Lumumba with his most stirring oratory, one actor would begin a speech and the other Lumumbas would emerge from elsewhere in the room to join him or her (fig. 3). When not playing Lumumba, each of these four actors appeared in other small roles peppered throughout the play, so that the audience had the experience of noticing the face of an actor who had been (and would again be) Lumumba in the guise of a soldier, a prostitute, or a citizen in the crowd. In our production, Lumumba was truly an emanation of the Congolese people, and his presence was detectable among them in almost every scene.

Seeing different performers in the role of Lumumba when the character was, for instance, addressing the public, engaged in backroom
Critical Acts

both in the Congo and around the world—

started doing what our young actors had done,
taking on the role of new Lumumbas.

Motivated by a session during our rehearsal
period with activist Deborah Green in which
they learned how the political situation in
Congo had deteriorated since Lumumba’s time,
with civil strife and systemic rape still common
in the east of the country, the cast decided that
we needed to do more than just put on a play.
This impulse led Castillo and Youth Onstage!
to fundraise at the end of every performance for
War Child International, a relief agency
working in the Congo to provide safe haven for
young people affected by the violence. After
learning from Mbangu, Musunka, and the other
panelists how Western demand for Congo’s
mineral resources—in particular for coltan, a
material found in every cellular phone and
many other electronic devices—funds the
violence in the Congo, two cast members have
volunteered themselves to spearhead a letter-
writing campaign to pressure government
officials and major corporations to stop trade
with warlords and armed groups. Though our
show has closed, the organizing continues.

Continuing the Performance

In a panel discussion held in conjunction with
the production, Congolese lawyer and human
rights activist Joseph Mbangu told the audience
that he had been moved by our final image of
the four slain Lumumbas rising slowly from
their deaths and moving forward into the future
because, as he put it, “In the Congo, we need
more Lumumbas” (2009). Another panelist,
Noella Coursaris Musunka, an international
fashion model of Congolese descent and the
director of a foundation supporting education
efforts for girls in the Congo, said how moved
she knew people in the Congo would be to
know that young people from America were
performing their country’s history. Though
they never said it explicitly, the panelists
suggested that the chance for real change in
that country would come when many people—


9. This quotation comes from my notes, taken during remarks Mbangu delivered during the panel discussion “The
Longest Silence: The Rape of the Congo” on 28 March 2009 at the Castillo Theatre.
References


Tapia, Christina Marie. 2010. Email correspondence with author, 11 January.