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Abstract:

Building effective global partnerships are a key focus of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will shape how international development looks until 2030. This article explores how international partnerships in applied theatre/Theatre for Development (TfD) initiatives are performed, and draws on the author's own experience of being employed on a freelance basis by a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) to build on the skills of a Ugandan team to utilize theatre. Throughout the article key moments during a month long period of training are reflected upon and analyzed with reference to debates within international development, postcolonial studies and applied theatre. Through synergizing these debates it is suggested that a decentring of Western 'expertise' enables more effective partnerships to emerge.

Keywords:

Theatre, development, experts, partnership, postcolonialism, Uganda

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Performing Partnership: The possibilities of decentring the expertise of international practitioners in international Theatre for Development partnerships

Development 'knowledge' frequently travels from wealthier, more powerful countries in the North, it generally travels one way, and it travels as a solution rather than as a basis for learning (Mawdsley et al. 2002). This is

not simply an epistemic divide, but a material and institutional one (see Jones 2000), which underpins a tendency to view the South as a mix of countries that knowledge travels to rather than from. (McEwan 2009: 205-206)

Introduction

In this article I reflect on my involvement in a Theatre for Development (TfD) project in Uganda in 2015. I synergize debates in Applied Theatre, TfD and development studies, and utilize a postcolonial lens in order to deepen my understanding of unequal power relations between partners working across the North and South and whether these can be overcome. I focus on analyzing the ways in which partnerships may be performed in TfD initiatives involving an international practitioner and how colleagues from both the global North and South may uphold problematic and limiting performances of partnership. I suggest that more effective partnerships can be established once the 'expertise' of the Northern partner has been decentred. Throughout I reflect on the difficulties of decentring Northern knowledge not only because of expectations of how a North-South partnership may be performed, but also because of the wider structures that theatre practitioners who cross into international development work are faced with. If TfD is to be relevant post-2015, and help to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on equality and effective global partnership, I propose that more needs to be done to understand how Northern practitioners travelling to work in the South embody constructed inequalities.

Knowledge, expertise and the postcolonial lens

Sachs' (2010) *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* provides a useful and powerful unpacking and questioning of the development agenda. In particular Esteva's chapter on development, which he understands as being ushered in by a speech given by US President Truman in 1949, challenges concepts of 'developed' and 'underdeveloped'. He argues that:

Underdevelopment began, then, on 20 January 1949. On that day [the day of Truman's speech] 2 billion people became underdeveloped. In a real sense from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, which is really that of a heterogenizing and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority. (Esteva 2010: 2)

By positioning the West as developed, Western knowledge and cultures are prioritized. Elsewhere Naylor (2011) argues that representations of development typically pities those in the South - or in Esteva's terms, labels them as 'underdeveloped' - therefore legitimizing Northern knowledge and the North's power to intervene. Esteva's critique of development also argues that concepts such as participation - central to the ethos of applied theatre and TfD - can be guilty of manipulating the 'underdeveloped' into roles that the powerful West wishes them to take on. Whilst Esteva's critique resonates with other anti-development - or post-development - scholars, who generally argue that it is impossible to navigate away from the oppressive core of the development sector, a more balanced approach that enables Southern partners to shape development may go some way to addressing problems with development. I return to draw on arguments made by post-development scholars later in the article, but it is useful to note here that whilst elements of post-development critiques are useful to problematize development, a complete dismissal of development and a refusal to work within the sector may be counterproductive. As Richey (2014) argues, development is being claimed by a wider range of Southern voices who are actively reshaping development to meet their needs than is commonly reflected. Therefore by characterizing development as only ever meeting the interests of the North, we risk reproducing the silencing of Southern voices. Key to my analysis is whether a Northern theatre practitioner working in development contexts can be part of ensuring that the voices of Southern partners are more effectively listened to, and can therefore contribute to the symbolic aspects of partnerships and open up two-way, rather than one-way flows of knowledge and values.

In order to provide a deeper analysis of the problematic role that knowledge plays in international development, it is useful to look towards postcolonial studies. Sylvester (1999) writes that historically the fields of postcolonialism and development have largely ignored each other, with each field '[beginning] where the other refuses to look' (Sylvester 1999: 704). Whilst in the past development studies has not acknowledged the potential link between colonial domination and processes of development (Sylvester 1999), there are vital implications within the work of writers such as Spivak (1988) and Said (1978). In Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' she asserts that wherever the West aims to give voice to the South, what happens instead is that the West is seen to speak for the South. A false homogenous voice is therefore created, and neo-colonial power dynamics remain unchallenged, perhaps even more strongly codified. In Said's *Orientalism* a key argument presented is that Western scholars claim to know more about the East than individuals of the East, which also results in neo-colonial attitudes towards non-Western cultures and a sense that Western/Northern development actors have knowledge and expertise about development contexts that non-Westerners do not have. Postcolonial theorists have therefore sought to uncover the ways in which the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the world so that we might understand better how to ensure diversity and resist neo-colonial, unequal power relations. It is troubling that few development theorists consider historical links between colonialism and the emergence of 'international development' during transitions to independence, since development can be argued to simply uphold European and American interests through the extraction of wealth and resources (Sachs 2015). It is worth noting here that David Kerr (1995) shows that TFD also has links to a colonial past, where performance was used to stamp out local performance forms feared by Europeans (Plastow 1996) as well as in top-down education programmes.

Several academics have drawn on postcolonial critical theory in order to enrich debate around development studies and think about ways of working that do not silence or exploit. Of particular relevance to my exploration is Crush's (1995) argument that unequal power relations between North and South has resulted in the futures of

Southern communities being shaped by Northern development actors. Whilst a postcolonial critique of development prompts us to take a historicized view of international power relations, a core theme of much postcolonial writing also focuses on the privileging of Western ontologies and epistemologies (Radcliffe 2005; Briggs and Sharp 2004). Cheryl McEwan argues that a consideration of what postcolonial critiques can offer is vital in order to '[transform] the production and circulation of knowledge and [develop] a more cosmopolitan scholarship' (McEwan 1009: 249) that will enable us to navigate power imbalances in the creation of development knowledge and the application of development methodologies. Ensuring equal partnerships are established between colleagues from the North and South are therefore vital, although – as I will show - moments of equality in partnerships are fleeting and unstable.

Context of the case study

In order to consider these points in practice, I draw on my experience working with a team of development field officers in Jinja, Uganda during September 2015, and analyze the dynamics of our partnership. I was hired by a charity headquartered in the UK, but with Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) status in Uganda. The organisation uses TfD in HIV prevention, stigma reduction and gender equality initiatives. My brief was to improve the quality of the TfD activities being delivered as part of a three year project aiming to improve health outcomes and support women into starting small enterprises that would provide an income. The project was funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) between 2014-2017. The team undertook community education activities (referred to as Direct Delivery (DD)) which focused on the prevention of HIV, improving gender equality and reducing the stigmas faced by those living with HIV/AIDS, as well as dealt with some issues women in the community reported they faced in terms of starting an enterprise - for example, resistance from their partner. I was hired as it had been identified that the team needed support to more effectively use TfD, despite previous training and a multitude of manuals, workshop plans and scripts to support delivery. Freelance practitioners had travelled to work with the team before - in 2012 a TfD facilitator worked with the Jinja

team for a short time, before spending 6 months with a separate team in Kasese, and at times students from UK universities have been drawn on to support the work.

Hierarchies and partnership

It is the start of the second week. I am talking to a few colleagues in the back of the van on our way to deliver work. I am interested in how they feel about people from the UK (including students, volunteers, nurses and colleagues) coming to work with them. A colleague expresses that they have to respect and listen to the ideas of those travelling to work with them, and that because I had been sent by the UK team to work with them I was higher up in the organisational hierarchy than them. Being sent from the UK was seen as an endorsement of my level of skill and knowledge. I feel uneasy with this, and try to express that I don't feel I am higher up in the hierarchy than them. That I don't possess any real legitimacy to tell them what to do; this was, after all, my first trip to Uganda. The conversation tapped into a general sense I had in the two weeks that I was leading and making decisions about the work that I wouldn't be trusted to make in UK projects - at least not with a great level of discussion - since I am not hugely experienced. My uneasiness also stems from my own discomfort with whether I feel ethically able to work within the development sector, but also from my previous experiences of training and working with community groups that suggest to me that hierarchies are not conducive to creativity. My decision to work in TfD/Applied Theatre is motivated by a desire to work with others in a collaborative, egalitarian way - and here it felt this was not being realized.

The two weeks spent with the team in Jinja were characterized by this conflict. I tried to navigate my way through offering suggestions, delivering training and reshaping the team's TfD work whilst not imposing my views and ideas too heavily. Whilst it made me feel uncomfortable at times, I was also pushed to recognize, or maybe led to falsely believe, that I am in possession of theatre and community education skills and knowledge that the team did not have, and that they expected me to share this with them and at times to take a clear leadership role. As I will show, trying to establish a level playing field where all felt able to contribute, to shape and to in some way 'own' the two weeks we spent together, and the resulting materials and ideas, was therefore messy and the level of success uncertain.

In order to understand hierarchy in partnerships, it is useful to consider Contu and Girei's (2014) suggestion of an 'aid chain' or hierarchy that follows this format: donor –

international organisation – local organisation – local community (beneficiaries). In the context of this case study, the model can be applied to expose the following hierarchy: DfID – UK team – Ugandan team – Beneficiaries. Furthermore, Contu and Girei (2014) suggest that two aspects shape how partnerships look in development – the material and the symbolic. Material refers to the flow of concrete resources, such as money, whereas symbolic refers to knowledge and values. Historically the material flow has always been from the UK to Uganda - the UK team identify and apply for funding, but also provide materials such as workshop plans to be used. Within these workshop materials the knowledge and values of the organisation are codified, representing an intersection between the material and the symbolic. Whilst it may be that little can be done to address the material flow in terms of money in development projects that involve the UK as a partner, I will argue that more needs to be done to find ways of countering the hierarchized nature of the partnership between the UK and Uganda if the work is to become not only more ethically sound, but also more locally relevant and sustainable. It is interesting to consider that whereas international development discourse from 2000-2015 was dominated by the Millennium Development Goals, the next 15 years of priorities will instead be shaped by the much more globally-focused Sustainable Development Goals. These goals call for all countries to sign up to the 17 targets covering a wide range of development outcomes, and also highlight that in order to meet these targets global partnerships are vital. Given material challenges in Uganda (where funding for this work is not provided by the state or a nationally based funder) it is the symbolic aspect where there is most scope for establishing equality. It is likely that where North-South partnerships emerge the North will always be more able to provide funds. The key challenge in establishing more equal relationships, and therefore a global partnership through which to address shared development outcomes in both the North and South, is more realistically focused on the symbolic level. This level is related to knowledge and expertise, and the ways in which those from the West, or North, may be represented as having greater knowledge and expertise which can silence Southern colleagues. In the next section I pay closer attention to knowledge and expertise in development partnerships.

Reflecting on issues of knowledge and expertise in practice

This is the first time I have met the members of the Ugandan team based in Jinja. 11 colleagues sit together, shuffling chairs to make a better formed circle. 10 of the team know each other reasonably well, having worked together for at least a year. Many have worked as part of the team since 2006. The eleventh member of the team – me – is not so well known to the rest of the group. I struggle with a laptop to start a PowerPoint presentation introducing key theories in Theatre for Development that the country manager asked me to make a few days earlier. I am not convinced I have any useful theoretical insights to offer the team, preferring to work more practically and unsure that starting the two weeks by giving a short, theory-heavy presentation is the best way to start. The presentation seems to have been well-received, but I still feel this was not the right way to begin my relationship with the team. In a short discussion where I ask each member of the team to talk about how they currently understand and use TfD, I become aware that I have taken on an almost teacher-like presence and am being looked to for positive affirmation or to fill gaps in knowledge. The relaxed, free-flowing conversation, humour and exchange of challenges and ideas I had hoped for is missing.

Reflecting on the beginnings of my partnership with the team in Uganda exposes the problematic framing of my presence as an expert. In the discussion held after the presentation I feel that it is this performance of knowledge and expertise that led to the silencing, or filtered views, of my colleagues. Whilst it is arguable that I may have been met with a similar situation regardless of whether I gave a presentation or not (it was our first meeting after all) the hesitant, cautious responses to my questions are inconsistent with the participatory, empowering rhetoric that surrounds TfD, and that I was looking to establish. The atmosphere in this first meeting was also an unusual experience for me, since in the past when I have worked with groups of professionals open discussion is much easier to facilitate. Interestingly, after the discussion I facilitated a quick game which led into a drama exercise focusing on using image theatre as a way to open up conversation with community groups about problems they face. As soon as we were creating together, it was no longer just me as a visitor with knowledge and expertise to share talking. My colleagues shared their own ideas for how the technique could be used, but also some concerns around whether or not this kind of exercise would work in rural settings where they felt people were often reluctant to participate in drama. Claims made by writers such as Epskamp (2006) about the power of drama to open up discussion, and its efficacy as a participatory methodology might therefore have some

credibility. I am also led to consider that the ethics of applied theatre practice are relevant not only to on the ground work with communities but also in how we work together as colleagues. During this moment of playing and creating drama my status as an expert was less present – the game and image theatre exercise required a different type of performance from that given during the earlier presentation. The atmosphere created during a drama exercise is less formal, and there is room for laughter and the feeling that everyone is participating with everyone speaking and being listened to; a stark contrast from my performance (and reception) as the knowledgeable practitioner from the UK with information to pass on.

Whilst the presentation and the image theatre exercise present two different performances of my identity as a British practitioner being flown in to work with the team, how my colleagues – or audience, to extend the performer metaphor – receive my performance, or expect me to perform, also frames an important part of how partnerships may form. Looking back to the presentation I gave when first meeting the team, it is interesting to note my discomfort. I gave the presentation at the request of the local team manager, despite feeling that this was not the right way to start. For practitioners actively trying to create equal partnerships with colleagues and/or participants, the extent to which this is achieved might be hindered by problematic representations of the South as ‘developing’ and the North as ‘developed’. In the UK these representations may lead to problematic, often misinformed and homogenous views of countries such as Uganda. It may also mean that how individuals view their own countries is shaped in such a way that they see themselves as ‘underdeveloped’, with the North as the marker for ‘developed’. Whilst the racialized aspect of development feels uncomfortable to discuss, Kothari draws on Ngugi wa Thiong’o to consider whether ‘whiteness becomes associated with high cultural values and the west with modernity and progress’ (Kothari 2006: 16). Being white, or clearly Western, in a development context is argued to bring with it privileges and cultural capital that signifies expertise (Kothari 2005). Whilst TfD purports to be a methodology that is participatory and empowering, the fact that in many cases Western practitioners are

used to deliver projects or train local practitioners means that closer attention needs to be paid to the wider conditions surrounding partnerships. This further problematizes the inherent tensions in development identified earlier, and brings into question whether those organisations that use TfD and applied theatre approaches are guilty of legitimizing the wielding of power by 'developed' states over 'undeveloped' states. Even for practitioners who are mindful of the problematics of their presence in development settings, there are factors such as race, representation and the expectations that these factors lead to that impact on whether or not an equal partnership can be formed.

Whilst this early moment from my partnership with the team exposes some of the problematics of knowledge and expertise, and how this impacts on partnership, it is important for me to recognize that there were some moments of success, where it seemed that the whole team were working more equally. Briggs and Sharp (2004) point towards Spivak's view that development practitioners need to decentre themselves as experts in order to acknowledge non-Western knowledge. Spivak's view chimes with post-development scholars such as Escobar (1995) who argues that by de-professionalizing and unlearning practitioners can form more equitable relationships with colleagues, and help to navigate some of the historically entrenched problematics associated with development, expertise and being of the West. As I will argue in the next section, moments of more equal partnership in the context of this case study often seemed to result from a punctuation in my status as an expert, and were somewhat accidental.

Decentering expertise

It is Wednesday evening and I am scanning over my notes from a Direct Delivery (DD) session I have observed in a village in Mayuge district. The session was long, didactic, and lacking in any engaging drama that enabled community-led discussion. The session also seemed absent of opportunities for the facilitators to learn from the community and to find out more about the specific challenges or attitudes of the local community in terms of HIV/AIDS and gender equality. Planning for the next day feels challenging; I am aware that the work currently being delivered is not good enough, and I am interested in how the sessions have ended up looking like this. I know from previous discussions with the UK team and the country manager that the sessions have been

largely unchanged for several years, and I am wondering why there has been no innovation on this rudimentary, games-based and illustrative approach.

Reflecting the next morning, every member of the team is able to identify the challenges: the session is 'half-baked'; 'we've been [doing it] for 10 years, it needs rebranding'; 'it is hard to get the community to open up'; 'we get them there [to come, sit and watch] and then they leave'. I have little more to add, and suggest that we devise an engaging, short piece of drama that explores the key issues. I'm thinking on my feet and suggest that we play a brief focusing game to get ready to work. The game doesn't work, and I'm not sure where to begin in terms of devising. I decide to be open about feeling unsure what to do next and we struggle through the challenge together. We have the idea that it might be easiest to start off by thinking about who our central character will be, and I suggest an exercise where we draw around one person and begin coming up with information about them.

From there the rest of the morning is a mixture of chaotic devising, failed ideas and laughter interspersed with moments of silence where no one is completely sure what to do next. When we take our drama and a revitalized plan we have created together to Ndaiga the following week there is a greater sense of engagement from the community. Two men - Boc, aged 24 and Kso, aged 18 - come and talk to me, telling me the piece was like real-life, and relevant to the community. Boc appreciated the opportunity at the end of the performance to intervene in the drama and think about how we move from stigmatizing those living with HIV/AIDS to supporting them. Reflecting together the next day the team are enthusiastic, all of them have had positive feedback from members of the community. However, they also feel that there is more to be done, and unpick some aspects of the new plan that did not work well. A shift has occurred, and I'm interested in what has led to the team feeling more able to innovate, critique and create work.

Through destabilizing my status as an 'expert' and being open about being unsure of where to go next in terms of working together it seems that my colleagues were able to pitch in and help shape what we should work on, and how we would work. Although I maintained a leadership role in the process, this actually seemed to enable a range of voices to be heard, and meant I could balance dominant voices of the group along with those who felt less confident to speak out. Reflecting on the historical context of the partnership between the UK headquarters and the Ugandan team indicates that previous work by the charity has framed those travelling from the UK as experts with knowledge to impart. Training visits by UK-based staff and the creation of materials by the UK team which are then exported to Uganda to be applied in context can be problematized as silencing, restricting the extent to which the local team take ownership

of the work. A postcolonial reading of this partnership - especially when considering Said's (1978) view that the West claims to know more about non-Western contexts than those from those countries - is troubling since it perpetuates concerns around wider power inequalities and the criticism that knowledge flows are one-way and unequal. This process of production mystifies the process of creating TfD resources, and enforces a false perception that the team in Uganda would be unable to create resources for themselves. The focus has been on the team simply replicating material from a centralized knowledge base, and the material is created with the assumption that it will work not only in several different Ugandan context, but that the same material will stick in the other African countries the charity is active in. Looking towards Thompson's (2003) notion of the bewildered applied theatre practitioner brings another aspect to my reflection. Writing about his work in prisons, Thompson states that 'in a sense, the move through bewilderment increased creativity, but as it was forgotten, some of the innovation permitted by honest uncertainty was lost' (Thompson 2003: 45). Whilst practitioners often feel the need to hold the myriad pieces of projects and creative work together, I would argue that moments of uncertainty and confusion not only leads to more innovative work, but can also permit others to speak. I feel that the departure from my framing as an expert in the moment described above created a sense of bewilderment and uncertainty that enabled others to create on a more horizontal level.

Consequently, the kinds of partnership predicated on experts, who are laden with approaches and methodologies, appears to me to foster undesirable, unequal partnerships that are problematic in two key ways. Firstly, they mean TfD practitioners become implicated in the problems I have already discussed in terms of wider global inequalities and processes of knowledge exchange that subordinate and silence Southern development actors. Secondly, in line with Thompson (2003), such partnerships restrict creativity and limit the potential for innovation. I am led to feel that an expert-driven approach is not only ethically problematic along neo-colonial lines, but also creatively stultifying. The work in Uganda was richer and more artistically accomplished because a range of voices were able to contribute to the process.

Systemic challenges and their impact on the practitioner

There is evidence to suggest that my own experiences of being employed over a short time-frame speaks of wider systemic issues in development and international applied theatre/TfD practice. Jane Plastow's (2014) writing on ideology and TfD highlights how local development practitioners are being trained in using TfD, which maps against my own role in the training of the Ugandan team:

In order to impact on communities, the idea seems to have been that practitioners simply had to learn a single methodology and hand it on – this deeply fallacious concept has been most seductive and has proliferated in relation to TfD practice supported by many INGOs. Trainers/facilitators who have been trained over only a week or two, often in just a classroom setting, before being sent back to implement their learning among communities, simply do not have enough learning and thinking time to do more than repeat, parrot-fashion, the techniques they have been taught [...] Reliance on such short term training demonstrates that the organisations funding it do not require thoughtful, critical trainers – only those who will regurgitate what they have been taught. (Plastow 2014: 112)

Whilst an aspect of Plastow's argument would push TfD practitioners and funders to allow more time when training individuals in TfD approaches, she also highlights the problematics of being taught only one way of working, and being expected to simply repeat a methodology. This reality of how facilitators in development contexts are trained to use theatre fits within a logic that an external expert has skills and knowledge to pass on. When this is combined with the facilitator being of the North, as in the case of my own practice in Uganda being reflected on here, we have a doubly toxic situation that drastically undermines the extent to which equal partnerships can be formed. In fact, I would go so far as to say that in such cases equal partnerships are not on the agenda. Instead, the agenda is modernizing and paternalistic, based on the view that Northern development actors have everything to teach and nothing to learn.

So far this article has argued that a critical view of applied theatre and international development, drawing on postcolonial studies, exposes entrenched inequalities that impact on how Northern and Southern actors perform their roles in partnerships. Given these systemic challenges, I would argue that it is usually down to the individual practitioner to consider how committed they are to establishing the kinds of relationships that might subvert these challenges. Importantly, it is not just from international development where we can see broader overarching challenges that impact on the individual practitioner level and their capacity to perform different roles in partnerships. Whilst I have primarily outlined tensions in international development, and how these impacted on the work with the team in Jinja, Sadeghi-Yekta (2015) argues that applied theatre has become a globalized practice that can, at times, impose homogeneous methodologies and aesthetics on communities. There are links between this problem in applied theatre and Briggs and Sharp's (2004) argument that development permits the continuation of the colonial legacy of Western thought – particularly Western 'scientific' thought – being constructed as 'better' than other forms of knowledge. Sadeghi-Yekta's (2015) analysis raises the problem that the arts may also be a form of imposing Western knowledges upon Southern communities, just as the sciences are argued to be. Therefore, it is troubling that whilst the above reflection on my time in Uganda represents a breakthrough and seemed to point towards the importance of openness and planning together, my practice lacked local specificity in terms of performance culture. Although most of the ideas for content were coming from the team and their local knowledge, I shaped the piece stylistically. As a practitioner trained in the UK in applied theatre, my theatre practice is therefore heavily influenced by Western performance styles and also a British perspective of applied theatre practice. Much of my training in applied theatre has focused on familiar names such as Dorothy Heathcote and Augusto Boal, but rarely explored African - and more specifically Ugandan - performance. These influences were clear on the performances and workshops created. In terms of the performance, the story ended with an invitation to the audience to come up and change the end of the story, and to explain why they felt the ending needed to change, provoking wider discussion around how this could possibly happen. It is therefore problematic that I did not draw on the team's potential

knowledge and skills in Ugandan forms of performance. However, I also need to consider that they may have lacked skills in local performance styles that may have enabled my own practice to dominate. Alternatively - as may be closer to the truth - my colleagues may have felt that performance styles they knew of were not relevant, and that what I was bringing as a flown in 'expert' would be more useful. Moving forward, if I am to work in international contexts it is vitally important to find ways of collaborating with local artists in order to ensure local performance cultures are understood by all to be relevant. There are many Ugandan TfD practitioners with whom I may have been able to collaborate, and by connecting with just one practitioner and involving them in the project, we may have been able to balance my British theatre perspective with Ugandan influences. Whether international NGOs and donors will be convinced of the need to collaborate with local artists poses a potential obstacle to such an approach.

A further systemic challenge lies in the ways in which applied theatre practitioners are often contracted to undertake work. I was employed on a freelance basis to revise the organisation's training resources, and to spend time in Uganda working with the team, training and devising new performances and workshops. My own experience of working as a freelance practitioner since 2010 in the UK and internationally suggests to me that where practitioners find themselves employed on such a basis it is extremely difficult to try to create the more flexible and person-centred ways of working applied theatre and TfD rhetoric portrays. In these kinds of working partnerships, the freelance practitioner rarely becomes embedded enough in an organisation to make any lasting changes. They are also usually brought in once the terms of projects have been agreed, meaning that in a sense the perspective of what a theatre maker feels actually can and cannot be achieved is often a secondary thought. Organisations are also somewhat limited by having to meet funding outcomes. The pressure to meet targets understandably impacted on how possible it would have been to make mistakes and take risks, even if we agree with Thompson's (2003) view of the possibilities of bewilderment in practice.

Beyond partnership and towards 'friendship'?

I continue to believe [...] that in real life humans have more than one trick up their sleeves. An impressive number of individuals and communities are re-examining what they need in non-economic terms and in the context of a simple and humanly rewarding life. They realise how rewarding it is for them to substitute their induced compulsive needs with creative activities and different resourceful types of interactions. And more people come to rediscover how simple human gifts such as friendship, solidarity and compassion can indeed enrich and transform their lives, and how the economic bias can be a threat to their true blossoming. (Rahnema 1997: 127)

Rahnema's scholarship fits within the broader school of post-development. I have previously argued that the wholesale rejection of development would be counterproductive, but that the critiques from post-development scholars are still useful in deepening our understanding of development. Rahnema's focus on friendship is wrapped in a perceived need shared by Escobar (1995) to de-professionalize and unlearn development and to move away from interventions dominated by experts. It is argued that what is needed is for each of us to realize our own powerlessness in relation to oppressive hegemonies and to become humbler people for it. All we can really do is 'listen more carefully to others, in particular to friends who are ready to do the same thing' (Rahnema 1997: 391). The need to listen more carefully chimes with a perceived danger of partnership that ways of forming and sustaining partnerships are overly linked to management and professionalization. As Shivji (in Contu and Girei 2014) complains, we often see development consultants travelling from place to place, replicating the same development processes which are branded as participatory but lack any local context. Such a reality means partnerships claimed to be equal are illusory. Rahnema's suggestion for friendship over technocratic approaches might push the practitioner to consider how less methodological, managerial and hierarchical ways of working can grow out of a genuine engagement and care for those we work with. To suggest that we all become friends is disingenuous and somewhat naïve, and we also need to consider that those we work with may have absolutely no interest in being 'friends' with us at all. However, Rahnema's focus on friendship might lead to a deeper consideration of how international partnerships form between those committed to addressing societal challenges through theatre. In particular a greater engagement with

friendship and themes such as care and solidarity could lead the practitioner towards more effective and equal performances of partnership. There are links here with recent arguments for a focus on what an ethic of care may mean for applied theatre practitioners. Specifically, Thompson (2015) argues that ‘the “professional” cannot be sustained ethically without a commitment to the potential for it to blur dynamically with the personal’ (Thompson 2015: 432). From the two weeks I spent in Uganda – not a long time by any standards – I feel that the time spent with members of the team outside of the work environment impacted on our understanding of each other, helped to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and also acted as a leveler. Commonalities around interests and personal views were found that I feel helped to foster a more equal relationship, but also one in which the professional and personal blurred. Time is a considerable factor here, and if we were given longer than two weeks a more stable and equal input may have emerged. Again, whether adequate time can be provided is ultimately a question of funding and whether we value these kinds of partnerships, or if we would rather ‘capacity build’ and provide short trainings.

Problematics such as the way in which countries are represented, how this feeds into the way that we view our own knowledge and expertise, and the impact this has on power dynamics might never be fully navigated. The very fact that I was able to travel from the UK to work in Uganda embodies global inequalities. But for the Northern practitioner travelling to the South, a clear interest in our colleagues and a genuine desire to stand in solidarity to address economic, social and political inequalities in collaboration with local practitioners, rather than impart knowledge and manage processes of development is vital. If we are working in development, and more specifically through the arts, surely it is because we are interested in the human face of development. My argument is that we need to connect the why with the how, and that de-professionalizing and stepping away from performances of knowledge and expertise provides a radically different way of performing development partnerships. The feeling that we need to manage processes of development is counter-intuitive, and I feel that a focus on unlearning could go some way to ensuring voices of the South are heard, not

silenced through mystification and methodological approaches to meeting development outcomes.

Conclusion

This piece has been a deeply personal reflection, and the conclusions and recommendations I make are primarily for my own, emerging and evolving practice. Other Northern practitioners may have better contacts in international contexts that facilitate effective partnerships working with artists in the countries they are travelling to. They may also have already battled through some of the ethical and practical questions I raise here in terms of partnership. However, there may be elements of my reflection that speak to others, and I hope that by openly reflecting on my own practice I can contribute to an honest debate around what it means to be a Western theatre practitioner working to meet development objectives through theatre. My reflection has exposed flaws that are possibly true of many international organisations. These flaws are inherent due to the way projects are funded: insufficient time is given to developing work and to training; where resources and training are provided they often impose Northern knowledge that silences local staff; and, Northern donors (usually) sit at the top of the aid chain hierarchy and are therefore difficult to criticize for fear funding may be withdrawn or not offered again.

Furthermore I have suggested that the effective decentering of expertise may occur through moments of 'failure'. Thompson's (2003) notion of a bewildered practitioner therefore holds an important implication for practitioners that would suggest we embrace moments of uncertainty, and that in the context of a TfD partnership, openly reflecting on our own bewilderment can provide the space for effective and equal performances of partnership. In terms of the Ugandan team in Jinja, ensuring they have the space to shape how project resources should look would balance out the one-way flow of material and symbolic assets from North to South. My own (somewhat accidental) decentring as an expert was a small step towards this, and means that the

process of creating TfD resources has been slightly de-mystified for the team, but that they will also see their own work represented in the next set of resources the charity uses.

I have also shown that for applied theatre practitioners working wherever in the world, it is also problematic that the freelance nature of work often means individuals have little say in the wider organisation. Finally, this means we have little say in where work might develop next. Therefore whilst an individual project can be built on equal partnerships, the result can be that as knowledge is brought back to the North and codified, the findings are simply rolled out to other contexts. Partners, colleagues and beneficiaries are therefore viewed homogeneously, and as projects are scaled up and applied to involve new communities there is the risk that resources such as workshop plans and handbooks ultimately dominate and silence. This is despite an appearance of the resources and knowledge that informs projects having been created through participatory means and being shaped by Southern partners.

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