

DEVELOPING THEATRICALY: STAGING AGENCY AND INFLUENCE IN
BURKINABÈ THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Jean-Pierre Guingané and to the artistic community that he inspired.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the agency of Theatre for Development (hereafter TfD) in promoting social change in Burkina Faso, focusing on how economics and culture work towards and also inhibit social change. Burkina Faso has a thriving artistic scene that contradicts its economic realities as one of the three poorest countries in the world, but the same conditions also create a day-to-day struggle for financial survival for many theatre companies, giving significant influence to funding by Western NGOs. I argue that this influence has political consequences and funneling effects on theatrical production, affected by the ways in which grantors assess these projects. Cultural and social conditions contingent on Western monetary support generate sometimes complimentary, sometimes conflicting reactions from the African artists courting funding and the Western agencies with particular motivations and outcomes in mind. I examine how Western ideals might be conflated with “development” during project assessment and how theatre might also serve to protect African agency in social change.

In my first chapter, “An Introduction to Theatre for Development: Terminology, Theory and Practice in the Production of Burkinabè Theatre for Development,” introduces the history and definitions of TfD both internationally and nationally through a literature review. Although practiced throughout the world, TfD has a particular performance history in Burkina Faso that shapes how people perform TfD today and how theatre is produced more generally. In the second chapter “A Catch-22: The Relationship Between Theatre Education, Sponsorship, and Theatrical Production,” I analyze the relationship between TfD and theatre education, theatre professionalization, and the financial support for theatre in Burkina Faso. The advancement of theatre is hindered by a “catch-22”: to garner more audience appreciation, there must be an increase in arts education to raise the overall quality of theatrical production in the country, but in order to increase access to this education, the appreciation of

theatre must first increase. This quandary places a great deal of pressure on artists and poses numerous problems without offering any clear solutions. In Chapter Three, “Politically Correct: Staging a Mission for Democracy and Women’s Rights,” I give a case study of the relationship between the theatrical development of a particular theme, democracy and women in politics, and the missions of the granting organizations. Although Guingané developed the same theme in his three TfD play cycle of *Femmes, prenons notre place*, the grantors had very different agendas in why they chose to sponsor the project. The last two chapters, “Who Performs? The Roles of Women in Burkinabè Theatre” and “Staging the Norms: The Characterization of Women in Burkinabè Theatre for Development” give a close analysis of a popular theme in TfD, women’s rights. This theme serves as a dual lens, positioning the role of women in Burkina Faso by also investigating the role of female artists in theatre. This theme is particularly complicated because of the culturally specific understandings of female subjugation and feminism. The chapters work to show how women are limited in their roles due to their gender and how TfD promotes and restricts the advancement of these roles in portrayals of specific gender norms. Through these five chapters, I hope to show the complicated relationships between TfD and practitioners, audiences, and grantors.

Lacking any sustainable resources, the under-researched country of Burkina Faso provides a thriving artistic community and currently peaceful political climate in which art has great potential for social action. I posit, like other theatre scholars, that theatre *does* have agency, but that the assessment of theatre utilized as a mechanism for social change possibly negates some of this power. My research explores TfD as an investigation of cultural self-affirmation in a postcolonial world, and how the influence of the West shapes development. As a specific and localized topic, TfD in Burkina Faso addresses broader questions surrounding the terms

development and agency, as well as the social and economic interactions and ramifications of the postcolonial moment in which we live.

Developing Theatrically: Staging Agency and Influence in Burkinabè Theatrical Production

An Introduction

A new visitor to Burkina Faso inevitably makes their first observations on the heat, the dust floating in the air making it hard to breathe and to stay clean, and the reality of what the term “abject poverty” really means in inland Sub-Saharan Africa. These first observations render it almost impossible to believe that Burkina Faso might also play host to a dynamic, innovative, and dedicated artistic domain. However, Ouagadougou, the capital city of the small land-locked Francophone country in West Africa—one of the region’s cultural epicenters—boasts hundreds of theatre companies, numerous performance venues and schools, and dozens of international festivals including the first and largest film festival on the continent, FESPACO (Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou). Curiously, for the quantity and quality of theatrical work produced in Burkina Faso, those artists have received comparatively little critical analysis in regards to the plays they produce.

In this dissertation, I focus my analysis on a particular genre of theatre produced in Burkina Faso, Theatre for Development (TfD). The international focus on the country as a target for developmental efforts due to its poverty and lack of sustainable resources, combined with an investment in artistic expression, create a market for this theatre form. TfD, a mode of performance focused on disseminating an educative message, frequently receives financial support from foreign governmental or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The economic realities of Burkina Faso contradict the existence of its thriving artistic scene but also create a day-to-day struggle for financial survival for many theatre companies and result in significant influence stemming from these funding sources. In this dissertation, I complicate the relationship

between the production of TfD and the relationship to Western financial influence, by focusing on two overarching questions: How much influence and what kinds of influence can money have on artistic expression?, and, How does this influence inform the messages received by audiences and are there neocolonial risks for this type of dissemination? The theory of TfD depends on the belief that theatre can be used as a tool that either grants or promotes the agency to create social change. In these scenarios in which theatre practitioners have control over their artistic creations but also are subject to both the needs of the audience and the stipulations of the financial backers, who has agency: the artists, the audience, the grantors? What or whose purposes does TfD really serve? How does TfD as a dominant genre in Burkina Faso then go on to influence other forms of theatrical production? What is the future of TfD in the country? How might TfD serve as a lens to view a particular cultural and postcolonial moment?

Why Burkina Faso?

In order to understand the dedication to development efforts and the environment in which TfD is staged, we need to first have a better understanding of Burkina Faso as a country. Burkina Faso borders Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Niger, and Mali. The country, known as Upper Volta during French colonization in reference to the Volta River, was renamed Burkina Faso, a combination of Mooré and Jula meaning "the land of men of integrity," on August 4, 1983 by then President Thomas Sankara. The southern part of the country, particularly the region close to the country's second capital, Bobo-Dioulasso, has a more tropical climate with more frequent rains and better soil quality. The northern part of the country closest to Mali and Niger is a desert region mostly inhabited by nomadic peoples. The dry soil of most of the country results in a red dust that fills the air, particularly during the period of the Harmattan, a

season of strong wind. The dust not only stains clothing and makes housekeeping difficult work but also carries yellow fever and other illnesses. This means that raw vegetables before eating first must be well washed in mild dilution of bleach and hot water. The living conditions in Burkina Faso are quite difficult due to the environment.

The statistics of the country lend a startling impression of the poverty in Burkina Faso. Almost 17 million people live in the country and of those almost 2 million live in Ouagadougou. Home to over sixty languages and traditional societies, the traditional society of the Mossi makes up the majority of the population. Although French is the official national language, most people speak Mooré, Jula or Fulfuldé. The country's literacy rate is only 21.8% and the life expectancy is 52. With a 77% unemployment rate and over 46% of the people living below the poverty line, Burkina Faso's lack of development places the country in the list of the twenty poorest countries in the world. 90% of the population survives on subsistence farming. Cash crops include cotton and shea nuts. Although gold was discovered within the past decade, the privatization of this natural resource brings little wealth to the Burkinabè people ("The World Factbook: Burkina Faso"). Malaria leads to 35% of hospitalizations and 25% of all deaths annually. It is estimated that anywhere between 6.5-10% of the population is infected with HIV ("Burkina Faso: Travel Medicine"). Other serious diseases include typhoid, yellow and dengue fevers, tuberculosis, rabies, meningitis, cholera, and hepatitis.

While these numbers give a good impression of the somewhat dire circumstances in the country, I offer some of my personal observations to paint a broader image of life in Ouagadougou and to further contextualize the atmosphere in Burkina Faso. A popular phrase in Mooré, "*Na zem sa min,*" and in French "*Ca va aller,*" ("It will be ok") more accurately encapsulates the spirit found in the country. As indicated by the previous statistics, frequently

things are not actually “ok,” but the philosophy holds true: unless you die, there is always potential for improvement in one’s circumstances. Ouagadougou is a bustling city, notable for its chaotic traffic patterns and lively *maquis*, or bars, typically found alongside the road.

Although there are cars, most people travel by motorcycle, moped, or bicycle. Carts pulled by donkeys also affect the circulation of traffic. Only the main thoroughfares are paved, and during the rainy season, potholes collect water which breed mosquitoes. The city showcases a large disparity in distribution of wealth. A handful of ostentatious mansions loom over certain of the city’s neighborhoods, overshadowing the typical housing structures that encase several small, cement rooms with a shared a courtyard and with or without running water and electricity.

These one to two room homes can sometimes house upwards of ten people. The poorest neighborhoods are collections of small rooms built with loose clay. Despite the many hardships, people take time to exchange long greetings. Children play in the side streets. Livestock wander freely in search of food. In my experience, most people are friendly, jovial, religiously tolerant, and inviting. This environment provides the subject matter and atmosphere for the plays written and performed by the literally hundreds of theatre troupes that currently exist in Burkina Faso.

Why Theatre for Development?

Typically, audiences look to theatre to provide a much needed distraction, a moment to laugh and to communally discuss the problems affecting their lives. In my experience, successful TFD productions are overwhelmingly audience oriented in comparison to other forms of theatre. These plays are by no means meant to be pieces of literature. In that regard, I take some effort to contextualize the atmosphere in which theatre troupes perform these plays.

Although there are certainly many “bad” TFD plays written and performed in Burkina Faso, (and

by “bad,” I mean poorly received by audiences), Western audiences tend to understand successful Tfd plays as “bad” because of a lack of familiarity with the context in which these plays are performed. In support of this assessment, I quote Professor Harold Scheub’s observations on Western reception of African oral storytelling:

Observers often disparage the stories in the oral traditions of African people. On the surface, these stories seem to be typical fairy tale-type narratives, with the usual folkloric motifs, the ogres and the fantasy helpers, the Cinderella characters moving up from their status as least likely heroes. (Scheub xxi)

Professor Scheub goes on to describe South African storytelling as a subversive form of resistance during Apartheid, unremarked and underrated by the whites in power. I use this quote to frame my approach to Theatre for Development in Burkina Faso and hope to not only establish the significance of this form to cultural dialogues, but also argue that tension arises from conflicts of interest in how this form of theatre takes shape through the influence of foreign organizations. Although the political turmoil and violence in South Africa’s history far surpasses that of Burkina Faso, Scheub’s observations on the Western tendency to malign the quality of African performance, frequently due to a lack of cultural understanding, is a phenomenon I have frequently witnessed and hope to debunk within the context of Burkinabè Tfd.

Methodological Approach

My research relies heavily on primary source material, including articles written by practitioners about their work, live and archival videos of performances, government documents, and notably the personal interviews I conducted with practitioners, administrators, and grantors in Burkina Faso. My methodology in conducting interviews relied a great deal on my personal

relationships with Burkinabè artists and my own experiences working in theatre in the country. I relied on this knowledge in selecting the individuals I interviewed and frequently these conversations led to introductions or suggestions of other people with whom I should speak. I spoke with over forty practitioners, administrators, and grantors, including some of the most important and influential voices in theatre in the country. Interviews lasted between ten minutes to three hours depending on an individual's schedule and interest in the subject. I used the following questions to guide the discussion, which frequently led to numerous different conversations: "How did you enter into theatre? What are your experiences and opinions of Tfd as an artist or audience member? Can you give examples of particularly positive or negative experiences of Tfd? What are your future goals and hopes for theatre in Burkina Faso?" As I will investigate further, artists shared fond experiences, frustrations, criticisms, and hopes for the genre of Tfd.

The death of Jean-Pierre Guingané, founder of professional theatre in the country, the inspiration for this project and my mentor, proved to be the biggest setback to my work. Guingané left a distinct influence on the production of theatre in his country through his notable body of artistic and academic work and his having trained or directed the majority of theatre artists in the country. Author of dozens of published and unpublished plays, founder of the practical theatre department at the University of Ouagadougou, Guingané also served on several international theatre boards, including the role of Vice President of ITI (International Theatre Institute) and received numerous national and international awards. Despite this influence, little academic work (other than his own) focuses on his contributions to the field. Fellow theatre pioneer, Prosper Kompaoré, has received more critical attention in work by academics including James Thompson's book *Applied Theatre : Bewilderment and Beyond*, the Doctoral dissertation

by Joy Morrison, and the Master's thesis by Fabienne Roy, but he himself has been less prolific in comparison to Guingané. Although both of these practitioners deserve greater recognition for their contributions to theatre, because of my familiarity with and the notable absence of critical analysis on Guingané's work, I focus a considerable amount of my dissertation on his plays and his influence on theatrical production in Burkina Faso.

In addition to Guingané and Kompaoré, I also focus on the work of playwright, actor, and director Ildevert Meda.¹ A protégé and later combatant of Guingané, Meda's adaptations and original works are some of the most successful and poignant currently produced in Burkina Faso. While not discussed in this project, his play, *Le Rêve du lutin*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, led to some of the questions on cultural exchange that inspired my own work. Although I also discuss the work of other playwrights, the trajectory of Guingané and Meda's work helps to contextualize the origins and the future direction of Burkinabè theatre.

In writing this dissertation, I hope to give a general impression of current theatrical production in Burkina Faso and a contextualization and critical analysis of how Theatre for Development functions as a genre. The first chapter "An Introduction to Theatre for Development: Terminology, Theory and Practice in the Production of Burkinabè Theatre for Development," introduces the history and definitions of TfD both internationally and nationally through a literature review. Although practiced throughout the world, TfD has a particular

¹ Meda's foray into professional theatre is rather ironic. When he heard about the auditions for the acting school UNEDO, he auditioned because he was certain that this would be an easy opportunity to earn money. He evidently auditioned beautifully, which sent the selection committee into a rage after they learned that he had misunderstood that in order to audition, you must belong to one of the member associations. Although Meda did not belong to any of the troupes, Guingané came to his defense and insisted that he be accepted to UNEDO as they had founded the organization to encourage young artists to train and Meda was undeniably talented. This story is ironic because after he was accepted, Meda learned that not only were there no scholarships available, but he would need to pay for his training. He would learn time and again in his professional career that in fact, there is no money in theatre ("Personal Interview").

performance history in Burkina Faso that shapes how people perform TfD today and how theatre is produced more generally. In the second chapter “A Catch-22: The Relationship Between Theatre Education, Sponsorship, and Theatrical Production,” I analyze the relationship between TfD and theatre education, theatre professionalization, and the financial support for theatre in Burkina Faso. The advancement of theatre is hindered by a “catch-22”: to garner more audience appreciation, there must be an increase in arts education to raise the overall quality of theatrical production in the country, but in order to increase access to this education, the appreciation of theatre must first increase. This quandary places a great deal of pressure on artists and poses numerous problems without offering any clear solutions. In Chapter Three, “Politically Correct: Staging a Mission for Democracy and Women’s Rights,” I give a case study of the relationship between the theatrical development of a particular theme, democracy and women in politics, and the missions of the granting organizations. Although Guingané developed the same theme in his three TfD play cycle of *Femmes, prenons notre place*, the grantors had very different agendas in why they chose to sponsor the project. The last two chapters, “Who Performs? The Roles of Women in Burkinabè Theatre” and “Staging the Norms: The Characterization of Women in Burkinabè Theatre for Development” give a close analysis of a popular theme in TfD, women’s rights. This theme serves as a dual lens, positioning the role of women in Burkina Faso by also investigating the role of female artists in theatre. This theme is complicated because of the culturally specific understandings of female subjugation and feminism. The chapters work to show how women are limited in their roles due to their gender and how TfD promotes and restricts the advancement of these roles through portrayals of specific gender norms. Through these five chapters, I hope to show the complicated relationships between TfD and practitioners, audiences, and grantors.

Chapter One

An Introduction to Theatre for Development: Terminology, Theory and Practice in the Production of Burkinabè Theatre for Development

In order to explore the significance of TfD in Burkina Faso, we need a better understanding of the history of Theatre for Development and the ways in which theatre has been utilized to promote issues of social change. This chapter will investigate some of the theoretical approaches to TfD by considering the definitions international scholars are applying to this form of theatre, how Burkinabè define and perform TfD, the current trend in academe toward definitional shifts and questions about the practicality of TfD, and the potentially neocolonial implications such definitions pose to practitioners and audience members. While many of the definitions scholars developed and continue to develop for TfD and for the umbrella term “applied theatre,” TfD in Burkina Faso has its own unique history and implications. In Burkina Faso, the term Theatre for Development, as well as the linked term *théâtre du sensibilisation* (theatre for sensitization), create a specific understanding for practitioners, academics, and administrators along with specific debates over merits and production. As a deeply impoverished country with a unique commitment to artistic production, and one particularly invested in the role of theatre in society, Burkina Faso is affected in turn by how the rest of the world might view the term “development.” This definition of development works hand-in-hand (and sometimes at odds) with conceptions of artistry, thus giving way to a dynamic, versatile, and sometimes problematic form of expression.

Various theoretical approaches have helped to form the practical applications of TfD worldwide. The explanations and theoretical definitions for TfD’s origins in Africa vary, but most of them cite the influence of Paolo Freire’s work on pedagogy on Augusto Boal’s strictly

non-elitist “Theater of the Oppressed,” which encourages audiences to take an active role in performance, and in community advancements, through debate. Outside of pedagogical and theatre theory, approaching sociological theory on a more international level, Kees Epskamp cites the end of the Cold War as a primary influence on the beginning of TfD, when funds previously allocated for the military went instead to development and peacekeeping projects (23). This shift in diplomacy created funding for an influx of foreign aid workers to travel to under-developed regions, some of them employing theatre as a tool to create social change. While other forms now known as “applied theatre” began around the 1960s, “Theatre for Development” as a process-based art form that approached societal problems from a “bottom-up” perspective, began in the 1970s. These international influences have informed the production and professionalization of theatre in Burkina Faso, particularly in the ways that TfD has become a permanent fixture in Burkinabè performance genres.

To investigate the theatre history of TfD in Burkina Faso, we must have a basic understanding of the pedagogical theory of Paolo Freire and how this influenced theatre. TfD scholars cite the political nature of TfD stemming from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. According to L. Dale Byam, TfD “reconcile[d] Freirian concepts to a development project that used theatre as the stimulus” (25). Specifically, TfD originates from critical thinking on Freire’s process of conscientization, which recognizes that culture cannot be ignored or negated, but can be utilized in promoting social change (Byam 26). Freire sees oppression stemming from a “banking” education model in which students accept and absorb information from a teacher like empty receptacles. Based on Freire’s teachings, TfD works towards implementing a “problem-posing” model in which people learn by posing questions and finding solutions themselves. Freire emphasizes conscientization as a process that “is the deepening of the attitude of

awareness characteristic of all emergence” (Freire 90). TfD relies on this recognition, or “historical awareness,” that a community must first recognize a problem and then have the desire to resolve it. With the hundreds of TfD shows produced in Burkina Faso each year, the Burkinabè community, at least to some extent, has embraced the potential to internally resolve problems afflicting their society.

This very resolution to encourage necessary social change reflects the theories and practices promoted by Augusto Boal in his seminal work *Theatre of the Oppressed*. His “joker system” within forum theatre breaks down the boundaries between main characters and supporting characters, actors and spectators to create politically charged, revolutionary work. Within his model, a group utilizes theatre to act out problems and find potential solutions:

First, the participants are asked to tell a story containing a political or social problem of difficult solution. Then a ten- or fifteen-minute skit portraying that problem and the solution intended for discussion is improvised or rehearsed, and subsequently presented. When the skit is over, the participants are asked if they agree with the solution presented...The scene will be performed once more,...but now any participant in the audience has the right to replace any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems to him most appropriate...Anyone may propose any solution, but it must be done on the stage, working, acting, doing things, and not from the comfort of his seat. (139)

Although there are structural differences between the Burkinabè approach to TfD and Boal’s theories on forum theatre, these theatrical endeavors have similar objectives: “Maybe the theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a *rehearsal of*

revolution” (Boal 141). The desire for revolution expressed by Boal parallels similar sentiments expressed by Burkinabè practitioners when they defend TfD as an ever-imperative social and artistic effort due to the many developmental based problems afflicting their country.

Many TfD scholars, including those who have researched in Burkina Faso such as James Thompson as well as young Burkinabè practitioners, credit TfD in Burkina as originally influenced by Boal’s work. Prosper Kompaoré, one of the two early pioneers of theatre in Burkina Faso, however, explained that this was not the case. Kompaoré discovered the work of Augusto Boal in 1981 while in France. He worked with Boal personally throughout the 1980s, of note during the Francoforum, a festival held in Burkina inviting social intervention troupes from France, Belgium, Canada, and Brazil (“Personal Interview”). While Kompaoré describes his work as “forum theatre” and was deeply influenced by Boal’s work, he explained Boal’s theories came into play after the founding of his company, ATB, in 1978. Kompaoré explains instead that Burkinabè TfD developed out of Burkinabè society and an initial concern of theatre professionals to use theatre as a mode of social change. Although visiting artists and academics to Burkina Faso may have had previous exposure to Boal, to cite that Burkinabè TfD developed out of the teachings of Boal is, according to Kompaoré, an erroneous assertion.

Kompaoré, rather, cites inspirations for TfD found organically within African society, giving the examples of story telling, the tradition of dramatizing life with the examples of funerals and marriages, and *kotéba* (“Personal Interview”). Jean-Pierre Guingané, the other pioneer of professional theatre in Burkina Faso, describes the tradition of *kotéba* in his article “Rules Made to be Broken:”

In Mali, for example, the avowed goal of *kotéba*, a form of folk theatre organized once a year by young people, was to give the young a chance to criticize their elders. This was the only occasion in the year when they could do this without risk—the young people were in duty bound to have their say about society, while their elders were in duty bound to hold it against them. Everything said in this form of theatre was above the law. (12-13)

Kompaoré explained during our interview that the societal tradition to “amener les gens a se corriger,” or to encourage others towards self-improvement, inspired the practice of Burkinabè TfD. In his 1977 dissertation, “Les formes de théâtralisation dans les traditions de la Haute-Volta,” Kompaoré explores the levels of theatricality existent throughout the Burkinabè ethnic majority, the Mossi empire. This analysis includes oral story telling and proverbs, music, masks and dance, traditional games for both children and adults, but also ceremonies and rituals. An interesting example, *l'enfancité des chefs*, occurs in some villages during the initiation of a new village head. In walking towards the throne, the village head begins a walk to the seat of power beginning in acting out a baby, then a child, and as he acts out becoming an adult, ascends the throne as the village superior. We can see, as Kompaoré argues, a natural tendency towards the theatrical in Burkinabè society, supporting the thesis that TfD was not solely an initiative outsourced from the West. TfD research from other African countries also supports the argument for debate-style performance traditions evolving into African TfD, including *kotéba* in Mali and *kgotla* in Botswana, in which societal issues are performed and debated by the community.

Another important influence on TfD in Burkina Faso extends from Belgium and the influence of the theatrical responses to industry and unions during the 1960s and 70s.

Practitioners from Belgium traveled to other countries, such as Burkina Faso, to use the theatre techniques they developed out of factory closings and union strikes in their native Belgium as forms of protest and therapy. Two of these Belgian practitioners, Jean-Henri Drèze and Georget Mourin, came out of this movement separately to Burkina Faso and continue to work on TfD projects within the country. Both men had different forays into producing Factory Theatre—Drèze as a theatre student and Mourin as a laid-off factory worker—and have a different presence in Burkina Faso; Drèze worked closely with Jean-Pierre Guingané as a theatre professor and director while Mourin has been more isolated and moved permanently to Ouagadougou and founded his own company. Mourin, more critical of the work produced by academics like Guingané and Kompaoré, writes most of the plays that his Burkinabè-Belgian company produces. Drèze is known by all of the actors that received their training through Guingané's theatre school, *Le CFRAV*, and has had a hand in forming many of the country's most talented practitioners. The Belgian company that Drèze co-founded and the Burkinabè company Mourin co-founded in reaction to the same Belgian influences demonstrate how socio-political events in Europe inspired theatrical reactions both in that country as well as directly influencing work produced in countries like Burkina Faso.

Drèze and Mourin are just two of the examples of Belgian artists inspired by conditions in their own country that travelled to Africa to produce similar social-justice arts-based projects. Many of the most well documented TfD projects in Africa have been initiated or collaborated with European artists and scholars. Some of these documented TfD projects occurred in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania, Nigeria, Lesotho, South Africa, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Cameroon, and Ghana. Two of the initial and most cited projects include *Laedza Batanani*, which began in Botswana at Tutume McConnell College in

1973 and *I Will Marry When I Want*, written and directed by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ Mirii in Kenya in 1982.² Both projects share the critique of TfD as being produced by academics or being based in a University setting, a criticism also familiar in Burkina Faso. One such critic, David Kerr, regards TfD in some respects as a form of modern African expression, and in others as a product of the intelligentsia. With the loss of some forms of traditional performance and the introduction of Western theatre, the application of theatre for social change by academics and social activist groups creates, for Kerr, a unique yet mediated performance genre. *Laedza Batanani* bears additional critiques for being led by Ross Kidd, who gained prominence as a TfD scholar after the inception of the project. The project, sponsored by the Canadian University Services Organization (CUSO) under Kidd's adult literacy program at the University of Botswana, aimed to address apathy, but did not take into adequate consideration the "social and historical circumstances surrounding the problems identified," which also affected participation in the project (Byam 41; 44). In particular, the project's planting of audience members in order to sway opinions raises questions about Western influence, agency, ethics, and efficacy, such as the extent to which shows address the problems most experienced by villagers of a particular community, and if we can analyze either the "change" in a community or the success of a show if these reactions were obtained illicitly.³

Though approaches differ, TfD initiatives attempt to target specific problems afflicting a community. Common topics for TfD include female education, female genital mutilation (FGM), malaria and HIV prevention, conflict resolution, voting, and a myriad other developmental themes. One example of how TfD strategically promotes better health occurred in

² For more on these projects, see David Kerr's chapter "Theatre for Development," Banham et al *African Theatre in Development*, Penina Muhando Mlamba, and Kamal Salhi.

³ For an in-depth reading of *Laedza Batanani*, see L. Dale Byam's *Community in Motion: Theatre for Development in Africa*.

1996, when the Lagos-based Performance Studio Workshop used theatre in the Igboelerin East to encourage the completion of a local hospital building, to advance women's rights, and to end FGM (Mike in Banham et al. 61-78). While some of the goals that were contingent on cooperation in the village failed, the village nonetheless responded to the information on FGM. Radio programs addressing the health risks of FGM had been ineffective, but the staging of the play and subsequent discussion convinced villagers that the question of guarding the tradition of FGM mattered less than ensuring the health of women and children for generations to come. While it is worth questioning a clear-cut assessment of success or failure in regards to TfD projects, frequently as with this example from the Performance Studio Workshop, practitioners aim to encourage a community to critically discuss community-based problems.

This example of how TfD promotes advancements in health in an economically feasible, culturally responsible fashion through communication and education also shows some of the problems development efforts encounter. Although the mixture of failure and success exposes difficulties in project assessment, all TfD projects fall subject to the failure-success dichotomy displayed in this example. These failures and successes teach practitioners more about the communities they aim to reach and help to inform future endeavors. "Failure" or "success" are both very difficult, and problematic to assess. Guingané, for example, was known to express that even changing the opinion of one person on a subject like FGM meant the show succeeded. TfD, a multi-dimensional form of artistic expression based in good intentions, developed from many different influences throughout the world and while the assessment process might be problematic this is precisely the reason the form continues to develop in Burkina Faso.

The History, Application, and Practical Realities of Theatre for Development in Burkina Faso

The Originators of Burkinabè Professional Theatre and the Burkinabè Theoretical Approaches to Tfd

In Burkina Faso, there are two main forms of theatre whose purpose is social intervention: Tfd and *théâtre du sensibilisation*, translated as “theatre of sensitization.” The goals of these projects are quite similar: both versions have overt messages with characters displaying either socially desirable or undesirable behavior, but theatre of sensitization lacks a post-show organized audience feedback to the material presented in the play. The other major distinguishing factors in the production of theatre that carries a message for social change in Burkina Faso are the two historical approaches to Tfd taken by the country’s two originating practitioners, Jean-Pierre Guingané of Théâtre de la Fraternité and Prosper Kompaoré of Atelier Théâtre Burkinabè (ATB). Guingané founded Théâtre de la Fraternité in February of 1975 with the mission to explore the theatricality that exists in traditional Burkinabè culture, to train young actors into professional theatre makers, and to encourage audiences to consider the “social, economic, cultural, and political problems of society and to help find the most appropriate solutions” (gambidi.org). Kompaoré founded the troupe that later became ATB on June 17, 1978. Kompaoré invited a group of friends to start a theatre troupe and the group made the decision that their work would be in service of the development of the country (“Personal Interview”). To this day, the banner outside of the theatre reads “Atelier-Theatre Burkinabè: Le Théâtre au Service du Developpement.”

Both men have produced what is known in Burkina Faso as TfD, but Kompaoré defines his approach as Forum Theatre and Guingané used the term Debate Theatre. Structurally, Guingané's TfD plays are more presentational, framing each story as set in a community that decides to perform a play to address problems that have arisen. Joé l'Artiste, a reappearing character, suggests this form of conflict resolution, and after the play, leads the audience in a discussion of the problems and solutions presented. Kompaoré's plays are structurally more traditional, similar to the style used by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ Mirii in *I Will Marry When I Want*, which focuses on simple themes and scenes with musical interludes. Kompaoré's plays, in the vein of Forum Theatre, invite audience members to re-perform specific scenes in order to develop feasible solutions. Kompaoré also organizes specialists on the subject presented to address audience questions and concerns at the end of the play (Thompson 128). These terms indicate specific practices with which every professional Burkinabè actor is familiar, and in the same way that they carry practical meaning, they also carry the country's theatre history.

The Process: Commissioning a Play

Currently, as TfD in Burkina Faso is almost always commissioned by a source outside of the theatre troupe, the administrative process plays a key role in the development of a production. According to past administrator Jacob Sanwidi, the typical process for developing a TfD show through the company Théâtre de la Fraternité began when an NGO contacted director Jean-Pierre Guingané in order to meet and discuss the intended message and creation of a play. The director with Gambidi's administrative team then discussed the financial and logistical responsibilities the troupe would undertake in producing the show with the representatives of the

NGO. When the artistic and administrative teams reached an agreement, Guingané wrote a play and submitted it to the NGO for suggestions and approval. After he incorporated any recommendations for change, rehearsals began in French, and afterwards the actors helped translate the play into maternal languages spoken in Burkina. The translations and performances depended on which languages the members of the troupe spoke and most commonly included Mooré, Jula, and Fulfuldé. The troupe would then invite the NGO to see a dress rehearsal of the production, seeking suggestions and incorporating changes before performing the play for audiences and touring it to villages. For their work, actors typically received what is considered a small sum for Burkina, in addition to food and lodging during the tours. A final report and balance sheet detailing the expenses and outcomes of the production were submitted to the NGO after the completion of the tour (Sanwidi).

Kompaoré explained two different processes that ATB undertakes for developing a play. More commonly, an NGO or partner approaches the troupe with a subject and a request for help in theatrically transmitting their message. Occasionally the troupe itself expresses interest in a particular theme and Kompaoré writes the play himself, however this is less common. When working with an NGO, first the organization comes with either written or audiovisual information for the troupe to learn more about the theme. A member of the organization familiar with the community comes to speak with the actors about their observations and understanding of the problems facing the people there so that they might better understand the daily lives of the people with whom they wish to communicate. After these exchanges, the troupe writes and rehearses the play and they invite the NGO to a run-thru and exchange thoughts on the performance. The play then tours to the communities in question. Kompaoré pointed out some themes work better in town than in villages and vice versa, depending on what the reality is of

the community. Kompaoré confirmed that an outside organization funding a cultural transmission of a particular message runs a risk of denaturalizing the message, particularly if the troupe does not have artistic training and is solely interested in the money, however in his experience, he has found the roles to be clear-cut: a partner is charged with a particular message that they want to communicate and the practitioner is responsible for the artistic production of that message. Although Kompaoré shared that some partners' numerous requests to watch run-thrus and give feedback are tiring, he has found in his relationship with granters a respectful partnership.

Realities of Touring TfD Productions

The initial impression of touring theatre to rural areas with the hope of promoting positive social change might be optimistic, but quite often troupes encounter difficult realities en route and in performance. Touring TfD shows in villages presents various conditions to theatre artists, and while live theatre may always present obstacles, Burkina Faso redefines what some might consider extreme working conditions. In the opinion of Nongodo Ouédraogo, current Artistic Director of Théâtre de la Fraternité, TfD “demands a much higher quality of theatre.” Belgian actor, director and instructor Jean-Henri Drèze, who has worked extensively in Burkina Faso, echoed the praise for the work TfD demands of actors. Drèze emphasizes that the audience might be sitting within a foot of the playing space and may not abide by Western theatre etiquette, while the actors must convey the message established by the play, but also convincingly portray a complete character. Ouédraogo also notes that the difference between theatre in Ouagadougou and touring TfD shows is that in Ouagadougou “you hear the audience come into the theatre: the audience comes to the actors, but with TfD, it’s the actors who go to

the audience.” In Ouagadougou, the audiences frequently consist of the same people, oftentimes other artists, and the stage and blocking never change. Rural TfD audiences have been known to lose interest and walk away or audibly address the actors onstage and disrupt the playing space to voice opinions on the shows. This audience is not the same as the standard Ouagalais artistic and intellectual theatre audience that brings itself to the playhouse.

Getting to the audience often poses the most problems. Actors and technicians travel together in a van to each village. Any number of things can happen en route to make traveling a difficult process. For example, on one Fraternité tour traveling to the village Koudougou, the long handle of the gear shift snapped in half, which meant that the driver continued to steer and operate the pedals, while an actor was obliged to sit on the floor near the arm of the gear shift and change gears manually with the shortened gear shift. On another trip to Dori, the bus got a flat tire but the driver had forgotten the jack in Ouagadougou. The troupe lifted and propped up the bus together until they could change the tire. Actor and administrator Boukary Tarnagda described another trip to Djibasso, 13 kilometers from Mali, a village so close to the Sahel that the terrain consists only of sand. The troupe had not passed a single other vehicle on the road. Tarnagda thought, “If we break down, it’s over. It’s time to pray to God.” This is a side of Burkina Faso that foreigners rarely see unless they travel at least fifty kilometers outside of Ouagadougou. While non-Burkinabè could view Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso as promising, developing cities with buildings reaching five or six stories and roads with overpasses, as Tarnagda mentions, it is eye opening for Ouaga-based artists even to recognize that “only part of the country is developing.” Tarnagda added, “It wouldn’t surprise me if you found people out there that didn’t even know Blaise Compoaré was president.” Recently reelected, Compoaré has served twenty-five years as President.

Due to the extensive traveling required and the fact that actors touring the shows will spend weeks away from their homes in Ouagadougou in order to visit numerous villages, actors also risk their health in order to perform these shows. As Tarnagda explains:

It's not easy...especially getting to villages...You really need to be in good health...Everything is different: the daily realities, the way you eat, where you sleep, so many little, little problems...there are plenty of people who need to be hospitalized afterwards due to fatigue, malaria, that the roads aren't good, allergies, etc.

Although they risk health and comfort to perform frequently for little monetary compensation, actors who tour with TfD shows also emphasize both the benefit of learning more about their own country, and also the significance of forming a close familial relationship as a group of actors. Despite the problems, all of the actors I spoke with smiled while recollecting their experiences with these shows.

These harsh traveling conditions with little monetary compensation explain why the actors performing TfD are often just beginning their careers. While time on stage might lead to better paying productions, invitations to festivals, touring shows traveling to Europe, and workshops and training opportunities, the payment for TfD—viewed as meager at best, raises ethical questions about this work. The actors display a commitment to promoting social change and to developing their careers, but at what cost? The travel experience itself demonstrates the many basic developmental ameliorations neglected by the government, including the conditions of the roads (paved roads help to lessen the disease-carrying dust prevalent in the country), access to water, and the availability of proper medical care. Accusations of corruption in cultural

administration have been voiced and even performed on stage in Ouagadougou, but the meager wages also emphasize priorities of NGOs when funding shows. The organizations fund the message of the performance at the expense of both the health and professional experience of the actors.

Audience Reception

After the troupe travels and successfully arrives in the village, the actors often perform in a public place, establishing the stage by drawing a line in the sand and using a megaphone and djembe to attract a crowd. The van the actors traveled in might serve to create the back wall of the “theatre” and give the actors a backstage area. Audiences might range from around 100 audience members, considered a poor turnout, to groups as big as 800-1000 people. Because of the limited playing space and frequently large crowds, this also means that half of the audience could be watching what happens backstage instead of onstage. These conditions pose what actors frequently described as an enjoyable challenge—the fact that each village demands the troupe adjust the play to a different atmosphere gives new energy and creativity to the actors. These conditions also demonstrate a breaking away from the traditional Western theatrical values brought to Africa during colonization.

In addition to the challenges of travelling and performing, audience reception poses another challenge affecting the production of Tfd. First, the word in French for actor, *comédien*, is frequently misunderstood by non-artists as having the same meaning as the English word “comedian”: Burkinabè audiences expect actors to make them laugh. Due to this expectation, even though plays might deal with heart-wrenching subjects like death and rape, scripts and

staging are laced with humorous scenes through most of a play. Even with comedy mixed throughout plays, several actors spoke about experiences in which a play left every female spectator sobbing, reflecting afterwards that the negative aspects of the play corresponded exactly with their own reality in the village. Another effect of audience reception relates to the talent of the actors. Sometimes the actors perform their roles so well that the perceived reality of the play is transmitted onto the reality of the actors' lives in the eyes of the audience. Specific examples include an actress who was treated as if she was really a prostitute and solicited for sex after a show about prostitution; an audience member who took another actress's hand, championing her as his candidate in the next election after she portrayed a politician in a show that advocated women taking roles in government; and a play that needed to be re-written because an actor who was playing the villain was so sympathetic that the audience identified and sided with him. All of these experiences of audience reception influence how plays are received, but they also demonstrate how unpredictably audiences who are rarely exposed to theatre react to what they see. Seasoned performer Edoxi Gnoula, the actress whose performance convinced the audience she was actually running for political office, defended audience members like the man that grabbed her hand and chanted "Vive cette femme!" She explained that many villagers have never seen a play before and because the actors perform seriously, the villagers understand the action literally (Gnoula). Gnoula and others emphasize that villagers understand that the shows are performances, but these examples show the power that theater has to transform the emotions of its public, and demonstrates the potential within TfD to promote change.

Unfortunately, an unforeseen negative consequence of TfD is the temptation to inspire "arts appreciation" in audiences who might otherwise never get the chance to see a play by corralling traveling troupes that perform at no cost. With funding support from an outside source,

TfD is always performed free for audiences, and is often staged during a market day in villages, with music and dancing before the play begins to encourage crowds. While this inspires an appreciation of theatre in under-served audiences, TfD and sensitization plays have taught Burkinabè that one never pays to see theatre. Many practitioners among the younger generation of artists cited this as a problem they hoped to confront directly in their future as theatre-makers, even if the price of entry might be as simple as a handful of rice. The convention of offering theatre for free, a hard one to break in a country in which every F CFA⁴ counts, offers a concrete example of unthought-of negative consequences TfD might pose, which theatre artists are now compelled to reverse in order to ensure their careers.

The culture specific to each village also guides each performance. Burkina Faso is home to an estimated sixty or seventy languages and ethnicities, with traditions and relationships that vary from village to village. While troupes try to translate scripts into the language of the village, if no one in the troupe speaks a particular language, shows have been known to fail when performed in French. Although French is the official language of the country, it is rarely spoken regularly or with proficiency outside of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. The traditions of these different language groups and ethnicities dictate aspects of the performance. For example, among Djoula audiences, men and women sat together and spoke freely about their opinions during the talkbacks after the shows. Mossi audiences, however, were segregated by gender, with men gathered on one side and women on the other. The culture of a Mossi village mandates a specific protocol for who can begin speaking—an essential factor in a TfD show. Ouédraogo explained:

⁴ The Franc CFA is the currency throughout French-speaking West Africa.

Each group has their own organization. And the Mossi are perhaps the most hierarchical. There's the head of the village, but beneath him there are other heads and other heads right up until the head of each family, and each person has their role to play. For example, in a Mossi society—I'm Moaga⁵ so that's the society I'm familiar with—there are certain scenarios in which no one can intervene unless it's a child, even the head of a village...It's hard to explain...What you need to understand is that it's not just "the head is the only one who can speak." That's not it. The head of the village has his role to play, just like each woman has her role to play, like each man/mother/cousin/uncle/child/baby has its role to play—oh yes, we're going all the way up to a baby. There are situations that can't be solved without a baby, even though babies don't talk, you'll need the baby. So (in regards to Tfd), if the head of the village hasn't spoken yet, it's not that the audience hasn't heard you, it's not that they're not thinking (about the themes of the show) like you are, it's not that they don't have a point of view, but you might need the baby to speak in order to give the right to speak to its mother...At times when the head can take the microphone, thank the actors for coming, and then ask the audience what they thought of the show, the debate becomes very poignant...There are situations in which a cousin for example can speak out of turn and be forgiven...but all of that protocol needs to be understood beforehand (N. Ouédraogo).

Ouédraogo continued to explain that other societies do not have heads at all, but one way to ensure that the audience has a chance to debate and discuss the issues seen in the play is to invite

⁵ Moaga means an individual Mossi

him to speak in order to begin the proper protocol giving everyone else the right to speak. For a play to be successful, a troupe must understand the audience's culture before simply asking for everyone's opinions. The example of which Nongodo spoke reflected an experience Jacob Sanwidi, administrator of Espace Culturel Gambidi from 2002-2007, witnessed when he toured with the troupe to a small village called Zorgho in Ganzourgou:

I remember that participation in the debate started timidly until a boy of around twelve took the microphone and began critiquing the negative behavior the play aimed to critique. The crowd was filled with admiration for the young speaker and afterwards, almost everyone: women, men, elderly, adolescents, and adults wanted to speak to insist for the necessity to fight for women's rights.

In Prosper Kompaoré's experience with ATB, there are three ways to see how an audience incorporated the message—1. Empirical observation—you can see how people are reacting to particular scenes and what their opinions are; 2. Post-performance discussion—as part of the forum when people are asked their opinions on what happened; and 3. Post-excursion interviews—interviewing audiences months later to see how the message continues to affect the audience. Through these observations in Kompaoré's experience, audience response and reception varied depending on the subject matter of the show. For example, he cited religious themes as always being a sensitive matter. Shows discussing human rights, regardless of whether these were women's, children's, or the general population's rights were always a great success. "Everyone is interested in human rights," ("Personal Interview"). He also cited that observers can see audiences listening and learning with technical themes, such as illness, when education is the main goal of the show. One of the most important aspects of audience reception

to Kompaoré is giving people a chance to share an opinion and that people want the chance to be able to speak their minds.

These experiences illuminate the importance of giving a voice to members of a community, but also the difficulty that this can pose for the actors. The very power dynamics that withhold a society from developing in the direction of mutuality can prevent even a discussion on the subject from ever occurring. In the past, TfD troupes took up residency in the villages where they performed in order to gain a greater understanding of the community's particular problems. Establishing residency is no longer a guaranteed part of the process and the previous examples demonstrate that assumptions cannot be made—by either outside funding organizations or individual troupes—on the capabilities of Burkinabè artists to adequately perform without understanding the background of a particular society.

Stigmas and Questions of Genre

Though many artists with whom I spoke recalled nostalgically their experiences with TfD and consistently noted caveats for the work of Théâtre de la Fraternité and ATB in their critiques for the genre, everyone pointed out that the term TfD has taken on negative connotations and even become pejorative for some due to younger, less professional troupes. Since TfD is a source of income through funding from NGOs and other organizations, in a country with immense poverty, artistic quality often becomes an afterthought. Frequently troupes with no theatrical training or knowledge hurriedly produce shows for the sole purpose of financial gain. In spite of this, some artists continue to support the production of TfD and defend the genre like any other type of theatre—when done well, it is a form of art and deserves recognition. These

same Tfd supporters are critical of actors who refuse to perform in Tfd or *théâtre du sensibilisation* shows because of the stigma that Tfd is not “real” theatre. Due to the lack of artistic integrity among non-professional troupes, and the negative exposure they bring to villagers who rarely gain access to theatre, professional practitioners also acknowledge that a refusal to perform might be seen as an insistence on professionalism.

A chapter in *Théâtre et développement: De l’émancipation à la résistance* by Marie-Soleil Frère and Etienne Minoungou, titled “Social Intervention Theatre in Burkina Faso: Motor or Brakes for Artistic Creation?” addresses some of these questions for the state of theatre invested in social advocacy, and the future of theatre in Burkina Faso. Frère and Minoungou argue for the ways that Western involvement has benefited both ATB and ECG through the available monetary support from NGOs for Tfd, particularly in the late eighties and early nineties. The mission of the International Organization of the Francophonie has also resulted in the touring of shows from Burkina Faso to France and other French-speaking countries. Other countries, such as Norway, also collaborated with ECG, drawing outside funds and artists to produce *Peer Gynt* and *Hamlet*. Frère and Minoungou further establish the dependence of Burkinabè Tfd on Western funding, but also point out that there is a sort of monopoly formed by this particular genre. The authors note a varied opinion between the two main theatre practitioners on smaller companies: Kompoaré encourages new companies to form, while Guingané notes that the less serious companies may detract Western donors from contributing to future works. Regardless, with the dominance of ATB and Fraternité and the dedication of both companies to Tfd, the artistic experience of actors and audiences shift, both being trained specifically to perform and consume the genre of Tfd, criticized as detracting from a more holistic or psychological theatre experience (60, 63).

However, this very question of what genre gives actors more or better experience has a neocolonial bias, weighing TfD as a lesser form of theatre essentially because it is not considered a classic. A frequent discussion I have witnessed among actors in Burkina Faso, relating to the duality of stigma and support of TfD mentioned earlier, is to ask why theatre should be classified at all? Every Burkinabè actor I spoke with, when asked about theatre and agency, emphasized the belief that all genres of theatre, if performed well, can and should carry the potential of creating change within an audience. The extent of this change might be debatable, but in a country in which artists consistently choose to write, produce, and perform politically charged theatre, an insistence that theatre has a voice and place in society serves as self-affirmation that the artists themselves are agents of change. This argument over what forms of theatre are seen as more legitimate stems from how Burkinabè theatre genres are labeled. TfD and theatre of sensitization texts were both originally developed in groups, necessitating the distinction from “théâtre de l’auteur,” or theatre written by an author. Authored theatre in Burkina is then distinguished from classical theatre, or theatre recognized by universities and the Académie Française as texts of merit. The last classification, because of France’s colonial history in West Africa, can be seen as the point of frustration for Burkinabè artists—that in classifying genre, Burkinabè art is consistently denigrated when held next to European art.

Over-defined or Under-defined: The Challenge of Shifting Definitions and Understanding

This conversation about whether all theatre should be simply labeled “theatre,” or whether distinctions are necessary, should be weighed next to how academics are considering definitions of performance with practical applications internationally. While professional

Burkinabè artists understand the nuances between the terms for TfD—Debate Theatre, Forum Theatre, and Theatre for Sensitization—in a global sense these distinctions are not always clear, as practitioners and scholars generate multiple terms and definitions for TfD as well as other similar forms of theatre. These many terms sometimes create a loss of specificity, no longer being applicable to the actual practical work created. At other times, the definitions scholars use are overly specific and exclude similar and relatable forms of work pursued around the world. For example, Kees Epskamp notes the socialist and Marxist connections to socially driven theatre such as TfD, and cites these genres beginning in the 1960s with names such as ‘popular theatre,’ ‘people’s theatre,’ and ‘activist theatre’ (9). The broader umbrella terms “participatory theatre” and “applied theatre,” which include TfD, also envelope other theatre practices that might necessitate audience participation or have specific goals, such as “Theatre in Education, Community Theatre and Forum Theatre” (Epskamp 10). Along with a mixture of capitalization, theatrical forms with agendas for social activism blend and simultaneously differentiate between practical approaches and audience demographics.

More recently, theatre scholars have moved to place these various forms, including TfD, under the heading of either applied drama or applied theatre.⁶ Helen Nicholson defines applied drama as “forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities, and societies” (2). In some respects, this terminology is useful in streamlining the varied theatrical traditions that employ theatre for a particular agenda. Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton define applied theater as an umbrella term, which includes Theatre in Education, Popular

⁶ There is a discrepancy between scholars in regards to using the term drama or theatre as drama includes text-based projects and theatre mandates that projects include production. Helen Nicholson prefers the more inclusive applied drama, while Prendergast and Saxton emphasize the use of the term applied theatre.

Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre for Health Education, Theatre for Development, Prison Theatre, Community-based Theatre, Museum Theatre and Reminiscence Theatre. They use the term “applied theatre” to describe theatre:

Most often played in spaces that are not usually defined as theatre buildings, with participants who may or may not be skilled in theatre arts and to audiences who have a vested interest in an issue taken up by the performance. (6)

Further distinctions made by Prendergast and Saxton include the lack of a formal script and the role of a facilitator, referenced as an outside presence in the discussion on TfD.

In practical terms, these definitions of applied theatre fail to represent how TfD is produced in Burkina Faso. First, although there are certainly amateur troupes, many of Burkina Faso’s TfD shows are first produced in the country’s mainstage theatres with formal scripts written and directed by a prominent playwright. These shows tour nationally and internationally and the scripts may be published, possibly under the auspices of one of the funding organizations, such as UNESCO. Nicholson rightly suggests that a “pure” form of applied drama does not exist, and addresses the flawed implication that theatre genres that do not fall into the category of “applied” do not carry an intention to benefit audiences or promote change. One question Prendergast and Saxton raise for both the role and genre-classifications of theatre stems from Marvin Carlson’s *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*: “the continuing point of debate in modern theatre theory has been over whether the theatre should be viewed primarily as an engaged social phenomenon or as a politically indifferent aesthetic artifact” (Carlson 454). In forcing these definitions, scholars and practitioners predicate that theatre plays a particular role in society. As with the term “art for

art's sake," which implies that theatre can be purely aesthetic, "applied theatre," in the context of Burkina Faso, strips away important layers of meaning that the term TfD carries, including the history of how this theatrical form developed within the country. The word "development" carries implications in regards to Burkina as a developing nation, and the practitioners working with grantors from development-focused NGOs to produce the work. The professional practitioners of these pieces see them as legitimate expressions of artistic merit that also intend to promote social change, which the previous definitions strip away by asserting a lack of formality in the genre.

Although 'applied theater' is useful in some respects, it implies a sense of universality or consistency, and there are significant ways in which the term does not always apply to African theatre. Collections on how applied theatre functions globally are useful in assessing the various ways that theatre can be applied to social change, but an African context creates a unique set of considerations compared with how theatre might be produced, for example, in Northern Ireland, Latin America, or Italy. Potential problems that the vagueness in terms creates can be seen in James Thompson's work. While Thompson's experience working with ATB in Burkina Faso gives useful background information on the company, his theoretical analysis obscures terminology. One example is Thompson's use of the term "intercultural performance" to describe ATB's use of Forum Theatre in Burkina Faso. Thompson expresses concerns over authenticity for using in Africa a form that originated in Brazil. Although authenticity is an important question in regards to intercultural performance, Forum Theatre is not specifically Brazilian in nature and was developed by Boal as a tool for oppressed populations. The term "intercultural performance" then seems to misrepresent TfD in Burkina Faso. Thompson also does not consider how the traditional practice of *kotéba* might have served as a predecessor to

the use of TfD and Forum Theatre in Burkina Faso. Jean-Pierre Guingané and Prosper Kompaoré have both argued for the traditional origins of work in TfD, invalidating Thompson's argument about a loss of cultural identity in the Burkinabè utilization of Boal's teachings. Although influenced by Boal as well as Freire, the work in TfD in Burkina Faso does not echo the concerns for assimilation and appropriation that the term "intercultural performance" evokes.

While intercultural performance may not be a primary concern for theatrical production in Burkina Faso, the varied approaches to TfD by different practitioners present a specifically Burkinabè theoretical lens for approaching a definition of this genre of theatre. Thompson also constructs an argument for the positioning of TfD in Burkina Faso using Joy Morrison's reference to Jean-Pierre Guingané's assertion that Forum Theatre has no place in Burkina Faso. While Guingané and Kompaoré are the most important Burkinabè TfD playwrights, methodologically they distinguish different platforms for their work. Kompaoré finds agency in the Forum Theatre model, while Guingané resists relinquishing the voice of the theatre company to dominant and resistant members of the community that might undermine the mission of social change in the play (Minoungou and Frère). The differences between Kompaoré and Guingané's ideologies illustrate some of the questions of agency in theatre—Who is the agent? How does the audience benefit? Do they have more agency in seeing these shows, or does the practitioner assert the agency? Thompson fails to contextualize Guingané's response, and falls into the same mis-definition of terms, mis-representing Guingané as an opponent of Theatre for Development. Although a Freirian-Boalian framework might establish meaning in Kompaoré's work, other frames, based in Guingané's practices (and other Burkinabè playwrights) will prove more useful in analyzing that work.

This example of Thompson's misclassification of terms applied to Burkina Faso shows why an international attempt at streamlining terms could be neocolonial in its effects. The terms theatre for development, theatre for sensitization, debate theatre, and forum theatre might have similarities, but all hold a particular meaning for Burkinabè artists and administrators, signifying structure, authorship, and content. While shifts and advancements in how we consider theatre and theatre nomenclature are important, by consolidating previously autonomous theatre forms into one category, do we give the conception and production of theatre in the West priority over how theatre is viewed in smaller, developing countries? This discussion may not have a right or wrong answer, but in being conscious of the history of colonialism and the current influence of globalization, without an open conversation and an understanding of why certain terms are employed, negating or replacing particular terms might result in unintended applications of power and subjugation.

Defining "Development" in Theatre for Development

In exploring what the term "Theatre for Development" describes in Burkina Faso, the other defining, yet often elusive, word is "development." My own initial interest in the relationship between artistic production and Western influence began during the UNESCO seminar, *Conflict Prevention and Resolution—Role of Local Cultural Actors and Information and Communication Technologies*, which took place during the 2005 FITMO (International Theatre and Puppet Festival of Ouagadougou). This festival and seminar first introduced me to Theatre for Development and the sometimes symbiotic, sometimes culturally commodifying relationship between this theatre form and the Western NGOs that fund it. Representatives and

delegates from the “Culture in the Neighborhood Network” from around Europe and French-speaking Africa discussed methodologies to protect important cultural traditions. Impassioned, the participants spoke about the continued effects of colonialism and globalization on cultural identities, and focused on ways in which artists could use different forms of communication to prevent a loss of identity.

One reason this seminar links directly to TfD is the significance of globalization for non-Western countries, and an inherent lack of understanding of African culture in the West. Since 2005, I have witnessed or taken part in numerous conversations in which Africans lambaste Western condemnations of their society, and the condescending tone when Westerners “educate” Africans on what needs to change, often without comprehending the origins or backgrounds of practices that they have labeled as “barbaric.” Africans have a right to complain. After suffering the effects of colonialism, the postcolonial⁷ tendency to treat Africans as infantile through educative models aimed at development is understandably infuriating.

⁷ The academic debate surrounding the term “postcolonial,” though informative, will not be directly engaged in this dissertation. Tejumola Olaniyan addresses the complications in historically, linguistically, and politically framing non-Western societies in Western terms in “‘On Post-Colonialism’: An Introduction” as part of a 1993 special edition to *Callaloo*: “Post-colonial” (either with the suffix *ism*, meaning the discursive practices occasioned by the formal end of the historical experience of colonialism in certain parts of the world; or *ity*, meaning the institutional circumstances-social relations, cultural, political and economic practices-of a formerly colonized space) has been variously accused of abridging or warping time (the whole history of Empire is its purview), and squashing space (a homogenization that obliterates the historical specificities of the experience of colonization by different societies, specificities that may make all the difference to the “how” and “extent” of their being “post-colonial”-e.g., the coe-valness of such pernicious forms of decolonization as “nominal independence” and, even worse, outright colonialism). The “post” is seen at best as a tactless, or at worst as a conservative, surrender to the illusory seductiveness of teleology, unjustified more so, given the global fact of what is really not a cessation of empire, but the consolidation of what Harry Magdoff calls “informal empires” (25), a phenomenon Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o forbiddingly describes as a “more dangerous cancer” (25) than imperialism itself. (Olaniyan 744)

The history of the approach to development thus poses both exciting and difficult opportunities for African artists who engage in producing Tfd. The shows demand both bravery in countering long-established cultural assumptions and sensitivity in communicating and discussing personal topics. This form of theatre serves as a tool for bridging the gaps that are created when Western philosophies intercept traditional African lifestyles. Tfd creates a space for an African voice in the development of society on African terms. More specifically, artists have spoken about incidences in which villagers refuse to listen to lectures on subjects like HIV because they feel they have heard it all before and are being overly moralized. However the same villagers, because Burkinabè generally enjoy theatre, will happily go to see a play based in the same subject and are open to discussion after the show. In the possibilities for social change, theatre may be one of the most powerful forms of communication, education, and development in postcolonial settings, the reaffirmation and voicing of cultural identity and cultural agency.

Trying to define the term “development” gives rise to several other questions that have the potential to seem tangential at first glance: What agency does theatre have in tackling social issues and how does art shift when social change is the main goal? What is the role and value of aesthetics in using theatre as the engine of a political agenda? In regards to development, several important issues arise: how is development defined and who defines it? When dominant cultural and political entities fund the development of a small country lacking global economic and political significance, is it “development” or “globalization?” In her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba views these sorts of questions as part of a larger challenge in pursuing postcolonial studies:

The problem is an important one for postcolonial theory, which, as we shall see, has been accused of being unable to maintain any distinction between questions of

representation, language and culture on the one hand, and material and economic realities on the other. This is a difficult issue because while there is the obvious need to interrelate the two ('culture', for example, is shaped by both representations and economics, and economic questions are not free of ideologies), there is also the need to maintain some distinction so that the specificity of each is not eroded. (34)

Loomba demonstrates the significance of separating the interrelated cultural, political, social, and economic realities that frame postcolonial studies, and more specifically in regards to my own research in Burkina Faso, the production of TfD. This creates an interesting challenge for grantors and theatre makers—aesthetically and ideologically speaking, is it possible to create a division between the financial support and the ideological conceptions of European benefactors?

In some respects, the argument can be made that yes, this distinction is possible in countries like Burkina Faso because of the inherent linkage between the political and the aesthetic running throughout African theatre, and more broadly, through African literature. Because art has historically been used as a political tool in Africa, Western ideological influence might have less subversive power and agency in countering a platform in which a strong African voice exists. We see the potential for failure of Western influence in *Culture and Development: The Popular Theatre Approach in Africa*, Penina Muhando Mlama's analysis of the presence of Western theatre in Africa. Mlama defines Western theatre in Africa as a contentious colonial presence and defines it as "art for art's sake:"

“Art for art’s sake” was designed to enhance capitalist structures. It was a deliberate effort to paralyze the ability of the arts to question injustice and to create awareness that could move people to fight against colonialism (14).

In highlighting the colonial links to theatrical practices, Mloma works to break the bonds to particular aesthetic values and also distinguishes politically motivated theatre like TfD as potentially more postcolonial and African in nature than neocolonial, agenda-less, “art for art’s sake” performances. The level of political consciousness running more generally throughout African literature also informs the structural considerations for TfD. Burkina Faso certainly attests to this trend, with examples of both music and contemporary dance carrying similar agenda-laden messages and non-development plays focusing on subjects such as dictatorship, colonialism, freedom of speech, and genocide. According to Patrick Chabal in *Power in Africa*, “perhaps the most ample, and best documented, account of the evolution of the legitimacy of the state in Africa is to be found in literature... Writers of fiction have been among the most lucid and critical analysts of the African political order” (Chabal 143). In this regard, theatre as a form of literature and TfD as a politically motivated form of theatre construct Africa as a supportive atmosphere for the proliferation of this form of art.

The political themes of TfD raise considerations for both aesthetics and project feasibility. Frequently TfD plays suffer artistically. This can happen when the plays are written by groups based in social activism rather than theatre or when the organization funding the production of a TfD play demands the domination of the message over the artistic integrity of the play, a sacrifice artists frequently make in order to satisfy the grantor. Jean-Pierre Guingané responded in regards to how NGOs assess projects for funding, that while the message of a TfD play might be a priority, theatre must never ostracize its audience or lose a sense of “poetry,

dreams, and humor” (MacNee in Chalaye 83). This very regard for artistic integrity, however, is exactly what separates professional troupes from younger, financially motivated troupes. Tfd texts might also depend on stock characters displaying tropes found to be condescending to viewers, and establishing a good vs. evil dichotomy that David Kerr refers to as “The Mr. Wise and Mr. Foolish Formula.” Other challenges in addition to aesthetics include the feasibility for artists working in postcolonial settings to find financially supportable plays on themes relevant to an audience’s community-base. As with any other play in Burkina Faso, without financial backing, the production may never be realized. Lisa MacNee in her chapter in Sylvie Challaye’s *Nouvelles dramaturgies d’Afrique noire francophone* elucidates concerns for self-censorship by Tfd practitioners resulting from the assessment process. Local and national governments, NGOs, audience language-demographics, and cultural considerations set limitations on Tfd. In the collection edited by Kamal Salhi, *African Theatre for Development: Art for self-determination*, Jane Plastow echoes the concerns for particular political limitations that Tfd practitioners experience:

We may wish to utilise theatre as a tool of empowerment, but all too often funding and organisation of projects has been in the hands of governments or development agencies whose agendas may be overtly oppressive or at least coercive and/or propaganda oriented (97).

Because of censorship and specific considerations stemming from not only the groups for which the plays are performed, but from governments, NGOs, and the playwrights themselves, limitations on the efficacy are created several times over for the production of Tfd.

The limitations resulting in self-censorship and aesthetic concerns for the shows extend from the complicated confrontation of the definition of an artistic genre that stems from a word arising from a socio-economic context:

The idea of "theater for development" is problematic, however, not because theater lacks the power to teach and transform, but because we have lost any broad consensus as to what constitutes development (Fair 179).

Jo Ellen Fair's critique of TfD takes a definitive stand on the question of theatre and agency, but then asks if this agency can be measurable as "development," which affects the application and definition of the term. The conflation of culture, identity, and society within this construction creates potential for an ideological dilemma. Fair supports that theatre has agency—however, agency as quantifiable and measurable as development depends on how development is being defined.

The question of how to define development is obviously multi-faceted. Another problem arises however, when the definition is almost completely eradicated. If there is no evaluation process, can we determine that "development" occurred? In Fraternité's experience, grantors have not supplied money to the actors or to their own staff to return to targeted communities to review how the message was incorporated. Actors cite this as an oversight in the process, emphasize that this would be particularly useful information, most of all to the organizations funding the shows. Actor and director Nongodo Ouédraogo used the metaphor, "usually if you ask someone to build you a house, you're going to want to go and check if the house was constructed the way you had hoped," (N. Ouédraogo). Some post-show evaluations have identified potentially positive examples of how theatre directly influenced development. For

example in her dissertation, Joy F. Morrison reported that condom sales increased in the villages after ATB toured an AIDS-based play and Bobo-Diaolosso based artistic director Charles Guidem of the Troupe Bereda noted that in a village that previously refused to recognize the importance of tests for HIV, over a hundred spectators (half of the audience) came to be tested at the clinic on the day the troupe had indicated during the show (Guidem). Largely, however, troupes have no way of knowing how a village may or may not have internalized the message of the play. While artists point out that even motivating reflection in people might help promote change in future generations, the vast differences between these results play into how we define the “development” in theatre for development.

These considerations elucidate the significance of these definitions in regards to TfD studies in that the term “development” initially seems benign, if not beneficial. While some scholars like Fair site the danger in miscommunicating what development might mean, Mlama goes further to deconstruct how “development” might actually be harmful: “Development, as it has been applied to Africa, Asia and Latin America, is actually another name for capitalism” (11). Mlama distinguishes between capitalist and non-capitalist culture. Where she sees non-capitalist (indigenous) culture as frequently dismissed, capitalist culture creates value because of monetary exchange, for example, tickets for sporting events or performances and the selling of crafts (17). This invokes questions for TfD in that development might be considered non-capitalist cultural advancement, while the production of theatre when funded by Western NGOs with expectations on a measurable outcome becomes capitalist culture, particularly if the goals of the NGO are to create a country with an atmosphere more equipped to compete in a capitalist global market. Ouédraogo continued his house metaphor with, “if you are busy building too many houses, maybe you won’t have the chance to see the quality of how they are all

constructed,” (N. Ouédraogo). When NGOs take on numerous projects with numerous intentions, is it ever possible to know the actual results of these projects, even when they hold the best intentions. In some respects, this process could be viewed as “development” and in others it could more aptly be defined as globalization.

The larger ideological goals of the NGO host countries influence the ways in which development might be encouraged in these countries. In *Theatre and Empowerment : Community Drama on the World Stage*, Richard Boon and Jane Plastow explore how this dynamic affects the generation of specific artistic projects:

Here arts practitioners concerned with notions of rights and empowerment can quickly find themselves in awkward, and at times confrontational, debate with both funders...and with political states. In the experience of many who have been working in this area over the past twenty years or so, what funders usually want is issue-based theatre (preferably concerned with an issue of their choice) which is contained within closely defined parameters (5).

Boon and Plastow push this discussion forward by defining this process as “domestication” (7). Funders hope to find projects that meet their ideological standards and promote a message with which they are comfortable. Boon and Plastow point out that at times, this means that final productions might be more sanitized than actually beneficial to a community.

Power over the assessment of projects’ success in promoting development inevitably also assesses the cultural values of a community, in monitoring or encouraging which cultural values are presented and esteemed, and which values might be seen as roadblocks to development. The danger of being insensitive to cultural values while also intending to promote important social

change might indicate the vague definitions for terms like “culture” and “development.” Mlama criticizes the Western use of the term culture as a vague “catch-all” and defines culture as:

A people’s way of life, a way of perceiving and doing things that identifies one people as distinct from another...(culture) derives its qualities from the conditions—economic, political and social—existing in a society...(that) determine the regeneration of these conditions (10).

Mlama’s understanding of the Western “catch-all” use of culture resonates with Freire’s concerns about pedagogy and begins to unpack the socio-cultural-economic links being made between the term development and how it is employed regarding theatre. Unless a definition of culture stems directly from a people, the oppressor teaches the oppressed their own cultural identity.

The shifting of cultural values points to other difficulties in assessing the success of these projects. While NGOs and practitioners alike might be aware of the delicate and slow-moving nature of these initiatives, there will always be a goal to see “results.” Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton in *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice* emphasize the importance of question formulation in preparing projects for funding and that “development” mandates a certain level of tangible change:

When external agencies are involved in the evaluative process, their interests will generally be around questions of efficiency and effectiveness. The financial commitment of an outside agency dictates that the measures of success will be primarily attached to the outcomes of the original purposes of the project. (23)

For projects like TfD, Prendergast and Saxton show that in order to work with the outcome-based expectations of funding organizations, projects might benefit from initial goals to generate questions on a topic of social change within a community, rather than outright behavioral change.

All of these considerations are significant in terms of how we understand both the term “development” and the term “*theatre* for development.” Both terms take on positive goals and connotations, but as is typical with initiatives spanning different cultures, languages, and financial realities, even optimistic projects can threaten to carry undesired and even negative consequences and outcomes. However, these are also the intersections of theatrical production, social change, and power influencing theatre in Burkina Faso that can further an understanding of challenges posed to practitioners, communities, and grantors.

The history behind both the international movements creating and necessitating TfD, and the origins of TfD in Burkina Faso, concretizes the understanding of how TfD is currently produced today in Burkina. While Burkinabè artists understand the nuances of terminology in their country, international and local considerations of this terminology bring new light to both the practical applications and implications of performance, as also to the neocolonialism underlying most activities in postcolonial countries. In the subsequent chapters we will see how the term development relates to the ways in which troupes, audiences, texts, and grantors use TfD as a tool for communication, when this communication succeeds or fails, and how the climate of this country and other countries with influence in Burkina Faso affect theatrical production.

Chapter 2

A Catch-22: The Relationship Between Theatre Education, Sponsorship, and Theatrical Production

The continued struggle of positioning theatre as a valued measure of cultural expression combined with the complicity of Western intervention in the production of theatre in Burkina Faso affects both the message of the plays and the aesthetic quality of the productions. This chapter takes an historical and theoretical approach to education in theatre, focusing on the value of theatre in terms of training, education, and audience reception. In the second part of the chapter, I address how Western intervention subsequently shapes the educational message of plays through how and which plays receive funding. I analyze the development plays *Le Palu* and *L'Ecole de la terreur* as lenses to better exemplify how some of the problems with Tfd relate to theatre education. When the message in Tfd dominates over production value, that dynamic hinders audience reception and nullifies the value of the performance. In order to examine the intersections between Western influence and Burkinabè theatrical production, I investigate the misappropriation of Western culture in a Burkinabè context and what happens when the aesthetic value of Theatre for Development is sacrificed.

An estimated ninety-five percent of the funding for theatre in Burkina Faso comes from foreign organizations (Zongo, “Personal Interview”) but what happens when the “theatre” in Theatre for Development is an afterthought? This chapter investigates how poor theatre education affects not only practitioners, but seriously undermines the well-intended efforts of the individuals that represent sponsoring organizations that financially support and evaluate Tfd. As will be shown, a lack of familiarity with the practice of theatre as an art form creates negative outcomes for the performers and the audience members. What are the risks for the quality of the

message and artistry of the play when the *why* of the play outweighs the *how*? When failing to consider the production value of theatre training and aesthetics, despite financial backing, a lower quality product threatens the successful transmission of the message. The chapter builds on the history of theatre and education, Western influence, and the struggle for professionalization in order to analyze the reception of message-driven plays in Burkina Faso.

Theatre Education and Training

The following portion of the chapter will explore the placement of theatre education within Burkina Faso, beginning with the exposure of primary school-aged children to theatre, opportunities for high school students and young adults in theatre, to ways in which the University of Ouagadougou incorporates formalized theatre education into higher education. When asked about their first exposure to theatre, the practitioners I interviewed frequently cited grade school; examples included performing in small sketches or plays that included classical French plays in their lesson plans. I use the educational experiences of Professor Hamadou Mandé, Ph.D., founder of the troupe Théâtre Corneille de Tenkodogo to explore the ways in which theatre is and is not incorporated into education and the problems theatre faces as a discipline. Generally, for professionals in the field, this interest continues into high school either through exposure to touring plays or festivals, some of which showcased the work of young artists, or participation in scholastic or youth-based theatre troupes. After high school, many of these artists joined training-based theatre troupes, entered professional theatre schools, and/or enrolled in the University to continue their training and theatre education.

Theatre Education in Primary Schools

Theatre appreciation depends on exposure to theatre in Burkina Faso; this means either exposure in early education or to the free performances of touring Tfd shows, as the vast majority of Burkinabè struggle with poverty and cannot afford to pay to see performances. Exposure to theatre through education depends largely on an instructor's interest in theatre, rather than on a school's curriculum.⁸ As I will discuss below, artists and educators struggle to promote the value of arts education in schools.

Hamadou Mandé's experience with theatre began like many theatre artists, with a teacher who expressed a passion for the performing arts and wanted to share that passion with his students. In Mandé's case, his teacher loved theatre and soccer, "If we weren't very good on the soccer field...we at least had to be a good actor. Or pretend to be good at both of those things. Or at least one of those things, but we couldn't decide to not participate at all" (Mandé, "Personal Interview"). Mandé found that while he was not a very talented soccer player, he enjoyed performing. He, as many other professional theatre makers, was encouraged by his teacher to write and perform sketches with his classmates.

Currently, exposure to arts education in schools continues to be a lucky coincidence for children who find themselves enrolled with a teacher that happens to be personally interested in the arts. Alain Hema, artistic director and founder of Compagnie Théâtre Éclair, one of the five troupes that form the theatre association La Fédération du Cartel, and the only company (to my

⁸ Although I will not attempt a detailed cross-cultural study of the positioning of theatre education, I do find similarities between the secondary status of arts education in Burkina Faso to other countries in which I have lived. However, I do want to emphasize the particularity of Burkina Faso and the heightened difficulties in regards to theatre education and appreciation that, in my experience, result from the greater cultural stigmatization of theatre and the increased poverty in the country. Some of this stigmatization is more thoroughly addressed in the chapters on women in performance.

knowledge) that focuses on producing Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), cites several difficulties for theatre education for young people. Hema views the complete lack of exposure of children to art as resulting from the lack of teacher familiarity and education in art and that art is often relegated to afterschool activities. Hema supports the formal education of teachers in arts education to ensure that schools formally expose children to art and hopes that this training becomes mandatory for teaching certification. According to Hema, “a teacher in a class must know the color wheel, know scales and rhythms, basic movements in dance, and know how to talk about characters in theatre” (Hema 16). For Hema, if teachers receive a basic arts education, they can employ that education within other disciplines including math and science in order to make those subjects accessible while also teaching the value of the arts. In fostering an arts education in teachers, children can learn an appreciation of the arts at a young age.

The Ministries of Education⁹ share the goal of the artistic community to increase the arts education of teachers in order to improve the arts education available to children. In 2006 with support from UNESCO-Bamako, the Ministry of Secondary Education consulted on a project to garner support for educating teachers in fine and performing arts. The project, titled “Educating Teachers for a Better Arts Education” emphasized many arguments that support arts education, including how the arts help in developing personal expression, cooperation, basic motor skills, and creativity, but also how arts education can benefit at-risk children. However, the project posed instructive questions regarding implementation, such as: “Which teachers to form? And in which domains? What do we expect from them? What materials and financial support will be needed?” (8). The recommendations of the project for arts training included a range of fine, graphic, and performing arts, and many of the examples of what might be taught were culturally

⁹ The following proposal included support from the Ministry of Primary Education, the Ministry of Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Tourism

oriented (story-telling, batiks, a traditional dance called the warba, traditional songs and instruments) or modes of sensitization (plays, cartoons, and songs about HIV prevention, education, excision, etc.). The project proposed to train 260 teachers from various levels of primary and secondary education, ideally during the summer after school was no longer in session.

This proposed strategic plan to implement arts education in the thirteen regions of Burkina Faso reflects two of the major hindrances to arts education in Burkina Faso: available funds and a lack of societal appreciation. Although proposals and support have been generated by various Ministries, including those of primary and secondary education and that of arts, culture and tourism, these proposals either seem to be in the planning stages or have been unsuccessful due to the critical reactions of both the cultural and educational domains. Conversations continue on the necessity and absence of arts education for children.

As of 2010, in addition to Hema's analyses, artists and teachers continue to discuss how arts education might be advanced and valued in Burkinabè culture. For example, during Théâtre Corneille de Tenkodogo's tenth anniversary festival themed "Artistic Education and the Right of the Child," artistic director Hamadou Mandé organized a conference hosting Alceney Seydou Barry and Abdoulaye Ouattara, two former high school teachers invested in theatre education, who currently work as academic high school inspectors, Barry in Journalism and Ouattara in French Language Arts.¹⁰ The conference was titled "Art in Schools in Burkina Faso" and "The Contribution of Arts Education in Promoting the Right of the Child." Barry shared research that supports that theatre education in Francophone West Africa evolved out of schools, citing the William Ponty School in Senegal and Bingerville in Côte d'Ivoire as early examples, leading to

¹⁰ Inspectors work as controllers in schools, observing teachers in classrooms within a certain region or municipality and then grading the pedagogic performance of the teacher.

the creation of scholastic-based theatre troupes, which then led to the organization of theatre festivals. Barry emphasized that future teachers must in their own education receive arts training in order to educate their students in the arts. He expressed that in his personal opinion, without this arts education, the country cannot hope to nurture the necessary arts appreciation within the Burkinabè public to sustain and grow the future of the arts in the country. A few of the solutions Barry proposed to the absence or limited access of arts education to children include that schools might offer after-school clubs for extracurricular activities, taking after the model of Côte d'Ivoire, that professional and scholastic-troupes should look for opportunities to incorporate younger children into training sessions and plays, and that scholastic festivals provide opportunities to attract private organizations to invest in arts for young audiences.

Ouattara focused on the ever pertinent document "The Right of the Child,"¹¹ the stipulations that children must have access to arts and culture included in the document, Burkina Faso's inclusion in the list of country's having signed the document, and the continued lack of governmental support for arts for young audiences. Although the government never allocates more than 1% of the national budget towards the arts (Boundaoné 21), both the country's positioning as one of the poorest countries in the world and its, perhaps, neglectful approach to arts as a viable mode of development will be further addressed in this chapter. One must only

¹¹ On November 20, 1989, the Convention on the Right of the Child was "adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession" by the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The CRC emphasizes an important distinction in defining childhood. A person under eighteen is no longer solely included in demographics such as nationality, religion, and ethnicity, but is placed into a distinct yet liminal, non-subservient category bearing unique demands in liberties and protection. The UN determined that in vowing to protect the rights of individuals worldwide, children fall into a separate category, equally deserving of protection. The United States and Somalia (then in the midst of a Civil War) are the only two countries worldwide yet to ratify the document. (See Convention on the Rights of the Child. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 29 April 2008 <<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>>)

visit an outside bar in Ouagadougou and count the number of children under twelve years of age peddling goods to the patrons to understand that the Burkinabè government not only overlooks the stipulation of access to arts and culture, but wholly ignores the contents of the Right of the Child.

Both interventions point to a larger problem posed to the proliferation of this arts education. Ouattara emphasizes that children deserve arts education, that arts can be developmentally beneficial to young people, and that the government is in fact obligated to provide access to arts and culture. Barry provides feasible solutions to improving arts education in public schools. However, currently, schools and the government place too much reliance on the personal interest and responsibility of educators in providing arts education to children. Without an educational system for future teachers that incorporates the arts, a child's access to art relies on luck. Unfortunately, in the assertions of individuals assessing the field like Barry and Hema, building arts-appreciative audiences often relies on early exposure to the arts. This cycle, difficult to break, underlies most of the problems facing theatre education, and theatrical production in general, in Burkina Faso. Without access to arts education, future educators cannot themselves teach arts to their students and potentially supportive audiences lack the necessary exposure to instill an appreciation in the arts, that could, for instance, help to support the field internally and eliminate (or at least decrease) the reliance on foreign financial support.

The Position of Theatre for Young Audiences in Burkina Faso

Outside of formally organized arts education within schools, many of the centers (CDC, EDIT, ATB, INAFAC, ECG and CCF)¹² offer arts training for children. Several arts festivals specifically consider child audiences. Many of these local festivals evolved out of the now discontinued, government-organized Festival national de theatre scolaire, the predecessor of the also discontinued Festival national des arts scolaires.¹³ These local, now private, festivals include the CAPO (Concours Artistique du Primaire de Ouagadougou) and the CASEO (Concours Artistique des Scolaires et des Etudiants de Ouagadougou) hosted by ATB—competitions for young performing groups, the now discontinued FAR (Festival des arts de la rue) and Rendez-vous chez nous, two separate and free-admission street-performance festivals, Le Cartel’s Festival International de Théâtre Jeune Public, a festival for young audiences, TRAJET (Tremplin Artistique de la Jeunesse Francophone à Tenkodogo) a youth festival in Tenkodogo, FESTAC (Festival des arts et de la culture), a festival in Bobo-Dialouso that attracts young troupes from the surrounding villages, the Fitini Show organized by Bobo-Dioulasso-based L'Association Dénî Dèmè, or “Help the children” in Jula, and the Bambino Show organized in Ouagadougou by Youdé Bénito Productions. Although regular access to plays specifically geared towards children is more rare, Institut Français du Burkina (CCF) schedules a monthly variety of artistic opportunities for children through its “Ziri Ziri” program.

The major difference, and to some extent downfall, of these opportunities is that unlike receiving arts education within school curricula, much of the access to the above-mentioned training and performances (with the exception of some of the festival programming) is only

¹² Centre de Développement Choréographique La Termitière, École Internationale de Danse Irène Tassembédo, Atelier Théâtre Burkinabè, Institut National de Formation Artistique et Culturelle, Espace Culturelle Gambidi, Institut Français

¹³ To my understanding, these festivals existed between the 1960s and the 1980s.

available to bourgeois families because of the cost.¹⁴ The absence of arts education limits most Burkinabè children's potential performance exposure to the free-admission touring Tfd shows. This places pressure on Tfd in terms of quality of performance: because of limited accessibility to the arts, the viability of theatre depends on Tfd to garner audience appreciation. Depending on the level of training of the Tfd troupes and actors, the resulting quality of a performance can either enhance or threaten support for the performing arts. As will be addressed in this chapter, the neglect of NGOs and other funding organizations to consider the level of theatre training of the troupes hired to perform places the professionalization and appreciation of the performing arts in peril.

Theatre Education for High School Students and Young Professionals

Once children enter high school, students in urban areas might have access to participate in scholastic troupes. Mandé had this experience as a high school student in Bobo-Dioulasso. Following his own educational experience, while he worked as a high school teacher, Mandé created a valuable outlet for children in Tenkodogo when he founded his troupe, Théâtre Corneille de Tenkodogo. Théâtre Corneille, which celebrated its ten-year anniversary in 2010, emphasizes the importance of learning about theatre while balancing schoolwork. Rehearsal periods include study breaks and tutoring to encourage parents to value their children's participation and to help the young performers value their studies and balance their

¹⁴ Although occasionally access to theatre is free, this is limited to urban areas, typically Ouagadougou and is also limited to those people who have the free time to see a performance, the knowledge that a performance is taking place, and available transport to arrive at the performance. One of my favorite experiences of a free performance was a French clowning marching band, performing outside of the Institut Français (CCF) during Festival des arts de la rue in 2011 that attracted the attention of several cleaning women on their way to work. The women, clearly surprised and entertained by the performance, paused several times to observe the show, while walking in the opposite direction.

commitments. In Mandé's early exposure to theatre and his own role as a teacher, we can see ways in which theatre education encourages an interest in school, but also, that this education for many students, relies directly on the interest of the teacher.

For many artists, the transition into formal theatre training begins during or just after high school, frequently through an education-based theatre troupe. These troupes range in professionalism, from an after-school hobby, which may or may not offer the opportunity to tour with a show, to training in preparation for a professional career. Some of the Ouagadougou-based troupes, which focus more on training future professionals, include ATB, Théâtre de la Fraternité, Théâtre de l'Espoir, and Eclats de Sosaf, among many others. ATB and Théâtre de la Fraternité specifically utilize TfD as a training platform for young artists. TfD offers financially supported opportunities to produce theatre in which young artists learn performance techniques and receive experience in acting in front of large audiences. However, though these groups might not oblige actors to pay for the training, actors frequently go undercompensated. In the case that the performers do receive adequate compensation, interviewed performers observed that these troupes tended to irresponsibly mass-produce TfD to the detriment of the performances. The use of TfD as a mode of education for young actors, though beneficial, reiterates the complicated existence of the theatre form due to educational and financial realities in the country.

In addition to these troupes, formal degree-granting theatre schools also exist or have existed in the country. The most significant of these schools, UNEDO, or Union Nationale des Ensembles Dramatiques de Ouagadougou, trained some of the country's most important performing artists between 1990-2000. Some of the artists include Salia Sanou and Seydou Boro, founders and artistic directors of the country's first contemporary dance troupe, Salia nĩ

Seydou, and the dance performance and training center, CDC (Centre de Développement Chorégraphique La Termitière), Ildevert Meda, cofounder of CITO (Le Carrefour International de Théâtre de Ouagadougou) and artistic director of Théâtre Evasion, Etienne Minoungou, artistic director of Compagnie Falinga and founder of the most successful, private festival in the country, Les Récréâtrales (Résidences panafricaines d'écriture, de création et de recherche théâtrales), University professor Hamadou Mandé, founder of Théâtre Corneille, and current director of FITMO/FAB, and Alain Hema, artistic director of Compagnie Théâtre Éclair and founder of Cartel's Festival International de Théâtre Jeune Public.¹⁵ UNEDO, which took some of its direction from then director of the then Centre Culturel Français (CCF, now Institut Français du Burkina) Guy Maurette, first existed as an association with six founding members in order to help to form a supportive artistic community and draw resources like lighting equipment. The founding members included ATB, Théâtre de la Fraternité, GPT (Groupe de promotion théâtrale) under the direction of Jean Gustave Sawadogo, EARTB (Ensemble Artistique de la Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina), La Troupe Bonogo de la Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture de Ouagadougou under the direction of Jean Ouédraogo (which included Blandine Yaméogo and Salia Sanou as members), and EAGMO (Ensemble Artistique du Génie Militaire de Ouagadougou). The association currently still exists due to legal stipulations¹⁶ and although its activities have ceased, UNEDO helped to spawn the current theatre school CFRAV, founded in 2003, and the still occurring festival FITMO/FAB, which began in 1995. According to Hamadou Mandé, other troupes that have come into existence since the dissolution of

¹⁵ Meda, Minoungou, and Hema are also three of the four founding members of La Fédération du Cartel.

¹⁶ Due to differing interests, ATB left UNEDO and currently the only member of UNEDO to still exist is Théâtre de la Fraternité.

UNEDO are once again interested in such an association, and thus UNEDO may be reborn in the coming years (Mandé, “Personal Interview”).

CFRAV, Centre de Formation et de Recherche en Arts Vivants, in my estimation currently the most successful theatre training school in the country, trained over two hundred artists from sixteen African countries between 2003 and 2009 (gambidi.org). In 2009, the school made the transition from offering weeks-long subject specific seminars to becoming a three-year intensive, degree-granting program. The first class of six students (originally twelve) representing three different countries, graduated in 2011, receiving their diplomas in 2012, with the second promotion of students scheduled to graduate in 2013. Overseen by pedagogical director, Luca Fusi, though recruitment and financial support pose continual problems, the school continues to recruit educators from around Africa and Europe (“Africa Label Group” 18).

While many of the country’s most important leading actors move through these training-based troupes and schools, others have found their performance careers halted at this stage of professionalization. Though some might abandon theatre due to a lack of talent or financial resources, frequently other factors are also at work given the cultural context of the country. Parental reactions and familial responsibilities, particularly for women as will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five, means frequently artists either battle for societal acceptance or succumb to the criticism and abandon a professional career as an artist. Another issue for hopeful performers in the small African country is language acquisition. For many Burkinabè, French, the official language of the country, might be their second if not third or fourth language. As expressed by Professor Jean-Pierre Guingané, a lack of fluency in French led to more than the end of an artistic career for some hopeful performers:

Unfortunately, we need to train actors in the official national language. This means we lose many of our students....(For example, if a student) was dismissed from high school in their fourth year (generally around 14-15 years old) simply because he didn't understand French, he comes here and we say "It's in French." You see, we've already traumatized him...Some (students) have a sufficient level of French to learn to perform but unfortunately, often they want interpreters and everything has to be explained...Frequently they do not obtain the level of French which they need in order to perform. (Guingané "Les Conditions de la Création")

Demoralization due to an individual's level of language acquisition is unfortunately a reality of living in a previously colonized country. Although some troupes aim to perform in native languages, because much of the available funding for theatre comes from foreign organizations, many of the projects must be first written in a language familiar to the grantor for assessment purposes, generally French or English.¹⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, this funneling affect on theatrical production endangers artistic creation in Burkina Faso because of the lack of available financial support. Also discussed in the previous chapter, the reliance on French (and dominant ethnic languages) disenfranchises various audience demographics. As further seen in Guingané's example, this academic pressure for acquisition of a colonial language placed on aspiring Burkinabè actors, (nonexistent in countries in which people speak the same native language) hinders the advancement of the discipline by again, limiting participation.

¹⁷ Guingané frequently shared before his death that after his retirement, he wished to retire to his village, Garango, and cultivate peanuts. Peanuts are a crop stereotypically related to the Bisa, Guingané's ethnic group. When I talked about this further with Harouna Gouem, a recent graduate of the CFRAV, he shared that Guingané's real cultivation goal after retiring to Garango was to found the first professional Bisa-speaking theatre troupe.

Lack of language, lack of funds, and lack of support are only a few of the threats to formalized theatre training. As investigated in the following section on theatre in higher education, frequently the problems afflicting artists who wish to advance the professionalization of their field are frustratingly bureaucratic. Unfortunately, the bureaucracy in the University system also affects theatre training schools through the placement of theatre education in society: as we shall see, many problems face artists in regards to receiving a degree and what that degree means in terms of finding work and recognition in the field.

Theatre Education in the University System

In order to further contextualize theatre education in Burkina Faso, I would like to investigate the recognition of theatre as a formal discipline at the University level in a broader African context. Some problems that afflict this formal recognition at the University of Ouagadougou are similar to those felt internationally by theatre departments, others are more symptomatic of the postcolonial moment in which African Universities exist, and others are more specific still to the current climate and realities of both the University system and theatre community in Burkina Faso. In this section, I will investigate the history of theatre departments in Africa, the history and structure of the theatre department(s) in Ouagadougou, and the current, often bureaucratic, problems facing the department today. The following example assists in framing some of the more common conditions and considerations of African university theatre departments, such as the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, which I will use as a lens in analyzing the development of the arts department (AGAC) at the University of Ouagadougou.

University of Ibadan, Nigeria—A Struggle with Neocolonialism

On October 27, 1978, Professor and Head of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, J. Adeyinka Adedeji gave an inaugural lecture titled “The Theatre in an African University: Appearance and Reality” in which he presented himself as “the first African to be thus privileged to give an inaugural on behalf of a discipline which is widely misrepresented and grossly misunderstood” (1). In his address, he aims to justify, as well as dissect, the positioning of theatre as an academic discipline and one worthy of continued education:

Ours is a discipline which combines learning with performance or reinforces learning by doing and by its scope and method of evaluation, the university system has been challenged to contain a discipline which is both academic and technical but whose intellectual base is the fountain where knowledge, concept and thought are synthesized for the edification of man and the development of society. The theatre has come a long way—from the shrine of ritual man to the ivory tower of academic man has been a tedious journey (3).

Adedeji in his opening discourse raises many of the same problems posed to theatre education outside of an African context, but pertinently addresses the division between theatre practice and theatre research. In giving an historical account of the formalization of theatre in higher education stemming from American universities and influencing British and therefore African universities, he laments that in the original plans for the construction of the University of Ibadan, the inclusion of an open air theatre never came to fruition. The 1948 opening of the university, under the surveillance of British influence, originally invested in but finally opposed, the

inclusion of theatre arts.¹⁸ He uses these examples to highlight the polarization of the place of theatre within the African university. It would be fifteen years after the opening of the University of Ibadan, through a process of several developments that the School of Drama would open in 1963 through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation of New York (10).

While it stood as one of the first official academic theatre departments as of 1970,¹⁹ Adedeji critiques both its roots in “colonial heritage” and neocolonial generosity and the politics of its initial mismanagement (11).

In our naivety we indiscriminately embrace the products of foreign cultures and allow genocidal acts to be perpetrated on our own. It is high time we began to plan for modernization using our culture as the basis of orientation. A realistic approach to the development of culture as a dynamic phenomenon will eliminate the basis of our current societal problems (16-17).

I raise the example of the University of Ibadan and Adedeji’s support and fears for theatre in Africa because of Ibadan’s significance to African theatre history dating back to the 1590s through Yoruba theatre²⁰ (Tejumola, “African Literature” 354) and because of the shared sense of struggle and placement of theatre within the University of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. While Adedeji notes the difficulties in placing theatre in higher education in Ibadan, the

¹⁸ It was not until 1957, and Adedeji cites the influence of British-implants and the professors Randall Hogarth and Geoffrey Axworthy, that theatre began to gain formal recognition at the University level through the construction of the Arts Theatre and formation of the Arts Theatre Production Group and University College Dramatic Society (8).

¹⁹ Please also see Bakary Traoré’s *The Black African Theatre and its Social Functions*, Yemi Ogunbiyi’s *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, Robert W. July’s *An African Voice* and the volume *African Theatre: Histories 1850 – 1950*

²⁰ “Yoruba traditional theatre emerged from three developmental phases, ritual, festival, and theatre” (Obunbiyi 5). This development led to the creation of hundreds of modern Yoruba Traveling theatre troupes. For more on Yoruba traditional theatre and Yoruba traveling theatre, see *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*.

University of Ouagadougou has offered practical arts training for less than a decade and has no theatre or performance space. The lack of organization and the lack of theatre appreciation at the University of Ouagadougou continue to pose problems to establishing theatre in higher education in Burkina Faso.

University of Ouagadougou—The development of FLASH/ UFR-LAC, Arts and Communication, and AGAC

Initiating theatre education into the schools and the University as well as the process of professionalizing theatre has had similar organizational and colonial hurdles in Burkina Faso as shown in this Nigerian example. Although many interviewed practitioners cited their seminary or elementary educations for their initiations into theatre, Jean-Pierre Guingané cites one priest in particular, Father Feder, and his work at two different seminaries, Pabré and Kossoghin, for influencing several of the country's most important practitioners, musicians and professors alike beginning in the 1960s. At this time, the seminaries were the only locations in the country which had constructed theatres and Professor Guingané went as far to say that between 1965 and 1975, the seminaries were better known for the artists they formed than the priests ("Situation de l'enseignement du théâtre" 2). This observation of Guingané's relates to the information presented in Chapter One and the origination of theatre in Burkina Faso (and elsewhere in Africa) as well as to the exposure of youth to theatre through schools. Although the development of theatre in Burkina Faso can be attributed to various sources, the colonial influence of French culture and the presence of French educators and missionaries certainly contributed to the incorporation of theatre into Burkinabè culture. Through this academic influence, the period of the 1960s through the 1980s saw the creation of scholastically based

theatre troupes, some of which would later lead to the development of some of the country's first and most influential professional theatre troupes. As discussed in the first chapter, these troupes include Jean-Pierre Guingané's Théâtre de la Fraternité in 1975, Prosper Kompaoré's Atelier Théâtre Burkinabè in 1978 and to some extent, Amadou Bourou's Compagnie Feeren in 1990 ("Situation de l'enseignement du théâtre" 1).

Jean-Pierre Guingané and Prosper Kompaoré, the two founders of professional theatre in the country, also happen to be two of the leading academics in the field, both having completed their doctorates in France. While Kompaoré teaches theatre as literature, Guingané during his lifetime worked to incorporate practical arts training into the university curriculum. This restructuring of higher education to include formal arts education began in 2000. After Guingané left his post as the Doyen or Dean of FLASHS (Faculté de Lettres, des Arts, des Sciences Humaines et Sociales or School of Letters and Sciences: Art and Human and Social Sciences), the school was divided in two: UFR/LAC (Unité de Formation et de Recherche en Lettres, Arts et Communication or School of Letters in Arts and Communication) and UFR/SH (Sciences Humaines or Human Sciences). UFR/LAC currently includes several different departments: English Studies, German Studies, Linguistics, Communication and Journalism, AGAC (Arts, Gestion, et Administration Culturelles, or Arts and Arts Administration), and Lettres Modernes (Modern Letters). Lettres Modernes includes the following options in the third year for a Licence diploma: Semiotics, Grammar, Performing Arts, Black African Aesthetics and Literature, and African Oral Literature. Originally after the division of FLASHS, UFR-LAC included the department of Arts and Communication until art was eliminated and the department became Communications and Journalism. This served as the impetus for Guingané to create the AGAC department when he returned in 2002. The AGAC department includes three different

tracks—Dramatic Arts, Fine Arts, and Cultural Administration. The major difference between the AGAC department formerly headed by Guingané and now under the direction of Privat Roch Tapsoba, and the Performing Arts track in UFR/LAC under the direction of Prosper Kompaoré, is the distinction between a practical degree (AGAC) and a research-based degree (Performing Arts).²¹

Although degree-granting departments exist for both theatre research and for performance, many obstacles stand in the way of students in terms of completing those degrees and also having access to valuable resources. I taught the first two classes of students enrolled in the dramatic arts and fine arts promotions between 2005 and 2006 and witnessed and experienced many of the disheartening realities for both students and professors. Bureaucracy within the University and the frequent student strikes halt much of the activity and hinder the progression of each academic year, the University as of yet has not yet created a system of notation for arts-based theses, and Professor Guingané's sudden death left the department without a sense of direction. Many of the fine and performing arts students years later have yet to receive their degrees, some without a concrete understanding of what will be necessary in order to complete those degrees. Though professionally, many of these students continue their practical careers without their degrees, the psychological drain of dedicating years to pursuing a

²¹ The structure of how the university grants diplomas is currently shifting from an LMD System, offering a DEUG after two years (Diplôme d'Études Universitaires Générales or General University Studies Diploma), a Licence after three years, followed by a Maîtrise a DEA (Diplôme d'Études Appliquées or Applied Studies Diploma), followed by a Doctorate to offering a Licence, Masters and then Doctorate. In the French system, a Licence granted after three years, would be equivalent to an American Bachelor's degree. A student may earn a Licence degree in AGAC after first pursuing another discipline within UFR/LAC for two years and then completing an additional two years in AGAC. The student then has the option of continuing on for a Masters and Doctorate. Students in Dramatic and Fine Arts enter directly into that four-year program before being granted a Maîtrise degree or, as of now, a Masters degree.

degree only to have a bureaucratic process stand in the way of completion leaves many of these students disenchanted with the University system.

Some of the frustrations seen within the University of Ouagadougou stem from the lack of theatre education and theatre appreciation within the country. An anecdote of Guingané's demonstrates how the absence of theatre education creates a rupture in University-level assessment of artistic ability, which is in turn detrimental to students enrolled in AGAC:

If I want to teach students to play the djembé, I hire a good percussionist to train them and when it's time to pay (the instructor), they (the University) say "Yes but we're a University, where's his doctorate? How can you expect us to pay someone without a diploma?" And that's our University! So I say "I would like very much to, Mr. President, so give me someone with their doctorate in djembé and I'll hire them." But someone that had spent all of his time studying for a doctorate wouldn't be as talented as the artist that I've hired because this artist isn't a nobody. (Guingané "Les Conditions de la Création")

Guingané shows the complicated cycle of education and appreciation that haunts the arts at the University level: artists need degrees to receive the recognition they deserve by the University and the society in which they live, but these degrees are largely unavailable because the University lacks a needed system of evaluation or does not always offer the necessary training and experience that promotes an artistic education and opportunities for a profession. This experience exemplifies the benefit of professional training schools, in that organically talented artists can continue to develop their art and receive recognition for their talent. This anecdote also highlights the bureaucracy of using a degree as a marker of artistic talent, in that University-enrolled students might fail to receive training useful to their careers and the lack of a degree

limits professional artists' opportunities to pass on their craft to younger generations. Guingané used this example of his struggle to receive University approval in regards to artistic training to show the necessity of continuing to fight for the positioning of arts at the University level in order to gain further societal respect for the arts. Unfortunately, some of the ramifications of his passing have been increased problems and delays, resulting in his students abandoning the fight for their degrees. In keeping with Mandé's experiences with theatre education in Burkina Faso, Guingané's passing occurred weeks before his scheduled dissertation defense and he was forced to postpone his defense indefinitely for six months due to University bureaucracy. The delay of Mandé's defense was then momentarily detrimental to AGAC as they would not recognize his post as co-director of the department before he obtained his Ph.D.

Another of Guingané's anecdotes helps to further contextualize the University's bureaucracy, but further establishes how Burkinabè society views the arts.

When my students come to enroll, we've had a certain problem with our department. You want to know who discourages them? Often, it's the university staff. A student arrives and he says "I want to enroll in AGAC," someone realizes he's their neighbor's child and intervenes and says "My child, what's wrong? You can't find anything (better) to enroll in?" That's the university staff! They themselves discourage students from enrolling—How can we advance like that?... It further explains how difficult it is to generate support for the arts from people in our society. But it'll happen. It'll happen. (Guingané "Les Conditions de la creation")

The professor's struggle to secure societal recognition for theatre and the arts, as exemplified through these examples at the University level, leaves the Burkinabè artistic and academic

communities at a severe loss without his presence. The distinct respect he had garnered over his lifetime from his country certainly assisted in pushing many projects forward. Unfortunately, one of the most recent of his projects at the University, an Arts Institute, which had been in its final planning stages before his death, is currently and indefinitely stalled.²²

The current state of theatre education in Burkina Faso, from the positioning of arts education in public school education, to formal theatre training, to advanced University degrees in these disciplines demonstrates ways that the performing arts have grown, developed, and earned recognition but also paints a frustrating and at times bleak portrait of arts appreciation in Burkinabè society. This section on the positioning of theatre education on various levels will serve to show the importance of theatre training and arts appreciation to the future of the discipline, but also as evidence of the availability of theatre training in the country. These considerations serve as a point of analysis for the ways in which foreign funding aids and hinders theatre appreciation, how funding shapes the types of educational messages passed on in TfD plays, and how sponsors of TfD consider (or fail to consider) the aesthetic value of these performances.

Sponsoring a Message: Culture as Commodity and Western Influence

I will now investigate the relationship between foreign funding and theatre education in Burkina Faso. I hope to further complicate and analyze the realities of how theatre companies receive funding in Burkina Faso, how this relates to theatre education and the aesthetic quality of

²² One of my favorite memories of Guingané was in 2006 just before leaving Burkina Faso after teaching and directing in the department. He told me that when I returned, when I was a “grande-type” (because he said certainly one day I would be a “grande-type”), I would find him retired after opening the Arts Institute. When I returned in 2009, he said unfortunately that he was retiring and even though a university building had been secured for the Arts Institute, it was not yet open and functional as he had originally planned.

theatrical production, and how the organizations funding Tfd sometimes help to create a disservice to the artistic community in Burkina Faso by dismissing the importance of theatre training. At this juncture, the sentiments of some of the country's most important cultural administrators explain many of the frustrations behind the lack of funding for live performance that does not have a specific agenda to sensitize its audience with a message paid for by a sponsor.

From the standpoint of Martin Zongo, current artistic director of CITO and previous administrator of Espace Culturel Gambidi, Burkinabè theatre cannot survive autonomously. Using the example of CITO, he demonstrated the dependence of Burkinabè artistic production on Western support and made arguments for why, at this point, hopes for financial support from the government and audiences is unrealistic. Zongo appreciates that the NGOs that work with CITO understand that theatre is a social activity, not an economic one, and the long-term cultural objectives and accomplishments matter and eventually merit the expenditure (Zongo, "Personal Interview").²³

In a personal interview, he cited three reasons why theatre depends on foreign support:

1. Theatre is not supported by the government, but that's not ultimately the government's fault. The government has other priorities as a result of such a weak national economy and a great concern for developmental issues.
2. Because

²³ I want to note that CITO goes to some length to prevent Western financial influence from dominating the artistic vision of the company. Shows are either collaborative or visiting Western directors are assigned Burkinabè advisors when producing work with CITO. CITO also has an advisory board for each project that discusses artistic choices to ensure that each production meets CITO's aesthetic standards, but also cultural standards on what messages are being communicated to their audiences. The fact that the company necessitates these precautions and that Martin Zongo agreed in his interview that there are very real risks for neocolonialism through cultural exchange serve as evidence that the West can have a dominating influence through financial support.

theatre is not well supported by Burkinabè society, personal donations and donations from businesses do not exist. Private sponsors are much more likely to fund soccer, as it's an activity seen and supported almost unilaterally in Burkina Faso. 3. People do not regularly go to see theatre. Even the general price of admission, 500 F CFA, will make people consider whether they really want to see a play, or would prefer to spend an additional 100 F CFA to drink a beer. The people that understand that theatre is a valid enterprise, that theatre can transform a society, are foreign organizations. (Zongo, "Personal Interview")

One of the goals of CITO is to fight poverty through theatre in providing adequate living wages and health insurance to actors and helping to energize the surrounding neighborhood so that paid artists and the attracted audiences might bring business to the community. Though the admission price to see a show at CITO remains 500 F CFA,²⁴ Zongo cites the quality of the shows produced at CITO to merit at least 5000 F CFA per ticket. Each CITO production costs between ten and twenty million F CFA, which begs the question: How much should CITO be charging per ticket? Zongo is unfortunately correct, that the shows at CITO merit a much higher admission price, but a Burkinabè audience is not yet willing to pay more than 500 F CFA. This is the reason CITO relies almost unilaterally on foreign aide. Currently, CITO receives financial support from the Norwegian, Danish and Dutch Embassies, Bureau du Coopération Suisse, Suisse Helvetas, FGZ (a local printing establishment), and are ninety-five percent dependent on external funding.

While the government might occasionally provide funding, Zongo gave the example of

²⁴ 500 F CFA is approximately equivalent to \$1.00, 5000 F CFA is equivalent to \$10.00. To give further contextualization, a woman might be expected to prepare a meal for an entire family with 500 F CFA and the monthly rent for a one room/one bedroom home with electricity and communally shared water and latrine in the style of many middle-class families in Ouagadougou might cost 16,000 F CFA/month. The electricity and water bills are not factored into this amount.

government support for festivals, perhaps two million F CFA while the festival costs surpass 150 million F CFA (Zongo “Personal Interview”).

Zongo shared, with some frustration, that CITO receives a fair amount of suggestions from its supporters on how CITO might find ways to internally support the organization. Zongo presented the examples of renting the theatre or selling cds of the performances as great ideas, but that neither generates enough income. Even people who love the performances at CITO, when asked, state that they are unwilling to pay a higher entry price. Some audience members even answered a survey on the issue that raising ticket prices would turn CITO into another CCF, a theatre for the bourgeoisie and foreigners. Zongo hopes to continue to teach and reach out to audience members that theatre merits the cost, and that CITO will be able to slowly raise the prices over time (Zongo “Personal Interview”).

Cultural administrator Ousmane Boundaoné, who works more specifically in the domain of contemporary dance as an administrator at both EDIT and CDC, takes a staunchly different argument from that of Zongo in regards to the role of governmental support of culture. He faults first and foremost African governments for not being more supportive of arts and culture. In a 2010 article in *Artisttik Africa*, “Financer la culture? Laquelle? Et pourquoi?,” Boundaoné argues that regarding development issues, culture cannot be treated as an afterthought to health, education, or poverty, particularly as the country continues to form its cultural identity. Despite UNESCO’s recommendation that culture be an important consideration in regards to development, in the five decades since Burkina Faso’s independence,²⁵ the government has abandoned the financial support of culture to foreign NGOs. Boundaoné questions, for example,

²⁵ Boundaoné specifically faults the lack of government involvement in culture in the past four decades since the UNESCO discourse by André Malraux, but I would like to extend this critique to the end of colonization as many Burkinabè reflect on their own national identity given the 50th anniversaries of many West African countries in 2010.

completely sacrificing the protection and proliferation of cultural habitus to the construction of hospitals for populations with a thousand-year-old healing tradition. This example will strike some as extreme; however, I agree with Boundaoné's alarm at the failure of the government's current solution to completely dismiss culture in order to at best, inadequately confront other, deemed more worthy, developmental efforts. For Boundaoné, cultural efforts not only play a role in a country's economic health by offering jobs and potentially generating profit and tourism, but it is the cultural domain that feeds more ardently into a country's sense of cultural identity and expression (Boundaoné 21).

The Influence of Foreign Partnerships

*“ONG, moi je fais de l’humanitaire, 4x4 tous risques, mais on est tous solidaires
Compte bloqué, et Cash Money, la vie est belle quand on bosse dans l’humanitaire
Maladie, famine, guerre et fléaux
Beaucoup de victimes, mais pas un seul goulot
ONG, il y a rien à faire que de bronzer et se sentir aimé”* (Smockey, ONG)²⁶

In his song *ONG*, Burkinabè hip-hop artist Smockey raps the hypocrisies seen from a Burkinabè perspective on how NGOs function as a humanitarian intervention, but also a profitable business model for those working for the NGO. In the chorus, Smockey compares the employees of NGOs who drive expensive vehicles and live comfortably to the victims of illness, famine, and war that the NGO aims to assist. Within the song, Smockey criticizes the distancing between the wealth of the NGO employees from the suffering of those in the country and the power NGOs carry in assessing projects. Smockey goes as far to accuse NGOs of participating in a balancing act of assisting the population enough to see positive change but never so much as to eliminate the necessity of their organization. Although the NGOs working in Burkina Faso

²⁶ See Appendix for complete lyrics.

bear important, though idyllic, missions, the implementation of these goals by individuals sometimes leads to personal bias, incompetence, and sometimes corruption. In terms of theatre, the foreign financial support has enabled the domain to grow and flourish, but has also rendered it impossible for theatre to survive in its current capacity without foreign aide. The weight of this monetary influence, coinciding with the personal influence of individuals working for the NGO, on how art is selected and proliferated in the country reveals the necessity of cultural education in regards to Tfd funding and assessment. The influence of the financial investment in art raises pertinent questions to education with neocolonial underpinnings: Whose art? Whose education? Whose culture?

To contextualize these questions in a theatrical example, Belgian playwright Georget Mourin's *Le Palu* showcases the neocolonial risks of Tfd when using culture as a medium for education. Georget Mourin began working in the theatre in 1976 when he lost his factory job after the closing of the Siemens company in Baudour. A co-founder of the Belgian company Théâtre Tract and the Burkinabè company Le Théâtre du Copion between 1982 and 1984, he currently writes development plays in Burkina Faso. His plays address similar societal problems as other Burkinabè development plays, but also tend to draw on cultural collisions and postcolonial themes in addition to stereotypes, religion, wealth and poverty, and illness. His factory background greatly influences his impressions of the inequality between developing African countries and Europe, and he makes correlations between these inequities in his work. Although I feel it pertinent to note the incomparable poverty between Burkina Faso and European countries, Mourin's commitment to socially engaged drama stems from personal experience.

Though Mourin has a personal vested interest in his work, the plays that he writes for his Belgian-Burkinabè company reveal neocolonial educations at work. Mourin's 2010 play, *Le Palu (Malaria)*, showcases a man who spends his time and money at a dolodrome, a small market for traditional beer, rather than caring for his sick family. *Wendé*, which is Mooré for God, comes to speak to him directly on the errors of his ways and to counsel him and the doloh vender on how to better save and spend money in order to prevent deaths from malaria. When *Wendé* leaves, the characters are inspired to spread the lesson to others. Mourin aims at writing a didactic play with a theatrical plot, however, the play misrepresents an important cultural consideration: in the Mossi tradition, *Wendé*, or God, cannot come to speak directly to individuals. The concept of having conversations directly with God is a belief found in Christianity. To Mourin's credit, he has lived in Burkina Faso for decades and often researches traditional life, songs, and customs during his writing process. However, in the case of *Le Palu* in an effort to create a more dramatic intervention into the prevention of malaria, he also imposes a Christian-based comprehension of religion and spirituality onto his narrative.

Mourin's *Le Palu* informs the neocolonial risks in the exchange between foreign entities and postcolonial theatre as defined by Awam Ampka's "colonial modernity." Colonial modernity serves as a lens in viewing cultural exchanges between dominant entities as overly influential of the less dominant and at-risk cultures they infiltrate. Ampka defines colonial modernity as "a modernity semantically, culturally, and politically synonymous with European values and institutions, especially Christianity, the English language, and a clear consciousness of the boundaries between the secular and the sacred in cultural life (5)." *Le Palu*, as an intersection of culture and power, serves as a theatrical example that can help to provide an analysis for how neocolonialism and globalization are at work in Burkina Faso. The *neocolonial*

forces affecting postcolonial countries like Burkina Faso are reflected in *Le Palu* as a perhaps outwardly benign but concrete example of the intrusion of one culture on another. In the conclusion to her second edition of *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba applies Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's theory of *Empire*²⁷ to the current question of globalization and its effects on culture. While she quite obviously sides with the arguments for globalization as a culturally destructive force (and the United States as the definition of *Empire*), she also examines other approximations that the West currently acts as a necessary policing force for the greater good of global civilization, which we can see in the current practice of foreign organizations funding work like Tfd. This is Hardt and Negri's essential analysis for the difference between *Empire* and the previous imperialism experienced in countries like Burkina Faso. While the West might not currently serve as an official governing body in developing countries, it still extends a certain amount of control and influence into these regions. In *Le Palu*, Mourin's *Wendé* directly addresses a man on his abusive drinking habits in order to prove to the family's primary provider that those resources would be better used to prevent or treat malaria. Mourin as the playwright has agency in how he chooses to pass a message on malaria-prevention; however, his choice in structuring his message not only promotes individual lifestyle change leading to curing malaria, but also a particular spiritual and religious understanding of the world.

Although *Le Palu* serves as a minor example in comparison to more overreaching projects, these levels of globalization and *Empire* reflect Ampka's definition of colonial modernity. While Ampka refers to British imperialism, the continued prevalence of *Empire* by La Francophonie (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie), a movement led by France to ensure the proliferation of the French language and Francophone cultures, fits the models of

²⁷ I have kept the capitalization and italics of the word empire used by Loomba in her concluding chapter of her book.

influence referenced by “colonial modernity” and *Empire*. Written in French by a Belgian playwright with a plot structure anomalous to the culture, *Le Palu* demonstrates the power exerted onto developing communities by the West. Although audiences might watch a play like *Le Palu* and may easily reject the dialogue between *Wendé* and the main character, the fact that Mourin has the power and resources to stage his plays exemplifies the sort of unilateral influence extending from the West that Loomba critiques. In regards to the influence of Western ideological constructs, these ideologies might work towards “the greater good” by educating a population on preventative measures against malaria, but in other ways these institutions threaten what Ampka fears might lead to the disintegration of other elements of Burkinabè cultural understanding. In my experience, access to Western finances frequently also carries the burden of evaluation from a Western perspective, and the Western tendency to universalize cultural beliefs, particularly morality.

The second theoretical question to consider is the role of culture in development. In terms of TfD as a mode of education, it is hard to ignore that theatre as currently performed in Burkina Faso stems from a Western tradition. Penina Muhando Mlama questions the history of how the West approaches development measures in impoverished countries and how and when culture is incorporated into these measures.

To facilitate the structural changes in the developing countries, the prescription has always been economic and technical assistance from the reservoirs of advanced science and technology of the developed countries. For many years, Third World development has been seen as simply a transfer in health, agriculture and education. Development planning, therefore, became the preserve of economic planners and technical experts together with their local and foreign

political masters and benefactors. Economic and technical considerations have been the force behind the choice of introduction and distribution of development projects over and above social-cultural gains...Many arguments have been advanced calling for the need to look at culture as a necessary component of development. (Mlama, "Culture and Development" 8)

Mlama questions the superiority of economic and technical measures to advance development over the inclusion of culture. In considering the Western origins of theatre and theatre as a tool of development, must we challenge theatre as an example of Burkinabè culture? Prosper Kompaoré proposes solid arguments for the inherent theatricality in Burkinabè society and has based his life's work in this theory. Guingané argues that TfD in particular is culturally situated in that it is performed in maternal languages and employs socially valued components such as speech, argumentation, dance and music ("The Role of Art in Reducing Poverty" 4). Although these arguments are justified to support theatre as a natural tool of culture, it's the very lack of theatre in traditional culture that poses problems to the value of theatre education in Burkina Faso and leads to theatre as an underappreciated medium. This importation and mixture of cultures in Burkina Faso means theatre is seen as a foreign archetype and building audience appreciation is an ongoing struggle for theatre artists. As argued by Mlama, culture needs to be considered as an element of development, but we need to consider whose ideas of culture are being implemented. I have personally witnessed many examples exhibiting Mlama's cause for concern, though I would cite the collaborations between Ildevert Meda and Luca Fusi, to be discussed in detail in other chapters, as positive examples of how the invaluable tools of education and communication serve artists in creating valuable collaborations and culturally sensitive TfD. Often, the lack of education and failure in communication on the part of both the

Burkinabè theatre artists and the Western grantors result in developmentally questionable performances.

The first chapter of this dissertation addressed another of Mlama's concerns that while culture is an integral component to development, these development efforts also commodify culture. She describes the commodification of culture through the promotion of a lifestyle "compatible with capitalist interests" through the marketing of "capitalist value-loaded cultural tools such as films, books, pop music, television and video programmes" ("Culture and Development"15).

A variety of cultural tools are operating in Africa imposing and developing a capitalist culture vital to the entrenchment of capitalism. The development of capitalism, therefore, has been supported by a consciously designed development of a supporting capitalist culture. To imagine that the agents of capitalism would attempt to penetrate Africa without developing a cultural system to support the system is to underrate the powers of capitalism. ("Culture and Development"15)

Mlama's warning of underrating capitalism in regards to cultural commodity stands out more starkly when contextualized with an example from UNESCO. In "Mapping Cultural Diversity, Good Practices from Around the Globe: A Contribution to the Debate on the Implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions," the President of the German Commission for UNESCO, Walter Hirche, describes the need to evaluate culture as a commodity in order to gain more recognition in policy making:

International trade agreements have to take into consideration the unique and dual nature of cultural services as a cultural *and* economic good, as both commodities

and the means of conveying identities, values, and meanings. As such they are the subject of cultural policy. (9)

While Hirche promotes the evolution of culture as a commodity in order to secure support for culture, Mlama views the developing relationship between capitalism and culture as destructive. As seen in the example of CITO and also true of other Burkinabè companies, billing performances as valuable commodities to sell to NGOs creates valuable partnerships, but this partnered existence simultaneously results in a web of dependency almost impossible to untangle.

The positive and negative relationship between culture and economics plays out through theatrical production in Burkina Faso. Western influence in Burkinabè theatrical production, monetary and thematic, is a general critique and complaint of Burkinabè theatre artists and administrators. Professional artists, in some respects, find the relationship between artists and grantors to be cyclical and impossible to break and others see the influence on culture as patronizing and damaging. With an estimated 95% of funding for theatre coming from outside of the country, this contribution is almost unilaterally responsible for the proliferation of Burkinabè theatre. Assessment of projects by Western grantors adds to the status of art as commodity, as something to be bought and sold to a public with Burkinabè practitioners as the middlemen. The development of culture as commodity affects artists in a variety of ways, but I focus on artists' personal reactions to the messages that they are paid to promote and the safeguards that some theatre troupes implement to avoid the monopolization and appropriation of culture by outside grantors.

As previously stated, an NGOs familiarity with a given audience demographic and their emphasis on passing a message gives cause for concern. As members of the communities they

wish to sensitize, actors take certain risks in communicating socially motivated messages through theatre, particularly in how to incorporate sensitive material into a performance without offending the audience. Actor, playwright and director Aristide Tarnagda shared his experience touring a TfD show on the subject of FGM (female genital mutilation) to his own village. Tarnagda had an epiphany while performing: although personally against the continuation and practice of FGM, he felt ashamed to be a part of the play with overly moralizing themes that infantilized his elders. Currently a proponent of women's rights in his own written and produced work, Tarnagda formed this critique not around the play's content, but the methodology in passing the message. Tarnagda promotes traditional culture as a necessary medium and often-neglected resource in communicating the necessity of social change (A. Tarnagda "Personal Interview"). One of the sources of the neglect of traditional culture is that the foreign entities that fund the plays lack a familiarity with a community's heritage, but also prioritize Western-based solutions to problems over what might be labeled as "backwards" practices.

The collision of culture and capitalism in the Western appropriation of TfD to promote messages valued by particular organizations, can be seen in the manipulation of the TfD educational platform to promote products, rather than social change. Actor and director Mahamadou Tindano, reticent to share specifics as not to demean individuals involved in the project, explained one circumstance in which a theatre troupe received money to promote a particular brand of soap to rural communities, utilizing the traditional educational format of TfD to convince viewers of the validity of their claims (Tindano). This deceitful use of TfD threatens to break down the burgeoning appreciation of theatre and destroy the credibility of Burkinabè artists aiming to improve the quality of life in their country through art and education.

Helvetas: Attempting Aesthetics and Creating a Dialogue with Forum Theatre

While there are many negative attestations to the misuse of Tfd, other Western NGOs working in Burkina Faso recognize the risks of “colonial modernity” and aim to transcend the problems in using Tfd as a medium. One organization I spoke with emphasized its concerted efforts in guarding both cultural and artistic integrity when using theatre as a mode of education. Helvetas, a Swiss NGO focuses on a wide range of development efforts such as access to water, sanitation, building infrastructure, agriculture, sustainable forestry, and promoting democracy and peace (“Helvetas”). In Burkina Faso, Helvetas began employing Forum Theatre in 2008 to promote discussion and educate rural populations on these topics.

In order to focus the work on regionally relevant, culturally sensitive topics, Helvetas works exclusively in local languages with existing local acting troupes so that the people writing and performing the plays are personally aware of how the problems presented in the plays affect the communities to which they are presented. To promote artistic integrity and to also promote theatre education and training in these programs, Helvetas has invited members of the acting troupe ATB (Atelier Théâtre Burkinabè) to teach acting methodology and Forum Theatre techniques to local practitioners. In a recent evaluation of Helvetas’s efforts in the Fada region of Burkina Faso from 2008 to 2010, which included the Forum Theatre projects, Helvetas found that those populations enjoyed the plays not only as a form of amusement (which the organization defended as significant in its developmental efforts) but found that they offered a second chance at a missed education (Anonymous 1). My contact also emphasized that because of the societal hierarchy, theatre is one of the only platforms in which younger generations can acceptably attempt to correct the behavior of their elders. The impact of this form of theatre comes when “The established order is disrupted, but through the engagement of multiple

generations,” (Anonymous 1). Not only can the social taboo of reproaching elders be breached, but through theatre, the process is also a form of entertainment. Through this intergenerational engagement, artists and NGOs can responsibly use TfD as a way of reexamining cultural values, testing culture as shifting rather than a static relic of history, but also reaffirms that multiple definitions of “progress” exist and do not need to be modeled on Western approximations as such.

The plays organized by Helvetas focused on several themes including the disposal and treatment of plastic waste (recycling), FGM, HIV/AIDS, educating girls, and drinkable water. Currently the program has no systematic evaluation of the success of the shows and relies, as do many TfD troupes, on the actors’ impressions of the audience’s reception of the show. However, my contact did share that two years later, past audience members have recounted elements of the shows in detail and shared information they learned. For example, fewer black plastic bags are being used to serve food as they pose health risks, fewer are burned, and fewer are thrown on the ground without someone making a comment.²⁸ Evidently, fewer people feel stigmatized when purchasing condoms, but other sensitive issues like FGM continue to be difficult subjects to broach; although a play on FGM was written, it was never performed. While my contact expressed that this means that only small changes are observed and they do not plan for outright universal change, that these observations indicate that as far as Helvetas is concerned, the plays are reaching their goals.

²⁸ To say that black plastic bags are an environmental problem in Burkina Faso is an understatement. Most trees, fences, and open ground are laced and littered with the small bags that are given out with most purchases. Currently, there is no organized waste disposal system in Burkina Faso, rarely can one find a trash can, and most people let trash simply fall to the ground, frequently even if a trash can does happen to be in sight. This is a mentality that many people hope to change.

The troupes are local and use local languages and they do not come to moralize the audience but rather present information rather than judgment. In this way, the plays encourage people to discuss amongst themselves instead of giving villagers the sense that people from Ouagadougou or white people are coming to tell them what to do. This opens discussions even for taboo topics. My contact shared an anecdote about one village that chased out an organization and threatened them with curses for attempting to discuss FGM but that the same population responded openly to a non-Helvetas sponsored play performed by Théâtre de la Fraternité on the same subject and even the village leaders watched the show. She also observed a Helvetas-sponsored performance in which female audience members left to grab branches in order to come on stage and beat the leading male antagonist for beating his pregnant wife, sharing that “They were so moved to the point that they found themselves within the world of the play and forgot it was theatre...It’s a good route” (Anonymous 1). The frequent experience of performers and administrators of audience members blurring the reality of the play with their own reality, and the analysis that the issues presented affect them to the extent that they personally get involved with the action in the play, from my perspective demonstrates the value of these types of performances.

Compromised Education, Compromised Message: The example of *Ecole de la terreur*

Unfortunately, there are many occasions in which TfD fails in its intentions. I have proposed in this chapter that this failure stems from a lack of theatre education, in regards to the performers, the audience in terms of appreciation, and the sponsors in terms of familiarity with the population or with the practice of theatre. This lack of education and familiarity with theatre intersects the problems with how theatre is currently funded in Burkina Faso. The lack of

attention to aesthetics in terms of production value creates a dangerous pitfall for the future of theatrical production in Burkina Faso. In ignoring the value of aesthetics, traditionally understood as germane to any performance, a lack of attention to education in Theatre for Development plays, as will be shown, results in a disservice to performers, audiences, and NGOs alike.

The following example of the TfD play, *Ecole de la terreur*, situates my perspective on the relationship between a lack of theatre education and the detrimental effect on the play's intentions. Performed in 2010 by the troupe Athéna Théâtre de Kombissiri during a festival to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the troupe Théâtre Corneille de Tenkodogo, *Ecole de la terreur* was one of many rural development plays presented on the festival's theme "Artistic Education and the Right of the Child." Most of the plays during the festival were performed in Mooré to great success with the audiences.

The festival program included descriptions of each play written in French with a basic explanation of action and themes. The pamphlet assisted the audience members that travelled to Tenkodogo specifically for the festival, as the mostly illiterate audience spoke Mooré rather than French. The following is an English translation of the description for *Ecole de la terreur*:

Jean sends his daughter Esther to school and Bernadette does the same for Rosalie, in order that they might gain instruction in an appropriate environment where children can develop their personalities and their futures. Unfortunately, the school the children attend is the site of violence that risks compromising not only their education, but also their lives. *Ecole de la terreur* illustrates the negative behavior of two violent teachers, Mr. Bangré and Mrs. Konaté. ("Théâtre Corneille de Tenkodogo")

As a non-Mooréphone audience member, this was the only description available until after the show and it did little to assist in following the disjointed narrative of the hour-long play. The inclusion of long and static scenes demonstrated the lack of professionalism of the troupe; for example, in the middle of the play, the actors performing the roles of the two students stood upstage center and diverged from the plot to praise (while in character) the work of Théâtre Corneille's founder, Hamadou Mandé, and the festival's patron, Jean-Pierre Guingané. These tangential scenes confused even Moorephone audience members and shifted the action away from the play's intended message.

In addition to plot structure (and in lieu of other production elements due to financial restraints), directing and acting are the primary tools in communicating a message to a large Tfd audience. Most of the staging followed the example of the previously cited scene during which actors statically recited lines from the front of the stage. Mooré, a naturally theatrical and expressive language, lends itself well to a non-Mooréphone audience in theatre, as speakers of Mooré use gestures and inflection to enhance the meaning of the tonal language. Most of the performers from Athéna Théâtre de Kombissiri were quite young and these longer scenes demonstrated not only a lack of dramatic action in the text, but also a lack of attention, emphasis, or access to the theatre training necessary to communicate a story through performance.

The exception, however, was a scene in which one of the young students, a female character of the age of fourteen is called to her teacher's office. This scene, much more dynamic than any other in the play, shows how bad choices in theatre not only make for a bad play, but even worse, can make for a detrimental performance to the same themes the play aims to prevent. The scene depicts the teacher as he plans to rape his student in what can only be described as a vaudevillian or clownish use of space and acting style. The teacher, to much

audience appreciation, comically strips away his clothing upstage while having a conversation with the girl whose back is turned towards him, slowly approaching her on a diagonal. The rest of the scene transpires behind a curtain after the teacher captures his prey. Yelps and moans can be heard as articles of the girl's clothing fly over the top of the curtain. During the scene, the audience in Tenkodogo roared with laughter and shouted choruses of "merci!" at the action on stage. In the next scene, the girl runs home to her father, crying too hard to speak while fanning her genitals. The fanning action, intended to indicate pain, also elicits laughter because of the staging. The final scene shows both parents of the victimized children storming the school office, the father with a machete. During the exchange between the parents and the teachers, the teachers become the defendants and the parents the aggressors. A blackout ends the play with the rape victim's father leaning over the male teacher, comically poised with his machete over his head, leaving the audience to infer that he murders his daughter's rapist through an act of revenge.

Ecole de la terreur elaborates the failure of passing an educative message through theatre, of theatre training, and of audience appreciation of theatre. As indicated by the description and title of the play, Athéna Théâtre de Kombissiri aims to sensitize its public on the rights of children and the risks of adult predators in schools. However, rather than communicate the dangers that children face, the troupe's message dissolves in the comedic staging which diminishes the audience's accountability for not having taken it seriously. It should be noted that Burkinabè audiences frequently laugh when confronted with emotionally challenging material: the phrase "You don't know whether to laugh or cry" is commonly used to explain this reaction. In other words, at times the content of a play is too emotionally real to audiences and almost as a defense mechanism, Burkinabè spectators giggle while Western spectators are observably

somber. This is an important distinction to make in terms of audience reception in Burkina Faso: emotional plays typically elicit a particular type of laughter from Burkinabè audiences. However, the laughter in response to *Ecole de la terreur* was not an emotionally charged, defensive laughter. Because of the clownish physicality of the teacher, no one could take the scene seriously, and what is more, the staging of the scene encouraged the audience to cheer for the rape of a fourteen year old girl, as seen through the shouting of “merci!” by numerous audience members. Because of the staging, the message of this play not only failed, but even contradicted its original intentions by garnering support for the very actions it wished to suppress. What is more, in staging the final scene with the father poised to kill the teacher with a machete, the rapist becomes the victim and the play encourages violent retribution rather than, for example, justice through the judicial process and the rape is never prosecuted.

Athéna Théâtre de Kombissiri’s *Ecole de la terreur*, written by the troupe’s artistic director, Boubacar Dao, a high school teacher who teaches human rights, was sponsored by Amnesty International and UKAid as part of a project on education and human rights. The troupe received the financial backing to perform the play three times in schools for audiences of students, teachers and parents: twice in Koumbissiri and once in Manga. Dao shared that the troupe has since been re-commissioned to re-write and re-perform the play, keeping to the theme of violence against school children (Dao). In a personal interview, Dao discussed the process that led to the play’s creation and assessment. Amnesty International and UKAid commissioned a play on violence against students. Dao then wrote *Ecole de la terreur* in French in order to receive feedback, which the organizations then approved and later observed in production, in Mooré, at one of the schools. According to Dao, the organizations and troupe shared a pleasant working relationship and the play received reasonable feedback from the audience.

Dao, who received training in theoretical theatre through the department of Modern Letters at the University of Ouagadougou under Jean-Pierre Guingané and Prosper Kompaoré, while in some respects satisfied with the production of *Ecole de la terreur*, expressed reservations about the level of familiarity the sponsors had with the actual practice of theatre. Dao's concerns from his personal experience with this project correlate to concerns for the greater production of TfD in Burkina Faso. Structurally, Amnesty International and UKAid requested a Forum Theatre piece. Dao preferred to write a theatre for debate play as opposed to a forum play as he generally has concerns for garnering spect-actors during TfD plays. He shared his reasonable concern for using Forum Theatre through the example of a TfD play on the oppression of women: if you travel with such a play to a region in which women are oppressed, how likely will those women be to take the stage? Is relying on men willing to perform women's roles enough? The same concern applies to the request to write a play on violence against children: will abused children find their voices onstage in front of their abusers? Although this can lead to a fruitful debate on the efficacy of Forum Theatre in these scenarios, the concern for this particular project lies elsewhere: the people who sponsored the performance, who requested a Forum Theatre play, had no idea that the product that they received was not in fact Forum Theatre. The lack of an NGO's familiarity with Forum Theatre would be less concerning if the organizations had merely requested a show that supported a social-advocacy message. In acknowledging the most important distinction of Forum Theatre, that audience members re-perform the scenes with new interpretations, as an intentional absence from the productions of *Ecole de la terreur*, we can see a concrete example of how distanced NGOs and other sponsors are from the aesthetic value of the productions that they fund. Without an investment in the value of a production as a piece of theatre, can an NGO adequately assess the merit or the

efficacy of the projects they support? This example shows that not only is theatre education imperative for the fruition and success of theatre in Burkina Faso, but also for the organizations financially backing the plays.

Dao's critiques of the representatives of the NGOs familiarity with theatre further relates to the assessment of the text verses the actual production. In regards to representatives from the NGOs reading a French version of the text, the storyline, although simple, offered little to be critiqued (with perhaps the exception of the violent ending). In seeing the production, the representatives of Amnesty International and UKAid could not understand the Mooré used in the production, which while understandable, demonstrates a distance between the grantor and the population of the play's intended audience demographic. Regardless of language, the onstage action during the rape scene was quite clear. Without an assessment of the staging of the production from the sponsoring organizations, the focus on the message over the aesthetics of the production meant that neither the message nor the play could succeed.

Dao addressed a second problem that relates to the concerns expressed in the second portion of this chapter: the concerns for funding. For Dao, the funds given by Amnesty International and UKAid were insufficient. Unfortunately, from the playwright's perspective, this means the NGOs received the product for which they paid. The troupe would have liked to have created a better play, but the available money was already insufficient to adequately reimburse the actors and this particular project provided the funds for only three performances. As noted in the unique case of Burkina Faso's artistic scene, ultimately money is not mandatory to create quality theatre (although one hopes that reasonable financial gain will be an outcome). While Dao's explanations might read of an attempt to rationalize a poor production, he has a point that low investment of one party yields a resulting low investment from the other. In this

case, both the grantors and the artists needed to invest more resources—financial, artistic, and intellectual—in the production of this show.

Although a similar project will be performed between February and March 2012 in Koumbissiri, Manga, Gounghin, and Po, a total of seven performances does not provide the necessary investment of time in order for a real dialogue, and therefore for social change, to occur. Unfortunately in this scenario, the expectations for TfD to meet its goals of communicating with the audience are more unlikely, and the use of TfD comes off as a flippant rather than meaningful attempt to encourage positive social change. Although Dao shared the working experience to be a pleasant one, his criticisms and reservations on the experience reflect both of the concerns of this chapter: the lack of familiarity of the foreign grantors with theatre and why theatre education is invaluable. The often under-considered ramifications of this lack of familiarity and education potentially damage the future of theatre by not supporting the training of actors, resulting in a subpar production presented to audiences that are already resistant to supporting theatre.

Dao describes his troupe as “scholastic-academic” with young actors ranging in training, education, and inclinations to professionalization, and it's hard to fault a young group of hopeful artists and a dedicated high school teacher for aiming to create theatre that might help to change their community for the better. Though dependent on a further investment, if sponsors like Amnesty International and UKAid provide more attention to the production value of the play and emphasize the necessity of allocating funds to make sure the troupe had access to theatre training, they could hopefully better meet their own goals and the goals of the troupes they sponsor. We can see from this example that artistry plays just as important a role in TfD as the theme of the message; poor staging begets poor reception when neither the performers nor the

donors have the appropriate theatre training. Unfortunately, commodifying art spawns the necessity of the assessment process. In purchasing art as a product to serve a purpose, the donors are charged with finding the means to critique the project without being patronizing and taking the responsibility of adequately educating themselves in terms of what they are marketing.

Dao's frustrations with the production of TfD in Burkina Faso, both with his own projects and more generally throughout the country, implicate the *lack* of investment in those investments made by NGOs. Lack of investment in education resulting in a lack of investment in aesthetics nullifies to a great extent the initial financial investment. In approaching theatrical production pragmatically, as a tool to pass a message, without valuing its aesthetic qualities as a piece of art, some organizations fail their own agendas in passing a message, but more importantly inflict a colonial modernity onto their intended audiences that places cultural identity at risk.

A positive result of this experience, Hamadou Mandé on seeing this play performed during his festival, hopes to initiate an endeavor similar to that of *La Quarantaine* of the festival Les Récréâtrales. Similar to the "quarantining" of actors for months before the large, Ouagadougou-based festival, Mandé hopes to organize the troupes invited to his festival in the preceding months to help develop the plays and further train the actors. "We don't want to impose on anyone how they need to perform their show, but at the same time theatre has certain guidelines and putting troupes in contact with people who can help to train them during a given period of time can help them to come with better quality performances" (Mandé "Personal Interview). Although Mandé's projected venture may not come to fruition, the trivializing ("*banalisation*") of important themes forced him to reflect on how he can help to further intervene in promoting theatre education in his country. I use this example to further solidify

that Burkinabè artists control the theatrical work produced and the artistic future of the country, although I purport the furthered investment of NGOs and other granting entities in the artistry of the work that they support.

As shown in this chapter, advancing the positioning of theatre in Burkina Faso highly depends on education and developing audience appreciation. Western financial support, occasionally helpful and occasionally detrimental to this process, also depends on theatre education and a familiarity with the intended community to beget successful performances. Theatre for Development, irrevocably linked to both education and funding, exemplifies the precarious positioning of theatrical expression in Burkina Faso in regards to audience reception, production value, and cultural expression. Although much of the future of theatre in Burkina Faso depends on the increased access to theatre education, the wavering acceptance of theatre as a valuable medium in combination with extensive poverty recreate the same quandary that inhibits access to theatre education. In some respects a dismal outlook for the future of artistic production, the difficulties posed to Burkinabè theatre practitioners should also provide evidence for the extraordinary efforts undertaken by these artists and that despite these hardships, Ouagadougou continues to be a cultural hub of West Africa.

Chapter Three

Politically Correct: Staging a Mission for Democracy and Women's Rights

As with many postcolonial countries, Burkina Faso struggles to establish a functional democracy and a nation-state independent from its former colonizers. This struggle for democracy extends from a respect for strong leadership combined with a lack of education on voting and the democratic process and the disenchantment of several failed military and political coups. This chapter will give a brief political history of Burkina Faso and will investigate how Theatre for Development promotes democracy through education and discussion but also what it means to both the structure of the play and to the message of democracy when these plays are funded by outside organizations each with specific agendas. The chapter examines how multiple organizations with varying human rights based mission statements funded different versions of a Théâtre de la Fraternité play, *Femmes, prenons notre place*. The play promotes the understanding of democracy, the democratic process, gender equality, and women's rights in civil society, themes present in the mission statements of these organizations that helped to shape the differences in each version of the play. The chapter aims to show how the funding of a political play in itself becomes political. Theatre-based initiatives commissioned by foreign organizations risk politicizing both the theatre and the message of the organization, which becomes more complicated when the play already carries a political agenda. How does a mission statement *perform* onstage—can a mission be theatricalized? When do hypocrisies exist between the mission of a funding organization and their actions within a community? What are the potential consequences and how do these tensions perform within the targeted community? How do the politics of a funding organization play out in the scheme of a political play?

To further deconstruct these questions, I would like to first emphasize the correlation between the goals of the organizations and their use of theatre to carry their message, and why this is of particular significance in regards to a play based in politics. The following is an excerpt from the Gender Equality Policy of Centre Canadien d'Etude et de Coopération Internationale (CECI), one of the organizations that funded *Femmes, prenons notre place*:

A participatory approach to the development process is essential to the sustainable advancement of peoples and countries. Participatory development builds on peoples' willingness to change within the context of their culture and traditions. The place and role of women and men in determining these changes are fundamental. They ensure the foundation of a true democracy, as well as of the emergence and strengthening of civil society ("CECI Gender Equality Policy" 5).

As noted in previous chapters, the traditions of Theatre for Development and theatre for sensitization in Burkina Faso demand audience participation. The shows aim to give agency to the communities that they serve by promoting discourse and internal change, rather than imposing change. The emphasis on participation in CECI's mission corresponds both with how theatre is performed in Burkina and because of difficulties hindering the democratic process, which will be further outlined in this chapter, the problems both women and men face in regards to the political process. The emphasis on participation, gender, and democracy in this mission statement resonates through each version of the play *Femmes, prenons notre place*. This particular mission statement is also quite similar to the mission statements of the other organizations, which all place varying emphases on gender and democracy. These themes can also be used to address the hypocrisy of at least one of the grantor's promotion of theatre as a tool of social change.

Before going further into an analysis of the *Femmes, prenons notre place* plays and how the various versions reflect the different goals of the supporting funding organizations, a background of the political history of the country will ground further discussion of how these plays serve audiences, artists, and the altruistic missions of outsiders. In particular, through this brief political history, readers unfamiliar with Burkina Faso might better understand the emphasis on garnering participation from Burkinabè and why civil participation is difficult to encourage. While Burkina Faso as a small, landlocked country has had little influence on a global economic or political scale, it's important to note that former President Thomas Sankara served as a powerful revolutionary figure for the continent and current President Blaise Compaoré holds a contradictory regional reputation for intimidation and stability. Both of these men, in addition to French colonialism and postcolonialism and the over sixty different ethnic ruling traditions shape the (dis)unification of Burkina Faso.

To give a brief political history, during the country's young history as a "nation-state," Burkina Faso suffered some of the worst political instability on the continent. After the country, then known as Upper Volta, gained independence in 1960, the newly formed nation saw six coups d'état by 1983, with the most significant political upheaval—the assassination of President Thomas Sankara—occurring in 1987. Sankara continues to serve as a heroic figure to the Burkinabè population. A political leader who emulated the revolutionary styles of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, Sankara's administration was known for its sweeping economic and social reforms. A few of his notable contributions include changing the name of the country from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, a combination of the languages Mooré and Jula which means "the land of men of integrity," the dissolution of the traditional power of the heads of villages as an attempt to unify the population, and his anti-neocolonial speeches, particularly in his insistence

that Africa had no debt to pay back to its former colonizers. Because of his popularity and his anti-neocolonial rhetoric, rumors in Burkina Faso propose possible French, Belgian, or American involvement in his assassination.

Regardless of possible external influence, the presidency shifted to Sankara's best friend, his second in command, and his murderer, Blaise Compaoré. Compaoré never incurred any legal ramifications for his assassination of Sankara and remains in power to this day through manipulations of the constitution. After serving the remainder of Sankara's term and winning the two subsequent democratic elections,²⁹ Compaoré worked to change the length of a presidential term from seven years to five. While Article 37 of the constitution stipulates that each president may only serve two terms, this change in the constitution, not retroactive, allowed Compaoré to be democratically re-elected in both 2005 and 2010. Many speculate that another constitutional amendment, removing the limitations on how many terms one president may serve, is on the horizon. As recently as 2011 the subject of Article 37 has been formally discussed by the CCRP (Conseil Consultatif sur les Réformes Politiques), although currently no decision has been made as to whether or not to lift the term limitation ("Réformes politiques au Burkina Faso").

Although deeply popular with particular demographics of the country, the corruption of Compaoré's administration and his use of financial influence and intimidation to remain in power are widely known. Compaoré squelched uprisings in his country by disappearing his adversaries, most notably journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998. Compaoré also gained regional notoriety for his rumored involvement in the wars in both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Despite these accusations and past actions, Compaoré has in the past decade received attention as a

²⁹ The term "democratic" in this sense is loosely defined. As with many African countries, Burkina Faso is a democratic dictatorship entrenched in corruption, bureaucracy, and cronyism.

peacekeeper, particularly through his efforts to help other countries hold successful democratic elections. Until the recent 2011 military uprisings and mounting public tension, Burkina Faso under Blaise Compaoré gained a reputation for regional stability in West Africa.

From this outline of the country's political history, we can see how democracy after French colonialism remains, at best, in a stage of adolescent development, particularly because the Burkinabè population has yet to elect a president that did not first gain power through a violent overthrow of the previous administration. The dissatisfaction of the public with the current version of the democratic process can be seen through voting participation; television and radio stations announced after Compaoré's 2010 reelection that out of the 7.5 million citizens of legal voting status, only 3.3 million were registered to vote at the time of the election and only 1.7 million of those registered actually voted (Sanou, "Scrutin de 21 novembre 2010"). These figures, in addition to Compaoré winning over eighty-percent of the vote, indicate not only probable corruption and a lack of education on the democratic process, but more importantly, a passive form of protest and resistance to the current administration's version of democracy. Although the country celebrated its fiftieth year of independence on December 11, 2010, many Burkinabè rather than celebrate, solemnly reflected on what "independence" has meant for their country.³⁰

From a historical perspective, Burkina Faso's struggle as a nation-state emulates much of the African continent's struggle. Basil Davidson discusses the difficulties and clashes between tribalism and nationalism that Burkina continues to face in his chapter "Tribalism and the New Nationalism" in *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*. He

³⁰ Many of these sentiments are reflected in popular culture. In example, hip-hop singer Smockey's song "50 ans 2 dépendance:" "On fête quoi ?...50 ponts...50 routes...ou 50 ports... '50 ans d'indépendance !' Ça alors ! Tu veux dire de dépendance... Et la France...et consorts...elle s'en sort...elle est d'accord ? 'Elle garantit son insistance!'"

distinguishes between French and British colonial approaches to traditional power in that “the French, for their part, simply fought a rearguard action in defense of a chiefly power which they thought, quite mistakenly as it was to prove, could be relied upon as a convenient partner” (106). The disunification of the Burkinabè nation-state stemming from ethnic tensions can also be attributed to the dissolution and resolution of the borders of Burkina Faso, the 1932 collapsing of the small country into the neighboring countries of Mali, Niger, and Côte d’Ivoire and its reassembling in 1947 (“Histoire du Burkina Faso”). Border troubles continue to plague Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire through the animosity between *tenga*, meaning “soil” in Mooré, or Burkinabè born and raised in Burkina Faso, and *diaspo*, Burkinabè nationals born and or raised in Côte d’Ivoire (and therefore also not accepted in that country). In terms of national identity:

The pioneering nationalists were intensely conscious of the history they had lived through. They scrutinized the news with all the seriousness of those who have had to struggle hard for enlightenment and who, having found it, look only for that. They studied the portents and examined the entrails of Europe’s nation-liberating struggles; and they found in them sure prophecies for colonial Africa and for the nations that Africa must build if it was to realize its destiny. (116)

As Davidson suggests, the failed development of the young Burkinabè nation-state stems not only from the problematic history influencing that development in terms of struggles of power and identity, but the failure of an imported European model to take hold and “succeed.”

More recently, the foreign influence has expanded from that of Europe to include the additional influence of the United States. Of note to this analysis, although the American government sponsored a play promoting democracy in Burkina Faso, the Embassy openly communicates its support of Blaise Compaoré’s administration. The mixed signals sent from the

American government in terms of its relationship to Burkina Faso can be further analyzed through the United States' approach to diplomacy in Africa after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Several sources note that U.S.-Africa relations took shape in reaction to the interventions of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, though more recently, the American government's approach to Africa focuses on curbing terrorism rather than communism.³¹ In my understanding of the post-9/11 strategy of the American government's interventions in Africa, the Department of Defense's support of cultural endeavors like Jean-Pierre Guingané's Tfd plays *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* and *Intolérances Ravageuses* falls under the theoretical framework of crisis diplomacy. James L. Richardson's definition of crisis diplomacy guides this analysis. For Richardson, a government intervenes with a mixture of humanitarian efforts and political self-interest in a region at a heightened risk for war. Richardson notes that probability verses perceived probability of war, and by whose perception, complicate both the definition and employment of crisis diplomacy (11). In regards to the DOD funding theatre as a security measure in a foreign dictatorship, I propose that this particular project falls under an American perceived probability of war.³²

The perception of crisis and methodology in intervention shifted under the George W. Bush administration. Edmond J. Keller, professor of political science and director of the UCLA Globalization Research Center—Africa, notes the emphasis of the Bush administration of national security regarding American relationships to Africa. Keller states the "...realist

³¹ See David F. Gordon, David C. Miller, Jr. and Howard Wolpe's book *The United States and Africa: A Post-Cold War Perspective*, Herman J. Cohen's *Intervening in Africa*, and Donald Rothchild and Edmond J. Keller's *Africa-US Relations: Strategic Encounters*, and the CSIS Panel Report *Rising U.S. Stakes in Africa: Seven Proposals to Strengthen U.S.-Africa Policy*.

³² Further research should be conducted on the extent of this DOD project. I submitted an FOIA request, however, I suggest the January 29, 2012 New York Times article, "Slow Responses Cloud a Window into Washington," as an explanation of why this research attempt was made in vain.

principles are paramount, but some moral considerations might serve those interests and therefore should be pursued” (7) and “What is most important about the current Africa policy is how it is driven by neorealist considerations of national interests” (8). Severine Rugumamu, professor of development studies at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, seconds the national interests behind American diplomacy and humanitarian efforts in Africa: “It was not until the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, that Africa was eventually perceived as a possible source of threat to international peace and security” (25). Between the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 1998 attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, the heightened perception of terrorist threats to American people and interests led the United States to take a greater interest in Africa and increased crisis diplomacy efforts.

Between 2003 and 2004, the Africa Policy Advisory Panel under Chairman Walter H. Kansteiner III and Executive Secretary J. Stephen Morrison, prepared for then Secretary of State, General Colin L. Powell a list of suggestions on American policy-making in Africa. “Rising U.S. Stakes in Africa: Seven Proposals to Strengthen U.S.-Africa Policy” analyzes:

- Postwar Sudan,
- Strengthening African capital markets,
- Elevated U.S. energy approach to Africa,
- Africa conservation initiative,
- Strengthening U.S. counter-terrorism efforts,
- Strengthening crisis diplomacy and peace operations, and
- Sustaining U.S. leadership on HIV/AIDS

as the most pertinent concerns for American involvement in Africa during the period of the Bush administration. The document reflects the post-9/11 mentality and embraces counter-terrorism

efforts as a backdrop or underlying current of most other initiatives. The climate reflected in these proposals, headed by the private, bipartisan, tax-exempt Center for Strategic and International Studies, may give insight into why the American government, supportive of the Compaoré administration, might also finance a play with aims of unseating his political reign. Jeffrey Herbst and Princeton N. Lyman state:

Collapsed, failed, and failing states risk penetration by terrorist groups. Political instability and violence undermine fundamental U.S. values and interests in promoting democracy and human rights, strengthening market economies, curbing global infectious disease, eliminating transnational threats such as money laundering and narcotics trafficking, and maintaining reliable and diverse sources of oil and mineral supplies. (121).

The above quote from Herbst and Lyman's study "Countering the Terrorist Threat in Africa" places in direct correlation the United States' fear of terrorism, the mission to protect human rights, and the self-motivated interest of promoting a free market. Without making any direct intervention, the United States ultimately desires a stable government, either through continued support of the dictatorship or an embrace of the democratic process by the population. Perhaps unsurprising that the study links U.S. diplomacy efforts in Africa to oil and terrorism, the self-interest of American interventions also perhaps point to the unpreparedness of the United States to appropriately analyze the current global climate. The American government desires regional stability and a free market, benefiting American economic control and the current living standard through peaceful and affordable access to oil. Compaoré in his more recent role as regional peacemaker serves the interests of the American government in West Africa.

A major problem to American interests, however, is that in supporting the Compaoré administration, after twenty-five years in power and with no clear successor, the upcoming 2015 presidential election could bring instability to the country and perhaps to the region.

When countries cross from crisis into conflict, the process of reconciliation, reconstruction, and economic recovery become far more difficult, costly, and time consuming and, in most instances, are accompanied by escalating humanitarian costs...Fundamental responsibility for peace and progress rests primarily with Africans themselves. Yet, the United States has every interest in playing a strong and active role in assisting and enabling Africans to carry out that responsibility.

(Herbst and Lyman 121)

Herbst and Lyman listed Burkina Faso as a smaller, risk-prone African country “in light of its continuing crisis of governance” (134). This impending conflict is so evident to the American government that one employee of the Embassy, who will remain unnamed in this dissertation, went as far as to suggest that Compaoré’s administration ought to change the constitution in a manner that suggests the change came from the will of the people in order that Compaoré remain in power. Though Compaoré’s current position as President ensures some stability, at what risk does the stability of his finite dictatorship and prolonging of a temporary peace place the Burkinabè people and at what cost? In financially backing an education in politics in the form of theatre, the American government supports a seemingly innocuous form of crisis diplomacy. The logic seems to be that either Compaoré will maintain regional stability while in office or the population will have been encouraged to take personal responsibility in peacefully transitioning into a new administration.

Theatrical Responses to a Postcolonial Era

The failure of the nation-state accompanied by reflections on independence, corruption, violence, and disenfranchisement, are omnipresent themes in African literature. As the political stalemate in Burkina Faso continues to fester and foster riots, demonstrations, and dual backlash from the military and President Compaoré, Burkinabè theatre takes an ever more aggressive stance to the country's political (in)stability. Burkina Faso with its tensions and ruptures between imperialists, tribalists, nationalists, and revolutionaries, has served as the subject and background for many plays, and one of the most popular subjects, though taboo, being Thomas Sankara. The assassination of an African luminary shortly after his rise to power and the democratic process's stalemate due to President Compaoré left a longing for a voice that the theatre community aimed to fill. Questions on democracy and independence in Burkina Faso, like in many African countries, echo within the country's own theatrical tradition as well other Francophone African playwrights. Congolese playwright Sylvain Bemba's *Noces posthumes de Santigone* (*Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone*) uses Sophocles' canonical play *Antigone* to frame Thomas Sankara's rise to power and his assassination. John Conteh-Morgan says of Bemba's work:

If his play is an attempt to appropriate a "European," legend for local ends, which it is, it is no less an attempt...to give global resonance to local concerns...to use a text of empire to interrogate and destabilize *not* the power of empire but of the Creon figures of its postcolonial successors. (Conteh-Morgan 86)

Bemba uses the regional specificity of Sankara's assassination to speak more broadly of the failure to successfully implement democracy in postcolonial countries. The self-imposed censorship of many artists and journalists after the murders of highly visible individuals like

journalist Norbert Zongo, however, might address why the play only seems to have been staged once within Burkina Faso and by a foreigner. The only production of the play that I can confirm was directed by Congolese Hugues Serge Aliune Limbvani in 1996 and which toured throughout Africa.³³

In October 2010 leading up to both the celebration of the country's fiftieth year of independence and the presidential election, CITO (Carrefour International de Théâtre de Ouagadougou) staged Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendences* (*The Suns of Independence*), a play based on his 1968 novel that also inspired fellow Ivorian playwright Koffi Kwahulé's 1998 play, *Fama*. The play, which confronts a similar shift in societal perception of traditional life to the political landscape resulting from colonial influence seen in the literature of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, follows Fama, a character who attempts to abandon his familial obligation as king and whose downfall results from the shift out of colonialism to independence. Artistic Director Martin Zongo explained that CITO chose to stage the play because of the country's *cinquantenaire* and invited the audience to contemplate what fifty years of independence has meant to Burkina Faso. Zongo's tone and the messages of the play imply that Burkinabè independence merits reflection (Zongo "Post-show discussion").³⁴

³³ When I spoke with Sidiki Yougbaré, he recalled that Guingané shared an anecdote of being in touch with Bemba and staging a version of *Antigone* that Blaise Compaoré himself attended, but I have yet to confirm this story (Yougbaré "Personal Interview").

³⁴ On October 23, 2010, Jean-Pierre Guingané invited me to see *Les Soliels des indépendences*, in which Nongodo Ouédraogo, former student and current artistic director of his troupe, Théâtre de la Fraternité, performed the lead role of Fama. At the end of the play, Zongo thanked both Guingané and the mayor of Ouagadougou for their presence at the production and thanked the entire audience for not leaving the open-air theatre due to the rain and strong winds during the production. The play prompted us to discuss how democracy works in my own country, evidenced by the then recent unseating of Democrats after the unpopularity of the Obama administration's healthcare reforms. Although Guingané expressed his support for Obama and

The strongest moments of the play in relationship to Burkina Faso's current political reality came through Fama's twenty-year imprisonment for sharing that one night he dreamt a dream with revolutionary themes, the character of the president appearing like a celebrity, flanked by guards complete with sunglasses, a microphone and false promises, and the "Greek chorus" of women narrating the play, speaking in unison and frequently punctuating the most poignant moments of the play with a collective and aggressively reflective "hmmmmmmmm." When Fama is shot by the border guards at the end of the play for misunderstanding that although he is the chief of the region, he's no longer allowed to go as he pleases without an identity card, the subsequent argument between the guards over which orders they were meant to follow and whether Fama should or should not have in fact been shot replicate some of the same frustration and confusion experienced by Burkinabè and the bureaucracy of their own political realities. The splitting of identities and loyalties between borders and ethnic and governmental authority has left a state of disunification deeply felt within both the politics and national "identity" of Burkina Faso.

The Politics of Jean-Pierre Guingané's Political TfD Plays

With a better understanding of the country's political history, we can also see why, in addition to the country's economic status, Burkina Faso receives so much attention and external aid from NGOs. Theatre for Development as an artistic medium linking artistic responses with the funds from external partners creates a simultaneously symbiotic and problematic union in attempting to better the daily living conditions of Burkinabè. We can see, for example, the

universal healthcare, he expressed more respect for the ability of a population to express displeasure with their government and to take action on their opinions. Frustrating to many of the artists and academics in Burkina Faso, voters are unable express dissatisfaction through the electoral process.

emphasis of the NGO CECI's mission statement, "Participatory development builds on peoples' willingness to change within the context of their culture and traditions" poses particular hurdles to both the NGOs aiming to educate the Burkinabè public on the subject of democracy and also to practitioners utilizing Theatre for Development as a form of artistic communication.

The country's most prolific playwright, Jean-Pierre Guingané, utilized a mixture of more traditionally Western theatre approaches and those based in the genre of TfD to the political realities of Burkina Faso and Africa in general. Much of Guingané's body of work focuses on questions of corruption, democracy, and identity, although the message shifts depending on the format of the play. *La Musaraigne*, a straight play about political corruption figuratively represents this corruption through the presence of a musaraigne, a shrew-like rodent in West Africa known for its stench that befriends and corrupts the character of the president through its influence. The presence and advice of the talking shrew leads to the political leader's downfall. *La Malice des hommes*, another straight play, addresses the failure of true democracy due to democratic dictatorship and the effects of postcolonialism through external political influence and corruption. Performed in Côte d'Ivoire before the election in which the defeated President Laurent Gbagbo refused to step down to newly elected Alassane Ouattara, audiences received the play as a premonition of things to come (Mandé, "Curtain Speech"). One of the most recent TfD plays, a work in progress before Guingané's death, *Etranges étrangers*, analyzed the identity conflicts between Burkinabè born and raised in Burkina Faso and Burkinabè raised in Côte d'Ivoire. The play addresses solutions to the region's instability and violence due to emigration, immigration, and border disputes. Guingané's series of TfD plays that serve as the focus of this chapter, *Femmes, prenons notre place*, exist in several versions and although very similar to the

themes of Guingané's other plays, particularly *La Malice des hommes*, address more specifically the roles of women in the building of a true democracy.

Guingané wrote at least three versions of his Tfd play advocating the advancement and inclusion of women in politics. Each version of the play Guingané developed, though thematically similar, evolved quite differently depending on the interests of the organization funding the production. The versions of the play *Femmes, prenons notre place* are unpublished, and as such pose some difficulties to the researcher. According to past administrator of Espace Culturel Gambidi,³⁵ Jacob Sanwidi, multiple versions of the play were written to coincide with the missions and demands of the organizations commissioning the tours of the plays. These organizations include The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Oxfam Canada, Droit et Citoyenneté des femmes en Afrique Francophone (DCF) and their Burkinabè constituent, Coalition Burkinabè pour les droits de la femmes (CBDF), Centre Canadien d'Etude et de Coopération Internationale (CECI), and the American Embassy of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Due to the sudden passing of Guingané on January 23, 2011, gaining access to the plays was difficult. With the help of administrator Karim Tebi, I was able to access two electronic versions of this play on an old desktop computer at Gambidi. I was also able to watch archival videos from 1999, 2001 and 2005 performances in villages, which a friend helped to interpret from Mooré.³⁶ The archival material allowed me to construct a loose timeline in regards to when Théâtre de la Fraternité performed each version. The troupe performed *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* (*Happiness in the Ballot Box*) sometime between 1999 and

³⁵ Espace Culturel Gambidi is the cultural space built by Jean-Pierre Guingané and home of the troupe Théâtre de la Fraternité.

³⁶ The 2005 performance of *Pascaline's Campaign* performed in Bogodogo, a village 15 kilometers from Ouagadougou and introduced by a representative from CBDF was performed in front of the banner promoting both the women's organization and the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of Théâtre de la Fraternité.

2002 and *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes* (*Women, Lets no Longer Leave Our Places Empty*) between 2001 and 2003. When performed for the American Embassy, the play *Femmes, prenons notre place: La Députation de Pascaline* (*Women, Lets Take Our Places: Pascaline's Campaign*, written in 2002) was performed under the title *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* (*The Vote for Social Peace*) between 2003 and 2004. *Femmes, prenons notre place* continues to be performed by the troupe, most recently in 2010 in Madrid, and is currently being translated into a written version of Mooré.

Learning more about each version of the play resulted in a year-long process of speaking with actors who performed in *Femmes, prenons notre place* and representatives from the American Embassy to learn which version the American government commissioned. Most of the actors lost their versions of the text or were only given excerpts of the play to save money on photocopying paper. The staff at the Embassy changes every few years, to the point that the Assistant Public Affairs Officer was unaware that the Embassy had ever funded a theatre-based initiative. According to one of the project managers, Yolande Kaboré, in building a new American Embassy, the paper files of the play were lost in the move and the electronic files were accidentally deleted. I contacted actors from several performance generations and the past administrators at Gambidi to try to learn more about the versions of these plays. Because of the passing of Guingané and to this point, a lack of attention and organization to the archival history of Théâtre de la Fraternité, I am uncertain why the play's title changed from *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* to *Femmes, prenons notre place*, but with many thanks to actor Oumar Ouattara who found his 2003 version of the text, I learned that these were the same play.

Although the exact timeline of these plays is unavailable I would like to propose a reconstruction on how these plays evolved based on available evidence. Guingané's theatrical

interventions into democracy and women's roles in politics began in 1999 with the play *Le Bonheur dans l'urne*, sponsored by IDEA. In 2001, Guingané received support from CECI and DCF to write a more gender-focused democracy play and Théâtre de la Fraternité began performing *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*. Although the electronic copies of this play and *Femmes, prenons notre place: La Députation de Pascaline*³⁷ both bear the year 2002, *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes* was performed before 2002 and *La Députation de Pascaline* was performed in 2003. According to the 2003 report to the American Embassy, Guingané originally proposed a different play than what was performed. As this description resembled his play *La Malice des hommes*, I assume he planned to adapt a play he had already written for the American sponsored project. I propose that as Fraternité had recently toured *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*, that rather than write a new play, Guingané worked with the American Embassy to revise this text into the more recent version. When performed under American sponsorship, the play bore the title *Le Vote pour la paix sociale*. CECI and CBDF (the organization that evolved after the departure of DCF) continued to sponsor the project, but rather than perform two different versions of a very similar play, Théâtre de la Fraternité performed the newly revised American version of *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes* as *Femmes, prenons notre place: la Députation de Pascaline*.

Structurally, each version of the women and democracy plays begin as all TfD plays written by Jean-Pierre Guingané, with Joé l'Artiste, a narrator that suggests the village confront its problems using theatre for debate. While I will discuss *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places*

³⁷ Although the electronic version of *Femmes, prenons notre place* does include this subtitle, no one at Gambidi refers to this play in this way. In writing this chapter, because the titles are so similar, I try to make a distinction between *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes* by referring to it as the main character, Bibata's play while referring *Femmes, prenons notre place* as either *La Députation de Pascaline*, *Pascaline's Campaign* or *Pascaline's play*.

vacantes and *Femmes, prenons notre place* in greater detail in terms of plot and sponsorship, I will begin by discussing *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* in order to give a greater sense of the plays' evolution. Each play follows the story of a woman elected to political office, but with slight variations to the focus of the play's message. *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* exposes the corruption in government experienced by a recently elected female mayor. *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes* begins with a series of vignettes showing discrimination against women and then shifts to focus on the political campaign of Bibata. Both *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* and *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes* end with an educative scene that teaches the audience about the role of democracy and how to vote. *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* (or *Femmes, prenons notre place: La Députation de Pascaline*) tracks the political campaign of Pascaline and that of her opponents and focuses on how voters are also responsible for helping to curb corruption. Each version of the text shows the progression of the playwright in working to structure a message that effectively communicates a theme to an audience that generates a discussion.

Le Bonheur dans l'urne

Loosely translated to *Happiness in the Ballot Box*, written in 1999, *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* is the first of a series of development plays that Guingané wrote addressing the themes of democracy and women in politics. The prologue begins with a party for a young female student's acceptance to a prestigious school, which ends abruptly with the news that a powerful political figure intervened to reject her admittance. The debate portion of the play follows the story of a newly elected female mayor and her struggle to confront corruption from both her own party and that of her opponent. Some of the problems facing elections in Burkina Faso such as tribalism, voting fraud, black magic, abuse of power, and defamation of character accompany the

theme of misogyny leading up to the new mayor's recruitment of her political opponent to work with her to better their community. The play ends with a didactic scene in which characters from the play teach the audience about the role of government and how to vote. Out of the three plays, this play focuses the most on the effects of corrupt political figures and how this corruption then affects the lives of the population.

Le Bonheur dans l'urne, written in 1999, was funded by The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), "an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide...by providing comparative knowledge, and assisting in democratic reform, and influencing policies and politics." IDEA, based in Stockholm, focuses on the following: "elections, constitution building, political parties, gender in democracy and women's political empowerment, democracy self-assessments, and democracy and development" (Idea.int). *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* fell under a project titled "Pour l'enracinement de la démocratie au Burkina Faso," or "For the Development of Democracy in Burkina Faso."³⁸ In addition to Burkina Faso, IDEA has taken on long-term projects in Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Nepal, Nigeria and Peru with short-term projects in dozens of other countries. As reflected in the play, IDEA takes into account the importance to democracy of the frequently marginalized role of women in politics, but places more emphasis on the participatory process of establishing a working democracy.

IDEA does not seek a single definition of democracy. Models of democracy can vary substantially. Rather than assuming a given set of democratic institutions, IDEA tends to see democracy as a process involving political equality and popular control as basic characteristics... Preconditions for democracy include

³⁸ Enracinement can be translated as taking root, deepening, promoting, etc.

basic human security, rule of law and respect for basic human rights such as freedom of expression and assembly. IDEA is concerned about making democracy sustainable, which implies, that all groups in society feel they can make their voices heard, that democratic institutions can effectively channel and mediate conflicting interests, and develop and deliver policies which protect the freedoms and livelihoods of their citizens. (Idea.int)

In sponsoring *Le Bonheur dans l'urne*, IDEA utilized theatre as a mode of communication that actively employs their goals to encourage conversations on developing democracy. In addition to the debate after the play, the characters develop the action of the play through their conversations on the hopes of their government. Through these scenes, the characters reveal how expectations for corruption renders the government ineffective and that officials that take into consideration the alternative viewpoints of opponents can meet the needs of a greater percentage of the population.

Although the play also challenges discrimination against women and misogyny, the play focuses on IDEA's own accentuation of dialogue and democracy. The underemphasizing of the mayor's gender also draws more attention to her successful engagement with politics and her opponents. As seen in the following literary analyses, the interests of the sponsorship by women's rights organizations is much more evident in both of the *Femmes* plays. However, with this focus on dialogue between the politicians rather than a direct involvement of non-politician characters, this play gives non-politician audience members less agency in viewing how they might make conscious decisions regarding government that affect their daily lives.

Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes: Bibata's Play

Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes, (Women, Let's no Longer Leave our Places Empty) which I will refer to as Bibata's play, does not follow one story line, but shows several vignettes which help to frame the societal hurdles the character Bibata faces in running for political office. Between the vignettes and the first act and second acts, there are no recurring characters. The text includes several lengthy monologues for Jo   and a pseudo-monologue for Bibata in which she engages in a description-heavy, one-sided conversation with her community on the democratic process. In the first scene of Bibata's play, a crowd has gathered to listen to the Minister charged with Internal Affairs speak on the subject of reproductive health. The Minister invites the crowd to attend an open meeting in which a decision will be made on how many children each woman can have and what types of contraception should be allowed. A female representative from an NGO asks why out of 350 delegates, there are only three women, and how decisions so directly affecting the lives of women could be made by men. The Minister explains that women, with the exception of unmarried and widowed women, rarely have the time to participate in politics because they are too busy taking care of their children and their husbands. Jo   interrupts, stating that the underrepresentation of sixty percent of the society shows not only an exclusion from politics, but from societal rights in general. Jo   suggests they work to find solutions to these problems using theatre for debate, and the play within a play begins.

The debate portion of the play begins with three vignettes. In the first, a grandfather teaches his son to raise his granddaughter as inferior and subservient to men, the second a father berates his daughter and removes her from school in order that she can do more housework, and in the third three capable women are presumably passed over for a promotion in preference for

an incompetent man.³⁹ The second act of the play switches its focus to the local political campaign of Bibata. Bibata, a motivated female politician, proves that she understands politics through her detailed explanations of the democratic process in Burkina Faso and demonstrates that women are both competent and capable to take on what they identify as “male” roles, or roles of power in society. This scene, arguably the most important in the play, shows Bibata addressing a skeptical crowd about politics. Bibata exchanges with the other characters, verging on a monologue, describing the format of the country’s government, the role each aspect of the government plays in the daily lives of the people, the importance of government decentralization, and the necessary steps for running for election. Bibata encourages women to run for office, insisting that participation in the political process is part of their duty to their community. She also warns the audience that gender discrimination is not limited to women. She encourages both men and women to support female politicians, and that women should see the potential for support from their husbands if they hope to enter politics.

³⁹ The vignettes in Bibata’s play openly critique the traditional subjugation of women in Burkinabè society. These harsh scenes, particularly the beginning familial dramas demonstrate particularly cruel thought and treatment of women, which Joé openly recognizes as overly extreme. Exaggeration in TfD can be useful in communicating to an audience in that launching a discussion on negative behavior is easier when members of the audience do not feel they are being openly attacked. This happened to TfD practitioner and founder of the Company *Théâtre de l’Espoir*, Hippolyte Ouangrawa. The play, confronting the forced marriages of child brides, portrayed a character of an older gentleman who recently married a much too young wife. Ironically, the character shared the same name with a gentleman in the audience who recently married a young woman, also of the same name of the child bride in the play. The gentleman interrupted the play and stopped the performance because he thought the troupe intended to mock him personally. After a discussion in which the troupe explained that the shared names were a coincidence and not an attempt to publically defame the man, they returned at a later date to re-perform the play (this time with different names for the characters). Although the experience of another of Burkina’s playwrights, Ouangrawa’s experience highlights the importance of performing extremes, as seen in the opening vignettes of Bibata’s play in order to spark conversation without demonizing the audience. If, as in Ouangrawa’s experience, an individual in the audience feels attacked, this not only risks ending the performance, but ending the transmission of the play’s message. (Ouangrawa)

The drastic shift in structure and dramatic action from the first act to the second act in *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*, shifting from the use of thematically related vignettes to a distinct storyline, creates the loss of a true dramatic arc. Though the vignettes do not directly relate to Bibata's plotline, they frame the familial, academic, and professional hardships that a woman faces in order to advance in a political career. Practically speaking, Guingané may have aimed to account for the typical staging of his plays during busy market days, in which crowds form at a leisurely pace and frequently miss the introduction and opening scenes. By opening the play with both a prologue and several vignettes, Guingané allows the audience time to adjust to the performance and discuss the scenes with their neighbors before launching into a cause and effect plot structure.

Femmes, prenons notre place: La Députation de Pascaline or *Le Vote pour la paix sociale*

In contrast to Bibata's play, *Femmes, prenons notre place: La Députation de Pascaline* (*Women Let's Take Our Places: Pascaline's Campaign*) which I will refer to as Pascaline's play, abandons the structure of the vignettes and follows a more traditional Aristotelian-based plot in which we follow one main character in which one scene precipitates the next. Also performed under the title *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* (*The Vote for Social Peace*) when performed through the support of the American Embassy, this play appears to have been the most successfully funded with the greatest amount of performances out of Guingané's three Tfd plays on women and politics. The play abandons the purely educative scenes on voting and democracy and focuses more on how misogyny and corruption unnecessarily threaten political stability.

The prologue of *La Députation de Pascaline* begins in a dolodrome, a small shop selling traditional beer. A political discussion turns into a bar fight between members of two different

political parties. The fight begins when an older gentleman visiting the village learns that his daughter-in-law happens to be the leader of a political party in the upcoming election. A major difference between this play and others of Guingané's Tfd plays is that the character of the father-in-law carries over into the subsequent action of the play. The father-in-law visits his son and later his in-laws with the intention to end Pascaline's political career, but learns that the entire village supports the young doctor's political ambitions.

Although there are other moments in the play in which the characters question Pascaline's capacity as a woman to hold office, the majority of the action follows the campaigns of the two parties and focuses on political corruption and incompetency, most notably in the back-to-back campaign rally scenes. These scenes show how *La Députation de Pascaline* diverges from both *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* and *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*. In this play, Guingané eliminates the more theatrically stagnant, didactic scenes in which characters teach the audience about politics and voting. Although *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* also showcases political corruption, *La Députation de Pascaline* shows more evidently the voter's role in preventing this corruption by voting for a party with the interests of the public at heart.

Pascaline's party, the National Progress Party, promotes equality of the sexes in politics, the building of more schools, a decrease in the price of basic commodities such as rice, salt, milk, and grain, better irrigation systems both to help fight hunger and malnutrition, and an educational campaign aimed at reducing unemployment. Burkinabè audiences or audiences familiar with the realities of Burkina Faso recognize that these goals are not only important, but also achievable. For instance, while funds might be needed to build schools, irrigation, the reassessment of the price of basic commodities, and equality rely more directly on education. The National Progress Party promises advances that it can deliver.

The opposition, the party in power, the Liberal Opulence Party, campaigns on bigotry and unachievable goals. Although LOP qualifies that further promotion of women's rights stems from a feminist threat from abroad, they cite the numerous ways the party has already promoted women's rights: their support of education has helped women achieve professional degrees, they continue to promise to build pediatric hospitals in each village and they have recently sent researchers to teach people in London to eat soumbala⁴⁰ in order to advance the economy and therefore the living conditions of the mothers and wives working in the fields. The Liberal Opulence Party ends their rally shouting, "Don't let skirts fill up the General Assembly!" and offers free beer and t-shirts to everyone that joins them at the local bar. The corruption of the Liberal Opulence Party continues when Pascaline wins support after her television appearance. One member of the party boasts that due to his efforts, his nephew cut the electricity three times during her thirty-minute interview. Though the rest of the party reacts negatively to the sabotage, their concerns do not relate to the dishonesty and potential damage to Pascaline's campaign, but to the current concerns of the public over the lack of freedom of speech and that the power outages might certainly be traced back to the party. The Liberal Opulence Party decides a better campaign move will be to bribe people to vote, to vote more than once, and to target the unemployed in this recruitment. The scenes showcasing the Liberal Opulence Party clearly and humorously show a self-interested, misogynist party, willing to sacrifice the interests of the public to remain in power without living up to their promises.

The campaigning scenes exhibit the reality of political corruption in Burkina Faso. I emphasize these scenes because of the similarities between the Liberal Opulence Party, and the real political party, Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès, (CDP) the party currently in

⁴⁰ Soumbala is a sauce made out of spinach-like leaves eaten with a grain-based meal called "tô."

political power and the party of President Blaise Compaoré. The CDP has been known to take advantage of traditional power, which Compaoré reinstated when he took power, invalidating Sankara's mission for unification. The real-life corruption echoed by these scenes is also evident in the number of free t-shirts emblazoned with Blaise Compaoré's face given to Burkinabè leading up to each presidential election. While comedic in the play, the reality of a vast number of a population owning such a limited wardrobe that the prosperity of receiving a new, free t-shirt can ensure a vote shows not only corruption, but a general lack of empathy to take such advantage of a deeply impoverished population.

The *Femmes, prenons notre place* plays confront prevalent political problems in Burkina Faso and the country's struggles with successfully implementing democracy while emphasizing the struggle for women's rights and women's full participation in society. The solicitation of support for women, as well as the societal recognition as to why women might be held back, serve as fruitful reflections on community values and are necessary to promote social change. Theatrically, the story line of Pascaline's campaign helps the audience to embrace a specific character on her journey to political office. Out of the three plays, *La Députation de Pascaline* is the more focused on questions of politics, corruption, and democracy. Bibata's play, however, in its reliance on a narrator and several vignettes, focuses the message of the play more on the disenfranchisement of women in society.

Although Bibata's play aims to distance the audience with extreme scenarios, in assessing both the texts and archival videos of the performances, Bibata's version provides too little engagement in terms of action and plot development. In a 2001 version of the play, Alima Nikiema, currently one of the country's most celebrated actresses, performs the role of Bibata. During her monologue describing the political process, other cast members, placed in the

audience, ask her scripted questions. I addressed the ethical questions of planting audience members in Chapter One with the example of *Laedza Batanani* led by Ross Kidd, however I would like to clarify that in the case of *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*, the audience would recognize these actors as having performed in the previous scenes. During this scene, the audience audibly loses interest in the performance and Nikiema strains to deliver her monologue over the crowd. Etienne Minoungou, another of the country's most influential theatre makers, plays the role of Joé l'Artiste, and although he made a valiant effort to engage the audience in debate, a sudden and violent rainstorm ended this performance.

The 2005 version of Pascaline's play, performed in Bogodogo, a village located fifteen kilometers outside of Ouagadougou more successfully held the attention of the audience based on the available recording. At the end of the performance, Aristide Tarnagda as Joé l'Artiste asks which party the audience would vote for given the opportunity, the Cats or the Hyenas. One young woman answered that she would vote for the Hyenas, as they "have better food over there" in order to say that the Hyena party offers benefits to their supporters. An older woman intervened and took the microphone from the girl to state that the country suffers too much corruption because of that mentality and that as seen in the play, people need to vote for candidates that consider the issues rather than how politics provides personal gain. *La Députation de Pascaline* succeeded in eliciting a range of opinions from the audience and encouraging a debate between the villagers.

The evolution of these texts demonstrates the development of the playwright's voice in incorporating socially relevant themes that promote an audience-led debate while balancing the expectations of a funding organization into a theatrically viable production.

Using the missions of the various organizations that funded these productions, in conjunction with the texts, personal interviews, and archival research from Espace Culturel Gambidi, the plays can be further deconstructed to understand how the influence of the funding organizations might shape and therefore create very different performances. The three versions of the play while thematically similar are structurally almost entirely different. In this way, we can see how the pull between aesthetic values and theatricality and the clarity of the message of the play can work together or create opposing agendas. Emphasizing the differences between the plays will help to further lay out the groundwork of analysis in regards to influence from NGO partnerships.

The Mission of Gender Equality

All three plays thematically incorporate democracy and female participation. *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes* addresses societal prejudice and misogyny and *Le Bonheur dans l'urne* and *La Députation de Pascaline* focus more on political corruption with the latter emphasizing the agency of the voter. The following analysis will show how the mission statements of the gender equality focused NGOs, CECI, DCF and CBDF, inform the two *Femmes, prenons notre place* plays. Although CECI and DCF appear to have partnered on this play as part of a larger coalition, and CBDF evolved as an organization specific to Burkina Faso after DCF's interventions ended, particular elements of the goals of each organization resonate with specific moments in the plays. In review, Bibata's play recognizes the many societal hardships confronting women and making it almost impossible for Bibata to succeed and Pascaline's play focuses much more on the democratic process than on the specific realities of gender equality. Bibata's play takes an educative approach to how the democratic process

functions specifically within Burkina Faso while Pascaline's play pins desirable against undesirable values of politicians and political parties. Pascaline's play reveals gender discrimination, but in addition to promoting women's rights, places just as much emphasis on how eradicating corruption and learning about the democratic process will help to advance a democratic society. Through these distinctions, we can analyze how particular mission statements might have informed Jean-Pierre Guingané's construction of each play.

Centre Canadien d'Etude et de Coopération Internationale

To begin this analysis of the affect of mission statements on the construction of Theatre for Development plays, we can see how the action of the second vignette in *Femmes ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*, Bibata's play reflects the mission statement of CECI (Centre Canadien d'Etude et de Coopération Internationale). This mission in particular has evolved as CECI has become more focused on the rights of women and girls:

Our mission statement and values have, therefore, been revised and are now based firmly on the principles of equality and equity between women and men. In them, we put forward a vision of human relations based on respect, cooperation, and justice. At the same time, our "women and development" policy has also been updated to become the Policy on Equality between Women and Men (CECI "Gender Equality Policy" 2).

CECI, a Canadian aid-based network of organizations focused on "combating poverty and exclusion" emphasizes the importance of gender equality over the occasionally divisive "women's rights." CECI focuses on general questions of participation and development through community involvement and their gender equality policy specifically echoes the goals presented

in the *Femmes* plays. The action of each play demonstrates that men and women working together create a harmonious society. CECI's utilization of Tfd as a participation-based engagement encourages the democratic process but more specifically, the participation of both men and women working in tandem in governmental roles.

Exemplifying CECI's stance, the organization advertizes their mission for equality through their literature; the cover image of CECI's Gender Equality Policy shows a man and woman hand-washing laundry side by side, visually representing the goals for gender partnership. From my perspective, I was struck by the cover image of an African man and woman happily doing laundry. In Burkina Faso, men and women's duties are strictly delineated, and laundry falls under women's work. With the exception of economizing bachelors, mothers, wives, and cleaning women generally tend to this time-consuming and fatiguing work. Ironically, I have often heard laundry cited in casual conversations about equality during which men berate feminism as Western-imported, as an activity in which women must never expect men to participate.

While this image appeared in CECI's literature and was not directly related to the performance, we can see the resistance to shifting the gender assignments of labor as portrayed in the laundry image reflected in the subject matter of the vignettes in *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*. The second vignette highlights the stratification of gender roles and how an unequal workload creates inequity for girls that CECI aims to address. A father educates both his son and daughter on the inferiority of women. The father insults his daughter, first for her decision to help her mother move a boiling pot of water rather than immediately answer her father's call, and then for her poor performance in school. The scene reveals the difficulty for girls to balance their responsibilities of helping with housework and also pursue an education:

while the daughter helps her mother with tasks around the house, the son is only expected to study. Trying to get his sister to speak for herself, the son shares that she defended girls to their classmates and that given the chance to dedicate more time to schoolwork, she and other girls could easily surpass their male counterparts. The father dismisses the argument of the children and insists that withdrawing his failing daughter from school will both help the family financially from the burden of her tuition as well as helping their mother to have additional help around the home.

The cover image of CECI's Gender Equality Policy featuring a man and woman washing clothing together, a visual representation of the organization's mission, shows an idyllic image of how work might be better delegated between men and women, while the play shows a more realistic image of how Burkinabè men dismiss housework and how girls are often left berated and uneducated. The father insults his daughter for staying to assist her mother and ignoring his call, even though his wife's welfare was in danger, and offers no help to his wife or daughter with the heavy pot of boiling water. Both of these vignettes demonstrate how the play theatrically performs the problems that the CECI laundry picture and the mission statements of both CECI and DCF aim to resolve. The stories told in these vignettes, as they relate to the goals of these organizations, help to elaborate the realities in countries like Burkina Faso that encourage not only the use of theatre to address these sorts of scenarios, but also the shift in CECI's mission to focus more on women's rights and partnerships between men and women. As seen both through the play and the goals of the organizations, to reach a true democracy, the population simultaneously must work towards gender equality.

The Development of a Message, The Evolution of a Scene

Regardless of how the sponsoring organizations influenced the playwright, the texts exhibit the ways in which Guingané developed the theme of women in politics over time and how his own vision on how to communicate these themes to an audience shifted. Although the two *Femmes* plays are almost entirely different, they each contain a similar scene in which the lead female character discusses her campaign with two childhood friends. The scenes fall in relatively the same place in each text, pages 15 and 18 respectively. Each scene follows the revelation of sexism and prejudice that block the social advancement of women within the community; however, the women in each scene exhibit a much different internalization of this discrimination.

In *Femmes, ne laissons plus nos places vacantes*, Bibata and her friends Francoise and Tipoko discuss her campaign with tangible tension between the newly elected politician and the other two women. Francoise and Tipoko celebrate Bibata's success and exceptionality and Bibata rebuts the flattery with encouragement for the other two women that they can accomplish the same achievement. Both Tipoko and Francoise exhibit self-debasing behavior and lack not only the same confidence exhibited by Bibata, but display an internalized inferiority. The scene exhibits the female assumption imbedded in society that a career in politics exceeds most women's. Despite the fact that Bibata's friends have the ability to run for office, both understand politics to be exclusive to exceptional women.

In the scene between the three women in *Pascaline's Campaign*, confidence and sense of purpose erase the internalized inferiority seen in the supporting female characters in Bibata's play. The three female characters in Pascaline's play hold a meeting not to garner encouragement, but to further campaign strategies. Pascaline with her childhood friends and fellow running mates, Abibou and Fanta, discuss hurdles that they will face as women and how

to balance their responsibilities and work with men in their community to prove that women can play valuable roles in politics. The three women determine that they represent a diverse demographic of women in the country—intellectuals, businesswomen, and housewives. This scene takes a more active role in communicating political realities than Bibata's play. Rather than emphasizing female equality, Pascaline's scene outlines strategies the women plan to undertake to get elected and what they will do when nominated. The scene is active rather than defensive as the scene in Bibata's play, and while both are based in gender, Pascaline's play places more of an emphasis on the role of democracy. Structurally, the placement of each scene, following several scenes of adversity, demonstrate the importance of female solidarity and also show the audience a more intimate encounter with the female protagonist. Both scenes address the individual pressures women feel in regards to discrimination and concerns for entering leadership roles in their communities. In helping to abandon the constraints of gender, however, Pascaline's play advances the issue of women in politics by showing three confident and capable women who balance their responsibilities, the societal expectations placed on them as women, and their goals as leaders. In this way, the play is respectful of gender roles, yet helps to break the cycle of submission still seen in Bibata's play.

Without having the opportunity to interview the playwright, it is difficult to assess how much direct influence these sponsoring organizations had on the content of the play. However, in this scene in particular, we can see the shifting approaches in trying to help women in development mirrored in the playwright's developing voice in the manner in which he addresses women's rights and politics. Although CECI, DCF and CBDF focus on the significance of gender equality in these plays, *La Députation de Pascaline* also represents a play that depicts a particular international political moment and raises questions on the role of diplomacy. This

play, also sponsored by the American Embassy under the title *Le Vote pour la paix sociale*, exemplifies how global ideology influences artistic production. While Guingané ultimately had agency over the writing and production of his own plays, the text and the responses to the performances help to reveal the agenda of each sponsor.

The American Embassy's Role within the Political Climate in Burkina Faso

Le Vote pour la paix sociale, the revised title of *Femmes, prenons notre place*, was one of two Théâtre de la Fraternité Tfd productions commissioned by the American Embassy of Ouagadougou to tour throughout Burkina Faso. The project began in 2003 and the financial support fell under the budget of the Department of Defense as part of a Bush administration counter-terrorism initiative promoting democracy and religious tolerance. The Embassy funded first, *Le Vote pour la paix sociale*, performed in 2004 and then *Intolérance Ravageuses*, a play on religious tolerance which began touring in 2010 and which Théâtre de la Fraternité continues to perform.⁴¹ According to Binta C. Mayaki Ouédraogo, former Program Advisor and Educational Assistant at the American Embassy of Ouagadougou who worked on this project, representatives from the Embassy worked closely with Guingané through several revisions of their commission of *Femmes, prenons notre place* to ensure that the play focused on the democratic process, eliminating other social commentaries (Mayaki Ouédraogo). According to a Gambidi administrative collective performance report, the Fraternité performed *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* forty-five times with thirteen actors and *Intolérances Ravageuses* fifty times with thirty-six actors (“Fiche de Renseignement”).

⁴¹ As of February 2012, twenty out of forty-five commissioned performances remain to be performed. This was one of the many projects temporarily derailed by Guingané's sudden death.

In order to establish the significance of this project, I want to investigate the perspectives of the playwright in writing the play and the Embassy in commissioning the play, as well as the perceived success of the projects by those involved. In considering the American involvement in the evolution of the play *Femmes prenons notre place*, an expensive project with much more effort going into the original conception than the assessment of its outcome, we might ask what is the role of the American government in promoting democracy in foreign countries? What is the role of a playwright in confronting a dictatorship or a foreign government? Is true political resistance through theatre possible when sponsored by a foreign entity? What is the role of diplomacy? When is ideology trumped by political reality and to whose benefit? What is “politically correct?” for governments sponsoring TFD in another country or for a playwright accepting the financial support?

The Perspectives of the Playwright

Playwright Guigané described his goals for the project in his first progress report to the Embassy, dated November 2003. Twenty actors were asked to interview at least ten people including elected officials and citizens to get a better sense of how a play written on democracy could meet the needs of the audience. The play’s goals were as follows: To acknowledge the population’s desire for a working democracy, to eliminate “every form of corruption, nepotism, and regional favoritism,” to address the manipulation of the voting system, either through the falsification of votes or the rewriting of the constitution to remain in power, and to teach the audience about democracy because illiterate villagers often do not know how to vote and are even scared of the process because of this ignorance. These are all things that, in one way or another, the real life party of President Blaise Compaoré, CDP, has used to their advantage.

Guingané emphasizes that the fourth goal, to educate the population, is the most important and expresses in his proposal that demystifying the concept of democracy and the voting system would be one of the main goals of the play.

These four goals outlined in Guingané's report not only consider the political climate of the country, but of the region. Guingané's goals are largely in response to the experience of the neighboring country, Côte d'Ivoire. After many Burkinabè moved to the costal country in hopes of economic prosperity, the ethnic-based civil war beginning in 2002 brought many hardships for people in both countries. Guingané expresses the urgency of democracy education in the mission of the text. The play (quote):

aims to grab the attention of the Burkinabè public that helped the immigrants from Côte d'Ivoire who escaped the civil war, which started because of a lack of democracy. We want them to understand that if the population wants to avoid a similar situation in their own country, they need to seriously consider the debates on democracy and the voting system. ("Rapport d'Exécution du 1^e Trimestre" 3)

Almost ten years later, we see how regionally, democracy continues to fail. The prime examples affecting Burkina Faso include the November 28, 2010 elections in Côte d'Ivoire when incumbent Laurent Gbagbo refused to recognize the victory of opponent Alassane Ouattara until he was forcefully removed from office April 11, 2011 and President Blaise Compaoré's landslide re-elections, his rewriting of the constitution, and the dissolution of the Burkinabè government on April 15, 2011. The mission of *Femmes, prenons notre place* is as urgent as ever, particularly as Burkina Faso faces the seemingly inevitable conflict that the 2015 Presidential election will bring to the country. The population predicts two possible scenarios: another surreptitious change to the constitution or a potentially violent scramble for power. A democratic shift in

power as portrayed in *Femmes, prenons notre place* remains unknown to the Burkinabè population.

The progress report to the American government not only shows the effects of failed democracy on the Burkinabè people, but on the playwright himself. Within the report, the original summary of the play does not summarize a development play, but resembles the plot for one of the last plays that Guingané would publish, *La Malice des hommes*:

A dictator, for reasons that we shall ignore, decides to become democratic. He plays the game well. Political parties are put in place, the electoral campaigning begins and everyone prepares for the elections. The government and political parties work to give the population a civic education. (“Rapport d’Exécution du 1^{er} Trimestre” 3)

La Malice des hommes was first staged in 2003 during the same period of time that Guingané was developing his collaboration with the American government. The play presents a dictator pressured by more powerful foreign governments to create the appearance of a democracy. At the end of the play, he loses the election to his niece, who he had placed as a figurehead leader of a progressive political party. Though it is unclear whether Guingané originally planned to write a different development play for the Embassy and how he then transitioned from this synopsis to the text of *Femmes, prenons notre place*, his body of development work focused on political corruption, educating the population on the role of government and elections, and women’s roles in politics represents a major preoccupation for the playwright.

The Perspective of the American Government

On October 26, 2010, the American Embassy of Ouagadougou issued an invitation to all American citizens living in Burkina Faso to meet the newly appointed ambassador, Thomas Dougherty, and to tour the newly constructed embassy building. Of significance to this analysis was Ambassador Dougherty's reconfirmation of the goals of America outside of the country: promoting democracy and religious tolerance. However, shortly after his reiteration of these two agendas, accompanied by additional information on the American presence in Burkina Faso, Ambassador Dougherty commended the role President Blaise Compaoré has played in regional stability and the American government's appreciation in working with him. This leaves one to ask what is the role of the American government in promoting democracy in foreign countries, particularly when they sponsor a theatre-based initiative in democracy education but also show support for a dictator? When taking into consideration the post-9/11 American agenda in Africa outlined in the beginning of the chapter, the "crisis diplomacy" approach helps to clarify the hypocrisy evident in the American financial support for *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* in conjunction with the Ambassador's support of the country's dictator.

In terms of implementation of this sort of program, Mayaki Ouédraogo found several problems with the initiatives, including how she perceived the mission of the plays to have failed and a shift in the Embassy's mission to have ultimately affected the assessment of the plays. The Embassy spent quite a lot of money on the initiative: the first payment to Gambidi for *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* was equivalent to over \$16,000 ("Rapport d'Exécution du 1^e Trimestre" 4). However, for such a large project, no evaluation was ever conducted to inform the Embassy or Gambidi as to how the audiences perceived the messages of the play outside of the initial talkbacks. In terms of the Embassy's mission, the project was initiated under the Bush administration and not continued under Obama's administration, as, according to Mayaki

Ouédraogo, the current administration was not interested in this sort of project. From an Embassy perspective, the play garnered little success as evidenced by the landslide elections, voter fraud, and voter abstention seen in the 2010 Presidential Elections.

The sponsorship of *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* positions the United States concerns for the potential threat of political instability in African countries to American interests, *Intolérances Ravageuses* further clarifies the Embassy's concerns for terrorism. *Intolérances Ravageuses* follows a long-absent religious zealot's near destruction of his natal village. According to Oumar Ouattara, Guingané originally linked the development of the character's bigotry to exposure to American Evangelicalism, to the dissatisfaction of the Embassy. The edited script attributes the unnamed religious zealotry to the character's world travels, clarifying that the character did not learn these practices in the United States through added and overly evident praises of American culture. The play, a product of a particular global though American-centric historical moment, elicited different reactions from the participants. Mayaki Ouédraogo criticized the project as irrelevant to Burkinabè society: the majority of Muslims, Christians, and traditionalists live harmoniously (Mayaki Ouédraogo). For example, Christian neighbors invite Muslims to celebrate Easter and Muslims invite Christians to celebrate Tabaski. Although Burkinabè hold Americans in high regard, the general opinion is that American culture breeds religious intolerance. Harouna Gouem, a young actor and recent graduate from CFRAV had a different experience when performing in *Intolérances Ravageuses*. Having grown up in Dori, a village known for Islamic fundamentalism in the northern, desert region of the country and a Muslim himself, Gouem shared that he originally feared performing the play in front of his fellow villagers due to their extreme belief systems. His fear turned to relief when the play, well received by the village, sparked a successful debate in which the villagers rejected violent

extremism. From a personal perspective, Gouem deemed the performance successful as he previously believed a conversation of this nature to be impossible (H. Gouem).

Regardless of the successful experience for Gouem, Mayaki Ouédraogo offered the additional and poignant criticism of the timing of the play. Théâtre de la Fraternité began touring *Intolérances Ravageuses* between 2009 and 2010 and shortly after, AQIM (Al-Qaïda in the Islamic Maghreb) began kidnapping foreigners in the porous Sahel border region between Mali and Niger.⁴² It would be an exaggeration to directly link the regional kidnappings to the failure on the part of the TfD play, but the perceived success or failure of the play by the participants begs the question who are these Embassy-sponsored plays meant to benefit? For Gouem, the communal experience shared between audience and actors helped each group to better understand one another, but from the Embassy's perspective, the regional instability and terroristic threats following the performances indicates a failure on the play's behalf.

The intention and reception of *Le Vote pour la paix sociale* further complicates the question of which audience these development plays serve. While the Embassy perceived a failure in educating a population, practitioners touring with *Femmes, prenons notre place* felt otherwise.⁴³ Mohamadi Gouem, the resident lighting designer and technician at Gambidi, tours with Fraternité's productions and cited *Virus au lycée*, a play on HIV/AIDS for student audiences, and *Femmes, prenons notre place* as two of the most successful productions in terms of audience reception. He shared that TfD is important because "it's a type of theatre that goes to a village, where people are living these problems at any given moment but don't know how to resolve them." Gouem noted that in 2006, before the municipal elections, *Femmes, prenons*

⁴² See Reuters Africa

<<http://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL5E7N84T720111208>>

⁴³ The perceived success of this play on behalf of the performers has been noted elsewhere in the dissertation. Please see Edoxi Lionelle Gnoula's accounts in Chapter 1.

notre place encouraged populations to accept that women run for office. He cited that many women now hold office and named examples of the consequent elections of female mayors in Dano, a village near Gaoua in the southwest of the country and Saaba, a municipality of Ouagadougou. Gouem shared that due to this play, there were women who became mayors and who became advisors after viewing the play and that the story offered them encouragement. “They didn’t realize that they themselves could run for election, become a deputy, become a minister, become a mayor. They didn’t realize it...(The play) gave them more credibility in their (campaigns)” (M. Gouem).

Although these limited observations give an unsubstantial overall assessment of the play’s agency, the perception of success combined with the perceived probability of political instability draw into question the efficacy of “crisis diplomacy” perhaps more so than cultural interventions in society. From the practitioners’ perspectives (and the subsequently elected female politicians), the play succeeded in broaching the subject of women in politics. From a diplomatic perspective, the play was unable to disengage potential voters from the metaphorical quagmire of the country’s current political dysfunction. This particular project in cultural intervention, outside of assessment, represents a product of the current political climate of both Burkina Faso and of American diplomacy.

A cultural intervention of the nature of the *Femmes* plays ultimately cannot be assessed in the direct terms of “success” or “failure,” but we can draw some conclusions from the intentions of the sponsoring organizations evident in their agendas towards the project. While TfD cannot be expected to reshape the complicated intertwining of power structures that exist in Burkina Faso, theatre can be expected to spark the dialogue necessary for gradual social change. In applying this analysis to the agendas of the sponsoring organizations, the use of culture to

encourage democratic stability as a branch of the short-term endeavor of crisis diplomacy sets culture up for failure. The sponsorship of culture by organizations like CECI, DCF and CBDF more closely matches the organizations' goals and the outcomes of the plays. Though they might outline idyllic goals in their mission statements, the organizations discussed in this chapter aim to initiate conversations that lead to social change.

While the theatricalization of a mission statement can lead to a haphazard intervention by foreign entities in attempting to shape a country's political landscape, Jean-Pierre Guingané ultimately had control over his own theatrical project. With an intimate knowledge of the politics of the country and a deep investment in inspiring social change, Guingané aimed to reach and to educate new audiences on the democratic process and the advancement of women. His partnerships with the funding organizations ultimately provided him with the ability to tour these messages throughout the country. While the organizations might encounter difficulties in assessing whether the stipulations of their mission statements were met through the course of the performances, we can be sure that the artist's mission, to transmit a message that promotes a functional and democratic government with equal participation for women, succeeded.

Chapter Four

Who Performs? The Roles of Women in Burkinabè Theatre

An Introduction

Women artists in Burkina Faso are slowly gaining recognition and acceptance within their society in comparison to their predecessors. However, because of the expectations produced by particular gender norms, the role of theatre artist remains a marginalized one for women in Burkina Faso. Although conditions have improved, female theatre makers continue to struggle with societal resistance to their work from family, audiences, and even fellow theatre makers. In the following two chapters, I discuss the impact of cultural expectations on the social, theatrical, and professional roles of women in Burkinabè modern theatre. I examine how social expectations inform the characters women perform on stage in addition to the professional roles of women in producing theatre, first through theorization and a series of interviews and then through a literary and performance analysis of two Theatre for Development texts.

In this chapter I explore the roles of Burkinabè female theatre makers and the roles they perform onstage and offstage. First, in Burkinabè society, a woman's perceived valor depends on her dedication to her roles as wife, mother and homemaker. Second, these same social roles and values appear onstage in female characters defined by their positions as wives and mothers within the world of the play and subversion of these roles can jeopardize a woman's real life reputation. Third, the roles women perform onstage and in society are thus codependent, and the same limitations for women shown onstage affect the offstage lives of female theatre makers. Within this chapter, I incorporate feminist theory and theory on gender performance to analyze the struggles presented to female artists in Burkina Faso. I examine how feminism might be articulated in Burkina Faso using Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's feminist theory *Stiwanism*, which

takes into account the poverty, social-mindedness, and dedication to motherhood specific to an African female context. Because I am using the term performance not only to discuss characters in theatre and people in theatre, but also to show how expectations of gender influence behavior, I incorporate Judith Butler's theories on what it means to "perform" gender within society. The chapter aims to demonstrate how theatre, when used as a medium to address women's rights, contradictorily encapsulates women in a struggle against expectations on their gender.

TfD as a genre is unique in African theatre in that it consistently takes into account issues afflicting women in society. Many African plays initially addressed the aftermath of colonialism and the clashes of power, poverty, globalization, and definitions of "nation-state" that resulted out of violent Western influence but frequently overlooked specifically feminine realities. Scholar Valerie Orlando gives the following examples of African and Caribbean authors whose work depicted a "masculine in nature reflecting the 'new man persona:.'" playwrights Bernard Dadié, Cheik Ndao, Jean Pliya, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, and Aimé Césaire, poet Léopold Sédar Senghor, and theorist Frantz Fanon (155). Jean-Pierre Guingané seconds this observation and cites certain works of Sony Labou Tansi, Bernard Zadi Zahourou, Senouvo Agbota Zinsou, and two of his own first plays that focus on the failing nation-state and "the bankruptcy of African political regimes" (12 "Rules Made to be Broken"). As discussed by Orlando in her reading of the significance of Werewere Liking's work on ritual and feminine theatre, the African canon frequently overlooks the roles and positioning of women:

African drama, in much the same manner as literature, immediately following the end of colonialism, rarely expressed the needs and concerns of women. As in the case of politics, women found themselves virtually effaced, or at best beholders of minor roles, in the often militant and nationalist rhetorics of post-colonial

literature and drama. It was clear that all over Africa the spoken and written word of the educated, political and intellectual intelligentsia of Africa would be dominated by masculine protocol (155).

The “nationalist rhetoric” described by Orlando has since shifted to focus more on questions of African identity, neocolonialism, and power than nation-statism. The African canon has certainly developed in the considerations of African women, seen through the work of female playwrights like Liking, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Tess Onuweme among others as well as some of the subsequent work of the previously mentioned playwrights. For example, I would suggest Bernard Dadié’s *Béatrice du Congo* and Sony Labou Tansi’s *Parentheses of Blood* as well as Sylvain Bemba’s *Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone*, and Koffi Kwahulé’s *Bintu* as plays written by men with strong female characters.

Theatre for Development as a genre has never failed to focus on women. On the contrary, TfD plays frequently evoke themes designed to promote women’s rights. As noted by scholar Penina Muhando Mlama:

The bulk of these programs (TfD) are devoted to development issues such as agriculture, health, or education, and because women play a crucial role in the development process, bearing the heaviest responsibility in the areas of production and reproduction, it has been widely recognized that they must be included in the "communication for development" process. (“Women’s Participation” 41)

Most TfD initiatives are funded by governments and NGOs and these agencies either recognize that many developmental problems directly afflict the lives of women or have mission statements focusing on women’s rights. Partially through the influence of these organizations, TfD

incorporates the opinions of women into developmental efforts and thus attempts to give women a voice within society.

This inclusion of women both in performance and in community development also serves as a departure from *kotélon*,⁴⁴ the traditional performance medium found in West Africa that functioned to address possibilities for social change. The *kotélon* tradition is cited as a one of the influences on the origination of TfD in the region, but while socially motivated, *kotélon* was a male-dominated performance archetype. Orlando observes:

More traditional African productions performed as Kote-tlon drama... left little room for new feminine roles. While serving the people as a viable outlet for social criticism, it has also been criticized for being, “conservative and patriarchal in its social vision and [for preaching] a rigid adherence to normative behavior patterns and values, especially for women, who are forever depicted as fickle, adulterous and therefore potentially disruptive of the social disorder.” (156)

The re-adaptation of the *kotélon* tradition to which Orlando refers demonstrates the failures of these traditional outlets, which TfD aims to redress. Most of the themes of TfD center on women’s rights like the importance of educating young girls, reproductive health, education on the dangers of female circumcision, and general questions of equality.

However, as indicated by the later part of Orlando’s commentary, TfD does not escape the same risks of encapsulating women in the traditional roles that TfD hopes to help women escape. Prosper Kompaoré’s play, *Fatouma la machine à enfants* or *Fatouma, the Baby Machine*, exemplifies how important sensitization messages for a given community can also risk reinforcing the subservience of women. The play begins with a husband severely insulting his

⁴⁴ For more on *kotélon*/*Kote-tlon*, please see Chapter 1

wife for cheating, evidenced by her unwanted and seventh pregnancy. Through a series of flashbacks, the play returns to the couple's joyful marriage and the birth of their first son to the ensuing hardships of caring for four children born within five years of marriage and the confrontations between Fatouma and her lusty husband. Fatouma, attempting to avoid unwanted pregnancies through family planning, learns more about effective birth control methods through a friend who works for a social action organization and encourages her to use condoms and birth control pills. However, Tinga, her husband, caught between the demands of his father for a large family line and beliefs that his sterile neighbor has a better solution, practices some traditional sacrifices and forces Fatouma to wear a contraceptive belt fabled to prevent pregnancy. The story then returns to the opening scene of the play, with a tearful and pregnant Fatouma with a small child on her back leaving her home. Tinga accuses her of being unfaithful and sends her off with a kick to the stomach that sends her to the ground. The play ends with a song promoting better care for women, fewer pregnancies, and the use of proper birth control methods followed by a forum in which community members act out the scenes with proposed changes for a better outcome.

Within the world of the play, Fatouma does little to reproach her husband and has very few options. Tinga threatens to leave her if she does not meet his amorous demands and refuses to allow her to work outside of the home to help support the growing family as this could encourage her to seek an affair with another man. He spends money in bars while his children go hungry, unclothed, and uneducated. Although he ignores the advice of his father to have at least fifteen children and that of his friends to sleep with prostitutes because of his fears of HIV, Kompaoré presents in Tinga a figure of male dominance that is so complete that it is his ignorance rather than his forceful submission of his wife that creates the conflict within the play.

This means that in viewing the play, an audience can most readily offer solutions to Tinga's behavior rather than Fatouma's. Fatouma, as the capitulating victim and patient wife and mother, does little in terms of offering a space to the audience to correct her behavior or offer her solutions. In terms of how she, or women in her position, might better protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and domineering husbands, the play offers little space for improvement, and we see Fatouma's positioning herself as subservient as correct behavior. *Fatouma, the Baby Machine* serves as one example of how TfD aims to promote women's rights and ameliorate their position in society while also threatening to encapsulate them in particular gender norms or subservient victims.

Burkinabè theatre is a male-dominated art in a male-dominated society which complicates the mission of TfD in Burkina Faso. While there are a handful of influential female artists, the most important administrators, directors, and playwrights in the country are men. The structure of male power that occurs in the home is replicated in the theatre and men are the ultimate figures of authority. This gender disparity hampers the effectiveness of TfD in promoting women's rights because women play supporting roles in the production decision-making processes. While the plays themselves might work to promote the position of women in society, the performance of female tropes onstage echo the limitations placed on women within their homes. These limitations reverberate within the profession of theatre and demonstrate ways these plays continue to entrap female theatre artists in the very roles they aim to combat. In analyzing these roles, this chapter uses a literary and performance analysis of staged roles, firsthand accounts of the limitations on the roles interviewed female theatre artists feel they are permitted to play, and how gender norms help to shape the prescribed roles of women within society, and therefore, also onstage.

From the Perspective of Burkinabè Women in Theatre

A Theoretical Lens

As I investigate the societal positioning of Burkinabè female theatre artists in how their identities are informed and restricted by cultural expectations of women and how women theatre artists are viewed within their profession, I rely on the experiences of interviewed actresses and their reflections on the treatment they receive by families and other artists, the perception of audiences on the roles they perform, the current status of women as theatre makers, and the future of women's roles in creating theatre. The pervasive subservience of women to men in Burkinabè culture and the obligation to fulfill the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker control how women perform proscribed social roles, their roles onstage, and their roles within the theatre community.

Two theoretical lenses guide my analysis. First, how one “performs” gender within a society or how society “performs” gender for an individual are significant questions for the Burkinabè women interviewed in this chapter and for the female characters in the subsequent plays. Judith Butler's investigation of gender in *Undoing Gender* informs my analysis of these performances and helps to clarify the societal expectations placed on female practitioners.⁴⁵ Second, I will use Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's acronym, *Stiwanism*, in order to avoid a generalized understanding of “feminism” in discussing women's rights and female agency by acknowledging what is considered to be an African version of feminism. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's acronym, *Stiwanism*, elaborates the similarities and nuances of an African feminism to

⁴⁵ In terms of utilizing Butler to discuss gender in African terms, Butler does specifically address the significance of gender analysis in terms of the conditions of women of color in a global context. “Discrimination against women continues—especially poor women and women of color, if we consider the differential levels of poverty and literacy not only in the United States, but globally—so this dimension of gender discrimination remains crucial to acknowledge.” (*Undoing Gender* 6)

Western versions and helps to further explore some of the difficulties and contradictions facing Burkinabè women artists. This version of feminism emphasizes the significance of the role of mother in African femininity; however, some of the encapsulations of this role elaborate the connection between gender norms, female empowerment and female subjugation.

The gender expectations for women in Burkina Faso create several “performances” for female artists: the roles they perform in the home as daughters, wives, and mothers, the roles they perform onstage and how these roles unwittingly inform their real-life personas, and the roles women perform or fail to perform in authoritative roles in creating theatre. Judith Butler explores the exchange of gender and identity as between, but never fully possessed by, the individual or the society that creates the individual:

If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. What I call my “own” gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself). (*Undoing Gender* 1)

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler analyzes the give and take between the individual and the individual as the subject of a society in gender definition and how these exchanges are cyclical but not wholly the cause or result of a product that never rests in a unilateral definition of what “gender” is. I find her use of the term “authorship” to be particularly relevant in regards to a discussion on

theatre as so much of what these two chapters will address is literally the creation of both written texts addressing gendered problems and then performances of those texts. As stated by Butler and as will be applied to the world of Burkinabè theatre, defining and redefining gender is an act of a mutually engaged authorship.

Butler continues her deconstructions of gender in employing the term “norm,” which, as we shall see, is particularly useful in the context of how Burkinabè women are encouraged, obliged, and/or resistant to how they perform their roles as women in society. As Butler explains,

The suggestion that gender is a norm requires some further elaboration. A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation. Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce (41).

Theorizing gender as a norm through Butler’s definitions helps to give more focus to how women might “perform” the expectations of their gender in Burkina Faso, which are always referential to the demand placed on women’s roles as mothers, wives, daughters, and homemakers. For example, women may work professionally (and might even be expected to work professionally), provided that the professional roles not subsume the socially proscribed domestic roles. There are no specific prohibitions on women from performing and caring for a husband and family: though rare, there are in fact Burkinabè women who do all of these things

successfully. However, to further contextualize the reasons that female performers are subject to specific gender norms that will be explored in this chapter, the roles of women in theatre threaten the sanctity of the home because of the amount of time spent away from home due to rehearsals, performances, and touring and the heavy sexual connotations jobs in the arts carry for women. What is important to note is that although there might not be specific laws that regulate the behavior of female artists, these women, as seen in their interviews, internalize the extent to which they live outside of the socially prescribed norms for the female gender.

Gender performativity in the context of African-based feminist theory elaborates how gender norms simultaneously empower and subjugate women hoping to live in accordance to these norms. Above all, the significance of the role of motherhood within African culture helps to define the concept of African feminism but also risks entrapping women in particular societal roles. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's manifesto "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa," which she shortens to the acronym "Stiwanism," emphasizes the role of wife and mother as integral to the definition of African feminism. While most of her manifesto warns her audience on the dangers of essentialism and emphasizes that "Africa" represents many religions, ethnic groups, cultural belief systems, languages, and origins, she also recognizes that many African women are united in a dual-subjugation "as women, and as members of impoverished and oppressed classes where women are in the majority" (542). Although she justifies and clarifies that the idea of "African feminism" must include the many and distinct countries on the continent, the following is a list of summarized points collected by Ogundipe-Leslie from African feminists and female writers:

1. That feminism need not be oppositional to men. It is not about adversarial gender politics.

2. That women need not neglect their biological roles.
3. That motherhood is idealized and claimed as a strength by African women and seen as having a special manifestation in Africa (...)
4. That the total configuration of the conditions of women should be addressed rather than obsessing with sexual issues.
5. That certain aspects of women's reproductive rights take priority over others.
6. That women's conditions in Africa need to be addressed in the context of the total production and reproduction of their society and that scenario also involves men and children. Hence, there has always been an emphasis on economic fulfillment and independence in African feminist thinking.
7. That the ideology of women has to be cast in the context of the race and class struggles which bedevil the continent of Africa today; that is, in the context of the liberation of the total continent. (549)

Ogundipe-Leslie's clarification of African feminism applies to Burkinabè feminists' hopes to see their roles develop in their own country and also reflects particular gender norms not only in place in Burkina Faso, but reflected on the entire continent. As we can see in the play *Fatouma, the Baby Machine* and will also see in the next chapter in *Three Sisters in Suffering* and *On the Day After the Full Moon*, the focal points for African feminism are the same issues TfD plays take up as points of social change. The particular problem facing Burkinabè female artists is that many hope to embrace both familial responsibility and their passion for an artistic career without being oppressed by the former or defiantly shackled to the latter.

African feminism, or *Stiwanism*, values the roles of wife and mother as integral to African female identity, and while female theatre makers might desire to fulfill these familial

roles, Burkinabè society allows little opportunity to balance art and maternity because of the restriction of the gender binary. Although men with professional careers in theatre also suffer critique due to a general lack of appreciation for the arts in Burkina Faso, it is specifically the gender norms of Burkinabè society that disallow the acceptability of women performing in theatre. The role of female theatre makers and the difficulties they encounter because of these norms can be divided into two different points of analysis: first, how these norms affect how society views actresses outside of their work and second how women are viewed onstage by audiences and others in the field while they are performing.

Perception of Women in the Field of Theatre

The restrictions on female theatre makers and the limited representation of female voices extend across the continent to affect many African women in theatre. Even the most celebrated female African voices, women who have had a global impact with their work, have met with hurdles in their own countries. As addressed in the introduction to this chapter, Werewere Liking developed her theatrical mission in her native Cameroun to battle the stereotypes against ritual performance and women in theatre. She continued this mission throughout West Africa and established one of the few and most successful private theatre companies in Côte d'Ivoire, KI-YI, and was in residence in Burkina Faso in 2011. Nigerian playwright and professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Tess Onwueme, a fiercely feminist playwright, also works to attack the misogynist assumptions of her home country. Described by theorist and professor Awam Amkpa:

Male freedom fighters against English colonialism imagined an independent Nigeria as a national “home” in which women would occupy procreative,

maternal, and domestic managerial roles, illustrating Ania Loomba's claim that "despite their other differences, and despite their contests over native women, colonial and indigenous patriarchies often collaborated to keep women 'in their place.'" In Onwueme's depiction, Omu, before her conversion to Wazobia's cause, represents this feminine ideal domesticated to help manage patriarchy by enforcing conformity among women (Amkpa 71-72).

Amkpa's postcolonial reading of Onwueme's character Omu in her play *The Reign of Wazobia*, in which a woman unlikely ritually ascends the throne, confronts these issues of power and the conformity that men imposed on women during and after colonialism. Onwueme fortifies the female characters in her plays beyond the domestic sphere and although she writes at a distance from Nigeria, aims to combat patriarchal structures.

For Ghanaian female playwright Ama Ata Aidoo, this struggle against patriarchy begins in the act of writing:

All writers are plagued by fears, real and imaginary, by all sorts of uncertainties and some very solid problems. After all, we are also human. The truth though, is that some of us suffer a little more, simply because we are women, and our positions are nearly hopeless because we are African women. (*African Literatures* 517)

Aidoo fervently addresses the blatant omission of female writers from critical considerations on the African canon. Although this has been somewhat remedied since Aidoo wrote this article in 1986, this does not mean her concern for female writers has become invalidated.

More specifically to Burkina Faso, the female performers I interviewed, ranging in age from early twenties to mid-fifties, expressed similar concerns for the perception of and problems

posed to the women in their profession. Actress Safoura Kaboré discussed her experience with the play *Femmes prenons notre place* (*Women Let's Take Our Place*), a play that will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five:

You need to be prepared psychologically, I'm not talking about talent, but to do Tfd you encounter certain risks. You arrive in a place with your theme...take *Femmes prenons notre place*—It's a theme on government, that we want to put women in power, all of that, there are certain regions that you arrive, "No, a woman in power, they're going to kill you, they're going to kill you, you're crazy, do you have any idea what you're saying, how can you even think of something like that." Those are the risks. (Kaboré)

For Kaboré, the troupe took a risk by promoting women in politics. Kaboré espouses that her frustration stems from a tradition and certain education that women are meant to tend the home, bear children, and obey their husbands and though she has experienced comments such as these first hand, she hopes that in using theatre, she can help to change some of the limitations placed on women (Kaboré).

Most of the problems facing women artists relate to the role of the family. Many actresses expressed that family members did not approve of their choice to work in the theatre. Actress Jaqueline Thienan Kini laments that until family members come to see performances, women often do not receive familial recognition of theatre as a legitimate career path. Kini said her father supported her decision to act, but that when she would come home from rehearsals late at night, her mother would quarrel with her, asking her what type of girl was the last family member to return to the house. Kini also described her experience with an uncle in Koudougou that she invited to come to see her perform. Before the show, her uncle responded, "Oh, you still

haven't found anything better to do than to make people laugh?" After the performance, his opinion shifted, and at the end of the show told her, "That was good. Even me, I'm going to encourage you to continue." Now, Kini says, it's those same family members that encourage her and her uncle is one of her family members that now wants to send his children, even his daughter, to Ouagadougou so that Kini can help them to pursue theatre (Kini).

Like Kini, actress and comedian Edoxi Lionelle Gnoula explained that women sometimes achieve familial acceptance when they successfully convince family members to see a show, although this continues to be a hurdle. Gnoula, also frustrated by the lack of support she has received in her field, particularly from her family, emphasized that in order to succeed as a female performer, "you need to take your place in front of the people that critique you, in front of your family, your parents" (Gnoula). Gnoula shared that since she has become an actress, cousins she considered as friends stopped responding to her socially.

My mother was always supportive, I never had that experience with my mother but I know I have female cousins who stopped calling me back, I'm a little bit of an outsider, you see. It had been over a year since they had called me to see how I was but it doesn't bother me. "I send you messages to see how you are, send you messages on holidays, if I perform I invite you to the show" and nobody comes, until now—because other people (family members) have come and shared with them (their positive experiences) and now when there's a performance they (the female cousins) say "oh, you're going to be in a show, please send me a message, I want to come" and I think, "all this time I've been sending you messages and now you want to come?"...So you see, afterwards you forget how people have treated you (Gnoula).

Although frustrated by the treatment of her extended family, Gnoula's success in the field and her increasing fame in Ouagadougou helped to attract people like her cousins to see her performances. Actresses like Gnoula and Kini become jaded and critical of audiences through experiences like these, but it is this same determination that ensures future change in the acceptance of performance as a viable career for women. In order for an audience to be sensitized to the value of theatre, the actors must first put in the work to create the value of the plays. Though this is currently a struggle, actresses who slowly gain positive familial recognition create support for women in theatre within their communities and only through this continuation will women in theatre become accepted in Burkina Faso.

The concerns of families for women like Gnoula and Kini stems from the gender norms at work within Burkinabè society. Families fear that a woman with a career in theatre cannot find a husband, and in Burkina, the role of wife and mother is a woman's most important to play. With late night rehearsals, tours, and extensive time spent with male colleagues, finding a husband, and one that also accepts his wife's career, is rare. Actress Safoura Kaboré said of her experience with TfD audiences that the assumptions that artists are promiscuous tarnish the reputations of female theatre makers: "There are times that you arrive somewhere and people say 'Wait a minute, you girls go around with those boys and travel all around? You say you're doing theatre? No! It's anything but; it's a bordello!' All that. It hasn't always been very easy" (Kaboré). Although theatre-makers defend their profession as no more promiscuous than any other, the heightened visibility of performers garners negative perceptions of the artists' sexual pastimes, particularly in regards to women. These negative perceptions do not follow most women with professional careers because they are still able to care for their homes at night without the same demands for frequent traveling. The only other career so stigmatized by

Burkinabè society and linked to promiscuity and prostitution is that of waitresses in bars, as people infer that no husband would ever allow his wife to work late nights spent in the company of men and alcohol. In this regard, gender norms affect the lives of women because they are largely constructed through what men find to be acceptable.

Director, actor, and playwright Ildevert Meda engages this reality onstage and how it affects the familial lives of women with a female character in *Kubidu Abanda*, a play about a theatre company with a corrupt artistic director, commenting on both the corruption in the arts but also as an allegory for African states. One of the lead female characters in the play within a play nods solemnly when speaking to the artistic director of the troupe about her salary as he laments that her husband abandoned her and her newborn child because she refused to give up her professional theatre career. As within the world of the play, *Kubidu Abanda*, the expectation for women to preside over a home can imprison a woman to her family but can also fence her out of one. The implication that women are both promiscuous and untrustworthy stigmatizes both actresses seeking husbands as well as already married female artists, making marriage to a man with a career outside of the arts almost impossible.

Actress, administrator, and director Laure Guire emphasized the same issues in her interview as Meda raised in his play. According to Guire, theatre is the only career in Burkina that does not offer maternity leave. An actor in Burkina Faso might go three months without any sort of professional contract, which puts financial and reproductive restraints on women hoping to build families in addition to professional careers. As Guire emphasized, a young mother cannot simply say to her director “I’m sorry, I have to leave, I have a child” (Guire). These same conflicts do not affect other women with professional careers, as children are often in school during the day or in the care of family, neighbors, or young live-in housekeepers. As seen thus

far, if the roles of wife and mother are integral to African society and African feminism, how might a woman balance both and an artistic career?

In addition to considerations of motherhood, marriage itself presents some significant hurdles to women in theatre. Several interviewed actresses said they would refuse to marry a man that does not accept her passion for her work, but others were more reticent. Kini laughed when she shared that one young man tried to seduce her by promising to help fund her future education so that she could leave the theatre (Kini). One young up and coming actress and playwright shared that being forced to choose between a marriage proposal and her career in theatre is her current reality. Although she holds the promise of potentially playing an important role in the future of Burkinabè theatre, she was openly conflicted about her future and the choice between a socially suspect role as a theatre practitioner or a limiting but respected role as a wife, (Anonymous 2).

The thirty-four year artistic and teaching career of one of the more successful dancers and actresses in the country, Blandine Yameogo, provides evidence for the exclusive choices women artists are forced to make between career and family. Yameogo explained that in the 1970s, the same women performed in dance, theatre, and cinema but now that these careers have become more professionalized and more women have entered the field, it has been necessary to focus on one specific area. Yameogo shared that while conditions for female performers have improved since her career began, “it’s not easy, particularly in terms of the family” (Yameogo). She has openly stated that she made the decision to sacrifice a marriage and a family to focus on her professional dance career (Mayen 168).

These personal concerns translate into wider political issues. As will be addressed at length in the following chapter, female characters in TfD subscribe to these same gender

expectations that aim to regulate female theatre makers' roles to wife and mother. Although TfD in Burkina Faso is beginning to break down these expectations, the pervasiveness of gender performativity within theatre goes on to affect the real lives of the female theatre makers. That women have little authorship over how they perform their own gender roles affects them both socially and professionally. The following sections will address how this lack of authorship endangers women's sexual freedom and limits women's agency in their career paths to professional roles in which they answer to men.

Shifting perceptions of female sexuality

The shifting conception of female sexuality and the understanding of a woman's place within society contribute to the difficulties facing women in establishing acceptance of their professional career paths and balancing familial responsibilities. Colonial influence, the postcolonial shifting of social mores and the differing traditions of over sixty ethnic backgrounds in Burkina Faso shape the current realities for women and the perceptions of women within the country. While this is by no means a comprehensive anthropological study, the following represent examples of traditional societal views on marriage specifically in regards to the placement of women.

Actor, director, and playwright Aristide Tarnagda described these traditional views of women and marriage during a discussion on themes that are under-represented in TfD and themes which he fears are often caricatured by these plays because they are commissioned by Western agencies. The theme he emphasized was sexuality, specifically in regards to female sexuality and marriage.⁴⁶ He discussed how the image of female sexuality has evolved without a

⁴⁶ Tarnagda also mentioned homosexuality as an under addressed theme in Burkinabè theatre.

societal contextualization, which has led to both a lack of education and conversation in terms of the origins and development of that image. Because Western organizations commission Tfd plays, the solutions the plays offer are Western-sanctioned, meaning they are solutions vested in a Western definition of morality.⁴⁷ The risk of generational conflict, universalizing an African identity by blending ethnic backgrounds, and presenting solutions that are inapplicable to particular societies threatens to render a play irrelevant and therefore ineffective. Tarnagda elaborates how society has lost a concrete image of the expectations of a Burkinabè girl; he attributes this to a loss of education on traditional life, and sees that this has negative ramifications for the treatment of women within society. Tarnagda gives the following example of how the Bisa, his ethnicity, traditionally approached the predicament of young women bearing children outside of wedlock:

We have an image of a “good girl,” one that preserves herself until marriage, honoring her family as well as herself...Except that we know that men will do stupid things and in the case that they fail to live up to these standards, society created a window in response to this. So the question is, if this happens, what do we do? An aunt can house people like this, girls like this. But you have to teach a girl that, so that she knows that if this happens, that her parents aren’t only her biological parents, you see? Even if your father says, “get out!” her father is not her only father. Her father has brothers and sisters...Then the aunt, or whoever, will come and say, “Awa came to my home, here is what happened, we’re going to do some sacrifices and when she gives birth, hopefully she’ll get married but if she doesn’t, she’ll come back home.” So there you have it, even if this education

⁴⁷ For an example, see the example of Georget Mourrin’s *Le Palu* in Chapter Two

doesn't exist any more, we have to talk about it. (A. Tarnagda "Personal Interview")

The removal of societal precautions for women such as these without the implementation of other safeguards risks a woman's well being within a society. Tarnagda continued to explain that female sexuality, and sexuality in general, needs to be acknowledged and not caricatured by theatre. By losing cultural specificity in the education offered by TfD plays, the particular education offered misfires and can risk leaving some women without an understanding of traditional options that may have been offered within their own culture.

Through these observations, Tarnagda explored how Burkinabè society has lost a sense of self, which he defines as a societal education. Tarnagda emphasized that in regards to theatre, because of the thirty-year history of Western-commissioned plays, playwrights have worked too hard at universalizing a message for many ethnic groups and communities. He sees that TfD, rather than raising specific problems like the case illustrated above: how has society previously engaged with women who bear children out of wedlock? promotes a Western conclusion of proposed solutions. Tarnagda suggested that playwrights, rather than promoting solutions to societal problems, should address the specific problems of an ailing community, which could then allow those communities to discuss their own solutions.

Tarnagda extends his perception of the failure in societal education and open communication on traditional practices to the treatment of women and marriage. Tarnagda explains that foreigners interpret the Bisa marriage tradition to be forced marriage. He described at length the procedure in which after a public courtship, a woman invites the man she loves to meet her family and after a ritualized introduction to the family, the girl is asked a question four times "zakab ney?" or "are you the child of this house?" If she answers yes all four times and

the boy continues to come to visit and help the family till their fields, after a year or two, the girl will leave to live with her husband. A month or two later, the husband's family will confirm with the girl's family that "they found someone who appeared to be lost, but she is in good hands and we will take care of her." The family agrees that if she is in good hands, she might stay.

The meaning behind this is that:

In the Bisa tradition, we don't give away a girl in marriage, we steal her—I can't just bring a child into this world and just give her away to you like I'm throwing her away, so we steal her. There's all of this theatricality in the language, in everything that's put in place because we look at it like we don't have a choice—it's a person's destiny. That's life...And we've lost all of this education... (A. Tarnagda "Personal Interview")

Tarnagda explains that the girl, through the ritual, decides who she brings to present to her family and this only becomes complicated if she brings more than one young man to the home or has not spent enough time getting to know the young man she's chosen outside of her home before initiating the marriage ritual. One tradition in the Mossi ethnic group is almost opposite of Tarnagda's example from the Bisa tradition. Although it is possible for a couple to marry for love, a girl can also be presented out of honor to another family and the head of that family decides who she will marry. If a wife is abused, the entire family councils the couple and if the wife is removed by her family, the husband's family is disgraced. If the husband treats his wife well, he might be rewarded by receiving her younger sister as a second wife. In this tradition, a girl is seen as a daughter of an entire village and after her marriage, as the wife of the entire village and she must be treated with that level of respect.

Tarnagda spoke of the traditional treatment of women when asked to discuss weaknesses he saw in TfD. He used these examples to elucidate the ways that women have not only been subjugated by traditional societies, but also protected, a fact that TfD generally overlooks. Women have traditionally been viewed as an extension of their families and their communities, and this tradition influences the way women are seen today, particularly when performing onstage. When women take on marginalized roles in society, such as that of an artist, they also threaten to marginalize their families from the perspective of the community. Because of this rupture between traditional perspectives and emerging practices, it can be difficult for communities (and theatre) to accommodate new issues like women bending gender norms with performance careers. Tarnagda sees the difficulty for communities to tailor solutions to their own societal ills stemming from the loss of Burkinabè traditional lifestyles without gaining new social apparatus to support and protect women. For example, in regards to themes frequently seen in TfD, because the West misunderstands only the threat of forced marriage within these examples, a community faces the challenge of how to negotiate the same community investment in protecting women's rights but under modern circumstances. The loss of traditional educations within these communities has also resulted in the loss of traditional protections for women. This conception of a woman's place within her community and the evolution of how women are valued and positioned within society elucidate some of the fears expressed by audiences for the participation of woman in theatre as well as the reasoning behind the image of women in TfD plays. Although difficult, some of the attempts to mediate these hurdles will be discussed in the following chapter.

The Onstage Influence on the Offstage Perception

The fears of audiences and the shifting perception of women in society are reflected in how the perceptions of an actress's onstage character reverberate into her offstage life. Several actresses gave one example that if they performed the role of a prostitute and performed the role well, audiences would assume they must have the life experience to inform the acting.

I had trouble performing when I was cast as a woman who led a bad life—a bit of a prostitute... It wasn't at all easy for me because the image people have of me will be tarnished if I perform this type of character well. I was completely blocked and... even today I have a few problems. I feel that the audience and even between us as actors, we haven't yet accepted the differences between a girl that performs a prostitute and the girl herself. If a girl performs a prostitute with such perfection, we're going to say that at some point or another, she lived a corrupt life. It means at some point in her private life she behaved similarly.

(Anonymous 2)

This woman blamed a lack of professionalization, both for the presumptions of other actors and for her own hesitations in performing a prostitute, but she insisted on the ultimate importance of her self-image in society.

One actress shared that while performing, one concerned audience member tried to interrupt her to advise her (as an individual and not a character) that she could make another career choice. I observed these audience reactions first hand during a dance performance titled *Zalissa la Go* featuring Atlanta-based American dancer, Mallory Starling. The loose story line depicted Starling as a waitress with unknown and mysterious origins who attracted a lot of male attention. "La Go" means a pretty girl who may or may not be promiscuous. The performance, a mixture of solos, duets and group numbers, featured Starling's infusion of pointe with African

and modern dance techniques. During the entire performance, a man commented loudly in Mooré that Starling would not get any sleep that night, inferring she would be occupied by a sexual encounter and that she would never find a husband because she was uncontrollable. Sira Diarra, a Malian actress currently working in Burkina Faso, gave the example of the lived experience of the principle actress in a film in which she performed. The woman played a manipulative and violent character in the film, and was beaten several times in the street in real life by people who perceived her to be the same type of person they saw in the film. Diarra, angered, shared that her frustration stemmed from the recognition that she knew men who performed evil characters without suffering any real-life repercussions. The fact that men receive praise and respect for their performances while women, assumed to be typecast, receive abuse, whether verbal or physical, reveals the misogynistic impression that female performances imply actual lived experience, thus tarnishing a woman's image.

The other offstage impression of actresses—how these women are viewed by other theatre professionals—affects the perceptions as well as the careers of professional female theatre artists. Even more troubling than the perception of audiences is the reality, or the *impression*, that the woman seeking the part must engage in a sexual relationship with the director in order to be cast in a performance or festival. An anonymous actress shared her impressions of finding work during theatre festivals:

You have to battle, but immediately if you approach someone (for a role), they could assume that you are offering yourself (to engage in a sexual relationship). Or if you're determined enough, they'll see if they can tempt you with the role (to engage you in a sexual relationship). Not every man is like this, there are many that are upstanding, who are artistic, and focus on the theatre. That's it. But there

are others that think because you're a woman, because he's a man—there are boys that will fight to prove that they can, to prove their capacity. (Anonymous 2)

This actress went as far as to describe theatre as a “network of ass.” In another actress's experience, she found accusations of promiscuity to be directly linked to her nomination to a role of authority. She shared that after she had been named the head of one of the prominent troupes by the director, an actor and someone she considered to be a friend, viciously accused her of sleeping with the director and influencing who was cast in each show. The actor went as far as to threaten her physically. A year later, the actor confessed that he knew everything he said to be untrue, but he had trouble accepting that she had been named as the head of the troupe and taking her direction because she was a woman.

Another actress, while she did not cite the man's name, denounced one of the major contributors to Burkinabè theatre as the specific source of this sort of agenda plaguing women in theatre. She stated that in order to be recruited into the world of professional theatre in Burkina, he bragged that an actress must pass through his bed.

We need to work as much as possible. For the most part, women in theatre (in West Africa) come from poor families. We need to work. We need to make money. At least ninety percent of women have a family they're in charge of—we have to take care of our mothers, of our sisters—we're obliged to earn money to take better care of our families. So if you're offered 1,000,000 F CFA⁴⁸ for two months of work but you have to pass through the bed of monsieur, you're going to do it. (Diarra)

⁴⁸ The conversion rate of franc cfa to American dollars is around 500 F CFA to \$1.00. 1,000,000 F CFA would be around \$2000.00.

In this actress's testimony, she implied that she had not made the decision to exploit herself sexually to move forward with her artistic career but was angered by the bad reputation that men within the field gave to their female colleagues.

These types of accusations are as equally troubling whether based in truth or in rumor. Either men in roles of power take advantage of the subservient and dependent position of actresses on finding a job or other men and women make false accusations to damage the careers of their peers. This is particularly troubling in the case of women, as they are casting their colleagues in the same overly sexualized and immoral role to which they are so fearful of being accused. The quandary for women might be less "do women sleep with men to advance their theatrical careers" or "do men purport the myth that women sleep with men to advance careers" than if these women are interpellated by the belief that sexual availability begets roles and thus act on this interpellation. If so, does this mean the myth might actually be perpetuated by the women themselves? If the belief in this dynamic helps to place women in the beds of male directors and administrators, could women still be cast in shows by banding together and rejecting the possible demand on their sexual availability? By acknowledging the myth (or reality) that women sleep with men for roles, women are interpellated into continuing the same subjugation they wish to escape.

While collectively rejecting this sexual interpellation might strengthen the community of women artists, the economic realities of going without work already strengthen the level of competition felt between actresses to get parts, encapsulating women not only in a precarious position of men's proclivity to their bodies, but also in subordinate roles to men. In my experience, financial instability is the root of the phrase "*Nous ne nous aimons pas dans ce métier*" or "we don't love each other in this line of work" in reference to how all theatre artists,

men and women, treat one another. Whether the Burkinabè casting couch exists or not, men do hold the decision making roles in Burkinabè theatre and therefore a good deal of control over the careers of their female counterparts. Hopefully the future will help to address the next consideration of this chapter: the role of women as leaders in Burkinabè theatre.

Women in Authority and the Future of Theater Administration in Burkina Faso

While there are many successful actresses in Burkina Faso, few of these women enter into the roles of directors, administrators, or playwrights.⁴⁹ Aristide Tarnagda cites this lack of women leaders as well as the frequent portrayal of women as victims as the two biggest hurdles facing women in Burkinabè theatre today. To Tarnagda's knowledge, he knew of no projects proposed, written, and directed by women. Although Tarnagda praises the older generation of female performers including Aminata Diallo-Glez (Mimi Diallo), Odile Sankara, and Irène Tassembédo, he accuses the younger generation of women of being "lethargic" in that women are content to say that there are limitations and obstacles to being a woman, but that no one takes action against it: "They don't know what liberty means. They don't know how to emancipate themselves... There's a lack of dynamism." Tarnagda acknowledges the fact that there are social standards in place that limit female participation in the arts, he cites the rejection by romantic partners, but he finds that women have to start refusing these standards. He shared that he sees his female counterparts as happily accepting calls for casting but never taking the risk to propose projects or direct plays. "They always rest in second place but then complain to us that we're

⁴⁹ I want to clarify that this might be said for theatre, but not for other performance genres in Burkina Faso. For instance, Irène Tassembédo was one of the first professional dancers in the country, founded her own company and school, and regularly directs and choreographs some of the country's largest and most professional performances.

leaving them in second place. I get the impression that they're being complacent.” (A. Tarnagda “Personal Interview”)

Given the circumstances of women's reality in theatre in Burkina Faso, this assertion coming from a male perspective would be harsh if women in the field did not also echo this sentiment. Laure Guire, who has held various roles as both performer and administrator in her career and is currently working on a female-led initiative, shares Tarnagda's concerns that women are complacent in their current roles in theatre:

Everyone is an actress. A few attempted directing but pppttt! They abandoned it. So, I can't tell you that presently there are female directors. And that's the reason that I want to launch (my directing career). I don't see any. There aren't any. Mimi Diallo started but she abandoned it, Salimata Sanouka started but she abandoned it. You see, women start but don't go very far with it. But with the evolution of everything women must start to take her part because we talk about development...culture plays a part in development so we have to take part in the development of our country....The Récréâtrales⁵⁰ started to train (female) scenic and lighting designers—that's not bad, that's a start...but everyone loves the stage.⁵¹ Even female administrators; there aren't very many...The serious problem is that actresses aren't taken seriously...People ask “And your real, real, *real* job, what do you do?”...Stuff like this isn't seen as real work...Your real job

⁵⁰ The largest biennial private theatre festival in the country.

⁵¹ There are other initiatives aiming to train women in the arts and arts administration. For example, many female students enroll in AGAC, but few enter arts administration after receiving their degrees. In modern dance, Compagnie August-Bienvenue's program *Engagement Feminin* recruits young women and trains them to dance in an attempt to professionalize the field. Despite these examples and the available opportunities for women in the arts, I would like to reiterate that very few women take on leadership roles in theatre.

is taking care of your home and you say “Theatre, what is that?” We need this; as women we need this. (Guire)

Guire’s assertions show the correlation between how gender affects careers in theatre: women in particular in theatre are not taken seriously. Although theatre might be perceived as a hobby rather than a profession for men and women, this perception has not hindered men from taking on leadership roles within the field.

Guire, when asked, did not know why her female colleagues abandoned directing and could only cite a handful of past projects directed by women. Burkina Faso dominates the region in terms of number of productions, companies, and private performance venues, but other West African countries including Mali, Togo and Côte d’Ivoire can boast important women directing and running influential theatre companies. While actress Odile Sankara and playwright Sophie Kam should be noted for their successes in the field, currently in Burkina Faso, women’s leadership roles in contemporary dance are much more significant than in theatre due to the efforts of Irène Tassembédo, one of the first contemporary dancers in the country and the founder of EDIT (Ecole de Danse Internationale Irène Tassembédo) and Maman Koyaté, the founder of L’Ecole du Wamdé” a company that teaches orphans dance, theatre, music and fine arts. The theatre, however, lacks the same female leadership presence.

The irony of TfD projects is that while many playwrights have proposed intelligent theories on how to socially intervene for women’s rights using theatre, women have had significantly less agency in promoting their own rights even within the theatre. Thus we return to the question of “who performs” in Burkinabè theatre? Who performs women’s rights onstage and off, despite the incredible talent of up and coming Burkinabè actresses? The answer is currently men. Men write the plays, cast the plays, stage the plays, administer where the shows

tour and select the festival programs. While this analysis is bleak, the positive aspect of this argument is that while theatre might perform its own marginalization of women, it also plays a major role in trying to combat this subjugation. Although there are a number of innovative and talented women working in the field, as gender norms restrict women to subservient roles, women in theatre battle not only for the roles they gain onstage, but for the roles they gain as citizens.

In this chapter, I investigated the social and professional restrictions felt by women to frame the plays I discuss in the next chapter and to better situate the society within which these Tfd plays function. The plays *Three Sisters in Suffering* and *On the Day After the Full Moon* examine deeper and more violent forms of misogyny afflicting Burkinabè women, but the discrimination, the sexual prejudices, and the restraints placed on professional actresses exemplify the multilayered bigotry women face. While the current generation of female performers feels privileged to benefit from the struggles of their predecessors, as seen in this chapter, they continue to struggle for the basic rights to work, marry, and have a family. The same expectations on gender norms that inhibit women in theatre to easily attain these liberties are reflected in the construction and representation of characters in the Tfd plays that aim to liberate them. The reconstruction of socially limiting gender norms within the very medium that promotes women's rights brings us back around to the question "Who performs the roles of women?"

Chapter Five

Staging the Norms: The Characterization of Women in Burkinabè Theatre for

Development

This chapter builds on the discussion in the previous chapter of women's lives in theatre as a lens to inform a literary and performance analysis of two Theatre for Development plays written to defend women's rights. Ironically, in TfD plays, female actors play traditionally subservient roles in productions intended to challenge traditions and promote women's rights. Women perform these roles in their daily lives, then practitioners interpret and stage the same roles when writing and producing the plays, and women then re-perform these roles themselves onstage. Often the male-dominance in Burkinabè theatrical production mirrors that in society and these interconnected performances raise the question of who, precisely, performs women's roles in Burkinabè TfD. Within this chapter, I attempt to give further evidence to answer the question "who performs" within Burkinabè theatre through an analysis of the development plays, *Trois soeurs dans la souffrance* or *Three Sisters in Suffering* written by Jean-Pierre Guingané and *Au Lendemain de la pleine lune* or *On the Day After the Full Moon* by Ildevert Meda. While Guingané's play serves as an archetype of TfD in Burkina Faso, Meda uses his play to transcend the representation of female characters of his predecessor and advances audience responsibility in interpreting the messages of his play. Both of these plays attempt to promote women's rights by addressing domestic violence and female subjugation but both also reinforce established gender norms in performance. The expectations for gender norms in Burkina Faso will help demonstrate the methodology behind these TfD plays and also explore the complicated positioning of women with professional careers in the theatre. This literary analysis investigates how theatre aims to ameliorate the societal conditions to which Burkinabè women are subjected

and questions how this genre also codifies the oppressive elements of the construction of woman as wife and mother.

Although I will be critiquing the ways in which I see these plays continuing to concretize ways in which gender roles keep women subservient, I commend the effort that the production of TfD makes to alleviate the problems plaguing women in the deeply misogynistic culture of Burkina Faso. Through these critiques, I hope to not only further complicate these productions, but to validate the playwrights' efforts and to contextualize the world in which these plays are operating. As is the case in many developing countries, unfortunately many development problems afflict women specifically, as reflected in the dedication of TfD to women-oriented themes.

Jean-Pierre Guingané's *Trois soeurs dans la souffrance*, or *Three Sisters in Suffering*, an example of a successfully received play with positive audience feedback written by one of the country's theatre luminaries, tackles dire realities afflicting women, particularly sexual abuse. The play *Three Sisters in Suffering* follows three women who are subjected to sexual abuse and discrimination by society, religion, and tradition. All of the female characters in this play are obedient wives, mothers, and daughters, and their actions are contingent on these familial relationships. Directed by Belgian director and professor Jean-Henri Drèze, the company Théâtre de la Fraternité performed the play nationally and internationally in 2006. I chose this play because the clarity of its message reveals gender norms at work; the simple thematic structure shows how, even with the best intentions, a playwright risks reconstructing in his play the same societal controls that cause the problems he aims to rectify. I also personally worked on this play, aiding actors to speak selected lines in English during the 2006 rehearsal process

and helped to translate the play into English with co-translators Université of Ouagadougou Professor of English, Amadou Bissiri, and Guingané's daughter, Sylvie Yongoro-Guingané.

The second play this chapter addresses, Ildevert Meda's *Au Lendemain de la pleine lune* (*On the Day After the Full Moon*), confronts the mortality rate of pregnant women and the tensions between modernization and traditional societies. The family-oriented roles of wife, mother and daughter might be implied, but are not emphasized like in Guingané's plays. The onstage women in *On the Day After the Full Moon* include merchants, community organizers, and midwives. First performed in Mooré in 2011 by a cast of independent artists directed by Meda and Italian director Luca Fusi, the play toured to villages outside of Ouagadougou and was funded by two Italian NGOs: "Cerscereinsieme" of Verona and "Servus" of Bolzano. Both Guingané's *Three Sisters in Suffering* and Meda's *On the Day After the Full Moon* address the marginalized roles of women; however, Meda writes his play to be less didactic than traditional Burkinabè Tfd. Meda hides his educational messages within a murder-mystery and through the revelation of "whodunit," shows, rather than tells, an audience the role an entire community plays in the well being of women. This is a productive comparison to Guingané's play both in terms of how Meda delivers his educational message to the audience, but also in terms of how Meda's development of female characters depart from stereotypical archetypes.

An Archetypal Example of Burkinabè Theatre for Development—*Three Sisters in Suffering*

Three Sisters in Suffering follows the victimization and abuses three women from three different religious and economic backgrounds suffer due to social attitudes and customs that devalue women and make them vulnerable, regardless of their backgrounds. Guingané wrote the play to function within the practical realities of how Tfd is produced in Burkina Faso, the reality

of which has been discussed in Chapter One. Written to be performed on busy market days, the playwright acknowledged in his writing the goal of drawing crowds of thousands of people.

Guingané wrote his plays with the hopes of passing a message to illiterate communities that may not have access to radios or televisions and who have become resentful of being lectured to by representatives from NGOs. Guingané also incorporates how people communicate and debate in Burkina Faso, which can be further explained through his theoretical understanding of how art functions in the country:

The debate about the role of art in society is as familiar to humanity as the practice of art itself. And this debate is important for us collectively as well as individually.

Whatever its form of expression, art has never been without meaning in Africa. It has always been used as a means to an end. And this is something specific to the African context. Physical work, for example, is always accompanied by singing; a house will have a decorated façade to make it more attractive; a ladder must be solid, but it can also be poker-worked. Art is never without meaning... When I act in Ouagadougou, people come not to see how well I perform, but what I say. What is said is the most important thing; how it is said is secondary. (“The Role of Art in Reducing Poverty” 9-10)

Guingané utilizes art for a purpose. He balances the need for entertainment with the need for social change in his plays. Within the cultural context of his country, Guingané constructed the message of his play to help depict how traditional societies disenfranchise women and offer little room for justice.

The play begins with the story of Nopoko, who never receives an education because her family withdraws her from school as a child after her uncle rapes her. Her family sends her to

live with her great-uncle who refuses to re-enroll her in a new school because he fears she could be abused again. She later marries and has two daughters, but after years of marriage, her husband evicts her from her home out of preference for a second wife because Nopoko has not given birth to sons. Her husband forces her to abandon her two daughters so that they can work as servants to his new second wife.

The second woman in the play, Suzanne, is raped by the village catechist when she is just a child. Her pious mother hopes to cover up the rape and protect the image of the church by coercing Suzanne into a marriage with a man from a good family. Suzanne fears the man but obeys her mother's wishes and trusts her judgment. Justified in her misgivings, the scene ends with Suzanne in the hospital after her jealous husband cuts off her ears to punish her for being too beautiful and attracting male attention.

The third woman, Azara, becomes a sex worker as a young woman after a traumatizing experience in which she is drugged and gang raped by a politician's son and his friends. Azara restarts her life when she meets a wonderful though elderly husband and provider, who falls ill and dies after a few years of marriage. Her husband's family then evicts her and her children from their home, invoking the custom of inheritance for their personal benefit. The family defends their self-serving actions by stating their disapproval of Azara's marriage because of their perception of her loose sexual history.

Three Sisters in Suffering addresses rape, incest, corruption, customs of inheritance, lack of education for women, and the role women perform in the home, and theatricalizes the violence and disenfranchisement of women in Burkina Faso. In writing a play to be toured to rural areas, Guingané takes into consideration the construction of traditional gender roles—women as homemakers and men as protectors (and also aggressors)—following the *re-*

performance of gender norms as explored in the previous chapter. Within this dynamic, Guingané's text explores the ways in which these roles help to threaten the livelihood of women. Nopoko fails her role as mother; she is forced to leave her home under her husband's orders because she fails to sire a son. Suzanne's obedience as a daughter misleads her; she marries a brutish man she fears to comply with the wishes of her mother. Azara is victimized when widowed; she cannot escape the persecution of her in-laws without the protection of her husband. Guingané shows the unification of women in his title, emphasizing that the same institutions meant to protect women also entrap them in gender roles that leave them powerless.

This emphasis on justice serves as a major difference between this play and the play discussed in the previous chapter, *Fatouma, the Baby Machine* by Prosper Kompaoré. While both playwrights work within the specific gender norms of their audience demographic, the styles of the playwrights affect the outcomes in terms of practical application. Kompaoré's Forum Theatre, in which audience members reenact the scenes in order to find a solution, limits the agency of Fatouma, already patient and respectful to her husband, and places the majority of the blame on Tinga alone. Guingané's play more adeptly depicts the hardships for women as originating from numerous sources in society, which can then be addressed via the playwright's style of Debate Theatre. While both playwrights write superficial characters in general circumstances, Guingané's dispersion of blame expands the debate away from the villainy of one individual. In *Fatouma, the Baby Machine*, although Kompaoré effectively investigates sources of misogynist thought in Tinga's neighbors and father, Kompaoré more effectively vilifies Tinga rather than proposing solutions for Fatouma. *Three Sisters in Suffering* more successfully demonstrates how women can be victimized in varying degrees by family, religion, tradition, and politics, but still relies on representing women in inferior positions to men. This is not to say that

either attempt at TfD is “failing” at working towards implementing institutional and societal change, however, in order to appreciate the differences between Jean-Pierre Guingané and Ildevert Meda’s theatrical approach to women’s issues, we have to examine what is sacrificed by strictly playing within Burkina Faso’s gender norms.

In addition to gender norms and expectations, there are other cultural considerations Guingané must respect to garner the attention of a village audience. For example, traditionally in Burkinabè theatre, kissing and violence are not depicted onstage. Although onstage kissing is not a consideration for the staging of *Three Sisters in Suffering*, it is typically removed because sexuality is such a private matter. For example, couples rarely kiss or even hold hands in public, and younger Burkinabè assume their parents or older married relatives, especially those living in villages, might never have kissed. Kissing is thought to be a more Western tradition, something learned from television, or a convention of younger generations. However, because displays of affection are so private, it is also difficult for younger Burkinabè to attest to this fact. In terms of violence, death in particular is rarely staged; it is criticized when it is for fear that the actor invites death into his or her body. Due to a belief system vested in balancing spiritual energy in addition to a high mortality rate and shortened life expectancy, the absence of violence onstage, particularly in TfD shows, can be viewed as an attempt at sensitivity rather than a concession to superstition.

Theatrically, Guingané relies on exposition to reveal violence, frequently through secondary characters. For example, a hospital nurse tells Suzanne’s mother about the mutilation of her daughter’s ears; the narrator Joé l’Artiste describes Azara’s rape, the most graphic of the three, in direct address to the audience so that the events are not staged but retold. While the disembodiment of the victim’s voice strips away the reality of these violent interactions, this

very dismantling of the imagery of violence distances the action of the play without the risk for glorifying or sensationalizing violence or inflicting further trauma. Guingané's style of TfD, consistent with the evolution of the genre from the 1970s, relies heavily on challenging an audience with the message rather than with theatricality.

In addition to a reliance on the message, Guingané's TfD plays have in common a village fool driving the action. This narrator, Joé l'Artiste, frames the scenes (or collection of vignettes depending on the structure of the play) but also reiterates the significance and reliability of a male voice. Joé, portrayed as an outsider in the beginning of every play, rails against the current status quo, identifies a problem, and organizes the villagers to act out a play and investigate solutions. Joé shows the audience how to view the play with emotive and persuasive speeches that carry the voice of the playwright. Analyzed from a Brechtian perspective, we can see that the narrator provides a distance to the audience. As a male voice, he also anchors the audience in the gendered hierarchy of the society. Even as the village eccentric, his presence overshadows the other characters in the play; this is significant when reflecting on the issues of male authority in *Three Sisters in Suffering* or more generally in TfD as a genre. This play aims to amend problematic societal behavior afflicting women in the community, but all the while Joé l'Artiste reinscribes male power. This designation of a male voice to guide the audience through the messages of the play can also be attributed to an understanding of the intended community. Guingané aims to ameliorate the conditions of women in a given community, but those messages might fail if the play aimed at a complete upheaval of traditional hierarchy by presenting a woman as the primary speaker. Joé as a village fool cannot be analyzed as neutral, but because of his outsider status, he does have the agency to openly address both the characters within the play as well as the real-life audience Guingané aims to reach.

In *Three Sisters in Suffering*, playwright Jean-Pierre Guingané, one of the pioneers of Burkinabè theatre and a dedicated proponent of women's rights, creates a clear and compelling case for how women are unrightfully victimized. He ends the play with a promotion for WILDAF (Women in Law and Development in Africa) an organization that promotes women's rights and helps women seek justice after abuse. Joé l'Artiste as the voice of authority delivers the promotion of the organization simultaneously with the conclusion of the action of the play.

Here are three women....They have in common the fact that they were victims of the cruelty that our society imposes on women....They learned about the existence of an organization, WILDAF. WILDAF advised them, because there are laws that protect women against all kinds of brutality. Sometimes, they go unrecognized; sometimes fear takes over people and leads to inaction. Nopoko, Suzanne and Azara had nothing to be afraid of...They went to court and won. All their torturers were condemned to serve long prison sentences. Judge them for yourselves. (23)

As the play comes to a close, Joé l'Artiste describes the sentencing of each man and then directs several thematic questions to the audience, opening up the platform for debate. The closing of the play and promotion of WILDAF demonstrates to the audience that not only is there a course of action to follow for abused women, but also that whole communities can and should participate in ensuring women's rights.

It should be reiterated that these performances are meant to be performed in front of thousands of people who may not have access or the inclination to listen to development messages. The resolution of the play is simple, but the theatre troupe uses the clearly articulated message and the exhibition of negative traits by overly overt antagonists to launch a post-show debate with the audience to discuss women's rights. By first showing the individual suffering of

each woman at the hands of her family or husband, the play addresses the specific needs for change. The promotion of WILDAF demonstrates how the country has already committed to effecting institutional change and resources for women of which the audience may or may not have been previously aware. The play recognizes that frequently a woman's suffering is a malady of a community rather than an individual, and that men and women have agency in advancing the conditions of women.

The methodology behind the play, according to the practitioners, succeeded in effectively communicating a message to the audience. When interviewed, the three main actors and the show's director expressed the positive reception in Burkina Faso and what they felt to be a successful delivery of the play's message to the intended audience. Jacqueline Thienan Kini, one of the actresses from the play and a veteran member of Théâtre de la Fraternité explained:

Because afterwards we have a debate with the audience, people come and we ask them questions and they respond. With this play, even the old men and old women, even the heads of the villages received that play positively. Even they agreed and started to understand. There were village heads that responded and gave examples to the public of "this and that" that was done in the past, (quoting the head), "that after today, this can no longer happen, things have changed." In certain villages, yes. (Kini)

Kini, a seasoned TfD performer, emphasized the uniqueness of this reception. In her other experiences with TfD plays, due to the power and sway of the chief over the rest of the village, subtlety in the head of the village's reception indicated the play's messages would not affect change in the audience. Kini explained that in her estimation, a subtle and polite reception without a forthright assessment of the themes the troupe presented equaled a disingenuous

reception with little hope for the potential of change. She explained the encouragement for change on the part of the village heads after *Three Sisters in Suffering* supplied evidence for what she perceived to be success in communicating a message and hope for the enactment of social change. Because the head of each village holds such authority over village life, positive reception of TfD might equate successful reception.

This suggested approval—that the message may have reached some of the audience members—supports the simplistic and didactic approach to addressing women’s problems but does not discount some of the problematic elements of the play’s structure. First, the play places the female characters in tropes frequently seen in TfD plays showing women as subservient and complacent victims. Second, the direction of the 2006 production employed a Stanislavskian naturalness in the acting style but with a Brechtian distancing in the staging and triple casting of characters. This mixture allows the audience an emotional investment, but simultaneously distances the audience with humor, music, and dance.⁵² This stereotyping of women in conjunction with an anti-realistic performance style results in a theatrically simplistic production and lacks a challenge for both audiences and actors.

This underdevelopment of female characters, however, serves the same function of characters more frequently seen in popular fiction, denoted as “Mary Sues.”⁵³ A Mary Sue, a

⁵² Song, dance, and costume changes bridge the transitions between scenes and character changes and the duration of the play, without the debate, lasts a little under an hour. Director Jean-Henri Drèze emphasized that because TfD audiences sit so close to the actors, the performance must be all the more rich and realistic to captivate the spectators. Frequently utilized in TfD shows in order to attract crowds to form, musical interludes hold the audience’s attention and create pauses in the action to allow the audience to freely discuss the themes of the play. In the 2006 staging, actress Jacqueline Thienan Kini performed the role of all three women: Nopoko, Suzanne, and Azara while Edoxi Lionelle Gnoula performed all of the supporting female roles.

⁵³ “Mary Sue” originated in reference to Star Trek fanfiction “A Trekkie’s Tale” by Paula Smith in 1979 with the overly idealized character Lieutenant Mary Sue, a fifteen and a half year old,

female character generally consisting of superior traits but who lacks both specificity and noticeable flaws, allows the audience member to insert an idealized version of herself into the work. As with other Mary Sue archetypes, women in the audience of *Three Sisters in Suffering* can view themselves within the life of the characters performed onstage, accessing a visual representation of their own suffering. Though stereotypical of Tfd, this archetype can be useful in two ways. First, frequently during Fraternité play talkbacks, audience members (male and female depending on the play), tearfully testify that the scenes onstage corresponded directly to their own reality. Viewing a neighbor's distress can help convince a community that the play addresses relevant issues and change should be implemented. Second, the utility of seeing oneself reflected in a character is the inspiration to independently invoke social change. For example *Trois soeurs dans la souffrance* ends happily with all three female victims seeking the assistance of WILDAF. The perpetrators are tried and sentenced to jail time and heavy fines and the women are rewarded their property, compensation for their suffering, and children. The play portrays typified characters and a deus ex machina finale. However, if this allows women to recognize and act on their own victim-status because they more readily access the material—as typical with literature and Mary Sue character archetypes—the simplicity of the performance offers an entrance into a debate with solutions to the problems the audience faces.

The plasticity seen through the Mary Sue archetype also becomes more specific from character to character to reflect the ethnic and religious diversity of Burkina Faso. Joé l'Artiste introduces the three characters and their religious backgrounds: Nopoko Ouédraogo, an animist,

abounding in personal attributes but few distinct flaws (Verba 17). Other current popular literature examples include Hermione Granger in Harry Potter and Bella Swan in the Twilight series. In addition to being overly idealized, these characters can also serve as a portal for a female author's self-aggrandizement. See Anupam Chander and Madhavi Sunder's 2007 cultural critique in the California Law Review, "Everyone's a Superhero: A Cultural Theory of "Mary Sue" Fan Fiction as Fair Use."

Suzanne Traoré, a Christian, and Azara Thiombiano, a Muslim. Burkinabè audiences or audiences familiar with Burkinabè culture know the different ethnicities of the characters based on their family names: Ouédraogo is Mouaga (Mossi), Traoré is either Jula, Yadéga, Bwaba, Goin, or Toussian, and Thiombiano is Gourmantché. These names indicate different regions of the country, different languages, and different practices. However, outside of these identity markers and the emphasis on Suzanne's Catholic upbringing and the Muslim prayers after the passing of Azara's husband, the women themselves demonstrate little specificity in their identities. Joé l'Artiste reiterates the women's differences, but also the similarity of their suffering and that societal change must be enforced and the institutional opportunities offering change respected. The simultaneous commonality and distinction in identity allows the text to reach as broad an audience demographic as possible thus giving the audience agency to invoke social change.

Although the characters have distinct cultural and religious identities, they are unified in their suffering as well as in the performance of one actress. As frequently seen in TfD, the female characters are either good or evil while their male antagonists are undeniably cruel. In the case of *Three Sisters in Suffering*, the women are kind, subservient, and the most rational in the play outside of the narrator Joé l'Artiste. However, in this non-descript "goodness," the female characters lack depth outside of their victimhood. While theatrically underdeveloped, these characters serve an important function in that these women lack specificity and noticeable flaws, thus allowing the audience to insert a version of themselves into the work. Women in the audience of *Three Sisters in Suffering* can view themselves within the life of the character performed onstage, accessing a visual representation of their own suffering, gaining power in this recognition and finding potential solutions.

Despite the success of *Three Sisters in Suffering* and similar TfD plays, staging the victimization of women also risks entrapping women in the same roles TfD plays hope to confront. For example, Guingané exposes the complicated issue of female sexuality with his character Azara. In introducing her back-story, the narrator describes Azara's post-gang-rape trauma to the audience: "She, who had never had any sexual experience, appeared to have developed a taste for sex" (17). Relying on the narrator to depict her story, the absence of onstage violence helps to avoid the potential glorification or risk of humor as discussed in Chapter Two of sexual violence. This absence erases the performance of violence, but also Azara's experience and perspective on what happened to her. Most of Guingané's plays battle the numerous stereotypes and instances of violence threatening women, but with this phrasing, he launches his character into a Mary-Eve dichotomy. This brief description of Azara's promiscuous "taste for sex" forces the play to participate in the much larger societal expectations affecting the lives of women in Burkina Faso because it equates sexual experience—regardless of its consent—with lust and promiscuity. The reference to promiscuity erases the psychological damage of Azara's rape and unsolicited loss of virginity and replaces this violence with a connotation of perversity on her part. In Burkina Faso, chastity in women is seen as a valor and consequentially, female sexuality as a threat.⁵⁴ This perception affects the lives of women in ways as simple as preventing many women from drinking in public without being accompanied

⁵⁴ Each ethnicity in Burkina Faso views sexuality differently. For example, Jean-Pierre Guingané gives the examples in his dissertation of the differences between the Siamou and Toussian and Bissa, his own ethnic group. Among the Siamou and Toussian (and some Gourounsi), girls are encouraged to have intimate relationships with their friends before marriage. This serves two purposes: that additional children will help to replace the girl's absence from the work at home when she leaves to join her husband in his village and secondly, serves as proof to her new husband's family that she is not sterile and will be able to provide the family with children. In the Bissa tradition, a pregnancy before marriage is grounds for exile (149, 161).

by men. More extremely, this perception encourages the defense of female genital mutilation as a way to protect girls from enjoying sex, from promiscuity, and from unwanted pregnancy. TfD deserves praise for promoting women's rights; however, we can see how within this promotion, a particular type of woman—a sexually restrained wife and mother—is purported as ideal while other types of women, like Azara, must seek forgiveness.

The representation of victimized women in Burkinabè TfD, next to the lack of professionalization of younger troupes, threatens the efficacy of the play and the passing of a message. Director, performer, and playwright Aristide Tarnagda cites this weakness as one of the set-backs to the emancipation of women in his country:

At any rate in the plays written in Burkina, particularly in sensitization plays, the women are victimized. Victims of FGM, victims of their husbands, victims of rape: victims. In my opinion I find that to be dangerous. It's dangerous because I don't believe in a 100% victim. It confines to a defensive role. And what can they do to get out of it without giving them a mode of escape? (A. Tarnagda "Personal Interview")

As seen in Chapter Two, the unprofessionalism in theatre not only further victimizes women, but even risks promoting this victimization through poor staging. Guingané's play exhibits the extension of constrictive gender norms even into theatrical texts aimed at helping women. Tarnagda, one of several young playwrights whose productions focus on the conditions of women, notes that these are conditions in TfD that must change. What we shall see in the next play, *On the Day After the Full Moon* by Ildevert Meda, is the advancement of these concerns and an avoidance of overt victimization of women. This attempt to remove women from their

status as victims, both in life and in plays representing their lives, aims at providing communities with the necessary agency to empower women past their social restraints.

Agency as a term raises questions in itself—does the playwright have agency? the actors? the audience? the play itself? In terms of the playwright, Jean-Pierre Guingané spoke through his narrator Joé l'Artiste and, during his lifetime, worked as a version of this character: an artist bringing theatre from village to village, meeting with resistance but teaching a message. In his written oeuvre, he divided his focus between TfD, more Westernized-straight plays, and academic commentaries on life and art in Burkina Faso with the hope that his written work might promote the development and recognition of his country. His agency rests in this legacy: the country remains a cultural epicenter in the region because of his dedication to theatre. In regards to the agency of the performers themselves, Edoxi Lionelle Gnoula and Jacqueline Thienan Kini in the example of *Three Sisters in Suffering*, perform plays that attempt to address the problems of rural women, problems which exist outside of either woman's own reality. However as discussed in the previous chapters, both combat different kinds of misogyny within their careers and lives. Through the act of performing and performing well, the women gain approval for their craft while also aiming to help women to learn more about resources available to them and to encourage discussions on how to advance the position of women. The agency of the audience is perhaps the most difficult question to address as theatre is not a qualitative field, nor should it be (although some funding organizations and other research on TfD might wish for qualitative results). Although TfD might work towards social change, it would be foolish to directly equivocate the performance of a play with a direct social outcome. Guingané, aware that artists cannot assume a direct cause and effect relationship with their audience, wrote his plays to launch discussions in hopes that discussions might lead to shifting viewpoints and that shift

might initiate social change. Although this indicates the fluidity in analyzing agency, social change is potentially dependent on this ebb and flow of power.

One way to qualify agency and efficacy in TfD is through Jill Dolan's work in *Utopia in Performance*. Her theories of *communitas* (derived from Victor Turner) and the process of the actors and audience creating a shared experience through performance, invoke how I propose reading agency in Burkinabè TfD:

Throughout *Utopia in Performance*, I've suggested that moments of liminal clarity and communion, fleeting, briefly transcendent bits of profound human feeling and connection, spring from alchemy between performers and spectators and their mutual confrontation with a historical present that lets them imagine a different, putatively better future. (168)

As Dolan suggests, this shared experience holds the power of passing a message. There is no scientific way to measure the effect of performance or to qualify the performers' support for positive audience reception to indicate the actual "success" of a TfD show like *Three Sisters in Suffering*. Despite the fact that "theatre magic" does not equate qualitative evidence, as seen in Dolan's work, the more confidence instilled in the performers, the greater chance for a heightened *communitas* with the audience, and a greater likelihood that theatre then has the agency that could inspire change.

If analyzed via *communitas*, the play *Three Sisters in Suffering* succeeded in affecting its audience based on its positive reception. Structurally, the play represents Guingané's theoretical approaches to TfD: introduce theatre as a tool to address societal problems through a narrator, a play within a play, and clearly delineated plots and one-dimensional characters and discuss those problems with the audience in an actor-led debate concluding the play. Theatrically, the action

of the play relies on the colorful descriptions in the language, the mission of the play, and opinion of the playwright on societal issues that clearly communicate to the audience. However, as seen through this literary and performance analysis, the efficacy of the play in fighting for women's rights comes into question when considering the reiteration of gender norms, particularly the roles of wife, mother, daughter, and most importantly, victimized woman. Although women might be able to see their own lives reflected within the action performed onstage, *Three Sisters in Suffering* demonstrates continued significance of evolving the genre of TfD to further challenge the placement of women within society.

Innovation in the Genre—*On The Day After the Full Moon*

Although Guingané was one of the founders of theatre in his country and served as a model for how to approach TfD, Burkinabè TfD, as with any theatre form, continues to develop. The subsequent generations of theatre-makers aim at deconstructing the theoretical approaches of their forefathers and mentors in an attempt to address some of the theatrical pitfalls of TfD, while still meeting the needs of audiences the plays intend to serve. Ildevert Meda is a former member of Guingané's troupe Théâtre de la Fraternité and founding member of Carrefour International de Theatre de Ouagadougou, arguably the most successful current theatre company in Burkina. In a personal interview he condemns TfD plays based on his belief that theatre should never be used as a mode of information or education—that is what radios and schools are for (Meda "Personal Interview"). Meda gives the example of Guingané's TfD play, *Malo*, *Pilot*,⁵⁵ in which he performed. The story of the play follows two girls, the daughters of two

⁵⁵ *Malo*, *Pilot* was the most cited play of the generation of actors that worked with Guingané in the 1990s, some citing it as a successful example of TfD. Laure Guire noted that during one of the talkbacks to this play, a man cried, retelling the story of how his wife circumcised his

different families in the same village. One daughter receives an education, is not circumcised, and grows up to have a successful career as a pilot and is able to provide for her family. The second girl's lack of education dooms her to continue the cycle of poverty that the first girl's family might escape. Meda finds the blatant agenda of *Malo, Pilot* to be both condescending and ineffective. Meda stated that a play could not effectively affect his judgment on whether he would or would not send a daughter to school or would or would not circumcise her; he learned the value of an education and the health risks of FGM in school, and it is schools that should teach these lessons. Meda would educate a daughter and protect her health because of his education, and theatre should avoid becoming an educational or journalistic platform.

Despite Meda's fervent viewpoints on the separation of education and theatre, through a collaboration with Italian director, Luca Fusi, Meda began working with two Italian NGOs and has been commissioned to write and stage development plays. In writing these plays, Meda attempts to address the lack of plot and character development seen in many TfD plays and to treat any play he writes as a piece of theatre rather than a mode of education. Meda's theories of writing and performing TfD diverge from his predecessors, mostly seen in his attempt to make the play's message less overt in order to force members of the audience to come to their own conclusions. In this way, Meda aims to avoid an over-moralization of the audience.

Two of Meda's plays, *Yennenga* and *On the Day After the Full Moon*, take up the issues of women's rights and showcase Meda's differing theoretical approach to TfD from playwrights like Guingané. *Yennenga*, named after the twelfth century warrior princess and originator of the Mossi Empire, the dominant Burkinabè ethnic group, speaks to women's rights in an

daughter without his permission and without consulting him and she died during the procedure. Guire, touched by both the story and the man's tears (a cultural taboo) shared this as a particularly effective and moving moment. (Guire)

unconventional manner. Rather than recounting the story of a woman victimized by society, the audience listens to an onslaught of insults, slurs and stereotypes to the extent that audiences leave the theatre too ashamed to speak a single word against a woman or her role in society (Meda “Personal Interview”). In this way, the play aims to correct this behavior outside of the playhouse by forcing spectators to recognize the hurt they might cause to women in everyday life.

*On the Day After the Full Moon*⁵⁶ takes place in a dolodrome, a small market selling doloh, a traditional beer. A Tfd play disguised as a murder mystery, the action of the play revolves around a deaf and mute man, Muka (whose name means “mute” in Mooré), a stranger to the village accused of eating the souls of pregnant women and killing them when they give birth. The play begins with Fité, the angry owner of the dolodrome, complaining that because of the circumstances of the day, no one will come to buy her doloh. She criticizes a fellow villager for choosing to die in childbirth on a market day and berates her hired musicians for not playing loud enough. When Pagb naaba, the president of a local women’s organization arrives, the two women lament yet another loss of an expectant mother and Fité yells at the musicians for disrespecting the dead. Soon other villagers arrive and after more lamentation, the characters begin to gossip about Muka’s consistent presence outside of the delivery room whenever a woman dies. Although the elderly Zaambo took Muka in when he arrived at the village and

⁵⁶ The theme of the play *On the Day After the Full Moon* echoed a temporally relevant theme for the country. In 2011 during the celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8, a widely recognized and celebrated holiday in Burkina in which a majority of the population purchase fabric to make gowns and shirts and go drinking, the theme was “To give life, not lose it.” International Women’s Day, or *Huis Mars* in Burkina Faso, a day of celebration, is also one used to promote women’s rights and women’s issues. RTB (Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina), the national television and radio station, shared the statistic that a woman dies internationally every hour from complications during childbirth, and that statistic in Burkina is one woman every three hours.

repeatedly defends his charge, the other villagers suspect Muka of sorcery and eating the souls of pregnant women when they are most vulnerable. The scene ends with Fité concluding that the main problem plaguing the village is *munaficas*, Mooré for gossip. Everyone leaves, holding onto his or her reservations on Muka's character.

In the next scene, M'ba Sotiisi threatens Zaambo that if anything happens to his pregnant wife during her impending delivery, he will hold Muka, "the assassin," responsible and will kill him with his bare hands. Zaambo advises that M'ba Sotiisi would never hold Muka accountable for the deaths of the women if he understood what made Muka lose his ability to speak and hear. M'ba Sotiisi insults Zaambo and leaves before he can finish his story. In the following scene, Pagb naaba tells Fité that M'ba Sotiisi's wife Gompoko is in labor and that out of solidarity, all of the women are going to the delivery room to support her as she gives birth. Fité falsely promises to attend, but states under her breath that nothing will change the circumstances of the women as long as Muka and Zaambo are around to eat their souls. The next day, M'ba Sotiisi's brings Zaambo in front of the head of the village to accuse his charge, Muka, of killing his wife during her delivery. M'ba Sotiisi defends that he beat Muka to defend his wife after he found the man outside of the delivery room. M'ba Sotiisi also uses Zaambo's defense of Muka as evidence that he must also be a sorcerer and demands that Zaambo be banished from the village. Zaambo, given permission by the head of the village to defend himself and Muka, breaks his promise to Muka and reveals to everyone how he became deaf and mute. After Wend-Kuuni's (Muka's real name) own wife died in childbirth, he would sleep on her grave out of grief. Tradition states that on the third night of each full moon, the spirits rise from their graves to reunite and tell the story of how it died as part of a ritual trial before the spirits of the ancestors. Wend-Kuuni assisted in the ritual and when the other villagers found him the following morning, he was deaf and mute.

From that point forward, he could see the spirits, including his own wife, gathered around women in labor, deliberating over whether or not the proper precautions had been taken to help a woman survive her delivery. Because his own village had not yet built a maternity center, he moved to the village of Nayolse and asked Zaambo to house him so he might more effectively locate women in labor and help to appease the spirit world so that the women could avoid the fate of his wife.

The village laughs at Zaambo's story and questions how a deaf and mute man could recount his experiences. Muka dies from his injuries, and the mounting mortality rate of pregnant women leads some to compassion and some to accusation. Jeanne and Pagb naaba lament Muka's death and console Zaambo on the loss of his friend while Fité speculates that the rise in childbirth deaths means Muka most certainly worked for Zaambo. As the village gathers to drink doloh, they entertain themselves in mocking Zaambo and Muka and recreating the souls of the dead. In their incarnations of the souls, the villagers reveal the various causes of the women's deaths, including a lack of familiarity with and access to prenatal care, the financial strain a second wife places on a family (leading to the neglect of the pregnant first wife and her children), complications due to female genital mutilation, and physical abuse. The actors then turn to the audience and ask in direct address:

Did you take every precaution to facilitate her delivery? Did she arrive to the maternity ward in time? Did she go to her prenatal checkups? Was she well nourished during her pregnancy? Could she have been beaten during her pregnancy? Are there enough emergency medical supplies at the maternity ward? If not, did she have enough money to receive medical attention? Does she have

the support of her family and husband? Which facility did she go to? Are the women treated well there? (47)

Meda implicates the audience with this series of questions. The causes of the deaths are, in fact, not a mystery at all to the characters; nor would deaths in childbirth be a mystery in the audience's village. Meda weaves evidence throughout his play supporting that the villagers know the precise cause and effect of why pregnant women suffer but decide to ignore these problems or use supernatural explanations as a scapegoat from confronting institutionalized neglect in village life.

Meda depicts both village culpability and institutional brutality against women through his unseen character, M'ba Sotiisi's wife, Gompoko. Despite universal awareness that M'ba Sotiisi beats his wife, no one intervenes, even when she is pregnant. Both male and female characters acknowledge his behavior throughout the play, first by Jeanne in the dolodrome and again at the end by Karsamba Marcélé and Kulpinga when the village mocks Zaambo's testimony:

Jeanne: It's men like that that don't worry at all about what women go through. It's clear that if she dies, he'll just take a new wife. But I better leave before someone accuses me of saying things I shouldn't (15).

Karsamba Marcélé: Wait, you'll make me die laughing. Actually, it's been a few days since I've seen M'ba Sotiisi. Has anyone heard from him?

Kulpinga: It's also been a while since I have seen him. I hope he didn't go to the cemetery to lie on his wife's grave.

Karsamba Marcélé: Especially him; he even beat her while she was pregnant (everyone laughs).

Kulpinga: I can imagine him down there following the same sort of performance Zaambo described with Gompoko rising from her tomb saying “For me, it wasn’t Muka that swallowed my soul, it was my lout of a husband who beat me to death. By the way, there he is, he came to lie on my tomb, grab him!” (Everyone laughs). (41-42)

Although the villagers’ laughter infers M’ba Sotiisi’s cruelty in the treatment of his wife, it also implicates their own culpability through their inaction in preventing a woman’s death. Under these circumstances, it is easier for the characters to accept that the village has fallen victim to the malevolence of a foreign presence than to accept personal responsibility.

The characters reflect societal culpability in addition to the individual culpability of M’ba Sotiisi. Theatrically, the shared blame of the violence against women makes for a more dynamic Tfd play in addition to showing numerous available outlets to audiences that could make social change possible. The following are examples of how the entire village in *Au lendemain de la pleine lune* is responsible for the deaths of women. Jeanne, a traditional midwife barred from practicing, blames new medical practices (which includes the illegalization of FGM). Fité leads her patrons in a gossip campaign against Muka as the swallower of woman’s souls. The head of the village does little in terms of finding justice for either Muka or the deceased pregnant women; furthermore, although he welcomes the women’s presence at the trial, he upholds the tradition that women are forbidden to speak. Even Pagb naaba, the leader and creator of the local women’s association, only proposes that all the village women should be present at the maternity clinic to support each woman who goes into labor, rather than proposing institutional changes that could benefit women’s health. Through character development, Meda also shows societal culpability. As with other development plays, Meda presents a clear antagonist in M’ba

Sotiisi, however the victims, Gompoko and Muka, are absent. Doing so establishes and emphasizes the responsibility of the other characters in the victim's deaths instead of focusing on the suffering of the victims.

On the Day After the Full Moon serves as a departure from the work of Guingané and fellow theatre pioneer, Prosper Kompaoré. Meda does not use his play as a platform for passing on educational information to the audience but further develops the theatricality of the Tfd genre and challenges the audience to engage in discussion without the guidance and assistance of the theatre troupe. According to both of the directors and the actors in *On the Day After the Full Moon*, even without an organized debate or forum, the play succeeded in sparking lively debates among male and female audience members. One example shared by actors Nongodo Ouédraogo and Wilfried Ouédraogo related to the availability of and access to prenatal care. The women in the audience accused the men of neglecting them: that it was a long walk to the clinic and the men never made themselves available to transport them. The men responded that the clinic was the same walking distance as to the marketplace and that the women never complained about walking there on market days in order to gossip. The play helped to reveal unspoken tensions between the village community, and will hopefully lead to some future resolution.

Structurally, Meda reveals the message concerning female mortality in childbirth at the end of the play giving specific information through the series of questions posed to the audience by the souls of the women. Meda avoids constantly reiterating the development theme like many development plays (including Guingané's) which increases the theatricality and (from Meda's own point of view), avoids insulting the audience's intelligence or ability to discern meaning from a performance. The action of the play, rather than the message, implicates society, and thus the audience, while avoiding an overtly moralizing collection of scenes with one-dimensionally

good and evil characters. The murder-mystery style of *On the Day After the Full Moon* more aggressively addresses the problems of an entire community, rather than a handful of evil antagonists.

Another technique Meda employs is a mixture of traditional and modern epistemology and spirituality to mold social change into traditional belief systems. Although the original hypothesis of soul-swallowing is debunked because a lack of modern medical care is the culprit, the logic of Muka's story of going deaf and mute after hearing the attestations of the dead women's souls is reinforced at the end of the play when the villagers find a newly deaf and mute M'ba Sotiisi in the graveyard. Despite support from the oldest members of the village, Zaambo and Jeanne, that one must be initiated to see the spirits, the village doubts that Muka's afflictions came from the spiritual world until he is exonerated at the end of the play, both through his innocence and the validity of his story. This mixture of traditional spirituality with current medical knowledge allows for a deeper investigation of when traditional beliefs substitute as a shelter for dangerous practices and a way to facilitate societal neglect. Also, the incorporation of traditional beliefs serves as a rebuttal to the support of Western thinking and belief systems as superior practices.⁵⁷

While each ethnicity in Burkina Faso has its own language and system of beliefs, there is a general understanding of the power of ancestors, ancestors as emissaries to God, and of other spirits that wish to help or do harm to human beings. The Lobi, Meda's ethnic group, are particularly fervent in their beliefs in the balance of a spiritual world, and almost every decision must receive ancestral approval through performing sacrifices ("Le pays lobi, Burkina Faso"). Although the play also includes many references to Christianity, frequently Burkinabè of any

⁵⁷ See Awam Ampka's *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires* for his analysis of Tfd as a form of theatre that lifts the binaries of "traditional" and "modern" society.

ethnic background balance Christian or Islamic beliefs with traditional spirituality. The action of the play depends on an understanding of how the characters perceive the misbalanced spiritual world and its effects on their village, which is then significant in terms of women's rights. By recognizing and embracing traditional belief systems, Meda's play demonstrates that considerations for women and women's rights are not merely offshoots of imported Western ideology. The play does not aim to impose Western thought on the community; instead, it reinforces the fact that the well-being and health of women are necessary to healthy African communities.⁵⁸

Meda aims at giving audiences agency to ameliorate the conditions of women in this incorporation and validation of multiple belief systems; he continues this agency by further developing his female characters outside of their roles of wives, mothers, and victims. This analysis will focus on two of the female characters who specifically add dynamism, comedy, as well as conflict to the plot of the play: Fité and Jeanne. Pagb naaba, praised for her intelligence and social activism, also plays an important role in the play; however the function of her character is clear: because of her education, she contributes directly to the development of her community. As a character, Pagb naaba demonstrates support for the education of girls and the roles of women in societal development. Fité and Jeanne are more complicated characters in terms of whether their actions or inactions are detrimental to the well being of women in their community.

One of the central women in *On the Day After the Full Moon*, the dolodrome owner Fité, performed in 2011 by Pauline Tapsoba, adds dynamism and comedy through her dedication to

⁵⁸ See also Chapter Four for Aristide Tarnagda's explanation of traditional marriage in the Bisa community as his defense for why traditional educations and belief systems are important to current Tfd.

her business. Although negative female characters in TfD plays are frequently shrewish, rarely are they cunning. Fité, insensitive to the dying women, schemes to keep her business profitable by promoting a festive atmosphere to attract customers, all the while complaining that the deaths will hurt her sales. Fité pays the musicians to play jovially but berates them for showing a lack of compassion to the dead women whenever a customer arrives. In this way, Meda paints the gossiping Fité as manipulative but comic and elevates her from the starkly good-evil, Mary-Eve, mother-temptress dichotomy of many TfD plays. The following is one of her first lines in the play:

Fité: That woman, too! It's on market day that she chose to die. She couldn't have chosen any other day? All of this to ruin another person's business. For the past three days you were in labor...if you don't want to give birth then die, but pick a day when I'm not selling my beer! (10).

This commentary follows Fité's disparagement of the musicians she's hired who refuse to play out of respect for the other mourning villagers. In this scene, Meda manages to write a monologue for Fité's character that introduces the back-story of the play—that the village has lost a series of women during childbirth—without the presentational style of a narrator. By removing the narrator, Meda removes the “voice of authority” and gives the audience more agency in coming to their own conclusions. Fité, for example, has obvious flaws but is still able to communicate information to the audience. Fité cruelly expresses her frustration, but through the casualness of her reactions informs the audience that the loss of life in delivering children is an expectation rather than an exception. The perils of a bad market day also give perspective to Fité's lack of empathy for her neighbors. Village economic realities almost certainly ensure that a failure to sell one's goods will endanger an entire family's well being. Rarely do women

malign the significance of reproduction and family unless they are meant to be the villain. Not only does Fité exhibit an alternative to the more static female character archetype, she also believably escapes a more standard consideration of gender norms within Burkinabè theatre. Fité avoids the pitfalls of an oppressive obligation to family and Meda constructs a female character that is both more dynamic and more theatrically interesting than most female roles in TfD, but also outside of established gender norms; although nothing definitive indicates that Fité is not a wife or mother, her character is not defined by these roles.

Meda creates a more dynamic female role in Fité by stretching the interpretations of gender norms seen in other TfD plays. This same flexibility in interpretation can be seen in how Meda approaches traditional values in the face of a shifting cultural consciousness. For example Jeanne, the traditional midwife who formed her career around a now outlawed tradition, stubbornly faces new realities of a society in flux. As described in Meda's stage directions:

She is an ancient traditional midwife that the new law forbids from practicing out of preference to modernly trained midwives and maternity doctors. She hopes the increase of women dying in childbirth will help demonstrate her credibility and that she can begin working again in order to earn a lot of money and respect from her fellow villagers (Preface).

One of the beliefs in traditional midwifery in Burkina Faso is that a woman must be circumcised in order to safely bare children. Three familiar arguments in Burkina Faso justifying traditional female genital mutilation practices include: genitalia can carry disease and if a baby's head touches a clitoris, it can die; the tradition of FGM is thousands of years old and important to uphold; and that just as many women or more die with modern practices as with traditional practices. Modern laws, which outlaw FGM, have made work like Jeanne's either illegal or

obsolete. Like Fité, Jeanne focuses on how the deaths of these women affect her personally and financially. Including a traditional midwife in the list of characters and the way in which Meda portrays her in the script allows the play to invoke tradition without overtly passing judgment. From Jeanne's perspective, the failure of modern medicine (which she sees in the number of women dying in childbirth) vindicates her support for her traditional practices and thus her economic and social worth within her community. While villagers formulate accusations of Muka, she interjects support for her trade into these conversations and what she perceives as the shortsightedness of its prohibition: "In fact there must be many reasons (that women are dying). We, the traditional midwives have been prohibited from practicing and now everyone is surprised by the results" (14). However, just as the villager's belief that Muka swallows souls is disproved, so are Jeanne's claims that traditional practices are safer than modern medicine.

FGM as perhaps the most sensitively broached subject in Burkina Faso garners much attention from development organizations, efforts, and plays. As a seasoned playwright, Jean-Pierre Guingané encountered problems with how to reform beliefs in traditional FGM practices and supported theatre as the most effective way of changing the viewpoints of individuals. He cited theatre as succeeding where other measures, for example those undertaken by the President of the National Commission Against Excision, failed ("The Role of Art in Reducing Poverty" 11). He also cited, in addition to cultural and traditional considerations, economic circumstances as standing in the way of converting villagers' opinions on FGM:

This issue also involves economic problems. In a town in the north, 300 km from Ouagadougou, the woman in charge of excision summoned me after seeing one of our plays. She said: "My son, I saw your play and I liked it because I agree with you." However, she added: "Look at my grandchildren, they are well and have

enough to eat, and that is because excising brings me money. An excision costs 1000 F (sic) or a goat, and that is why my grandchildren are healthy. If I stop, what can you give me to support me?" I don't just tell people what they want to hear, so I told her I could not do anything for her, but I did say that I would talk to the mayor or governor so that we could find another project for her, as President of the women's association. When we say that traditions and customs explain behaviour, we often have to look for other reasons – namely, economic ones. We also have to build a certain level of trust and intimacy with these people to understand their problems fully and influence their behaviour. Decrees cannot do this. I do not believe in imprisoning poor women who excise children, because what we do not realize is that women believe that by excising their daughters, they are performing the greatest act of love towards them. They will just find another way of doing it. Drama is much more efficient because it explains why people need to stop this practice. (Guingané, "The Role of Art in Reducing Poverty" 11)

We can see how these realities Guingané witnessed in village women are the same realities that inform Jeanne's character within the world of the play. Jeanne can no longer find a livelihood and this serves as her prime motivation for defending FGM and traditional birthing practices. Jeanne as a female character highlights not only a belief system, but also demonstrates how a shift in beliefs affects a person's value within the community. Through the final scene of the play, the audience (and thus Jeanne) sees evidence that the deaths of pregnant women are caused by physical abuse, lack of medical attention, and can result from the same traditional practices she supports. It is significant that Jeanne and the audience members who hold similar viewpoints are not vilified or patronized, but simply proven wrong.

The casting of the role of Jeanne in the 2011 production leads to another point of analysis in regards to “who performs” in Burkinabè theatre. The roles of Jeanne and another small supporting character complicate the character development and the performance of female roles onstage: these roles were played by men. All but the main, repeating roles were double cast. Typically, double casting keeps the number of actors to a minimum, adhering to fiscal restraints: in Burkina Faso, this also facilitates the touring of shows by limiting the number of people traveling to a given village. The other women in the cast could not perform these roles, as their characters were onstage at the same time as Jeanne.

The casting, though practical from a financial standpoint also leads to multiple readings and interpretations. Given the positioning of women in theatre within society, casting men in women’s roles is ironic in that this particular play addresses women’s rights. Female performers are numerous in Ouagadougou, thus the choice to cast men does not indicate a lack of available women in the field. Though the casting choices might not be outwardly discriminatory, the choices are indicative of generational constraints on women in theatre. In terms of theatre hierarchy, Tfd generally attracts actors beginning their careers. Shows slated to perform at CCF (Institut Français) or that tour to Europe attract the more seasoned and recognized actors. Meda and Fusi’s production of *On the Day after the Full Moon* included a cast of up and coming professionals, but the absence of older female actresses to play the roles of older female villagers like Jeanne might also reflect a lack of older women in the field. Unlike countries in which theatre has earned some amount of respect as a profession and pastime, older actresses are rare in Burkina Faso and those who have succeeded and endured the hardships of theatre in Burkina are preoccupied by what are perceived to be more prestigious projects. The lack of actresses older

than their thirties, an absence not seen with men, reveals the history of the societal pressure against women performing in theatre.

However, the gender performance of male bodies in female roles can be further deconstructed in terms of how these performances are read by an audience. In the case of Jeanne, performed by Evariste Ouili, the actor's slender and muscularly defined body more closely resembles the aging body of a village woman than the bodies of many Ouagalaise women.⁵⁹ The labor-intensive responsibilities of women in villages build strength and endurance and coupled with poor diets, elderly village women typically have thin frames, wan faces, and hunched backs. Physically, the twenty-something body of Ouili more closely resembled the body of an aging village woman than the healthy female bodies of his young actress-counterparts. Because traditions of men performing women more effectively (like the traditions of Elizabethan British theatre, Japanese Kabuki, and Indian Kathakali) do not exist in Burkina Faso, I find that this reading of Ouili's body informs the physical realities of women within the rural regions of Burkina Faso. However, the fact that a youthful man's body might communicate those realities more effectively than a female city dweller's body also indicates the distance of the actors from the realities of the villagers they hope to sensitize.

⁵⁹ Village life is quite difficult, particularly for women. Responsibilities include carrying water from the closest well or water source, carrying firewood (typically on one's head), preparing meals, cleaning the home, hand-washing the laundry, in addition to working in the fields to raise crops and caring for children and animals. In some circumstances, the food preparation and other chores might be divided between multiple wives and the daughters of the household. In 2011, one of the major television networks in Burkina Faso aired a reality television short featuring Ouagalaise women brought to a village to perform the tasks of women living there. The segment displaced some of the discrimination against village women by their city-dwelling counterparts, showing rather the ineptitude of the city woman. Outside of the elements of humor, irony, and education, the show also demonstrated the strength, resilience and endurance of the village women that resulted from their daily chores in maintaining their homes.

Reading Ouili's body as an authentic representation of an aging village woman's body is interrelated to the other role Ouili plays in the play, that of the head of the village. In terms of communicating with rural audiences and considering how to cast the play, while the character Jeanne holds more of a presence in the play, the chief holds more status. In terms of authenticity and double casting, a village audience would be unlikely to accept a woman performing the role of the ultimate voice of authority. Although we might skeptically accept the authenticity of Ouili's body as female, the inauthentic positioning of a woman in the role of the head of the village might ultimately jeopardize the reception of the play's intended message.⁶⁰

Ouili's cross-gendered performance of Jeanne carried much different connotations and reception than that of Nongodo Ouédraogo's. Ouédraogo, double cast with the role of Zaambo, the aging defendant of Muka, also made a cameo at the end of the show in what could be considered a drag performance. With a headscarf, stuffed breasts, and a knee-length skirt, Ouédraogo arrives at the graveyard scene with the rest of the female cast to perform the dead pregnant women. Ouédraogo bats his eyelashes, folds his hands gently in front of his navel, curves his back to emphasize his newly appropriated female form, and breaks the fourth wall by cooing to the audience in recognition of his comedic transformation.

However comedic, this drag performance reiterated some of the same gender norms articulated in the analysis of *Three Sisters in Suffering*. Ouédraogo, contrarily to Ouili's "authenticity" in performing Jeanne, performed a stereotype of Burkinabè femininity. To return to the gender performativity theory of the previous chapter, Judith Butler's analysis on *Paris is*

⁶⁰ I want to emphasize a distinction in genre between TfD toured to villages and the theater performed in Ouagadougou as it is inaccurate to state that a woman can never perform a role of authority in Burkina Faso. I want to acknowledge that in November 2011, Mouna Ndiaye a Senegalese actress performed the role of Christophe in Aimé Césaire's *La tragédie du roi Christophe* at CITO directed by her husband Luis Marques.

Burning in her work *Bodies that Matter*, can be used to illustrate how this particular drag performance reestablished heteronormative privilege:

To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that “imitation” is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. (*Bodies that Matter* 125).

Ouédraogo’s comedic performance of an idealized woman, although in drag, is not at all subversive as Butler indicates and actually re-encapsulates the audience’s conception of appropriate female identity viewed from within the society in which the play is produced. While we can cite the inherent problems in casting men in women’s roles in a play aimed at supporting the well-being of women, the audience forgets that a man, after Ouili’s initial entrance, performs the subdued Jeanne. Ouédraogo’s comedic performance, well received by the audience as indicated by the uproarious laughter after each gesture and line of text, occurs in the scene when the souls of the women reveal the causes of their deaths and alleviates some of the tension of the scene. Although I have argued elsewhere that the incorporation of laughter into TfD plays serves as an important distancing mechanism, in terms of gender and the positioning of women within the world of theatre, this small moment in the play demonstrates that women are not taken seriously and even the play and the playwright cannot be stripped away from this reality.

As seen in Ildevert Meda’s *On the Day After the Full Moon*, a playwright might take into account women’s rights as an issue to address theatrically and work to remedy the stereotypical and archetypal representations of women through his female characters, yet still fall within the constraints of societal gender norms through the performance of the play. As seen through the

delivery of the educational material in the play and the construction of characters like Fité and Jeanne, Meda takes an active role in redefining traditional approaches to Burkinabè Tfd.

Meda's efforts in this play also demonstrate how conversations regarding the roles of women in society—and in theatre—must continue in this same evolution in order to gain ground for equal participation from women in these spheres.

Who Performs? Between Agency and Audience

Within this chapter, the texts of *Three Sisters in Suffering* and *On the Day After the Full Moon* represent the challenges facing playwrights and performers in promoting women's rights. Even within the most forward thinking plays, embracing female empowerment within an openly misogynistic society presents artists with the challenge of promoting a female driven agenda to an audience demographic resistant to giving women more rights. The question is then to what extent these plays bequeath agency onto the societies that they aim to sensitize to the issues of women? I conclude that though these playwrights make progress in drawing attention to women's rights, the proximity of any person to the gender norms of a given society limits their ability to completely re-articulate the standards that may be controlling a person's participation in society.

As development plays, *Three Sisters in Suffering*, and *On the Day After the Full Moon* demonstrate the progress of the genre of Tfd in Burkina, as well as proving the continued significance of the theatre form. Meda makes significant adaptations to the aspects of the archetypal Burkinabè Tfd for which he feels significant disdain. Particularly, he works to rectify the stripping away of theatricality and performance value out of preference for a clear message as well as avoiding the tropes of the "Mr. Wise and Mr. Foolish" dichotomy of conventional Tfd

plays. During Meda's play, not a single victim appears onstage. This choice is similar to one made by Guingané, in that Meda removes the violence to offstage and relies on other characters to recount violent action to the audience. In keeping the action of the play focused on the daily interactions of the village rather than the suffering of the pregnant women the play aims to address, Meda avoids the representation of victimized women and the Mary-Eve dichotomy plaguing so many development plays. No single character is directly accused of the women's deaths and while the characters have negative traits, they are far less black and white than in most TfD plays. While one might argue that a less overt message risks obscuring the purpose of the play to the audiences the plays desire to sensitize, an overly overt style can be not only demeaning to the actors, but also the audience.

While Guingané relies on more didactic characters demonstrating obviously negative and positive attributes, Meda creates a broader palette in his character's relationship to modernity and tradition, particularly in regards to his female characters. Luca Fusi, the co-director of *On the Day After the Full Moon* and theatre instructor at the CFRAV theatre school, understands both Guingané's and Meda's methodologies as being well informed and constructed. He sees the risk for TfD stemming from younger, less-seasoned playwrights that aim to emulate the styles of successful playwrights like Guingané and Kompaoré and from a lack of education, reinforce the negative attributes of TfD in their work. Fusi views specific theoretical choices made by Guingané and Meda in regards to the construction of their plays as valid and effective tools at communicating a message to an audience (Fusi "Personal Interview"). For example, the clarity of Guingané's characters ensures the audience's comprehension of the play's message while Meda's interpretation of developmental themes less overtly instructs audiences on how they ought to live. In regards to Meda's work, the development of his female characters in particular

deserves some credit, as he avoids the pitfall to which many playwrights fall under criticism for their lack of attention to female identity.

Both playwrights can be legitimately argued as feminist playwrights as seen through the reiteration of women's rights and equal place in society to men throughout each playwright's oeuvre. *Three Sisters in Suffering* and *On the Day After the Full Moon*, in addition to their thematic structures, grant women agency in giving women in theatre job opportunities and the chance to perform in leading roles. Performing in TfD gives women the power to promote the rights of women to society while specifically passing a message to women on how they might find support for abuse. More importantly, these plays showcase women who are in fact combating their society for equality and equal positioning to men by performing onstage professionally. By offering women these opportunities, plays like *Three Sisters in Suffering*, and *On the Day After the Full Moon* help to chisel away at society's biases, the biases that hold women to be subservient in many household hierarchies, but also those biases that view the life of a professional acting career for a woman as subversive and unacceptable.

However, despite these same attempts at liberation, as seen through this chapter, the performances of *Three Sisters in Suffering* and *On the Day After the Full Moon* are also encapsulating women in the same gender norms that the plays attempt to break down. Evidenced through the hardships faced by actresses as seen in Chapter Four, whether women in theatre are accepted or not accepted by an audience informs how TfD plays function, do not function, or even fail to truly liberate women. Women have little or limited agency because of societal expectations extending from particular gender norms and the roles which they must perform. Even given the agency proffered by TfD, severe limitations exist for women because these plays cannot overthrow the gender norms at play. In Guingané's work, these gender norms are

reiterated through his text: the importance of the roles of wives and mothers are emphasized along with the discrimination and physical abuse women face. In Meda's work, these gender norms are reiterated through performance: the cross-gendered casting of particular roles demonstrates expectations of femininity, even when performed by men, and or play female identity out of jest. Although the efforts of both playwrights should be commended, both plays demonstrate the extent to which they are products of particular, culturally specific, gender expectations at work. Despite the attempts of both plays to grant agency to women and men in promoting women's rights, ultimately it is gender hierarchy that performs, limiting the power and extent of the agency meant to empower audiences.

Perspectives on the Future and the Placement of Tfd in Burkina Faso: A Conclusion

Theatre for Development, as a genre, has played an integral role in the evolution of theatre in Burkina Faso. I have shown within this dissertation both the significance and the precarious position of Tfd in the country, particularly the complicated relationships between Tfd and education, politics, and women's rights. In entering its fourth decade as a profession, Burkinabè theatre currently stands at a crossroads. The recent deaths of Sotigui Kouyaté, Amadou Bourou, and most notably, Jean-Pierre Guingané have left many of the country's theatre practitioners reflecting on the future. In this conclusion, I will address some of the concerns and hopes of practitioners over the prospects for the continuation of theatre in the country. Some practitioners view the deaths of the forefathers and the stalled ratification and disagreements over *le Statut de l'artiste*, a proposal to help artists gain legal rights, as a death knell. Others view the shifting of generations and a hope for guarantees of future rights as a promise for innovative work to come. The continued struggle for professionalization exemplified through the slow-moving establishment of *le Statut de l'artiste* suggests the uphill battle for performers in their goals for recognition from the government and society. In other respects, younger generations of Burkinabè performers, through the influence of the tradition of Tfd in Burkina Faso, are creating new and innovative pieces of theatre that I propose as examples of a uniquely Burkinabè body of performance. These plays include *Kubidu Abanda*, a collaboration between Ildevert Meda and Luca Fusi, and *Ziitba*, written by Sidiki Yougbare and performed by Edoxi Lionelle Gnoula. Both plays, performed during the 2010 edition of the festival Les Récréâtrales, implicate the corruption of post-independence African governments and resonate with a distinct influence of Theatre for Development. In addition to these plays, the development of the company Théâtre Valise led by Mahamadou Tindano and Paul Zoungrana demonstrates the incorporation and

evolution of TfD today. I use these examples to show a trajectory of the future of Burkinabè theatre, which also encapsulate the difficulties posed to theatre artists that lay ahead.

Recognition for Artists

Since 2001, artists in Burkina Faso have been collaborating in order to receive legal recognition of the profession by the government, which in turn will hopefully lead to greater societal recognition. Artistic Director, Martin Zongo describes the goals for artistic recognition in his article “Le Statut de l’artiste au Burkina Faso.” Zongo defines the use of the word statute, as “the legal recognition and affirmation of a socio-professional group” which then grants that group certain legal rights. The artistic domains currently committed to the governmental proposal include music, dance, theatre, fine arts, and film. Zongo defends the positioning of artists as an asset to the country in his clarification of the goals of the statute:

If Burkina is a vast cultural field which brings pride to the country through its reputation, these cultural workers, by which I mean the artists, lack a legal system that recognizes their identity, regulates their work, defends and promotes their profession, and provides recognition so that they might gain their place socially and financially in the country....in this way, artists can be recognized and validated and ameliorate their living and working conditions. (18)

Zongo makes valid arguments for the positioning of artists, particularly because the country’s international reputation relies on its many festivals, notably FESPACO and SIAO.⁶¹ In addition to the professional recognition the statute would grant, artists sought assistance from the government in hopes of regulating access to health insurance, social security and a standardized

⁶¹ Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ouagadougou and Salon International de l’Artisanat de Ouagadougou

and appropriate wage for their work. However, in 2005 the government's General Secretary found the proposal unconstitutional because of restrictions on limited domain of the government in regards to the statute's fiscal stipulations.

Four years later in 2009, Burkinabè artists regrouped once again to discuss their legal options to receiving further recognition and the assurance of an adequate livelihood. As of 2012, a ratification of *Le Statut de l'artiste* remains elusive. Part of this may be attributed to the resistance of the state, but in speaking with artists about the progress of this governmental recognition, fissures in the philosophies of the artistic community have also resulted in arguments that stall the process. One such argument stems from concerns for the potentially negative effects of legislation on artistic production. An example of these arguments is how profits should be distributed after a production. Practitioners like Jean-Pierre Guingané and Prosper Kompaoré promoted using the majority of funds to support future endeavors, both in terms of funding future projects and the construction of artistic cultural centers. The founders of CITO and La Fédération du Cartel, a major contributor being Ildevert Meda, rather support paying artists salaries. Although Espace Culturel Gambidi and ATB are two best performance centers for theatre after l'Institut Français du Burkina Faso, rarely are these spaces animated with productions while CITO prospers despite the poorer performance conditions. Meda theatricalizes this particular debate in his play *Kubidu Abanda*, which at least partly addresses the inequality of power and financial stability that poverty sparks even in the artistic community.

Kubidu Abanda

The goals for societal recognition and professionalization of theatre occasionally conflict with the internal struggles between organizations and individual actors because of the powerful

influence money has in countries as impoverished as Burkina Faso. For the 2011 edition of Les Récréâtrales, the largest private theatre festival in the country, collaborators Ildevert Meda and Luca Fusi wrote and directed the play *Kubidu Abanda*. The duo was originally told they had received a carte blanche position for the festival, which guarantees not only the favorable monetary means to create the play, but also a prime performance slot on a professional stage and the accompanying publicity and prestige. However, after their selection for a carte blanche slot, they were also informed that the play must be a farce, must have a particular running time, and must be performed with a pre-selected cast of some of the country's leading film and television stars (Fusi). The collaborators, stung, worked to resolve the revocation of the artistic liberty implied by "carte blanche" by working within the requirements while still producing a personally gratifying play.

Meda and Fusi demonstrated their creativity and artistry in *Kubidu Abanda* by turning control into liberty, and more importantly, critique. *Kubidu Abanda*, a made-up phrase used in the play to invoke black magic, served as an allegory both for the corruption of African nations after independence, but also the same levels of corruption found in artistic administration of African theatre troupes. The play begins when a closely knit and successful theatre troupe receives a notification from the government that they have been selected as the national theatre troupe, receiving a sum of one million F CFA for a performance for the nation's president. As an allegory for independence, the president represents the colonial government and the theatre troupe the newly founded independent African government. With the generous financial support of the president, the theatre company receives its independence to operate freely and the company celebrates with dreams of prosperity for the future. The next scene however, shows the corruption of money and the audience learns that the artistic director invests the funds in black

magic and uses the remaining money to bribe the members of the troupe. Instead of dividing the money equally and openly, the director establishes a new policy and calls in each member of the troupe individually. As he runs out of money, he is obliged to pay them each less and less while continuing to flatter their value and contributions to the troupe. In reality, instead of using the money towards the troupe, the director kills an albino, a common superstition across Africa for bringing wealth and power, and gives most of the troupe's money to a *féticheur* to increase his wealth. The audience sees his clothing improve throughout each scene, while each member of the troupe suffers due to financial instability. After an (un)successful, farcical presentation of the troupe's play in front of the President, the audience sees the director fall victim to his own curse—the corrupt *féticheur* has fled the country with his money and his dreams are haunted by dismembered figures. The play ends with the troupe traveling on a bus to perform at the capital when they stumble upon a coup d'état and tragically, the most innocent of all of the characters dies with a stray bullet in her belly. Up to this point, the corruption and suffering have been presented with a cynical comedic edge. With the final scene, however, the play quickly shifts from farce to tragedy.

Meda and Fusi used the play as a commentary on postcolonial Africa, but also as a form of sensitization to educate the administrators of the largest and most important theatre troupes in the country on their own distribution of funds. In a personal interview, Meda revealed that he hoped the play would communicate to the founder of Les Récréâtrales, Etienne Minoungou, Martin Zongo, Artistic Director of CITO, and the country's two founding theatre makers, Jean-Pierre Guingané and Propser Kompaoré, and inspire them to dispense money more equilaterally among company members. Meda expressed his frustration with the notable absence of Zongo, Guingané, and Kompaoré in the audience and to Minoungou's reticence in his assessment of the

play's content. The play, part comedy, part zinging critique, modifies some of the techniques seen in sensitization theatre, like humor mixed with tragedy and an implication of the audience in order to garner an awareness of societal ills. As a progressive spin on the TtD genre, the play simultaneously illuminates some of the fissures that currently prevent the advancement of the field.

Ziitba

While *Kubidu Abanda* combined farce and sensitization, another performance during the festival incorporated Burkinabè and Western performance traditions as a sort of call to action. La Compagnie Kala-Kala performed *Ziitba* first at CITO and later during Les Récréâtrales in 2010. According to playwright and director of the play Sidiki Yougbare, the play was originally slated to perform during the “off” portion of the festival, but after festival director Etienne Minoungou saw a rehearsal of the play, he was so impressed with the work of Yougbare and Gnoula that he moved the play to a performance slot in the “in” portion of the festival. The play, performed in a mixture of French and Mooré, blends the traditions of oral storytelling and sensitization theatre with modern Western music and cabaret techniques. *Ziitba* translated by the company as *La Situation* in French, literally means “traitor” in Mooré. A live band consisting of a guitar, bass, and drum set plays music supporting the action during the collaborative monologue. Gnoula takes the audience through an investigation of the “situation” that political betrayal places a population. Though focused on a particular story, the play *Ziitba* depicts themes that communicate to any audience. Within the seeming hodgepodge of forms, a fresh and wholly unique performance develops, based in the traditional language that inspired its production.

The night begins with a dark, jazzy rendition by the live band and a direct address to welcome the audience by Gnoula, establishing a nightclub-esque atmosphere. Gnoula explains that the audience can expect almost anything—music, stories, comedy—almost anything except theatre. Gnoula’s comedic explanation that follows for why the night would not include theatre caricatures the critiques all too often offered after a play, and this night’s entertainment would defy definitions of the genre for that very reason. Soon, however, Gnoula’s dramatization of a political rivalry between a toad and a praying mantis shifts from an introduction to a concert to a traditional story to a monologue in a play. Gnoula acts out the toad and praying mantis by manipulating her hands into puppets. The praying mantis disappears the toad after he criticizes her political platform in which she insists that women have the right to wear mini-skirts in public. This parody is poignant for a Burkinabè audience. Although, true that it is not currently well viewed for women to wear skirts or dresses that fall above their knees, the critique in *Ziitba* has actually little to do with short skirts. The poignancy of Yougbaré’s use of the powerful praying mantis’s political platform comes through the toad’s observations. The praying mantis’s real agenda, shown through the critiques of the toad, reveals that the politician is no longer in touch with the reality in the country and hopes to appeal to foreign tastes rather than address the dire circumstances of the population. In Yougbaré’s words “‘Every woman should be wearing a miniskirt!’ Well ok, but first, has every woman gotten to eat as well as you have?” (Yougbaré “Personal Interview”). This example speaks to the very real concerns and critiques of many in Burkina Faso that the current administration neglects the needs of the people. For example, the government has invested a great deal of money into the construction of three overpasses and the Monument des Héros Nationaux, a large monument in Ouaga 2000. The overpasses and monument mainly serve the people living and working in Ouaga 2000, which consists of many

foreign embassies, ostentatious mansions, and the presidential palace. Many Burkinabè, insulted by the obvious efforts to prove the country's ability to "develop" to foreign visitors while overlooking the needs of the people, lament the unnecessary and garish expenditures while most of the population continues to suffer. Youbare and Gnoula use the triviality of the right to wear mini-skirts to criticize the preoccupations of the current administration and to reiterate that they have forgotten their promises to the people.

In standing up to the praying mantis's promotion of miniskirts, the toad loses his life in his attempt to invoke his freedom of speech. "All because they don't get along...because one finds that the other talks too much...So they kill him," (Gnoula). The storyline of the disappearance of the toad by the praying mantis allegorizes another story in Burkinabè history. Towards the end of the scene as Gnoula descends her raised hand representing the praying mantis onto the crouching toad in an act of violence, the audience recalls the 1998 disappearance of journalist Norbert Zongo at the hands of President Blaise Compaoré. The next scene further reiterates this message as Gnoula transitions into a new character, the blind mother of the toad, who insists on being led to the body of her dead son. As with the story of the toad, the body of Zongo was never found. Gnoula transitions beautifully between the emotions of a grieving mother to a citizen enraged by the promises and subsequent betrayals of politicians that promise a better life for their constituents while reverting to self-interest after being elected.

And me, I ran around trying to convince the people to follow you, but how could I know that you were as bad as all the others? ...What you did to the toad, if that's not enough, go to his tomb and wake him up and cut his throat again. And if that's still not enough, dissolve him in water and drink him. And if that's still not enough, come cut my throat. And if that's still not enough, come drink my blood.

And if that's still not enough, come dissolve me in water and drink me. Children of thieves, of witches, of swine... You're all traitors! ...Take me by the hand so that I can touch him, touch him to see how they slit his throat. (*Ziitba*)

This portion of the text exhibits some of the emotional shifts of Gnoula's character. As a member of a society, she feels abandoned by the false promises of a string of politicians that use the voter-base to become successful and forget these pledges after they benefit personally. As an individual, she is defiant. She mockingly pleads for her own death to denote that those in power will not be able to silence an entire country. As a mother, she begs to see her dead son's body to gain closure rather than to garner sympathy. The betrayal, defiance, and defeat performed by Gnoula speak to a population too long disenchanted with the rule of a dictator.

This scene, spoken in Mooré, posed practical problems to Yougbare and Gnoula in performance. While Kala-Kala focuses on writing material in Mooré, they acknowledge that many audience members do not speak this language. In the CITO performance, French subtitles were projected onto the back of the stage, but the audience found this distracting. In the performances during Les Récréâtrales, Gnoula spoke in Mooré while Yougbare echoed the text in French from the back of the audience. This performance technique, although rendering the text difficult to understand, exposed the passion and conviction of the two practitioners in their denunciation of political corruption. Towards the end of the scene as Gnoula gains momentum and power in her speech, another member of the company interrupts her and reminds her that she insisted that the night would not include any theatre. Gnoula raises the house lights and looks at the audience accusingly asking who would dare interrupt her. The play ends with a prayer in Mooré with members of the audience dragged onstage by members of the company. During Les Récréâtrales, white, non-Moorephone speakers were included in the prayer to much amusement

of the audience. This technique to include the audience in the prayer interpolates both Burkinabè and foreigners in the hopes of the future advancement of the country.

Both Yougbare and Gnoula emphasized that although *Ziitba* communicates in a particular way in the context of Burkina Faso's political history, they find the messages to be universal. Gnoula cited, for example, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King and that each country has its own examples of luminaries that were silenced because of their ability to vocalize their ideas and motivate others to join them in their pursuits. Yougbare and Gnoula also offered that *Ziitba* is a call to action rather than a direct incrimination of any individual. Through universality and specificity, both in use of themes and performance archetypes, the duo crafts a unique performance experience that is broadly relatable, but notably Burkinabè in nature.

Shifting Critiques into Changes

Kubidu Abanda and *Ziitba* show the influence of TfD on pieces of theatre not forcibly defined as sensitization plays. Artists are also reexamining the theories behind the production of development plays in order to combat some of the critiques of the genre. Théâtre Valise is a new theatrical endeavor being developed by various artists and spearheaded by Mahamadou Tindano and Paul Zoungrana. Both practitioners have worked in TfD, Tindano with Théâtre de la Fraternité and Zoungrana with ATB, but are dissatisfied with the effects TfD renders on artistic production in Burkina Faso. Some of the problems they pinpointed in separate personal interviews included that TfD trains audiences to consider all theatre to be free-admission, that TfD receives less attention artistically and has become a source of income, and that messages in TfD tend to be condescending and lack the necessary specificity to the intended community.

Tindano shared that the goal of Théâtre Valise is to make a commitment to work that satisfies both the artists and the audiences. Too often in Burkina Faso, theatre misses one of these objectives. In the case of TfD, plays are performed for free and rely on humor and messages of sensitization to reach an audience, but do not artistically challenge or invigorate the actors. In the case of classic theatre, most performances are too expensive for Burkinabè audiences and are geared towards Western aesthetics with the hopes of being selected for a European Tour. Tindano hopes to familiarize audiences with theatre by producing shows that appeal to and develop a financially supportive Burkinabè audience base. He notes that although people claim 500 F CFA to be too expensive to see a show, those same people will pay upwards of 1000 F CFA to see the latest Leonardo DiCaprio film in a movie theatre. In addition to the negative consequences that so much TfD performed for free admission, Tindano sees this as a disconnect between the theatre produced and the needs of the audiences. Tindano shared the successful examples of films from Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood—that although these films are successfully exported, they are first and foremost produced to please their own audiences. In response, Tindano and Zoungrana have started to canvas people they meet in the street to learn more about their reservations in seeing theatre as well as their daily preoccupations. Tindano hopes that by working closely with potential audiences, Théâtre Valise can produce an artistically enriching theatre that will also develop a greater audience demographic willing to pay for theatre, “even if that starts with just a handful of grain or peanuts,” (Tindano).

While Tindano focused on content in his interview, Zoungrana focused more on the structure of the performances. Zoungrana currently experiments with theories from TfD, Invisible Theatre, and Action Theatre to inform his work. He described one play that he wrote

collectively with a group of actors, *Violences faites aux femmes*, in which during the two performances, a pregnant woman (an actor) goes into “labor” in the audience, interrupting the show. Zoungrana said during both performances, the members of the audience rushed to help the woman as other covert actors revealed details of the woman’s life, for example that she had been excised and that this would make her delivery more difficult. The woman dies and shortly after, the actors reveal that this has been a scene in their play. Zoungrana shared that some audience members felt exploited and manipulated, but Zoungrana found the benefits of this type of theatre—the demands on the improvisational skills of the actors and the truthful responses elicited from the audience—outweigh the risks. He continues to experiment, focusing on artistically challenging work that touches audiences intrinsically rather than intellectually.

Conclusion

Although the future of theatre in Burkina Faso, including TfD, is uncertain due to its precarious positioning in societal acceptance and the disagreements in the artistic community, recent projects show a great deal of promise for a continued Burkinabè voice that promises to gain more prominence in the international artistic community. The roots of TfD as a bedrock genre in the evolution of Burkinabè theatre have spread past the goal of educating an audience, to inspiring artists to manipulate the genre in innovative ways in order that theatre might better serve both the audiences and the artists. Although I have aimed to provide evidence for the substantial influence Western organizations have over theatrical production in Burkina Faso, I advocate that the artists ultimately have agency over their own craft. The examples of *Kubidu Abanda* and *Ziitba* and projects like those of Tindano and Zoungrana demonstrate the reflection and ingenuity in current artistic production which aim to escape the valorization of Western

culture while speaking to Burkinabè audiences in order to initiate reflection and possibly social change.

The pioneers of theatre in Burkina Faso, Jean-Pierre Guingané and Prosper Kompaoré, paved the way for the current generations of theatre practitioners in the country. They founded the first professional companies in the country which remain two of the most important companies functioning to date, formed departments at the University of Ouagadougou and professional theatre schools to train future academics and practitioners, built cultural centers meant to encourage both performance and education, and laid the groundwork for theoretical approaches to producing and administering theatre in the country. Currently, no professional theatre maker in the country can claim not to have been influenced by these men. Although professional theatre in Burkina Faso is experiencing a moment of transition, the passion for art and the passion for social change are imbedded in the fibers of Burkinabè theatrical production. The work of Guingané and Kompaoré, particularly their work in TfD, has left an indelible mark on the future of theatre in the country.

TfD serves as a lens in viewing the current positioning of Burkina Faso as a developing country and its relationship to other more powerful global entities. Although theatre itself might be seen as innocuous, through the production of TfD, we can see the many facets of life in which foreign influence intervenes. Taking current concerns for globalization into consideration, TfD reveals not only influence, but an attempt at an active hand at molding the morality and customs of a population. From the perspective of Burkinabè culture, the playwright and the audience have the ultimate say in how to interpret these messages, but in turning the question back onto the grantor, who has the authority to intervene in whose culture? The influence of TfD, however

benign, serves as an example of the encroachment of Western thought without an assurance of equilateral exchange.

The inequity of this cultural exchange is just one of the areas relating to Tfd in Burkina Faso that I propose merits future research. This might be managed through a more detailed investigation conducted on the exchanges between a funding organization, a theatre company, and the intended audience. Additionally, further study is needed in the advancement of theatre education and theatre professionalization in Burkina Faso. As this is a moment of flux for the country's artistic fields, there are exciting and important research opportunities to further understand these efforts to advance the appreciation of the arts. Perhaps the most significant prospect for further research in regards to how governments extend influence into foreign countries is offered through an investigation of other projects funded through the American Department of Defense. In researching this dissertation, I encountered numerous problems and dead ends in accessing further information on these projects. However, further efforts could clarify the overall mission and intention of the United States government in employing culture as a security measure as well as giving a greater scope to assess the success of this project. While this dissertation aims to paint a broader picture of the current theatrical landscape in Burkina Faso as it relates to foreign influence, these particular research suggestions offer further opportunities to investigate the culturally rich yet otherwise impoverished West African country.

In conclusion, I maintain that although there are neocolonial risks in relying on outside financial support for theatrical production, more now than ever do artists have the agency to break away from this system of support and to build audiences appreciative of their work by creating plays that more accurately address those audiences needs and expectations. Theatre is one lens that demonstrates ways in which Western countries sustain African countries in a cycle

of dependence. Although a difficult cycle to break, I believe the shifting incorporations and utilizations of TfD demonstrate the ingenuity of artists to combat these forces in the future. Although theatre in Burkina Faso represents only a microcosm of how neocolonial forces affect a country's development, it is a unique and under-researched example both artistically and socio-politically. The circumstances of TfD in Burkina Faso provide further evidence for the agency imbued in practitioners and audiences through theatre and the ways individuals and communities develop this agency. As both an example of a specific culture and context and of a larger international moment in history, Burkinabè Theatre for Development combines external influence with internal ingenuity through approaching questions of the intended development of a country combined with the development of a country's artistic voice. The impact of TfD on a given community might never accurately be assessed empirically, but the impact of TfD on the Burkinabè artistic community can certainly be understood through the breadth, diversity, and creativity seen in the body of work produced and in the dedication to the continued artistic future of the country.

Appendix A

Smockey “ONG” Song Lyrics

Allo, Charly appelle Tango, Charly appelle Tango, on est sous le soleil là actuellement
Opération Couscous-Benga enclenchée

ONG, moi je fais de l’humanitaire, 4x4 tous risques, mais on est tous solidaires
Compte bloqué, et Cash Money, la vie est belle quand on bosse dans l’humanitaire
Maladie, famine, guerre et fléaux
Beaucoup de victimes, mais pas un seul goulot
ONG, il y a rien à faire que de bronzer et de se sentir aimé

Mesdames et Messieurs, c’est gratuit
Il y en aura pour tout le monde, ne vous excitez pas
Du bon riz périmé, de la farine et des biscuits
Apportés directement des Etats-Unis
Même nous, on en consomme, c’est pour vous dire

Chef, eh, on n’a pas droit à faire ça, hein !

Rapporteur, si vous êtes commerçants, on peut faire des affaires
Moyennant quelques billets, ouais, c’est pas cher
Je vous sors quelques sacs, tac tac
Je peux même vous les amener avec mon 4x4
Surtout, ne revendez pas sur la place du marché avec le tampon dont des Etats-Unis d’Amérique
Ça ferait pas bon pour mon CV, ça ferait pas bon et ça serait pas bon pour vous
Plus de marge, plus de biz, plus de benef, plus d’assos
Et je nierai vous avoir rencontrés

Ha ha ha ha ha ha

ONG, moi je fais de l’humanitaire, 4x4 tous risques, mais on est tous solidaires
Compte bloqué, et Cash Money, la vie est belle quand on bosse dans l’humanitaire
Maladie, famine, guerre et fléaux
Beaucoup de victimes, mais pas un seul goulot
ONG, il y a rien à faire que de bronzer et se sentir aimé

Vous avez faim, soif ? On est là
Vous avez des problèmes de santé ? On est là
Vous cherchez à être hébergés ? On est là
Vous voulez quoi ? Vous voulez tout ? Euh, on n’est plus là
Si on vous donne tout, vous n’aurez plus besoin de rien
Plus besoin de rien, alors, plus besoin de nous
C’est du business social quand même
Ce sont d’abord nos idées tout de même

Nous aussi, on veut manger
 Approchez, Mesdames et Messieurs, vous avez des projets
 Et nous, on adore les projets
 Surtout, quand ils ont des dossiers bien montés
 Arrangez-vous pour glisser quelques billets à l'intérieur
 Ça fera pas de mal pour bon nombre de services, et
 Si jamais votre dossier est accepté
 Pensez à reverser le pourcentage habituel
 Car ce qu'il y a de bien dans l'habituel, c'est les bonnes habitudes
 Et les bonnes habitudes provoquent toujours, toujours
 Les très bonnes attitudes

ONG, moi je fais de l'humanitaire, 4x4 tous risques, mais on est tous solidaires
Compte bloqué, et Cash Money, la vie est belle quand on bosse dans l'humanitaire
Maladie, famine, guerre et fléaux
Beaucoup de victimes, mais pas un seul goulot
ONG, il y a rien à faire que de bronzer et de se sentir aimé

Ah, admirez les paysannes dans la savane et les jolis corses...
 Pardon, elle n'est pas bonne celle-là, on la refait là

Ah, admirez les paysages dans la savane et les jolis ombrages
 Et si vous avez de la chance, vous croiserez peut-être dans le village
 De belles autochtones au passage
 Vous pourrez goûter aux spécialités locales
 Prochaine localité située à 200 km de là
 Notre mission : construire un petit complexe sanitaire
 Pour éviter aux villageois d'aller faire en brousse
 Mais c'est pas la peine de trop creuser, oh non
 Un petit trou suffira, oh oui
 Car avec ce qu'ils mangent, ils auraient de la peine à remplir la fosse septique
 Non, nous ne sommes pas sceptiques
 Mais, prévoyants
 Et parfois, on donne un petit coup de pouce aux événements
 Pour faire tomber les enveloppes budgétaires
 Alors, si tu as du savoir-faire ou pas du tout
 Un peu d'ambition, tu aimes les voyages et leurs applications pratiques
 Viens dans notre ONG où même le PDG est tous les jours en SRB

Hein, Monsieur, Monsieur, ça veut dire quoi SRB ?

Strictement Rien à Branler

ONG, moi je fais de l'humanitaire, 4x4 tous risques, on est tous solidaires

Compte bloqué, et Cash Money, la vie est belle quand on bosse dans l'humanitaire
Maladie, famine, guerre et fléaux
Beaucoup de victimes, mais pas un seul goulot
ONG, il y a rien à faire que de bronzer et de se sentir aimé

Oh, Salif, charge pas tout là, laisse quelques sacs et quelques litres de catwell
On doit en ramener à l'anniversaire d'Elizabeth
Tu as oublié ?
Oh, viens, viens, on part, on part
Ah, trop de villageois ici là
Toi tu crois qu'on va donner l'argent cadeau couan
Toi tu es bête ou bien c'est quoi

ONG, ONG

Salopard

Appendix B

Smockey Lyrics “50 ans 2 dépendance”

Intro : ...approchez ...approchez, approchez mesdames et messieurs...et écoutez sonner ce joli mot que l'on appelle « indépendance »...laissez vous emporter par la consonance du mot « liberté »...écoutez les sonner...car pour sonner ils sonneront...mais ils resteront...des mots !

Couplet 1 :

Ecoutez sonner le glas de nos indépendances
 50 ans d'incompétence sans autre conséquence
 Que de faire croire aux abrutis que le moment est venu
 De festoyer d'abord et de réfléchir ensuite
 Depuis lors ça continue malgré les déficits
 Si les cons savaient voler ils seraient sur satellite
 Ce sont les mêmes qui commémorent qui battent tous les records
 Dans le bas du classement des indices de développement
 Premiers à monter au créneau dès qu'il s'agit de réconfort
 Sans jamais avoir à fournir le moindre effort
 Car s'ils pensaient travailler ils n'auraient pas le culot
 De fêter quelque chose qui leur a été octroyé
 Vous la voulez l'indépendance ? ...disait le général...
 Alors ils nous l'on donné...c'est depuis lors que l'on danse sans pouvoir s'arrêter...

Refrain:

On fête quoi ?...50 ponts...50 routes...ou 50 ports...
 « 50 ans d'indépendance ! »
 Ça alors ! Tu veux dire de dépendance...
 Et la France...et consorts...elle s'en sort...elle est d'accord ?
 « Elle garantit son insistance ! »
 Arrête ça !
 Qui te l'a dit ?...monsieur Sarkozy...

Chhht...silence ya Sarkozy qui parle !
 Il dit dans une de ses déclarations que...
 La France économiquement n'a pas besoin de l'Afrique
 Avec 2700 filiales sur le continent
 Les entreprises Françaises s'invitent même dans le politique
 Quand le rapace attaque les pigeons fuient la menace
 Les Africains sont bien les seuls à se laisser pigeonner
 Puis à se faire inviter à la table du rapace
 T'as entendu parler des fameux comptes d'opération ?
 Paraît que c'est pour maintenir le cours de notre monnaie
 Alors on nous amène à exporter toutes nos devises
 Pour qu'ils aient la sympathie de récupérer nos intérêts

Cet argent nous sera reprêté sans doute plus tard
 Pour te donner une idée cela fait 8000 milliards
 En sens inverse c'est de l'aide au développement
 Mais ça rappelle étrangement un comportement de dealer Le genre de situation où la victime est le client....

Refrain

Bois, diamant, uranium, or noir,
 Phosphate, cuivre, transports, télécoms, gaz...
 Eau, BTP produits de pêche et agricoles
 Sur le sol, sous le sol, et même au dessus du sol
 En retour la super -puissance imprime du CFA
 Celui avec lequel nous fêtons l'indépendance
 Celui qui nous a permis 50 ans de subsistance
 Après des siècles marqués par des missionnaires
 Dont la mission était...le nettoyage des consciences
 Puis le soutien à nos pantins que nous appelons « excellences »
 Ceux qui tremblent à l'évocation du mot « alternance »
 Ce n'est pas eux c'est sûr qui en feraient une histoire
 Si on nous refilait l'apocalypse en suppositoire...

Refrain

....hommage à tous ceux qui se sont battus pour l'indépendance...la vraie...
 Un héritage que d'aucuns piétinent...et trainent inexorablement
 Jusqu'au panthéon des imbéciles..

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