

## Introduction

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From the live theatre, to street performance and to interactive television drama, African theatre and performance remain alive, resilient, and relevant to contemporary landscapes. Africa—imagined, constructed, and symbolic—takes shape in these varied genres and spaces, all of which underscore the critical role of theatre and performance as zones of creativity and socio-political dialogue. The papers compiled in this special issue of *Pula* corroborate this assertion. Ranging in topic, the papers in some way or other, speak to three key issues: (i) memory and memorialization, (ii) identity construction, and (iii) performance aesthetics. For some authors, Africa is remembered and/or re-remembered through self-defining acts and scenarios of self-determination that are attained through African-inspired idioms and enactments. Some authors highlight the assertion of Black presence in racially-charged landscapes, such as echoes of American race relations, tensions encountered during apartheid South Africa, and challenges of post-colonial Zimbabwe. Others take a forward look into the sustainability of a theatre industry in the context of Africa. Additionally, and in diverse ways, the papers encourage readers to reflect on questions about what gets included or excluded in acts of identity construction, as well as what is valued and what gets re-invested with new meanings and significations—through indigenous and contemporary processes of memorialization—in writing about Africa in theatre and performance.

In their paper, Seda and Sirayi look at attempts to promote African language drama written by black South African playwrights. The paper focuses on the struggle for hegemony and domination between intrusive colonialist discourses, apartheid racial and cultural policies, and the resilience of African dramatic forms.

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Rapoo and Bonno discuss how African performance traditions become the source of inspiration for African American playwrights in their memorialization of Africa. Looking specifically at Adrienne Kennedy's plays, the essay gives an insight into how African religious observances get appropriated into the self-defining acts of African American biracial characters. African, specifically Botswana beliefs, myths, and practices are invoked in the essay to interpret the characters' attempts to overcome psychological trauma and to reconcile their racial identities.

Thulaganyo Mogobe offers a panoramic overview of the status of theatre arts in Botswana. In his article, he calls for introspection into the level of investment into the sector of arts, culture and entertainment, and the possibilities of establishing a sustainable theatre industry in the country. Mogobe recommends, among other strategies, a thorough review of policies, an investment into theatre infrastructure, as well as capacity development for artists as a way to build Botswana's theatre industry.

Lebogang Disele's paper interrogates constructions of the Self by Botswana youth in two contemporary theatre productions. She shows how these productions destabilize accepted boundaries of identification, specifically those of gender and ethnicity. Focusing on the images and constructs of masculinity and ethnic belonging, the paper shows new forms of self-assertion that challenge monolithic imaginings of Botswana nationhood and patriarchal domination.

Patrick Ebewo's paper examines the scenario of former South African President Nelson Mandela's funeral, showing how the event exhibited African funerary aesthetics that are theatrical—some appropriate and mandatory, others inappropriate and alien. Arguing for the notion of "performance" as "showing off", the paper seeks to highlight not only the performative aspect of African indigenous performance traditions, but also how the sacred and

the profane took centre stage while mourners, through actions and rituals remembered the international significance of Mandela's life.

Ivy Musekiwa's paper explores the interplay of an internet meme and diaspora discourse by Zimbabwean virtual performers. A dialogue ensues between Zimbabweans at home and those in the Diaspora, showing not only the value of interactive performance in new media forms, but also how social actors might interrogate topical issues such as the socio-political and economic predicaments of their original homelands on the virtual space. Mediated forms such as the videos posted on the internet translate the meme into a zone for creativity, interconnectivity, and identity construction between Zimbabweans at home and those in the Diaspora.

Naomi Nkealah's interview with Eckhard Breiting (which took place shortly before his death in 2013) deals with the plays of Cameroonian author, Bole Butake. The interview shows Breiting at his critical best – incisive, balanced and informative, while aware of literary controversies which Butake's plays provoke.

Mwenya Kabwe's interview with Warona Seane unearths African female theatre makers and their significant role in drawing attention to a generation of Southern African female theatre practitioners.

Joanna Kamanyi-Abowe reviews a theatrical piece that casts and memorializes one of Africa's prominent musicians Philly Lutaaya and his struggles for acceptance in Uganda following the public announcement of his HIV status. The production shows Botswana's actor and playwright Donald Molosi's dramatization of how performance gives HIV/AIDS a human face, and how the theatre is useful in changing undesirable landscapes by reinforcing positive behavioural change and the acceptance of those affected by the scourge.

Makgala's book review of Justice Motlhabani's memoir of his time in the Big Brother Africa House shows how interactive reality TV shows selectively (dis)play participants—both on screen and behind the cameras. The author's experiences as memorialized in the book, show front-stage performances by Big Brother House Africa participants alongside backstage performances by the producers and managers of the show. Makgala recommends the book as a toolkit for potential housemates of the show. It is also viewed as a useful memoir for scholars of African theatre and performance as it touches on notions of mediated performance and identity acts.

This special issue of *Pula Journal* is thus a mix of articles, some very serious, others light weight, some clearly in the field of theatre, others navigating the much broader domain of Performance Studies.