Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of

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MA (University of Ilorin, Nigeria, 2016)
BA (Hons.) (University of Jos, Nigeria, 2011)

“Internally displaced or internationally displaced?” an exploration of participation and ethics in applied theatre projects in Africa and beyond”

Department of Theatre

Tuesday, March 24, 2020
9:15 A.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Warwick Dobson, Department of Theatre, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Kirsten Sadeghi-Yekta, Department of Theatre, UVic (Member)
Dr. Monica Prendergast, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Outside Member)
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Dr. Veronica Baxter, Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, University of Cape Town

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Charlotte Loppie, School of Public Health and Social Policy, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This research started as a quest to better understand the ethics of doing Theatre for Development/Applied Theatre with under-served, marginalized and vulnerable populations especially in post-conflict zones in the Global South. As a theatre practitioner-researcher from Africa who has lived and worked in post-conflict zones, I was interested in fostering appropriate ethical protocols for arts-based practices for citizenship participation and advocacy. Thus, in this dissertation, I focus on two concepts in applied theatre practice: participation and ethics. I examine how participation can be re-conceptualized in applied theatre practice and the ethics around conducting research among vulnerable populations with a focus on refugees and internally displaced persons.

On participation, I use existing case studies from various fields to argue that participation in community engagement and socially-engaged arts practices can become a tool to reposition voices on the margin to the centre in order to unsettle centres of power. However, for this to happen, participation needs to engage a communicative action that is both epistemic and ontic in its approach. An epistemic discourse provides a way of seeing the world while an ontic discourse provides a people with a way of being in the world. The former is a ‘theoretical’ discursive practice that is fundamentally epistemological, and the latter is an ‘embodied’ praxis that is fundamentally ontological. I examine the famous Ngugi wa Thiongo’s Kamirithu Community Theatre project in Kenya and Michael Balfour et al’s refugee project in Australia to foreground this new thinking on verb-oriented and noun-oriented notions of participation.

On ethics, I raise a series of critical questions around interventionist or humanitarian performances. These questions hopefully will deepen discourses in applied theatre practice and further challenge practitioners to rethink why we do what we do. Using narrative inquiry, I glean lessons from my field research facilitating drama workshop among secondary school students who have been internally displaced due to an ongoing socio-political crisis in Nigeria. I also reflect on my other applied theatre experiences in Canada and Sudan. I propose an ethical practice that is built on relational interaction. In the context of working in post-conflict zones or in places of war, I argue that precarity becomes a determining factor.
in framing the ethics of practice. The questions around ethics are raised to also draw attention to decolonizing ethical practices.

Finally, I articulate the connection between participation and ethics in that participation becomes a tactic to ensure that applied theatre researchers/practitioners conduct their work in ethical ways. This is because through participation, concerned communities can challenge unethical practices and transform the research to create outcomes that are beneficial. Thus, as an example of reflective practitioner research, the projects in this dissertation critically examine how participation has been conceptualized and the need for a decolonizing understanding towards ethics in applied theatre practice especially in post-conflict zones.