

Another Roadmap School - Intertwining HiStories

Johannesburg Working Group (Africa Cluster)

Medu Art Ensemble

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Definition and contexts

The Johannesburg Working group reiterates how the themes and aims of the international cluster project, Intertwining HiStories, has resonated with their research processes over the last five years. These are understood as: modes of “inhabiting” histories, history as a “resource”, disturbing hegemonial narratives of history and animating, activating counter-hegemonial narratives. The map/timeline conflation does several things: it deconstructs the idea of progress; it disrupts the idea of a calendar/rhythm; and it articulates questions of social justice and visualises time and histories differently.

The Johannesburg Working Group continues to work on broader histories of arts education in southern Africa projects. At the same time, we consider how this work might become part of Pan African histories of “arts education”, given how arts practices transgressed borders in the 1980s (e.g. Medu Art Ensemble’s work connecting with practices in Botswana, Tanzania, Sweden). A number of more specific projects are already under way identifying and tracking imported and migrated models of arts education and/or wider education models that have impacted thinking on arts education and continue to play an “invisible” residual role (e.g. the South Kensington system; Slade School; Bauhaus; Freirean presences in the 70s, 80s and 90s; Christian National Education and Fundamental Pedagogics; the Reggio Emilia System). At the same time, the research seeks to identify what might be termed “local” models of “arts education” that have emerged from this space of southern Africa. The intention has been to physically map, in as detailed a fashion as possible, all these models to try and understand the evolving of arts education as a surface of jostling, overlapping, receding and dominating moments and processes that have existed with varying degrees of proximity, in their contestatory, contradictory and, at times, complementary states. In doing this, the Johannesburg Working Group seeks to establish a series of counter and complementary narratives to those that often exist as central to an understanding of “arts education” in southern Africa. Just as much as the “mapping” seeks to identify models, it will include moments, events, individuals and collectives in order to reveal legacies critical to an understanding of how “arts education” might be re-imagined and practised. The presence of resistances to imported and migrated models is critical to the research project.

The Intertwining HISories paper maps out the stakes and methodologies for a much larger project, namely, the writing up of the histories of arts education in South Africa and, by implication, southern Africa. This is a bringing together of a series of concerns, questions and interests accumulated over a number of years that probe the nature of how we have come to understand and practice this thing called “arts education”. We do this in an attempt to consider how to dislodge sedimented notions of “arts education” and then offer, not a new model, but a set of possibilities and practices that might allow for a liberation from the constraints of said field. In effect, a set of possibilities, propositions and practices for an “arts education against arts education”.

We begin with a set of tactics that might be described as both metaphorical and methodological. This initial part of the paper is permeated by Eduoard Glissant’s understanding of histories as processes that take on the following injunctions: “We must exhaust our landscapes, in other words, realize them. But we must not fear discovering them endlessly: new, tempting, possibly prohibited” and “... we must exhaust our landscapes, where we starkly illuminate structures (by “retreating” them)” (1969, 11,12). So our first tactic is to invite the reader to imagine this exploration of histories as being about landscapes, topographies - and property. Here we highlight the following:

To exhaust

To realise

To endlessly discover

To illuminate and then retreat

We position these as tactics for an engagement with the landscape of South African “arts education”. Glissant’s writing in *Poetic Intention* (1969) seems to demand from the reader an altogether different encounter with doing histories that seems apt for our purposes. The South African “arts education” landscape, if not all of its “landscapes”, is in need of this “exhaustion”. We take this to be both a painstaking process of unpicking, delving and surfacing, but also one that unlearns the landscape as we have known it. With this “exhausting”, realisations emerge, discoveries continue (endlessly), aspects of the landscape are illuminated and then retreated – brought into focus for the moment necessary for scrutinisation and then retreated in order for other moments to be given attention.

Extending the landscape metaphor and methodology, we are reminded of an article written in 1992 by the South African academics Yusuf da Costa and Dirk Meerkotter. They introduce their article titled *Decolonialisation of education in South Africa* with the following epigraph:

Our customs are dug up.

And put aside, like the grass

On which the dancer trod,

And foreign crops implanted;

And we pass by, eyes on the ground,

Submitting to the foreign as ours.

The epigraph is from Joe Mutiga's publication *To the Ceremonial Mugumbo* (1970, 22) and it extends and focuses our mobilising of Glissant's writing referenced earlier in the introduction. It does this in the manner it uses the ground, landscapes, to succinctly encapsulate the colonial project and the imposition of models of culture and education. Furthermore, Da Costa and Meerkotter's referencing of Mutiga's 1970 publication offers a resounding reminder of how it took the events of #RhodesmustFall and #FeesmustFall campaigns to galvanise attention and action for the decolonisation project. "Arts education" research in South Africa is the homework required to address the "digging up", the "putting aside", the "implanting" and, yes, the "passing by". The sites to be considered in the exhausting of these landscapes are numerous: schools, mission schools, tertiary institutions, universities, former technikons, FET colleges, Teacher Training Colleges, Community Art Centres, museums...and also the collectives, the clubs, the homes, the community halls, the spaces of dust.

In our mobilising of Glissant's writing and the metaphors associated with land, landscape and topography, we note Tuck & Wayne Yang's concerns regarding the reducing of decolonisation to the level of metaphor (2012). But it is through these metaphors that we seek to arrive at the activation leading to the decolonisation of "arts education". What we are discovering through this research is how Medu Art Ensemble is something that is "here" – it is part of a proposition for a potential future. Arguably, Medu Art Ensemble offers practical substance to the addressing of the question: "what next?" This becomes particularly apparent as we draw together their work with Keleketla! Library and the *Inkulumo-Impendulwano* project.

Overview of central elements

Here we identify the key presences in our research project, many of which are found in the practices of Medu Art Ensemble:

- Intergenerationality of research teams, debates, information gathering and decisions. This extends to the collective, ensemble-like methodologies present for the research;
- Dialogue/talks/conversation and re-enactment sessions;
- Decentralisation of learning sites;
- The potential for a "festival" format that authorises itself, has broader appeal and crosses disciplines;
- The centrality of grappling with language - and ideological languages.

What follows is an engagement with the "story" central to our research, that of Medu Art Ensemble. This is prefaced by the connected research conducted by Plessie which draws together her own project with that of Medu Art Ensemble and Keleketla! Library in order to emphasise the unchronological timeline qualities of rewinding, moving back and forth, reversing, pausing and repetition. In doing this Plessie's research holds past, present and future at the same time.

The Story

Medu Art Ensemble

The Medu Art Ensemble was a collective of artists, activists and ‘cultural workers’ working in Botswana between 1979 and 1985. While the collective was composed of only black artists, it soon became interracial, as well as international in its membership (Kellner and Gonzalez 2009). Many of the founding members were exiled South Africans, coming from disbanded groups such as Dashiki and Pelandaba Cultural Effort (Kellner and Gonzalez 2009). The practices and experiences from these disbanded groups (triggered by the 1976 students’ uprisings) informed Medu’s work in Botswana. The members of Medu disbanded to different countries after a brutal raid by the South African Defence Force (SADF) in 1985. According to Kellner and Gonzalez (2009) the raid left 12 people dead, including four Medu members (Thami Mnyele, Mike Hamlyn, George Phahle and Lindi Phahle).

The Medu Art Ensemble presents an interesting case because many of the skill-sets and techniques used i.e silkscreen, theatre, graphic arts and design, publications and research, film, music and photography (as well as poetry and others). While these skill-sets and techniques may have been “imported”, they carried a universalizing, problematic ideal that demanded localisation. The first aim listed in the Medu published pamphlet is “training Botswana nationals and exiles in the above mentioned skills” (Kellner and Gonzalez 2009). The formation of a Southern Africa Arts Trust Fund (one of the outcomes of the 1982 ‘Culture and Resistance’ symposium) aimed to facilitate and enable the training of cultural workers in Southern Africa.

Just how did Medu localise the techniques to create a model that was relevant to the environment; social, political and economic? One of the key features of the training provided is that it involved school children, adults and secondary students. What is important to note though is *available means and knowledge* determined the programming across the disciplines. According to SA History Online: “By 1984 the graphics unit proposed producing and distributing the ‘silkscreen workshop in a suitcase’. This would be a portable box (50 cm x 75cm x 15cm) with a silkscreen press that could print A2 posters, ink, squeegee, and stencil material. This would enable township organisations to make posters even under ill-equipped or illegal conditions. With the assistance of Dutch donors, a few pilot suitcases were built; but following Medu's destruction in 1985, they were not put into use.” Of note, also, is how “music became an independent and vibrant branch of Medu in its own right”.

Sergio-Albio Gonzalez (2009) recounts that over dinner in 1980, he suggested a visual arts exhibition in Sweden as it was one of the countries sympathetic to the political struggles in Southern Africa. Named the ‘Swedish Project’, the endeavour expanded beyond the visual arts into other disciplines, resulting in an integrated performing arts festival, a visual art exhibition and a symposium to be known as ‘Culture and Resistance’ in 1982. This project had to out of necessity turn its back on the local issues necessitated by the need for a comprehensive representation – thus remaining in Southern Africa instead of Europe. This is the gathering at which Professor Kgositse delivered the keynote address that was re-read and revisited on 9 October 2016.

It is of interest how these units later renamed themselves in Setswana: Graphic Art Unit became Ngwedi Graphics, Itumeleng Films replaced Film Unit and the Theatre Unit became Boiteko Theatre. Music again takes a different mutation, ‘embodied in Shakawe and

Kalahari'. What does the symbolic renaming of the units do to the terms and attitude of the unit itself? In our research discussions, Andrew asked "How do these universal techniques become localized – how are they inflected by other local techniques and practices? Not necessarily a 'local version' of silkscreen but an attitude?"

A contentious statement by Sergio-Albio Gonzalez (2009) suggests that "the way the ensemble conceived its art production through collective discussions and consensus was entirely new in southern Africa". How does an unchronological timeline engage with such a statement given that collectivity, communalism and self-organization preceded the Medu Art Ensemble in Southern Africa? For example, groups such as Mihloti, MDALI and Dashiki were vibrant in the early 70's before many members were exiled, including those who became part of the Medu Art Ensemble.

Another story

Solanka

Inkulumo-Mpendulwano is an IsiZulu hyphenated word that comes closest to the dialogical pedagogies in arts education in Johannesburg. Broken down *Inkulumo* means to talk or to have a conversation and *Mpendulwano* means to respond. This call-and-response method of *Inkulumo-Mpendulwano* not only emphasises facilitations which can be adapted in the classroom as well as curated spaces, but the relevance of language and terminologies used to localise content. This paper speaks firstly to the importance of localising content through language and terminologies, and secondly, is followed by Keleketla! Library's *Inkulumo-Mpendulwano* facilitation methods used in "arts education".

Professor and Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa-Thiong'o's (1986, 87) expresses his dissatisfaction of speaking African literature in English, the European language. We would further argue that there are certain terminologies in the facilitation process which are crucial and relevant for localising content such as the word "History". In IsiZulu there is no HIStory, no masculine, or feminine but rather *Umlando*, a word used to define a stem of a plant or a story. This stem-story represents time, the beginning or the core essence of the story. This sharing of stories into simplified tales, storytelling and re-enactment would be something many of us grew up calling *Inganekwane*. *Inganekwane* is an indigenous folk tale that not only tells a story but is in itself a learning tool and *Inkulumo-Mpendulwano* encounter.

Organisations such as Keleketla! Library and *Ba re e ne re* involve such encounters which encourage engagement, participation and storytelling as pedagogy. *Ba re e ne re* is a Sesotho and Setswana word which, when directly translated means "They say it was said that..." similar to "Once upon a time..." like *Inganekwane* used for storytelling. The word *Keleketla* is also a Sesotho and Setswana word which means "to participate". Keleketla! Library is a Johannesburg based arts organisation which runs several art projects with learners, organisations and artists. Keleketla! Library was previously located at the Drill Hall between 2008 and 2015. The Drill Hall is a heritage site where the beginning stages of the Treason Trial took place during the 1950's in South Africa. Keleketla! Library used the history of this heritage site to initiate educational programmes that translate into dialogue as a stimulating, evocative tool for learning (Keleketla! Library 2012, 7). The organisation began the process by asking a series of critical questions which would assist in the assembling of an arts-educational-history programme:

How can understanding the past help us deal with present issues?

How can one look behind and look forward?

How can one re-look at the present and imagine the future we want?

Keleketla! Library created *Keleketla! After School programme* (KASP) which aims to engage youth in critical analysis of contemporary social, political and economic issues of the city (Keleketla! Library 2012, 8). In June 2011 Keleketla! Library invited Ahmed Kathrada, who was amongst the 156 accused of High Treason in 1956 at the Drill Hall, to be interviewed by learners who were KASP members. In April 2012, learners interviewed artist and activist Judy Seidman who was part of the Medu Art Ensemble during the apartheid era. In September 2012, learners interviewed Lynn Carneson, Fred Carneson's daughter who was also part accused in the Treason Trial. It was important for Keleketla! Library to utilise the Drill Hall space as a starting point to initiate *Izinganekwane* and *Umlando*. However, as the organisation relocated to the King Kong building, the same dialogues, engagements and *Inkulumo-Mpendulwano* interactions and encounters were still consistently present.

In October 2016 Keleketla! Library collaborated with *longstorySHORT* for the *Another Road Map*, a Medu Art Ensemble case study in conversation with South African Poet Laureate and a member of the Medu Art Ensemble Professor Keorapetse Kgositsile. The conversations consisted of four panels (including Professor Kgositsile) and the audience which ranged across four generations with different backgrounds (race, gender and class). *Izinganekwane* were shared from both the panelists and the audience. Judy Seidman was also in the audience and mentioned how she was hearing Professor Kgositsile's keynote address for the second time - the first being at the conference organised by Medu Art Ensemble in Gaborone in 1982. Themes ranged from financial stability as a writer, to the *Umlando* of South Africa, but most importantly, language and the terminology were prominent themes which were relevant to post-apartheid South Africa. Referencing elements pertinent to the *Inkulumo-Mpendulwano* pedagogy, an elderly man in the audience mentioned that there were systems put in place for Apartheid, however there were no systems put in place for post-apartheid South Africa. He emphasised how we are currently living in a society that still needs interventions. One of the panelists proposed the term *Solanka* for this post-apartheid South Africa. This is a slang word for 'in the meantime'. Another panelist further interpreted this by singing a line or two of Kwaito lines from Mgarimbe's *Sister Bettina* that has 'in the meantime' as part of the lyrics of the song. From terms such as colonial, to post-apartheid, to *Solanka*, *Sister Bettina* is a crucial example of breaking down language, terminology and art which is relevant to a specific content.

Keleketla! Library somehow managed to facilitate the same *Inkulumo-Mpendulwano* encounter where a key feature of the process was ownership. Learners and interviewees took ownership of the interview session in the Drill Hall space and so did the panelists and the audience in the King Kong space. Researcher and teacher Carli Coetzee gives examples of these learning spaces as community spaces such as public rooms, schools or church halls when she writes "These rooms already carry in them a promise of learning and its power to transform, [...] draws a sense of group identity, but can also reinforce the sense of collaborative learning and responsibility" (2013, 116). The facilitation by Keleketla! Library was mediated in such a manner that it was not didactic or authoritarian, rather giving room for call-and-response interactions. Through Plessie's observations, she affirms how

Keleketla! Library in their different programmes and dialogues have managed to answer and are still answering the questions below that are an essential part of *Inkulumo-Mpendulwano*:

How can understanding the past help us deal with present issues?

How can one look behind and look forward?

How can one re-look at the present and imagine the future we want?

Story of another story

Brief report on 1st public meeting

The first public manifestation of the Johannesburg Working group of Another Roadmap School took place on 9 October 2016 at Keleketla! Library. It was a partnership with #longstorySHORT, a project that makes African literature accessible through digital platforms. The project defines itself: “#longstorySHORT in its simplest incarnation, introduces readers to the vast community of African writers from all over the world. The podcasts are essentially "mini-adverts" for the writers and publishers featured in the series - but more importantly, the podcasts are also an important distribution channel for African writing. There has been much talk (and plenty of screaming) about the literary value chain and how it consciously ignores African writers and readers. With the current state of affairs where our townships and rural areas don't have physical bookstores, #longstorySHORT is a pioneer in getting African stories distributed through mobile platforms”. Please see appendix for the press statement.

Earlier, as a working group we wrote: “The main case study/story of The Johannesburg Research Group focuses on the work of the Medu Art Ensemble from 1977 until 1985. The project exists as part of a wider recuperative project that seeks to map histories of arts education in southern Africa with the view to producing a more comprehensive understanding of how imported colonial models have come to assert a particular understanding of “arts education” that has often marginalised or attempted to erase the presence of existing local models. The research group aims to demonstrate the active presence of a series of local models that challenge the hegemonic status of imported models.” Staying very close to this aim, a collaboration with #longstorySHORT is a proactive recognition of models that are imagining what a decolonising education may look like. Just as we are mapping historical models, it was important that we recognize, and work with models implemented by others in present time.

The event was special in many ways. For #longstorySHORT, the project marked several milestones. One is that this was the first non-fiction reading of a text, as the text was first delivered as a keynote address at the 1982 ‘Culture and Resistance’ symposium co-organised by the Medu Art Ensemble in Gaborone, Botswana. Secondly, the #longstorySHORT was debuting a public reading in Johannesburg, a city credited as the cultural and economic capital of South Africa.

For all of us partners, the consistent insurgence of resistance to a neoliberal state, visible through education, labour and service delivery protests made sense for a reading of a text that takes such a bold position on the role of an artist in society. That such a position is contentious, historical, current and problematic meant that the event presented an opportunity

to reflect and do the work of thinking. We were all left with more questions than answers, and we are particularly satisfied that the participants (both presenters and 'audiences') were fittingly intergenerational. Lefifi Tladi, who offered some of the 'last words', what could be termed a 'clarion call' strongly proposed that the next gathering must be concerned with solving the problems, rather than discussing them.

The recording of the event can be found here: <https://soundcloud.com/keleketla-library/ntatemogolo-speaks-prof-kgositsile-revisits-medu-art-ensemble>

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