

# SOCIAL THEATRE TOOLKIT



## INTRODUCTION

Social theatre in West Africa is not well documented and access to training, whether face-to-face or online, is limited. However, social theatre is a widely used practice in the region. It is a tool capable of stimulating debate on social issues, providing food for thought, developing critical thinking and encouraging social cohesion.

The “Social Theatre Toolkit” was developed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as part of the “Migrants as Messengers” (MaM) campaign. MaM is a peer-to-peer awareness-raising campaign aimed at empowering young people in West Africa to make informed decisions about migration. It has been implemented in Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. “Migrants as Messengers” is a campaign run by returnees themselves, who share and collect authentic first-person testimonies from migrants and other community members.

The toolkit is based on research conducted in 2021 on different approaches to social theatre in West Africa. The research contributes to the existing documentation, archiving and dissemination of social theatre practices. It also provides a database referencing the main social theatre companies operating in the region, to provide visibility to their work, and facilitate exchanges between companies/organisations

in Africa. From the research, simple, accessible, and practical teaching tools on social theatre were developed and are presented in this toolkit. They enable those who are new to the field to use this approach and acquire a basic understanding. These tools also allow those who are already practicing some forms of social theatre to enrich their practice. They will be able to experiment with new techniques and combine the different approaches as they see fit, to develop new forms of language.

The toolkit includes five sections presenting different social theatre approaches: theatrical storytelling, forum theatre, popular storytelling, collective creation, and improvisation battle.

Other approaches could also have been used. However, the five approaches that came up most in the research, which are also the most documented forms, were given priority. A balance between methods derived from the cultural practices of traditional societies and methods that have a deliberate ambition to generate positive social change was also considered.

The “Social Theatre Toolkit” was developed by Marilena Crosato, Mamadou Diol and Allison Fernandes.

It is available online at [yenna.org](http://yenna.org).





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Due to its educational and transformative approach, social theatre is an important means of stimulating debate around social issues and sensitive topics.

IOM regularly uses it in the framework of community actions to engage audiences about safe migration, local opportunities and risks to irregular migration.

Social theatre is used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations, as it can address certain socio-cultural realities by speaking directly to the target audience.

This toolkit shares knowledge and practical tools. It is intended for artists, facilitators, educators, teachers, and cultural and humanitarian workers who wish to use theatre for social purposes.

Included are tutorial videos, which help practitioners, amateurs and even the non-experts, to learn the basics to lead a theatre workshop or how to put on a show.

In this toolkit, the following five social theatre approaches practiced in West Africa are featured:

### Theatrical Storytelling

Popular Theatre

Forum Theatre

Collective Creation

Improvisation Battles

This toolkit presents the basics of each of these approaches. It does not claim to provide a single definition, rather these guides are a proposal that can be used as a basis for experimenting and combining different approaches in order to develop new forms of theatrical expression.

# 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH

A tale is an incredible story that was once transmitted orally. It is defined as a tale of imaginary adventures of an educational nature.

The tale is a mirror of society. It contains cultural values and traditional knowledge. It shows us symmetries, colours, magic and above all, and there is a moral at the end of the tale.

# 2

## HISTORY OF THE APPROACH

Tales have nourished the imagination of oral tradition societies for thousands of years.

In Africa, storytelling is widely used to transmit knowledge in villages from generation to generation. It is an integral part of West African culture, thanks in particular to the tradition of the griots. They are musicians-entertainers and their performances include tribal histories and genealogies.

In the early 1980s, several popular tales in the region were made into television films or performed on stage (e.g., “Coumba am ndey”, “Sarzan and Xanju” in Senegal, and “La légende de Miniyamba” in Mali).

As time passes, the tradition of storytelling by the fire is being lost, especially in urban areas.

Combining storytelling and theatre therefore makes it possible to offer a new form of narration through a live performance, and thus helps to continue the transfer of knowledge and values contained in tales.

# 3

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

A tale is a story, told by a person, with imaginary facts. It has a moral purpose and cultivates values. The universe is incredible and magical, and the characters can be humans, animals, elements of nature, spirits and more.

A tale appeals to our imagination, our fantasies, our deepest fears, our dreams, and our desires for adventure.

In a tale, one person narrates the whole story, whereas in Theatrical Storytelling, the characters can be played by different actors. Sometimes the roles are doubled to limit the number of actors on stage.

# 4

## CREATIVE PROCESS

The theme of a tale is generally linked to a social fact. Once the theme has been translated into a moral message, one can look in the collection of folk tales to see if any of them reflects this moral message. Alternatively, one can also invent a tale.

Some people write the text on paper in order to facilitate the work of the actors and this text can evolve through the actors' inputs and improvisations.

# 5

## PERFORMANCE PROCESS

The performance of Theatrical Storytelling does not require any particular props. It can be performed with or without a set, with or without music. Sometimes a musician accompanies the storyteller, but this is not necessary.

Traditionally in African storytelling, there is interaction between the audience and the storyteller. This interaction can also be recreated during the Theatrical Storytelling in order to satisfy the playful and educational aims of the show.

# 6

## PERFORMANCE SPACES AND PUBLIC

As in any other forms of social theatre, Theatrical Storytelling goes towards its audience, and not the other way around. It can therefore be performed anywhere: in courtyards, in houses, in the streets, and in squares.

The audience for storytelling is wide, from children to youths and adults.

# 7

## A SELECTION OF PROFESSIONAL STORYTELLERS IN WEST AFRICA

### ✓ Burkina Faso

Kientega Pingdéwindé Gérard, alias KPG  
Website: [www.compagniekpg.net](http://www.compagniekpg.net)  
Zeinabou Nikiema  
Website: [www.bienvenuetheatre.com](http://www.bienvenuetheatre.com)

### ✓ Côte d'Ivoire

Taxi conteur, founder of the Company Naforo Ba  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/CompagnieNaforoBa](http://www.facebook.com/CompagnieNaforoBa)

### ✓ Liberia

The Liberia Movie Union  
Address: Capitol Hill, Monrovia  
Website: [www.liberiamovieunion.org](http://www.liberiamovieunion.org)

### ✓ Nigeria

Mosaic Theatre Production  
Address: 423, Ahmedu Bello Way Abuja Nigeria  
Email: [dongozy@gmail.com](mailto:dongozy@gmail.com)



✓ Senegal

Massamba Gueye, founder of the House of Orality and Patrimony Kër Leyti, Dakar

Website: [www.kerleyti.com](http://www.kerleyti.com)

El Hadj Leeboon

Website: [www.leeboonleconte.com/](http://www.leeboonleconte.com/)

Thierno Diallo

Website: <https://www.thiernodiallo.net/>

Ngary Mbaye



**THEATRICAL STORYTELLING  
MAIN EVENTS IN WEST AFRICA**

✓ Burkina Faso

“Festival des Grandes Nuits du Conte” in Ouagadougou

✓ Guinea

Annual Festival “La Grande Nuit du Conte” in Conakry

✓ Senegal

“La Grande Parole Invite” organized by Kër LEYTI, la Maison de l’Oralité et du Patrimoine in Dakar

“Festival international du conte et de la parole” in Gorée

“Festiparoles”, Traveling festival of storytelling arts

For more information

Bibliography:

✓ 1. Deniers Jeanne et Gauvin Lise. Autour de la notion de conte écrit: quelques définitions : Études françaises, 1976.

✓ 2. Demarcy Richard. Contes et légendes en théâtre: Acoria, 2006.

✓ 3. Contes d’Afrique noire: [www.mediatheque.chenneviers.com](http://www.mediatheque.chenneviers.com), 2016/05



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## 1

### OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH

Popular Theatre - which is the opposite of elitist theatre and literary theatre, based on an absolute text - is inspired by traditional forms of theatre practiced in villages, especially during social events (such as births, weddings or harvests).

It is a multidisciplinary form of theatre, which mixes music, dance and performance, which often includes comedy.

## 2

### HISTORY OF THE APPROACH

In Africa, there have been forms of representation comparable to what is called theatre elsewhere for thousands of years. For example, in Mali, after the harvest season, during weddings or circumcisions, the villagers would gather to watch skits performed by the youth of the village.

This type show, which includes music, dance and sketches, is called Koteba. Often, the skits echo the daily life of the inhabitants. This kind of practice exists everywhere in West Africa. Popular Theatre has its origins in this folklore.

## 3

### BASIC PRINCIPLES

Popular Theatre aims to democratize access to spaces of artistic expression. As its name indicates, it is a theatre for the people, which intends to go beyond the theatre halls to meet its audience. Popular Theatre is a multidisciplinary theatre that often mixes performance, music, dance and poems.

The show is presented in the form of a relevant and coherent thread and is composed of different local artistic talents.

Popular Theatre generally uses comical methods, such as satire or caricature.

## 4

### CREATIVE PROCESS

Popular Theatre deals with topics of interest to communities and frequently addresses the issue of living together. Among the social issues that can be addressed, these have included child marriages, rural exodus, water shortage, etc. Topics that are relevant to the daily lives of community members. Popular Theatre uses comedy to denounce certain factors of dysfunction in the society.

The creative process is flexible and free. There are several ways to create a play, sometimes companies use a script.

This script can be modified according to the work of the actors. Other times, the actors start with a theme and are invited to reflect, discuss and improvise to create the play.

## 5

### ACTORS

Actors are drawn from the community and often speak for the community. In order to best improvise, the actors start by doing research on their characters, such as by interviewing members of their community.

The find answers to questions like:  
How do their characters dress?  
How do they live and express themselves?  
What are the issues they face?

It is also important for an actor to practice regularly with the other members of the troupe. This will facilitate the work of improvisation.

## 6

### PERFORMANCE SPACES AND PUBLIC

Popular Theatre is brought to the audience, not the other way around. It is therefore performed in places that are open and accessible to the community, such as schools, soccer fields, public squares, and markets. Any place that is accessible to the community.

In order to be understood by as many people as possible, it is often performed in local languages.

## 7

### MAIN GROUPS IN WEST AFRICA

#### ✓ Côte d'Ivoire

Company les Ambassadeurs d'Abidjan (CT2A)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ambassadeursdabidjan](http://www.facebook.com/ambassadeursdabidjan)

#### ✓ Gambia

Jamma Ak Salaam Drama Group

Website: [www.jammaaksalaam.gm](http://www.jammaaksalaam.gm)

#### ✓ Guinea

Company Fénènè from Guinea

Email: [aboukanke253@gmail.com](mailto:aboukanke253@gmail.com)

Company La Muse

Address: Quartier Kipé, Commune de Ratoma,

Conakry/Guinea

Email: [contac@lamusegn.org](mailto:contac@lamusegn.org)

#### ✓ Senegal

Company Bou-saana in Ziguinchor

Website: <http://www.bousaana.com>

Company Gindi from Kaolack

Email: [gindikl@hotmail.fr](mailto:gindikl@hotmail.fr)

Association Ker Mame from Ngor, Dakar

Email: [mouhagtp@gmail.com](mailto:mouhagtp@gmail.com)

✓ Côte d'Ivoire

"Rencontres théâtrales d'Abidjan" (Rethab)

✓ Guinea

Humanitarian festival "FRISTIVAL"

✓ Senegal

"Festival national des arts et de la culture"

"Festival International de Théâtre et de Danses populaires"

For more information

Bibliography:

✓ JOULIA Dominique. Regards de l'étranger : Notre Librairie. Revue du livre. Afrique, Antilles, Océan Indien, 1984, n°75 – 76.

✓ DERIVE Jean. Oralité moderne et nouveaux bardes dans les pays africains francophones : Revue de Littérature Comparée, 1993, n°265, pp.101-108.

✓ MAÏGA M. Le Koteba. Le grand escargot bambara : Notre Librairie. Revue du livre. Afrique, Antilles, Océan Indien, 1984, n°75 – 76, pp.135-136.





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## 1

### OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH

Forum Theatre is an interactive and participatory theatre approach, which invites the spectator to become an actor of their own choice by bringing them on stage to reflect on a given problem, and thus opens a space for exchange and collective reflection.

## 2

### HISTORY OF THE APPROACH

Created by the Brazilian theatre artist Augusto Boal, Forum Theatre was born in the 1960s in Brazil.

It was originally practiced in the favelas of Sao Paulo and addressed situations of conflict and oppression experienced by local people. Augusto Boal developed several social theatre techniques as a response to the political dictatorship in his country.

For him, theatre is inherently political. He considered it a very effective instrument that the lower classes had to re-appropriate. It is a theatre that aims to transform society and raise the awareness of oppressed minorities.

A theatre “made by the people and for the people” in the words of Augusto Boal, with a basic principle: “Anyone can make theatre, even actors. And you can make theatre anywhere, even in theatres”.

In the 1990s, several West African groups adopted this approach in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, and later in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Mali. Each group adapted it in its own way and in relation to its social environment.

## 3

### BASIC PRINCIPLES

The actors, whether professionals or amateurs, perform one or several sketches illustrating situations of oppression or inequality.

They are then performed again, but this time the spectators, henceforth called "spect-actors", can interrupt the course of events.

They have the opportunity to go on stage to replace a character and/or add one and try to break the situation of oppression and present concrete solutions.

## 4

### CREATIVE PROCESS

Before the performance, it is important to define the theme that will be addressed.

Remember that the theme highlights a conflict situation (e.g. domestic violence, violence at work, environmental problems, etc.).

Once the theme has been defined, either research is carried out on the subject or interviews with people who have lived through a similar situation who will share their life experience.

Next, there is the dramatization: this is the actors' improvisation phase. They play a short sketch that presents a problematic situation without providing solutions.

## 5

### ACTORS

Forum Theatre actors do not need to be professionals. The idea is that the scene be acted well enough to make the situation believable and elicit strong reactions from the audience.

Actors need to be well informed about the issue in order to feel comfortable with their characters. They must also practice improvisation techniques to be able to deal with the audience's interventions in the scene.

The approach relies on an experienced facilitator called the joker. They act as an intermediary between the actors and the audience by moderating their interventions.

First, the joker presents the general problem in the form of a difficulty encountered by a person or a group. Then they introduce the characters and the rules of Forum Theatre.

For example: “First, we will play the initial scene, which has an unfortunate/unhappy outcome.

Then we will discuss what is happening in this situation to help the protagonist explore alternative actions in the conflict. Those who wish to do so can come on stage to replace the protagonist.”

During the audience interventions, the joker listens to and rephrases the different points of view expressed by the audience.

Then, in the light of these exchanges, the joker invites the audience to come on stage to replace the protagonist and explore the effects of a new behaviour.



The performance takes place in three steps:

✓ 1- The set-up: This is also known as the initial scene. In this step, the performance is presented as if it were a regular show.

✓ 2- The trial: The actors appear before the audience, which judges them on the basis of their behaviour in the play. In Africa, particularly in Senegal, those who have acted badly are brought in "under the burning sun" and those who have acted well "in the shade". And in the middle, those whose fate will be speculated upon.

✓ 3- In the third step, the joker asks the "spect-actors" if they agree with the solutions proposed by the protagonist and invites them to replace him/her in an attempt to find a better solution. The spectator has to say where they want the scene to be replayed. The actors then start to replay the scene with input from the audience. This is an improvisation game where the work on the construction of the characters will enable them to react in a credible and coherent way.

The aim is not to find a single solution to a given problem, but to experiment collectively with possibilities.

The performance can be adapted to any environment and does not depend on major technical means.

A play can be performed in the city under electric lighting, or in a village under the moonlight.

A good production depends more on the commitment and conviction of the actors than on technical means.

Forum Theatre is often performed in the street or in public spaces, to reach out to the audience. It is also usually performed in the local language so that it can be understood by as many people as possible.

✓ Burkina Faso

Atelier de Théâtre Burkinabè (ATB), Ouagadougou

Website: [www.atb.bf](http://www.atb.bf)

Bienvenue théâtre du Bazega, Kombissiri

Website: [www.bienvenuetheatre.com](http://www.bienvenuetheatre.com)

Company Marbayassa, Ouagadougou

Website: [www.compagnie-marbayassa.com](http://www.compagnie-marbayassa.com)

✓ Bissau Guinea

GTO-Bissau (Grupo de Teatro do Oprimido)

Address: Escola Nacional da Educação Física e Desportos

ENEFD 652 - (Alternativo) Bissau, Guinée-Bissau

✓ Guinea

Nimité Théâtre from Conakry

Email: [nimitetheatredeguinee@gmail.com](mailto:nimitetheatredeguinee@gmail.com)

✓ Senegal

Company Kaddu Yaraax, Dakar

Website: [www.kadduyaraax.jimdofree.com](http://www.kadduyaraax.jimdofree.com)

Company Brrr Production, Dakar

Website: [www.brrrproduction.com](http://www.brrrproduction.com)

✓ Burkina Faso

ATB's National Forum Theatre Competition in Burkina Faso (Concours national de théâtre-forum de l'ATB au Burkina Faso)

✓ Senegal

Senegalese Forum Theatre Festival in Dakar (Festival sénégalais de Théâtre-forum de Dakar)

Forum Theatre Marathon in Ziguinchor (Marathon de théâtre-FORUM THEATRE de Ziguinchor)

For more information

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✓ 1. COUDRAY Sophie. La radicalité politique du Théâtre de l'opprimé: Période, April 2018.

✓ 2. BOAL Augusto. Théâtre de l'opprimé: La Découverte, 2007.

✓ 3. GUERRE Yves. Le théâtre-forum. Pour une pédagogie de la citoyenneté: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1999



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# 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH

Collective Creation is a social theatre approach where a participatory process brings together a group of people to create a theatre performance.

Traditional roles such as actors, directors, playwrights, are dropped in favor of an accessible community where every member can contribute to the development of the content and form of the show.

At the heart of this process is a dialogue between various artistic expressions such as music, dance, theatre, poetry and visual arts which are used to engage audiences into an experience that brings about change.

# 2

## HISTORY OF THE APPROACH

Collective Creation is a traditional practice used by communities around the world. It is rooted in artistic movements of the 1960's, 1970's and 1990's where a more equitable society was promoted, and social and political actions were encouraged.

We find in North America, Europe, Colombia and other parts of the world interesting experiences and experimental approaches.

# 3

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

Unlike the other methods that have a written set of rules, Collective Creation translates into a variety of experiences that find their common ground under some guiding principles: collaboration, participation, dialogue and groupwork are essential in Collective creation.

What defines Collective Creation above all is the way in which the text and the staging are produced collectively. In this approach, the creative process and the final product - the performance - are equally important. Every step is an opportunity for individual and collective empowerment.

The audience is called to question beliefs, take a stand or a concrete action by interacting with the performers during the show.

# 4

## ACTORS

Collective Creation allows non-professionals to be involved in the creative process. Community members, artists and people with similar life experiences are brought together. They may be survivors of gender-based violence, refugees, returnees, environmental activists or other witnesses to social problems.

The actor-author is encouraged to express his or her own experience through writing and then acting.

They share their truth to the group. The exchange can bring people together and strengthen resilience and personal development. This theatrical experience can be a form of catharsis.

# 5

## CREATIVE PROCESS

The creative process starts with the creation of the group. Participants identify a theme that interests or influences their lives. Usually a workshop facilitated by an expert allows participants to share their personal stories and thoughts.

Theatre exercises can range from storytelling to improvisation and collective writing sessions that help the group to find their own voice. At the end, the group finalizes the script and starts rehearsing it before the performance.

# 6

## RULES OF THE GAME

There are no fixed rules to co-create, other than respect and freedom for every participant to express their views and emotions.

At the beginning there is usually no text, no script but the people. A written script can be the result of the creative process and be ready at the end of it.

This approach easily brings to collaboration with artists of different disciplines and can result in video production, photography, visual art installations and other collaborations.

# 7

## PERFORMANCE SPACES AND PUBLIC

Collaborative performances are often done in public spaces. Markets, youth centers, on the street, bus stations - each place is an opportunity to meet the public.

The choice of a place can be a way to target a specific audience. For example, performing in a market can be a way to target women outside of their household to discuss certain issues.

Bringing social theatre into real-life spaces is a way to show we can change our reality.

✓ Côte d'Ivoire

Body Acceptance, Abidjan

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thebodyacceptance?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

Email: [assandre.paulemarie@gmail.com](mailto:assandre.paulemarie@gmail.com)

Noir Scène

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TNMCP-Officiel-356906315167078>

Email: [jeanclovis6@gmail.com](mailto:jeanclovis6@gmail.com)

✓ Guinea

Troupe humoristique pour l'éducation et le développement (Thed)

Address: Maison des jeunes de Kankan, quartier Koréalén, commune urbaine de Kankan / Guinée

Email: [asow0405@gmail.com](mailto:asow0405@gmail.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/THED3Kankan](http://www.facebook.com/THED3Kankan)

✓ Niger

Maman Sani Moussa, choreographer, dancer, artistic director, at Association Néma from Niger

✓ Senegal

Fatou Cissé, choreographer, dancer at Compagny Fatou Cissé, Dakar

Marilena Crosato, artist and social theatre expert, Dakar

Website: [www.marilenacrosato.com](http://www.marilenacrosato.com)

Sarita Marchesi

Email: [sarita.marchesi@gmail.com](mailto:sarita.marchesi@gmail.com)

Domou Walo Richard Toll

Email: [domouwalo2009@hotmail.com](mailto:domouwalo2009@hotmail.com)

Company Espoir de la banlieue, Thiaroye

Facebook: [@EspoirDeLaBanlieue](https://www.facebook.com/@EspoirDeLaBanlieue)

Email: [aeb20012001@yahoo.fr](mailto:aeb20012001@yahoo.fr)

Gonga bouri sogui

Email: [amdia09@gmail.com](mailto:amdia09@gmail.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/gomugonga.bourisogui](http://www.facebook.com/gomugonga.bourisogui)

Company Kaddu Yaraax, Dakar

Site internet : [www.kaddyaraax.jimdofree.com](http://www.kaddyaraax.jimdofree.com)

Company ASMI (Association Sénégalaise de lutte contre la Migration Irrégulière)

Address: Dakar, Yarakh

Email: [laramatou@gmail.com](mailto:laramatou@gmail.com)

For more information

✓ 1. HEBERT Lorraine, Pour une définition de la Création collective, Revue de théâtre, 1977 [En ligne] [www.erudit.org/fr/revues/jeu/1977-n6-jeu1063455/28584ac.pdf](http://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/jeu/1977-n6-jeu1063455/28584ac.pdf)

✓ 2. CROSATO Marilena et HAVILAND Maya, AelanGel / IslandDaughters: Co-creative Storytelling of Place and Resilience with Women in Vanuatu. In Oral History, Place and the Environment Issue - No. 43: 2021, pp 25-56. [www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021-Issue43-CrosatoHaviland.pdf](http://www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021-Issue43-CrosatoHaviland.pdf)





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IOM regularly uses it in the framework of community actions to engage audiences about safe migration, local opportunities and risks to irregular migration.

Social theatre is used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations, as it can address certain socio-cultural realities by speaking directly to the target audience.

This toolkit shares knowledge and practical tools. It is intended for artists, facilitators, educators, teachers, and cultural and humanitarian workers who wish to use theatre for social purposes.

Included are tutorial videos, which help practitioners, amateurs and even the non-experts, to learn the basics to lead a theatre workshop or how to put on a show.

In this toolkit, the following five social theatre approaches practiced in West Africa are featured:

Theatrical Storytelling

Popular Theatre

Forum Theatre

Collective Creation

**Improvisation Battles**

This toolkit presents the basics of each of these approaches. It does not claim to provide a single definition, rather these guides are a proposal that can be used as a basis for experimenting and combining different approaches in order to develop new forms of theatrical expression.

## 1

### OVERVIEW OF THE APPROACH

A Battle is a confrontation between rappers or dancers, who improvise in front of an audience on a music they do not know. At the end of this competition, a winner will be chosen.

This artistic expression is used by young people in urban and suburban areas. A Battle is also called "Cypher" in the hip-hop jargon.

## 2

### HISTORY OF THE APPROACH

The Battle was born in the 1970s in the United States, in New York, to enable the Bronx gangs to challenge each other by dancing or singing, instead of using fists and weapons.

The Battle was therefore created in response to urban violence, and also to give young people a space to express themselves in a society where they did not feel heard.

It was in the 1990s, with the rise in hip-hop culture, Battles appeared in West Africa in response to political events, such as bad governance, human rights violations, violence suffered by migrants, marginalization of youth, or drug issues.

## 3

### BASIC PRINCIPLES

A Battle is a confrontation between two people - rappers or dancers - or two groups, called "crew". Each artist takes turns to perform to the music, without physical contact with the opponent. The confrontation is done from an artistic point of view.

A Battle combines creativity, a competitive spirit and empowerment. The competition is theatrical : the rappers can take jabs at each other, but they are playing against each other. It is a game because the values defended in the Battles are peace, love and unity.

At the end, a winner is declared. A bit like in a boxing match, the two opponents hug each other to show that above all, it is the art that is put forward.

## 4

### CREATIVE PROCESS

Even though the Battles are based on improvisation, they require work beforehand. Dancers can prepare moves, and rappers can come up with good rhymes. Once in the Battle, the improvisation is based on the players' listening and creativity.

The Battle also requires a good stage presence. You have to occupy the stage, and put on a show in order to arouse the interest of the audience.

## 5

### ACTORS

Besides the rappers and dancers, there are several other actors:

- The disc jockey or DJ: his role is to mix, play the music and create the atmosphere.

- The master of ceremonies or MC: they set the mood, introduce the teams, the process of the Battle and encourages the dancers with the microphone.

- The judges: the jury is normally composed of three to five people. They elect the best rapper or dancer. They vote by a show of hands while respecting certain criteria such as creativity, originality, musicality and technique.

## 6

### PERFORMANCE PROCESS

In the first part, during the open mic, everyone is free to take the microphone and perform. This allows the artists to warm up and gain confidence.

In the second part, there are freestyle Battles – with or without a theme. The theme can come from the audience, the jury or even the presenter. These themes are often about societal problems, such as unemployment, migration, and general problems concerning youth.

Sometimes a rhyme is imposed. The duration of each can vary from one to three minutes.

No established precept codifies or dictates the dancer or rapper's movements or words. The freedom of expression is total, in the respect of the values of peace.

At the end, the jury votes. In the event of a tie, the jury may ask the artists to return to the stage and propose another number to break the tie. Sometimes, the winner can also be decided by applause.

## 7

### PERFORMANCE SPACES

A Battle is usually held in places where youth gather: community/neighbourhood youth centres, sports fields, public squares, or in the streets.

The audience is arranged around the playing area to allow interaction with the performers.

## ✓ Burkina Faso

Improvisation League of Burkina Faso

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## ✓ Côte d'Ivoire

Let's stay calm! League of theatrical improvisation in Côte d'Ivoire

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## ✓ Sénégal

Cypher Jblack de Yarakh

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/BlackingEntert1](https://www.facebook.com/BlackingEntert1)

Cypher festival Guédiawaye by rap

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