



2018 - The Year of ITI



English Translation

World Theatre Day Message 2018 – Africa

Were Were Liking, Ivory Coast

Multidisciplinary Artist

One day

A Human decides to ask himself questions in front of a mirror (an audience)

To invent himself answers and in front of this same mirror, (his audience)

To criticize himself, to make fun of his own questions and answers

To laugh or cry, anyway, but in the end

To greet and bless his mirror (his audience)

For giving him this moment of spite and respite

He bows and greets him to show him gratitude and respect...

Deep down, he was seeking peace,

Peace with himself and with his mirror:

He was doing theatre...

That day, he was talking...

Despising his flaws, his paradoxes and distortions,

Shocking himself through mimicry and contortions;

His pettiness that has blemished his humanism

His tricks that led to cataclysms

He was talking to himself...

Admiring himself in his surging outbursts,

In his aspirations to greatness, to beauty,

A better being, a better world

That he would build of his own thoughts

That he could have forged with his own hands

If from him to himself in the mirror, he wanted it, he says to himself,

If he and his mirror share the desire ...

But he knows it: he was doing representations

Of derision, no doubt, of illusion,

But also, of course, mental action

Construction, Recreation of the world,

He was doing theatre...

Even by torpedoing all hopes
By his words and accusing gestures
He was bent on believing
That everything would be accomplished in this single evening
By his crazy stares
By his sweet words
By his mischievous smile
By his delicious humour
By his words that, even while hurting or rocking
Operate the surgery for a miracle
Yes, he was doing theatre.

And in general
At home in Africa
Especially in the Kamite¹ part where I come from
We do not care about anything
We laugh all the same, mourning while crying,
We hit the ground when it disappoints us
By the Gbégbé² or the Bikoutsis³
Scary Masks are carved
Glaé⁴, Wabele⁵ or Poniugo⁶
To figure the Uncompromising Principles
Who impose on us the cycles and the times
And puppets, who like us,
End up figuring their Creators
And by subjugating their manipulators
Conceive rites where the spoken word,
Inflated with rhythmic songs and breaths,
Goes forth to the conquest of the sacred
Provoking dances like trances
Incantations and calls to devotion;

¹ Kamite; Inhabitant of Kamita, the 'Land of the Blacks', lit. "Africa". Kamite also refers to all natives and their descendants scattered throughout the world in the diasporas, as well as practitioners of the original religion of this region.

² Gbégbé; a traditional dance of the Bétés country, Ivory Coast, used in public demonstrations of rejoicing or mourning.

³ Bikoutsis; a) Kout: hit. b) Si: the earth. An original Fan Beti dance from South Cameroon, initially practiced by women when to ensure blessings from Mother Earth: good harvests, better weather, etc. in which it was necessary to strike the ground vigorously to get it to listen to reason. Today it has been recovered by the youth of the whole country and beyond, thanks to many international stars.

⁴ Glaé; Religious system of the Wè and Wobè peoples of western Ivory Coast, based on 'the Masques'. A whole hierarchy of masks, often frightening, acts as a cornerstone to all the beliefs and social organization of these peoples.

⁵ Wabele; one of the masks of the religious Senufo system in the north of the Ivory Coast. With the head of Hyena, fire-eater, it represents knowledge and power.

⁶ Poniugo; another mask of the Senufo religious system, based on the Poro, the initiation in the heart of the sacred groves and which governs all their society.

But also and above all, bursts of laughter
To celebrate the joy of living
That neither centuries of slavery and colonisation
Racism and discrimination
Nor eternities of unspeakable atrocities
Could smother or snatch
From our paternal Soul of Father the Mother of Humanity;
In Africa, as everywhere else in the world
We do theatre...

And in this special year dedicated to ITI
I am particularly happy and honoured
To represent our continent
To carry her message of peace
The Peaceful Message of the Theatre;
Because this continent that was said not so long ago
That anything in the world could happen
Without anyone feeling the slightest malaise or lack,
Is again recognized in its primordial role
Of Father and Mother to Humanity
And the whole world is pouring in...
Because everyone always hopes to find peace
In the arms of their parents, isn't that so?

And as such, our theatre more than ever, convenes
And engages all humans, and especially
All those sharing the thought, the word and the theatrical action,
To have more respect for themselves and for each other
By favouring the best humanist values
In the hope of reclaiming a better humanity for all:
One which brings out intelligence and understanding.
By using this part of the most effective human cultures
The very one that erases all borders: the theatre...
One of the most generous because it speaks all languages,
Involves all civilizations, reflects all ideals,
And expresses a deep unity of all men who,
Despite all the confrontations
Are especially interested in getting to know each other better
And to love oneself better, in the peace and tranquillity
When representation becomes participation
Reminding us of the duty of an action that imposes on us
The power of theatre to make everyone laugh and cry, together
By decreasing their ignorance, by increasing their knowledge
So that man becomes again the greatest wealth of man.

Our theatre proposes to re-examine and reassess fundamentally
All these humanistic principles, all these high virtues
All these ideas of peace and friendship between peoples

So much advocated by UNESCO
To reincarnate them in the scenes we create today
So that these ideas and principles become an essential need
And a deep thought of the theatre creators themselves first
Who can then share them better with their audiences.

This is why our latest theatrical creation titled « L'Arbre Dieu » repeating the recommendations of Kindack⁷ Ngo Biyong Bi Kuban⁸, our Master, says:

"God is like a big tree"

Of which can only perceive one aspect at a time
From the angle where it is beheld:
Whoever flies over the tree will only perceive the foliage
And possible fruits and seasonal flowers.
Whoever lives underground will know more about the roots,
Those leaning against the tree will recognize it
By the feeling in their backs.
Those who come from every cardinal point
Will see the aspects that those opposite do not necessarily have access too,
Some, privileged, will perceive the secret
Between the bark and the pulp of the wood
And still others, the intimate science in the marrow of the tree;
But whatever the superficiality
Or the depth of perception of each,
No one is ever placed under an angle from which
You are able to perceive all these aspects at once
Unless you become this divine tree yourself!
But then, are we still human?

That all the theatres in the world tolerate and accept each other
To better serve the global goal of ITI
In order that finally, on its 70th anniversary,
There is more peace in the world
With a strong participation in Theatre...

Werewere-Liking Gnepo, Multidisciplinary Artist

Translation: Malory Domecyn / Tom Johnson

⁷ Kindack; lit. "Mistress of Recommendations", title given to the Matriarchs. Women who have attained a level of wisdom by initiating Mbock or Mbog, religious system of the country Bassa, in the center of Cameroon and corresponding to the title of Mbombock reserved for men.

⁸ Kuban; Girl of Biyong, Son of Kuban. This is the name of my grandmother, my initiator, one of the last holders of knowledge "KI-Yi Mbock" from which I received the duty of transmission that I have been toiling toward for more than three decades.