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Import/Export: Trafficking in Cross-Cultural Shakespearean Spaces

Abstract: This essay examines the phenomenon of cross-cultural Shakespearean "traffic" as an import/export "business" by analyzing the usefulness of the concept cross-cultural through a series of theoretical binaries: Global vs. Local Shakespeares, Glocal and Intercultural Shakespeare; and the very definition of space and place within the Shakespearean lexicon. The essay argues that theoretically, the opposition of global and local Shakespeares has a tendency to collapse, and both glocal and intercultural Shakespeares are the object of serious critique. However, the project of cross-cultural Shakespeare is sustained by the dialectic between memorialization and forgetting that attends all attempts to record these cross-cultural experiences. The meaning of cross-cultural Shakespeare lies in the interpreter's agency.

Keywords: Global Shakespeare, Local Shakespeare, Intercultural Shakespeare, Glocal Shakespeare, Dobson, Michael, Wilson, Robert Kennedy, Barucha, Rustom, Massai, Sonia, Isango Ensemble, *Venas No Adonisi,* Globe to Globe *Hamlet*, Laura Bohannon, "Shakespeare in the Bush," Orkin, Martin, Al-Bassam, Suleyman, *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, C*hildren of the Sea*.

In 1972, American dramatist Robert Wilson staged one of his monumental postmodern performance events, *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE: a story about a family and some people changing*, at the Shiraz Arts Festival in Iran. It was staged over seven days, with each day's performance moving to another location on the hills above Shiraz. In Wilson's memory, this loose conglomeration of people, performers and audience together, was liberated from constraints of geographical origin to form a "family":

> At the base of the first hill I erected a sort of tower of Babel that had seven levels. Walking up this scaffolding structure, one could sit and converse with a wide range of people: artists, housewives, teachers, scholars, shepherds, etc.

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> People were talking about anything and everything: politics, art, how to make a pizza, and how to build a house. There was an elderly storyteller from the bazaar telling stories from the past and a housewife from New Jersey conversing with local women from the city of Shiraz. It was a real cross-cultural view of the East and West. The entire seven-day play brought together a mix of extraordinary people. There were some with formal education and some with no education. Looking back at it now I think this was the most interesting aspect of the work. I cannot imagine anyone today taking such a risk and commissioning a piece like this. There was no censorship, no one telling me I could not do what we did . . . I often think of this work as a cross-section of people with very different political, religious, social, and cultural backgrounds working together for an event that would happen only once, like a shooting star. We were like a large family evolving. ("Excerpt")

The performance was site specific, taking place in a unique land formation adjacent to the ruins of ancient Persepolis, a UNESCO World Heritage site. At the same time, the hill was overlaid by a fantasy landscape, replete with such figures as dinosaurs, created for the occasion of Wilson's drama. The place of the stage was at once Shiraz and Thomas More's No-Place, a utopia in which an uncensored conversation among many peoples from many places might occur. Also utopian, in this story, is the power of place to overcome any of the expected barriers between audience members from different cultures. Exporting *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* to the Shiraz Arts Festival and importing a multicultural, multinational audience into the barren hills for this performance, now freed from its own cultural origins, results in lively conversation among elderly storytellers, local women from Shiraz, and a New Jersey "housewife." What language did they all speak, we might ask? What barriers of politics, communication, or custom did they have to overcome to enjoy these neighborly chats, to join in this evolving family?

While Wilson's memory of *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE*'s sole performance might seem overly sunny and optimistic, at the other end of the spectrum we find Michael Dobson's ruminations on his role as "uniformed theatre-goer" (190) at the multi-national, multi-lingual plays put on for the Globe to Globe Festival in the 2012 Olympics. For the Armenian *King John*, Dobson recalled, adapted text, unhelpful summaries and surtitles, performance customs and costumes, and language itself all conspired against his ability to understand and appreciate this play. In this anecdote, Shakespeare was exported to Armenia, re-imported into London, and performed for what Susan Bennett and Christie Carson considered as a bifurcated audience: those London residents linked ethnically and linguistically to the visiting troupe, and "uninformed" spectators like Dobson, watching the unfamiliar spectacle through the eyes of the diasporic Armenian community. Isolated, baffled, and

uncomprehending, the uninformed spectator remains largely at sea in the face of "foreign Shakespeare."

Wilson and Dobson can represent the endpoints of experience for cross-cultural theatre; in the first case, a site-specific performance overcomes other obstacles to create a community; in the other, bringing together people of different nations and cultures at the iconic Globe in London largely fails to create a coherent dramatic experience. Within the poles established by these two case studies, the nature of cross-cultural Shakespeare is vexed and variable. How the phenomenon's political tenor is understood depends on the understanding of several theoretical issues. The first of these is the opposition between global and local Shakespeare. The second is the political inflection of glocal vs. intercultural Shakespeare. The last is the role of place, both physical and represented, in actual performance.

Global vs. Local Shakespeares

Global Shakespeare can mean anything from the export of the bard to other nations to the import of "foreign Shakespeares" into Western metropolitan centers. One obvious example of exported Shakespeare might be the 2012 *Hamlet* Globe to Globe tour, which took two years, included performances in 197 countries at 202 venues, and aimed to bring Shakespeare to every nation in the world. (This goal was approximated, if not completely realized.) The production strove to be global in another way by featuring a multi-national cast. The performance that I saw at the Folger Shakespeare Theatre on 16 July 2014 featured Naeem Hayat, whose family is from Pakistan but who was born in East London, as Hamlet; and New Zealand's Maori actor Räwiri Paratene as both Polonius and Claudius. With this production, the Globe attempted to take the Globe brand worldwide while simultaneously epitomizing the great globe itself within its traveling company. As an example of "foreign Shakespeare" imported into the bard's homeland, Alexa Huang suggests "the Shanghai Kunqu Opera's adaptation of *Macbeth*, entitled *The Story of the Bloody Hand*, performed in Scotland in 1987" ("'What Country, Friends, Is This?': Multilingual Shakespeare on Festive Occasions"). The 2012 Olympic Globe to Globe Festival, already alluded to, offers a more complicated example in that it was billed as bringing Shakespeare, now inflected through world cultures, "back home" to his "original" theatre.[1] As Huang writes, "at the core of the touring

[1] Writing in *The Guardian* about the forthcoming departure of Emma Rice as artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe at the end of the 2018 season, Lyn Gardner writes that with the decision to terminate Rice's contract, the Globe has chosen to be part of the

phenomenon is the idea of returning to Britain as a geocultural site of origin (performing 'within the architecture Shakespeare wrote for'), as an imaginary site of authenticity." With this neo-imperialist gesture, as some skeptical readers have noted, Britain lays claim to the reimagined Shakespeare of other cultures as well as to their "original." The idea of local Shakespeare, by contrast, imagines readers/consumers from non-Anglo cultures who reconfigure Shakespeare's play in light of their own, unique local knowledges. An extreme vision of such a local Shakespeare would be Laura Bohannon's account of the reception of *Hamlet* by West African tribal elders, who, based on their own social codes, decisively ruled in favor of Gertrude's remarriage to Claudius as the politically correct option ("Shakespeare in the Bush").

A more complicated example can be found in Ania Loomba's analysis of the *Kathakali Othello* as experimenting with Shakespeare's play "without violating its own specific codes of signification" (153). Tracing the evolution of *Kathakali* as a traditional dramatic form in postcolonial India, Loomba concludes that "the appropriate context for the *Kathakali* adaptation of Shakespeare is thus within indigenous and intellectual histories rather than in simply the colonial heritage of English literary texts in India" (159). The appropriation, in Loomba's view, is more responsive to the native tradition than to the source play. It is more "native" drama than it is "Shakespeare."[2]

The division between global and local Shakespeares, however, is neither simple nor politically innocent. Sonia Massai's introduction to *World-Wide Shakespeares* calls for redefining the very terms according to distribution model or intended audience: local Shakespeare for local, national, and international audiences ("Defining Local Shakespeares"). A good example of a local Shakespeare destined for an international audience might be the Isango Ensemble of South Africa's *Venas No Adonisi*, which opened the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival in London. This beautiful event achieved a pleasing balance between local theatrical traditions and consideration of global audiences. While retaining small portions of the Shakespearean text, much of the performance was sung and spoken in six of the nine major languages of South Africa (Cocks 31). At the same time, the prevalence of dance and gesture made the plot—surely not one of Shakespeare's best-known—comprehensible to English speakers (or for that matter, any speaker of one of the seven languages used in the performance). Personified figures, such as Death and Cupid, plus a giant puppet dramatizing the antics of Adonis's horse, added narrative clarification. Elizabethan costumes complemented the Xhosa face paint worn by the women singers. The choruses,

heritage industry rather than the dramatic scene. Such a judgment is consistent with the skeptics' assessment of the Globe to Globe Festival's claim to authenticity.

[2] For a critique of Loomba's essay, see Bharucha, 15-20.

according to Colette Gordon, perform call-and-response according to the pattern of African choruses (Gordon). There was also a steady accompaniment of percussion produced via marimbas, drums, beat-boxes, whistles, and other improvised instruments redolent of the drama's township origins (Cocks 31). As Malcolm Cocks's review of the event noted, however, the local/global flavor of Isango Ensemble's townships-meet-literary-classics productions is strategic: "For astute economic reasons of its own, post-Independence South Africa has become a remarkably efficient machine for marketing a certain global image of the not-so-new but still shiny Rainbow Nation" (34). Coming from the Capetown townships gives the company an exotic appeal that masks the stark socio-economic realities of race and privilege that persist in today's South Africa. At the same time, as Colette Gordon points out, the jingoist essentialism of the British press emphasized the "enthusiasm" and downright noisiness of so-called native African styles. Instead of Shakespeare's refined poetry, we get Africa's energetic choral shouting and stomping. Isango delivers and the British press was ready to accept a carefully groomed, sentimentalized vision of the Rainbow Nation, of the townships, and of South African art traditions. To this extent, not only is the line between global and local muddied, but the categories themselves seem compromised. There is no "local" here.

Not surprisingly, the political integrity of this division between global and local Shakespeares is also subject to complication. Consider, again, the Globe to Globe *Hamlet*. Much of its cultural capital derived from exotic quirks of local performance conditions: a sand storm in Sudan, replacing missing swords with billiard cues, hitching a ride on a hearse when transportation failed to show up. More seriously, local political realities sometimes cast a pall on the global celebration. For instance, of the performance in Kyev on 24 May 2014, Bruce Kahn wrote enthusiastically on the company blog: "Many VIPs turned up including the favourite for the presidency, Petro Poroshenko, and next to him the new Mayor, Vitali Klitschko. There was an expectation that the people of Ukraine were about to experience a regime change—just like at the end of our play, as Hamlet utters his dying words to Horatio when he elects Fortinbras to take over the state" ("All the World's a Stage"). From the perspective of 2016, that political optimism about Fortinbras's succession as a precedent for Ukraine's future seems cruelly ironic.

The Huffington Post, reporting on Dominic Dromgoole's enthusiasm about performing *Hamlet* in the "Calais Jungle" refugee camp, followed his statement that "This performance will be yet another wonderful example of this ground-breaking tour's ability to reach displaced people across the world" with a cautionary reminder that "Some 6,000 people are living in unsanitary and dangerous conditions in the camp on France's north coast as European nations struggle to deal with the migrant crisis" (Harris). While the Globe performance

occurred with the help of the Good Chance theatre company, which is based at the camp, Dromgoole's optimism about the performance's utility for its audience can be questioned. Finally, the company's much-criticized desire to take *Hamlet* into North Korea yielded, finally, to a compromise performance at the Globe for the London community of refugee North Koreans ("Globe Theatre defends its world tour including North Korea").

In Bohannon's "Shakespeare in the Bush," as well, the idea of the African elders creating their own, purely local version of *Hamlet* also can be vulnerable to charges of sentimental essentializing. The original subtitle to Bohannon's published essay, "An American anthropologist set out to study the Tiv of West Africa and was taught the *true meaning of Hamlet*," might suggest as much (emphasis added). As Martin Orkin has argued, however, while Bohannan's narrative shows an "imperialist" tendency to sentimentalize the Tiv elders as other, her narrative also foregrounds the culture clash between western ethnographer and (supposedly) insular natives. Orkin sees Bohannon as moving toward, if not completely achieving, an understanding of Shakespeare in the bush as cross-cultural Shakespeare. Occurring everywhere (in the Globe to Globe *Hamlet*) or in one particular, distant, exotic place (in the case of "Shakespeare in the Bush"), in these examples the distinction between global and local Shakespeare is complicated if not collapsed, with the question of any given event's authenticity and cultural politics hanging in the balance.

Glocal and Intercultural Shakespeare

For the past fifteen years, critics have acknowledged that global Shakespeares are big business involving national branding (see Kennedy). From this business model followed the concept of "glocalization," popularized in Shakespeare circles by Richard Burt in 2007. The earliest reference to the word "glocal" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1983) refers to a business strategy that "relat[es] the local and special to the global" in order to widen a product's market. McDonald's menus, individualized by nation, exemplify glocalization in practice. For Burt, more specifically, the "glocal" means a collapse of the local into the global that subordinates local traditions and practices to an overarching Hollywood aesthetic and ideology:

> As glo-cali-zation collapses the global into the local, cultural centers and margins are no longer opposed as high to low culture, authentic to inauthentic, serious to parody, sacred to profane, and so Shakespeare cannot be placed squarely on the side of the hegemonic, dominant culture or counter-hegemonic resistant subculture. (16)

Burt's gleeful reveling in glocalization's anarchic energy, its relentless upending up of high-low distinctions, while he still acknowledges the persistent stranglehold of Hollywood on the film business, has been critiqued by others, particularly in the case of the international film industry. (See, for instance, Modenessi.) For some writers, by contrast, the glocal can be a redemptive space for local Shakespeares by preventing a loss of the local through hegemonic processes of globalization. Discussing Suleyman Al-Bassam's *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey identify this Arab/English commentary on the world after 9/11 by way of Shakespeare as a productive glocal endeavor: "It occupies one of innumerable local sites that have no territorial linkage, yet reflect specifically on global events, defined as events that implicate humankind as a whole. This is the ultimate globalisation of Shakespeare; but it is also the ultimate localisation of Shakespeare, since it implies an infinite multiplicity of local/global Shakespeares" (43). In a less politically inflected vein, the essays in Paul Prescott's and Erin Sullivan's recent collection *Shakespeare on the Global Stage: Performance and Festivity in the Olympic Year* redefine the glocal as that which unites in surprising, idiosyncratic, and site-specific ways disparate communities all over the globe.

At its most optimistic, glocalization can be seen as supporting the same egalitarian goals as intercultural Shakespeare. Like its cognate, intertextuality, interculturalism implies a relatively neutral, if imaginary space where two cultures meet, mingle, and converse. This model implies as well an ability to transcend or circumvent the intractable power hierarchies governing the postcolonial literary scene—as Brian Singleton puts it, a "sharing and mutual borrowing" (628) that implies equity between and respect for the integrity of the dramatic traditions involved. This is a "voluntary" borrowing that results in hybrid art forms (see Pavis). As an example, Diane Daugherty defines as intercultural Shakespeare the *Kathakali King Lear* performed at the Globe in 1999. Her case for the production's success with diverse—i.e., intercultural—audiences points to several features of the production that make converse between them possible: a simple, familiar plot type; communication through music; and mutually recognizable facial codes for emotional states. Yong Li Lan makes a more skeptical analysis of Ong Keng Sen's *Desdemona* as a production that inadvertently performs the *failure* of interculturalism. In *Desdemona*, the proliferation of different national languages and traditions created a chaotic space in which cultural conversation simply became impossible.[3] Im Yeeyon's

[3] Rustom Bharucha offers a different assessment of *Desdemona*, judging that "for Ong, Shakespeare was not so much universal as strategic, insofar as he represented neutral territory" (9). In other words, Ong was not particularly interested in being intercultural, but in his own role as a new Asia dramatist. In this light, Bharucha finds

critique of intercultural Shakespeare points out as well that interculturalism can easily slide into glocalization. While it is possible to over-emphasize the economic motivation, Im suggests, "the use of the Western canon like Shakespeare adds a tinge of high art to an intercultural production as well as guarantees easy circulation in the countries that were and are under Western influence" (248). Just as Yong shows that interculturalism rests on a fantasy of native authenticity, Im concludes that it offers only an "illusion of utopian cultural pluralism," a "wistful" desire for "cultural equality" (253).

"Here is my space": The Places of Shakespeare

When exploring cross-cultural Shakespeare, we tend to think of dis-placement as a geographical phenomenon, a movement through space. Despite Antony's concrete declaration that "here is my *space* / Kingdoms are clay" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.1.38-39), in Shakespeare the word "space" is often abstract, resistant to visualization: consider Lear's horrified vision of the "indistinguished *space* of woman's will" (*King Lear*, 4.7.300) or Hamlet's lament that "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite *space*, were it not that I have bad dreams" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.273-75).[4] The word can also refer to a span of time, for instance in Henry VI's banishment of Suffolk:

> If, after three days' space, thou here be'st found
> On any ground that I am ruler of,
> The world shall not be ransom for thy life.— (*2 Henry VI*, 3.2.305-307)

What we mean when we talk of cross-cultural "spaces," in the lexicon of Shakespeare's play, is closer to the way he uses the word "place." And so I would like to conclude by seeing what we can learn of Shakespeare in cross-cultural spaces/places from the plays themselves.

As a search of the Folger Digital Texts indicates, in Shakespeare's plays the term "place" often denotes an entity's location within a social or metaphysical hierarchy. Orlando complains that Oliver "lets me feed with his hinds, bars me the *place* of a brother" (*As You Like It*, 1.1.19). The Old Man of *Macbeth* reports that "on Tuesday last / A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of *place*, / Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed" (*Macbeth*, 2.4.12-14). Place can be vertical as much as horizontal in its reach, with the physical placement of persons (e.g., at table with the hinds) designating social or, in the case of the

troubling Ong's "marketing of *Desdemona*, on the international festival circuit, as intercultural process" (15).

[4] All references to Shakespeare are to the Folger Digital Texts, edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/).

hawk, metaphysical status. But these placements are just as often abstract, even contingent. Think, for instance, of the "marvelous convenient *place*" (in the wood) where the mechanicals meet to rehearse their play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (3.1.2). *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in fact, contains an unusual number of references to unmarked "places."[5] So does *The Tempest*. Caliban laments that he showed Prospero "all the qualities o' th' isle, / The fresh springs, brine pits, barren *place* and fertile" (*Tempest*, 1.2.404-405). At the play's end, Ferdinand concludes rapturously, "Let me live here ever. / So rare a wondered father and a wise [*sic.*] / Makes this *place* paradise" (4.1.135-37). Where the concept of cross-cultural Shakespeare meets the Shakespearean sense of space/place, I think, is first of all, in its sense of contingency. A marvelous convenient place is not for all time. Nor would Prospero's island be paradise without the key players of "wondered father" and (possibly) wife. Second, the Shakespearean conflation of place and time is relevant to cross-cultural Shakespeare. Third, while most discussion of Shakespeare's movement between cultures, particularly those that see this border crossing as a benign phenomenon, depend on a logic of remembering—a willed act of stopping time to avoid contamination between the cultures involved—the survey of concepts here suggests instead the inevitability of memory loss, a forgetting of cultural origins.

Conclusion: Remembering and Forgetting

By way of explication, I turn to *Children of the Sea*, an adaptation of *Pericles* set in Sri Lanka in commemoration of the 2004 tsunami that included among its cast orphaned children who had survived that natural catastrophe. This production, along with the original cast, was then "exported" to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. According to Genevieve Love's account, the change of setting profoundly altered the event's meaning. The original staging in Sri Lanka took

[5] Here are the results of my search in the Folger Digital Texts edition of *Dream*:
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 1.1.203 Lysander and myself will fly this place
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 2.1.208 What worser place can I beg in your love –
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 2.1.209 And yet a place of high respect with me –
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 2.1.218 And the ill counsel of a desert place
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 3.1.2 Pat, pat; and here's a marvellous convenient place
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 3.1.116 place, do what they can. I will walk up and down
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 3.2.354 Thou seest these lovers seek a place to fight
A Midsummer Night's Dream MND 3.2.423 Thou runnest before me, shifting every place.

place in Matara overlooking the sea: "the stage [was] behind a cobra's nest and beneath four towering coconut trees, their fruit dangling perilously overhead" (Fisher 2005, cited by Love), with the aim of bringing together for the first time the community to sort through their trauma. At the Fringe Festival, by contrast, *Children of the Sea* was performed in the Royal Botanic Garden, where the charm of Sri Lankan dance and puppets melded with the sights and smells of the magnificent garden, diluting, in many people's minds, the play's social origins: "As a theatrical experience, written responses interestingly intermingle the 'magic' evoked by the show's location in the Botanic Garden with the power of the show's use of Sri Lankan culture as spectacle." As Love's somewhat skeptical survey of reviews suggests, however, the cultural politics of relocating *Children of the Sea* to Edinburgh evokes some of the same moral uneasiness as performing *Hamlet* in the Calais Jungle refugee camp. In both cases, geographical dislocation can be a means for the selective forgetting required for a celebratory embrace of the cross-cultural transfer.

The same kind of memorial suppression haunts the production with which this essay opened, Robert Wilson's *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE*. In that case, not only did the journey to Iran supposedly erase cultural differences among the players, at least according to Wilson, but the geographical "coming together" persists in memory by selective forgetting. Compare Wilson's 2013 memory of the event with Calvin Tomkins's journalistic account, closer to the 1972 date of performance. In Tomkins's recounting, Wilson himself was arrested briefly at the airport after hashish was found in his belongings; multiple players were hospitalized because of dehydration; and performer Cindy Lubar suffered a dangerously precipitous breakdown. What is more, portions of the seven days, seven nights' performance – which ground on despite shifts in temperature and audience interest – had no viewers. It was like a tree falling in the forest with no auditors. Cross-cultural Shakespeare, it turns out, is vulnerable to the same vagaries of time and space as any performance, the "two hours traffic" of contingent, variable Shakespearean stages (*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue 12).

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