

Shakespeare (way down) along the Nile

How a pidgin adaptation of Cymbeline gave South Sudan its theatre

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Aim of the paper is to analyse the gradual development of Southern Sudanese theatre, focusing on the development of Juba Arabic in the light of the contemporary translation of Shakespeare's Cymbeline by the prominent intellectual Joseph Abuk, who is also the father of the South Sudan national anthem. The paper is divided in two parts: in the first one, the authors investigate the history of theatre in Sudan and South Sudan, considering the historical background that influenced it with a focus on the adaptations of Shakespeare's works in Arab and African countries. The second part is dedicated to the relation between languages and ethnicity in South Sudan, thus offering a brief overview of its socio-linguistic landscape. A major attention is given to Abuk's adaptation of Shakespeare's Cymbeline from English into Juba Arabic (Cymbeline: li katib Shakespeare) for the South Sudan Theatre Organization (SSTO). This second part also comprises an appendix, which provides a brief linguistic analysis of some selected parts from the 2012 adaptation, as part of the recorded play Cymbeline (London, June 2012), performed by the South Sudan Theatre Organization (SSTO). The original Abuk's play script (2012) is yet unpublished, while a full video-recording of the play is available at: <https://globeplayer.tv/videos/Cymbeline>

Keywords: African theatre, Shakespeare, South Sudan, Juba Arabic, adaptation, translation

1. Journey into the Arab and African World of Shakespeare's translations: An Introductory note¹

It seems that in the Arab cultural area Shakespeare has been well received: in fact, many examples of Shakespearian works have been re-adapted all around the Arab world.²

¹ The article is the result of a continuous exchange of ideas between its authors. For Italian legal and academic purposes only, the authors hereby state that Sections 1 and 2 are by Graziella Acquaviva and Sections 3, 4 and the Appendix by Ilaria Morgani.

² As Hennessey and Litvin (2016:2) state, topical new Shakespeare adaptations have highlighted the US occupation of Iraq (Al-Bassam's *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*, 2007); Sunni-Shi'a sectarian strife in Iraq and the rise of extremist Sunni movements (Monadhil Daood's *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad*, 2012); and the threat of recurring tyranny in post-uprising

According to Alghaberi (2018: 8), at first Shakespeare, for some Arabs, appears merely as a foreign literary curiosity, but later the situation has changed, when the Cultural Committee of The Arab League in the mid-1950s commissioned a group of writers and translators to officially translate the complete works of Shakespeare. Tragedies such as “Hamlet,” “Macbeth,” “Richard III,” “King Lear,” and “Romeo and Juliet” have frequently appeared in the Arab literary arena and political theatre. In particular, “Hamlet” and “Richard III”³ have been recreated in the Arab world in numerous adaptations and appropriations, attesting to the multiplicity rather than the uniqueness of a Shakespearean text (Alghaberi 2018).

The first Arabic-language (indirect) translations/adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays appeared in the late nineteenth-century in Egypt with the contributions of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants who adapted French translations of Shakespeare’s plays (Alghaberi 2018). According to Holderness (2007), “Hamlet” was first performed in Egypt in 1893 in the translated version of 1769 by Tanius Abduh, with whole scenes and characters deleted and with a happy ending. Since audiences expected a play to be more like a revue, with music and songs – “Hamlet” courted Ophelia in the language of Arab love poetry – Shakespeare’s masterpiece flourished as a stage show in revised adaptation: the character of Hamlet has always been viewed as a romantic hero who sets off to fight corruption and dies for the cause of justice, or as an Arab intellectual who cannot cope with the reality of his time. In 2002, “Hamlet” was performed in English at the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival with the title of “The Al-Hamlet Summit” by Suleiman Al-Bassam. In the same year, it was also presented at the 14th Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre, where it won “Best Performance” and “Best Director Awards.” In 2004 it moved into Arabic and played at the Riverside Studios in London; in 2005 at the Singapore Arts Festival, at Elsinore Castle in Denmark, and other festival venues around the globe (Seoul, Tokyo, Warsaw, Tehran) (Holderness 2007: 141-145). Al Bassam’s “The Al-Hamlet Summit” and “Richard III: An Arab Tragedy” were also translated into the Arabic language accompanied with a translation – screen subtitles – in the primary language of the audience if different from Arabic. Another adapted play, “Hamlet in Kuwait” was initiated by al-Bassam in 2001 in association with a cultural festival “Kuwait 2001: Cultural Capital of the Arab World.” The play

Tunisia (Anissa Daoud and Lofti Achour’s *Macbeth – Leila and Ben: A Bloody History*, 2012). Nawar Bulbul’s two projects in Jordan’s Zaatar refugee camp have cast Syrian children in *King Lear/Hamlet* (2014) and *Romeo and Juliet* (2015).

³ By 2012, several Arab productions were commissioned as part of the World Shakespeare Festival timed for that summer’s Olympic Games in London. At the worldwide festivities marking the quadricentennial of Shakespeare’s death this year, for instance, one of the most ambitious events was organized by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt (Hennessey and Litvin 2016).

highlights social and political parallels: Claudius is the Arab despot, the young prince suggests a disillusioned younger generation, the ghost symbolizes the Gulf War, a past that still haunts the people of Kuwait. “Richard III: An Arab Tragedy” was performed in 2007, at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford. The play was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company (Hennessey and Litvin 2016). The project was initially titled “Baghdad Richard.” Al-Bassam changed the title in response to changing events, particularly the trial and execution of Saddam Hussein, but also out of a realisation that in this theatrical medium oversimplification is a constant danger. As Holderness (2008: 73) claims, the new title “An Arab Tragedy” suggests a broader territory, not just Iraq, and broaches wider issues of concern to the Gulf States and the Arab world in general.⁴

In Jordan, in 1918 an Arab Catholic priest named Anton al-Heehi came from Bethlehem and started an “Arab Catholic Youth Society” with as one of its objectives teaching stage acting, and with Father Zakaria al-Shomaly, also from Palestine, offered a number of theatrical performances. In the 1920s they staged a production of “Hamlet” with their students (Ghanma and Omran 1999: 122). From the second half of 1940s, Shakespeare and Molière were the authors who most inspired the local theatrical production. The actors in these performances were only men. In 1982 a new theatre group emerged, the *Fawanees* (*Fawānīs*, “Lanterns”) Theatre that, in 1984, took an un-orthodox version of Hamlet to the Rabat Theatre Festival. As Ghanma and Omran (1999: 128) claim, the importance of the production is characterized by the search for a new scenographic style utilizing colour, light and silence, and musicians on the stage pushing the flow forward with original theatrical scores, while mocking and commenting on the action through recognizable local tunes.

In Algeria, Shakespeare came in 1922 thanks to the Egyptian Izz ud-Deen Troupe that presented “Julius Caesar” and “Romeo and Juliet” in classical Arabic. According to El Rukaibi (1999: 47), the two performances attracted larger audiences, probably due to the fact that the Egyptian troupe also presented Middle Eastern songs and chants between acts of the play, a feature that was subsequently used by many Algerian groups.

According to Al- Khozai (1999: 60), it was in 1940s that in Bahrein clubs and literary societies began to show interest in theatre and dramatic literature but only in 1970s some theatrical groups became semi-professional producing plays from the world repertoire in translation, and among these were works by Shakespeare.

⁴ All the Christian elements in Shakespeare’s work have been uprooted and replaced with Islamic references: the character of Clarence is presented as a devout Muslim who quotes the Holy Quran; conscious of his sin, he prays for forgiveness. His appeal to his murderers is articulated in terms of the Islamic values they share, just as, in Shakespeare, Clarence appeals for mercy through the blood of Christ (Holderness 2008: 73).

It is during the 1960s that in another Arab country, Lebanon, a great renewal takes place. Until that period, the theatre followed the historical and complicated past of the country.⁵ In this period the Lebanese theatre was largely inspired by western acting and directing techniques. The two pioneers of this movement were Antoine Multaqa and Mouneer Abu Dibs who, in 1953, both directed and acted in *Macbeth* at the Jesuit University, and in 1960 they agreed to present it on television in 1960 and in 1962 the same performance has been presented by *Ḥalaqat al-Masrah al-Lubnānī* (“Lebanese Theatre Ring”), established in 1961 and headed by A. Multaqa. Most young directors and actors were amazed by the richness of the Shakespearian legacy when they discovered it as their predecessors had done before them (Murad 1999: 144). It is necessary underline that the presence of Shakespeare’s work in Lebanon dates back to the first decade of the twentieth century when the American University of Beirut initiated its theatrical activities at Daniel Bliss Hall where presented “*Julius Caesar*” in 1903, “*Hamlet*” in 1904 and “*Othello*” and “*Macbeth*” in 1905 (Murad 1999: 157).

In Oman, the first and most important group to emerge in the 1980s was the Youth Theatre founded by a number of young people concerned with improving the situation of theatre in the country. A director from the United Arab Emirates, Mustafa Hashish, was recruited, and under his direction the Omani Youth Theatre’s first production was Shakespeare’s “*The Merchant of Venice*,” a difficult and challenging play theatrically and socially because of its implications with the religious sphere (Jawad 1999: 183-184).

Concerning the African context, there are many critical studies dealing with the presence of Shakespearean translation and adaptations to the African audience (Rosenthal 1964; Wright 1990/91, 2004; Mazrui 1996; Devji 2000; Banham, Mooneeram and Plastow 2002; Ebewo 2009; Caulker 2009; Plastow and Banham 2013; Lebday 2013; Soyinka 2016). Shakespeare’s works were translated into many African languages (Lebday 2013: 182): some examples are the Swahili translations of “*Julius Caesar*” (formerly *Julius Caesar*, 1963, later revised in 1969 with the title *Juliasi Kaizari*) and “*The Merchant of Venice*” (*Mabepari ya Venisi*, 1969) by the first President of Tanzania Julius K. Nyerere

⁵ Throughout its history, Lebanon has been overrun by larger nations including ancient civilization. The year 1098 marked the start of the Christian Crusades that ended in 1291. Until 1516, the country was ruled by Mamluks, and after them for the country started the Ottoman rule that ended after World War I, when the colonial control passed to the French. In 1943, following rioting and a general strike, the French government, in agreement with Britain, proclaimed Lebanon’s complete independence. Murad (1999) states that probably the oldest form of Lebanese performances was connected to Greek mythology and local folk religious celebrations such as some examples found in *khayāl al-zill* (shadow theatre), and in the continuing popularity of *al-ḥakawātī* (the storyteller). These two forms inspired many modern directors to experiment with such things as audience participation as they tried to incorporate into their work elements of those celebratory events found in birth rites, weddings and funerals (Murad 1999: 137-138).

(Wright 1990/91; Devji 2000); Thomas Decker's translation of Julius Caesar in Krio with the title of *Juliohs Siza*. According to Caulker (2009: 208), the act of translation and appropriation of *Juliohs Siza* amounts to an assertion of a sovereign linguistic identity after having gained Independence in 1961 as well as an appropriation of the powerful democratic message carried by the political legacy of Shakespeare's work for a newly independent Sierra Leone. *Shakespeare fe Makbet* is Walter Blege's translation of Macbeth into Ewe (Agbozo (2018: 48). It is the only known translation of Shakespeare's work from English into Ewe, and is targeted at the Ewe people in Ghana, mainly students, since the translation is done mainly for the purpose of teaching and learning the Ewe language, especially for what concerns developing reading comprehension skills. Shakespeare is remarkably prominent in Nigeria, probably due to the thematic similarities between Shakespeare's works and the civil war events that occurred in Nigeria in the 1970s. In 1972, the playwright Wale Ogunyemi first staged *Aare Akogun*, a Macbeth adaptation. There is one key difference between the texts: Akogun and his wife Olawumi do not kill the king out of ambition as do Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, but rather under the influence of Yoruba spirits. *Aare Akogun* was performed during the rise of General Gowon, a military general who had also gained power after demonstrated valor in battle. In this sense, Ogunyemi's tale reads as a warning against militaristic assumption of power, made all the more relevant to Nigeria through the inclusion of Yoruba spiritual ideology, and numerous instances of song, chant, and idiom. Femi Osofisan's recent *Wesoo, Hamlet!* is set in Yorubaland in the last half of the 20th century, a period of civil war and the aftermath. As Shakespeare's Hamlet is based in turbulent Denmark, with the outside forces of Norway marshalling against the nation, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* is centered in postcolonial, (mostly) post-civil war, economically troubled Nigeria, with outside Westernizing forces of industry marshalled against the traditional order of the village (Frigyik 2018).

Wright (2004: 66) states that the first recorded performance of Shakespeare in South Africa took place at the opening of the African Theatre in Cape Town in September 1801, with the play of "Henry IV, Part 1." South Africa has a rich heritage of Shakespearean translations into both Afrikaans and African languages. Among the more famous of these are Sol Plaatje's Tswana translations of "A Comedy of Errors" (*Diphosphoso*, 1930) and "Julius Caesar" (*Dintshontsho tsa bo-Juliuse Kesara*, 1937); Uys Krige's Afrikaans translations of "Twelfth Night" (*Twaalfde nag*, 1967) and King Lear (1971), Breyten Breytenbach produced an Afrikaans translation of "Titus Andronicus" in 1970; André Brink did "Richard III" (1969) and "Romeo and Juliet" (1975; Wright 2004: 70).

As Lebday (2013: 182-183) highlights, one of the reasons for the strong expansion of the adaptations of Shakespeare's works into local languages is due to a sort of challenge, namely to demonstrate that African languages possess such a lexical richness that they can compete and thus

translate complex works such as English classics can be. Such a statement may seem limiting with respect to the commitment that any form of adaptation and/or appropriation of a work, and in particular of a classic work, entails. However, adaptation and appropriation are important creative techniques utilized by modern dramatists, not only in Africa or Arab countries. Both the techniques raise questions of originality and imitation on the authenticity of the “new” drama; because of the tug of war-like relationship between the world of the original and the world of the derivation (Nyosu and Uchegbu 2015: 31).

2. The theatre in Sudan and South Sudan between history, tradition and modernity

When we intend to build a significant discourse on the theatre and on the other forms of artistic expression that underlie it, we have to consider what are the relationships between the artistic life and the historical and cultural context of the country.⁶ In addition, theatre and culture are two complementary concepts, and the subject becomes even more complex if we refer to forms of communication which, for historical reasons, have been in direct contact with external cultural elements, often undergoing their contamination.

The modern history of Sudan was connected for a long time to the Ottoman Empire; from 1898 until 1956 the whole territory was controlled by Britain through Egypt and was known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Towards the end of 1898 the whole of Northern Sudan, except Darfur, came under Anglo-Egyptian control and in 1899 an Anglo-Egyptian Condominium was proclaimed over the entire country. The Egyptian presence was nominal, and Great Britain was the effective ruler. The Southern Sudanese region presented the stiffest resistance to the colonial force: in 1901 Nuer and Azande peoples waged armed resistance, followed by the Anuak and the Aliab Dinka. The pattern of Southern Sudanese resistance was dependent upon the organization of each individual society and its relations with neighbouring peoples.

The implementation of the Southern Policy in 1930 was based on the premises that the Negroid Africans of the South were culturally and racially distinct from the Northern Arab Sudanese, and that the Southern provinces would either develop as a separate territorial and political entity or be integrated into what was the British East Africa. The Southern Policy required a number of measures that would eliminate all traces of Arab influences in the South: the government’s first step was to

⁶ According to Ebewo (2009: 21), the place of theatre in society can be seen in its role within a culture, not only in terms of its contribution to the entertainment industry, but also in the way it analyses and interrogates moral economic, political, and social issues

institute the use of local languages in primary schools. The Administration financed social service projects (schools and hospitals) throughout the 1930s, and created an Advisory Council in 1943 in response to the upsurge of nationalism in the Northern Sudan (Wai 1980: 375-380; Seri-Hersch 2011: 333- 338). The Southern policy continued to function into the 1940s. The decision to change the Southern Policy was made following a report of Sudan Administration Conference held in Khartoum in April 1946. The recommendations of the Sudan Administrative Conference had led to the new Southern Policy of merging the North and the South into one political and administrative territorial unit: the Sudan.

In May 1952, the Northern political parties submitted proposals for self-government to the Condominium Government. All the Northern political parties were represented in these negotiations, but the South was not invited to participate. The Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1953 and the Self-Government Statute did not contain any special safeguards for the Southern Sudan. The Agreement stipulated that the North and South were one united territory and that elections to the first Sudanese Parliament would embrace both regions. Sudan formally attained its independence from Britain and Egypt on January 1, 1956, in the midst of a civil war and economic decay. The substantial differences between Northern and Southern Sudan escalated until full civil war took place. In 1958 General Ibrahim Abboud overthrew the new government in a military coup and declared martial law. Fighting continued until 1969 when Colonel Joafar el-Nemey came to power and brought an end to it in 1972 by granting limited autonomy to the south. A semblance of peace lasted until 1983 when he introduced Islamic rule and religious fundamentalists gained new power. A state of Emergency was called in 1987 and the army took control over the country in 1989. Through the early 1990s the country was ruled by Revolutionary Council, and the south continued to push for full independence remaining a war zone (Mustafa 1999: 223). South Sudan gained Independence in 2011.

What kind of influences has this historical travail had on theatrical expression and communication both in Sudan and in South Sudan?

The first theatrical performance in Sudan took place in Qitaina city in 1902 with a play by an Egyptian magistrate and entitled *Al-Murshid Al-Sūdānī*⁷ ('The Sudanese Leader'), written in formal Arabic verse. In the early part of 1920s European style theatre began to be seen with regularity when Shakespearian drama began to be taught and produced by students at Gordon Memorial College –

⁷ The Arabic names and titles are reported in transliteration as well as from reference sources.

University of Khartoum.⁸ One of the pioneers of Sudanese drama is Ahmed Altayeb who was the first to translate and present Shakespearian plays adapting “King Lear,” “Macbeth,” “Hamlet” and “The Tempest” (Dafalla 2015: 89). Hussein Mallasi (1894-1946), in collaboration with Egyptian expatriates, formed a theatre company that was active in Port Sudan from 1910 to 1924 uprising, when the company had to stop because of a colonial backlash that hit all cultural and educational institutions. By 1933 Sudanese were themselves writing plays: Khalid Abdul Rahman Abdul Rus (1908-1985) – known as the father of Sudanese drama - wrote, co-directed and acted *Tajouj*, based on a local legend and written in Sudanese dialect, as opposed to classical Arabic (Dafalla 2015: 90; Mustafa 2004: 81). The legend tells about a poet who gets married to a very beautiful woman. On their wedding night, he asks her to parade in front of him totally naked, approaching him, moving away and then returning to him again. She is shocked by this request but accepts as long as he agrees to a request from her. He accepts. She then parades in front of him, and when he is satisfied, she makes her request to him: the divorce. He must agree and dies in misery; she will die at the hands of a tribal chief when a major conflict is triggered by her beauty. Following the first performance of *Tajouj* in 1933, the playwright had some problems with the religious authorities who disapproved of his including women characters in the play which required male actors to dress as women (Mustafa 1999: 224, 228). Other important dramatists were Ibrahim Al-Abbadi (1890-1981), Sayyid Abdul Aziz and Al-Khalifa Yousuf Al-Hassan whose plays focused on Sudanese themes and were written in colloquial Sudanese Arabic. Their productions were also fundraising efforts for the Ahlia Schools, the alternative educational system set up by National Movement (Mustafa 1999: 224). In 1948 the “Sudanese Company for Acting and Music” or *Al-Sirāj*, was formed in Omdurman, the historical and national city which hosted several social and sports clubs. Here the company produced works in classic Arabic language and it was the first theatrical group to have a woman actress as a member and likewise the first to issue the magazine *Al-Ufuq* (“The Horizon”) (Dafalla 2015: 90). Al-Fadhil Saeed played an important role in Sudanese theatre for starting the establishment of a “Youth’s Theatrical Group for Comedy” that was formally registered by the Omdurman City Council in 1955. The company reached the most remote regions of the country and probably the strength of Saeed’s theatrical group was in its mobility (Dafalla 2015: 90; Mustafa 1999: 227). In 1956, after the Declaration of Independence, Sudan witnessed a great ferment in theatrical activity: in 1959 National Theatre was established and some of the plays

⁸ In Gordon Memorial College, Abdulrahman Ali Taha wrote indigenous Sudanese plays such as *Suaad*, written in verse and performed on Bakht Al-Redda stage in Eldouiem in 1940s (Dafalla 2015: 89).

produced were based on real stories that took place during the colonial period and the early years after Independence (Dafalla 2015: 90). In 1966 the National Folk Dances Troupe was founded: the dancers usually performed pieces from a repertoire of fifteen tribal dances selected from across the country. Among the Troupe's performances there is *Zar* - a dramatic ceremony not specifically Sudanese generally performed for the purpose of healing, that survived despite its non-Islamic roots (Seligman 1914; Natvig 1987; El Guindy and Schmais 1994; Kolk 2006); during the *Zar* the participants, mainly women, dance and go into a trance and are transformed in other characters. In the end, the costumes are removed and the dancers return to their original selves.

Other rituals and ceremonies that have been incorporated into the National Folk Dance Troupe's repertoire were the rain-maker's ritual and the *Baramka*, or tea ceremony. In the first ritual the *kujur*, a combination of rain-maker and medicine man, goes through a series of theatrical ritual dancing in full regalia. The figure of *kujur* is very popular in non-muslim areas of Sudan. For the *Baramka*, people sit in a circle with tea-pots and cups in the centre. The tea is prepared and poured in prescribed ways with the participants singing and offering forms of praise (Mustafa 1999: 231).

As Mustafa (1999: 226) states, when the regime signed an agreement with South Sudan in 1972 several companies were formed and the art was seen as a means of both celebration and dissent, but the 1980s shift towards religious intolerance saw the institution of the Islamic common law - Sharia imposed that involved the destruction of the books in the streets of Omdurman and other atrocities.

It will be necessary to wait until the end of 1980s for the theatre comes back to life. It is in this period that theatre program at University of Khartoum has played an important role in the dissemination of information and awakening of popular consciousness about the reality of social problems that plagued the country, and in particular the urban sites. One of the issues involved the so-called "darker-skinned" refugees and Internal Displaced Populations (IDPs)⁹ who remained "missing" from the official narrative. The students at the drama school set up their performances in neighbourhoods¹⁰ across the city, and the neighbourhood-based theatrically performances enabled residents to articulate their exclusions from the material resources of their cities and nation, and to

⁹ Khartoum and Omdurman were the destinations for thousands of IDPs who fled the first and second civil wars in Sudan (1955-1972; 1983-2005). Being of different ethnic groups and/or religion, they were racialized as 'darker-skinned' and were to remain invisible to the official count (Simone and Bou Akar 2014).

¹⁰ As Simone and Bou Akar (2014) state, people called their neighbourhoods using the name of Chicago, Harlem, Bronx, Detroit. In this way people pointed to the urban character of their lives and to their toughness and resistance in a city like Khartoum where many ethnic groups lived, and keep living, in condition of exclusion and marginalization.

expose their racialized and invisible bodies. The performances thus became sites of resistance (Simone and Bou Akar 2014).

According to Miller (2010: 32), in 1980s Juba was considered the most active city of the South Sudan where Juba University was created, and the Nyakuron Cultural Centre that was established by the Ministry of Culture and Information was a multipurpose conference centre including a theatre. The strongest cultural institutional body was the Radio of the National Council of Churches with programs in various Southern languages, southern traditional music and social plays in Juba-Arabic. They were very popular. Years later radio programmes and participatory theatre¹¹ are playing a strong role in reducing internal conflicts.¹² Participatory theatre involves artists trained to acts as moderators who engage in dialogue the audience in proposing peaceful ways of addressing the conflicts presented in the play. The artists come from diverse communities of South Sudan, and some of them are from the Protection of Civilian Sites (PoCs). As Gotev (2018) claims, discussions in the participatory theatre were often an inspiration for radio programmes, thus the messages could reach a wider audience. Since the level of illiteracy is very high, radio therefore plays a key role in disseminating news and represents a tool for peace-building in the country; the radio network consists of community-based radio stations broadcasting in eighteen different languages.

Another tool or channel for South Sudanese people to speak about human rights and politics is playback theatre. Namubiru (2018) reports a drama performed at the Catholic University of South Sudan: a young actor tells the story of walking for months from South Sudan to refuge in Ethiopia. Behind him a group of five actors dramatize the tale for the audience. The playback theatre technique is an appeal to the audience members to share their stories, whether directly “played” by the actors. The actors thus serve as a mirror of the experiences of the public directly. A facilitator or driver invites a member of the audience on stage to tell a story that has happened. The driver, actors and audience listen attentively. Using the techniques of improvisation, music, song and movement, the

¹¹This form of theatre is also known through other denominations, such as Theatre for Development, Theatre for the Oppressed, Popular theatre, Community theatre, or Theatre for Social Change. These are often used interchangeably and are associated with a transformation of a social reality, by using community and individual participation. Participatory theatre is an approach in which the actors interact with the public, based on a real problem. Throughout the participatory event, the public participates to adapt, change or correct a situation, an attitude or a behaviour that is developed during the show. This form of theatre aims to join entertainment with an exploration of attitudes and to share knowledge in order to stimulate positive social changes (<http://dmeformpeace.org>).

¹²Many factors undermine South Sudan’s prospects for peace and stability: armed groups are fragmenting, criminality in increasing, and violence is infiltrating in everyday life and political actors have built local constituencies based on pre-existing ethnic divisions (Gotev 2018).

actors play the history of the person who remains on stage. In the end, the person is asked to discuss what they think of the ‘story’ just acted out (<https://dmeformpeace.org>).

The topics that most interest theatre in South Sudan in the aftermath of Independence mainly concern issues relating to peace-building, war trauma, immigration, emigration, and refugees. The same commitment is carried out by one of the best known and most recognized dramatist Joseph Abuk Dori, known as Joseph Abuk,¹³ whose work will be discussed extensively in Section 4; he runs the South Sudan Theatre Organization whose aim is to stage plays, often in the street, to prompt discussion on sensitive issues. The audience collaborates with the actors in projecting the actual meaning of the play. With this art form, Abuk’s Theatre Organization has powered many political campaigns (Namubiru 2018).

3. South Sudan: perspectives and challenges

3.1. Languages versus ethnicities: an overview of the Southern landscape

Since the 19th century, South Sudan and its adjacent regions – northern Uganda, eastern Central African Republic – have undergone a high degree of multilingualism, with groups speaking various languages, mainly from the Nilo-Saharan phylum.¹⁴ Thus, South Sudan constitutes a multilingual context, which is composed by nearly 120 named languages and nearly fifty ethnic groups of various sizes living within its borders. In 2006, the SIL¹⁵ estimated around 65% of the population belongs to the four major ethnic groups: Dinka, Nuer, Zande and Bari.¹⁶ The main Southern Sudanese vernaculars include Juba Arabic (henceforth: JA), Bari, Lotuxo, Moru, Madi, Zande and Nuer (Owens 1996: 134),

¹³ Joseph Abuk is a prominent intellectual in South Sudan; he helped writing the national anthem after independence in 2011 and still represents a remarkable figure. As a young boy in the 1950s, he and his family moved from the countryside to Juba: there, he first came in contact with JA. In the early 1970s, Abuk has been a refugee in Uganda and Kenya during the first civil war. He returned back to Equatoria in 1978: at that time, he started his career as a cultural critic and a playwright, by developing street theatre forms.

<https://www.iwmmf.org/reporting/voice-of-a-nation-how-juba-arabic-helps-bridge-a-factious-south-sudan/>;
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/south-sudan-war-disrupts-a-theatre-inspires-a-dramatist/article16760007/>

¹⁴ More precisely, the Eastern Sudanic unit (Dimmendaal 2018: 5). The Nilo-Saharan phylum was posited by Greenberg (1963).

¹⁵ An international evangelical institution from Dallas (USA), SIL promotes Bible translations into local languages worldwide and it documents lesser-known languages. SIL has a long-established expertise in South Sudan and nowadays a branch group is still working in Juba (<https://www.sil.org>).

¹⁶ This percentage has been confirmed by the 2011 survey of Tom Power and John Simpson “Scoping Mission for an ELT Program in South Sudan”.

which are widely spoken as home-languages. Along with this, religious practices include Christianity, Islam and animism. English and Arabic are the official national languages, which are used as prestigious languages in the media, education and legal purposes (Nakao 2013: 140).

Sudanese¹⁷ Arabic is widely spoken by people of northern Sudanese descent and by Southerners who were educated in Arabic and/or sought refuge in Sudan before 2011 (Manfredi and Tosco 2016: 2). Furthermore, non-native varieties of Arabic (generally known as *arābi al besīt* “simple Arabic”) are spoken as interethnic medium in the northern (Malakal area) and western (around Wau) states of South Sudan (Manfredi and Tosco 2016: 2).

During the decade 1920-1930, the British colonial authorities had widely promoted the learning of English and the use of ethnic languages within the Southern educational system (Mugaddam 2006: 123), in order to constrain the spread of Arabic and Islam.¹⁸ However, a variety of “local” pidgin Arabic was already in use throughout the Southern Sudan (Nyombe 1997: 103). Regarding educational matters, from its outset the Condominium allowed educational system into the power of European missionaries and of different Christian churches, in the southern provinces (Miller 2010b: 384).¹⁹

According to Nyombe (1997: 104), in 1928, the Rejaf language conference – managed and sponsored by the British administration, and attended by missionary groups from Congo and Uganda, and the International Institute of African Languages and Culture (based in London) – selected six vernacular languages as medium of instruction for the Southern primary school. The higher levels, instead, were to be taught in English, and the use of Arabic language was proscribed in any contexts. Consequently, the event officially addressed to the status of indigenous languages in the region and to their future development.

Since 1970s, different language surveys have been launched in Sudan – through questionnaire and/or quantitative methods – in order to assess the degree of multilingualism and the spread of Arabic among the non-Arab migrant community in the North. The Sudanese political milieu has

¹⁷ The adjective ‘Sudanese’ refers to the Arabic of the state of Sudan, and contrasts with ‘Sudanic Arabic,’ i.e., a broadly Arabic-speaking region stretching from Nigeria to the Red Sea (Owens 2014: 237).

¹⁸ The establishment of local missionary schools launched the literacy process in southern Sudan until 1947, under the frame of the so-called “Southern Policy” (Miller 2014: 357), which officially aimed at a strict separation of the South (including the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan) from the North. Consequently, the “Southern Policy” attempted to prevent Southerners from political influences against the Condominium, thus electing English and the vernaculars (Juba Arabic excepted) as the languages of education and administration.

¹⁹ With reference to Seri-Hersch (2017), the Southern provinces were divided into spheres of influence: there were Italian Catholics in Bahr Al-Ghazal, British Anglicans in Mongalla (later renamed Equatoria) and South Upper Nile, American Presbyterians in Central Upper Nile.

debated language issues since the early 20th century (Miller 2006), as the Sudanese multilingualism and cultural diversity have widely been perceived as threats to national unity. Therefore, a severe Arabization process has affected the Sudanese Republic for decades since 1956, whose purpose was to create one united country. As Versteegh (1984: 7) states, like other Arab states, Sudanese policies focused mainly on the recognition of local languages than the diffusion of foreign ones, on behalf of national policies on Arabic language in spite of English. The pro-Arabization phase underlay a greater “Sudanization” discourse, i.e., the assimilation of non-Arab groups into a greater “core” Sudanese Culture with one language, one religion and one culture (Miller 2002: 117). Thus, the Southern administration was forced to replace English and the local languages with Arabic (Nyombe 1997: 114) within formal contexts, at least. In spite of these policies, since the 1960s, JA has established itself as a distinctive language-system, while the new influx of urban population widened its speech community.

In 1972, the Regional Assembly of Juba reintroduced indigenous languages (in the Primary schools) and English (in all higher levels) as medium of instruction in the Southern Sudan, thus curbing the role of Arabic as a national language although Juba Arabic was amply spreading as a lingua franca in multilingual zones (Nyombe 1997: 116).²⁰ In 2004, the Naivasha Peace Agreement officially recognised all Sudanese vernaculars – the Southern ones were included – as potential national languages (Miller 2006). As a result, the question on whether to teach indigenous languages and/or Arabic has been a main “national” issue since the 19th century: political boundaries scarcely accord with linguistic ones. Nowadays, South Sudan is a “vertical multilingual society,” wherein individual multilingualism adheres to hierarchical relationships (Nakao 2013: 140). Hence, Arabic and English are the prestigious languages: more precisely, the 2011 Constitution appointed English as the “official working language.”

3.2. Juba Arabic: an introductory note

Juba Arabic²¹ is an Arabic-based pidgincreole²² spoken in South Sudan, where it represents the main lingua franca for its multi-ethnic population and, concurrently, the native language of a large part of

²⁰ Six languages were selected: Bari, Dinka, Kresh, Lotuho, Moro, Ndogo, Nuer (Nyombe 1997: 116).

²¹ The name Juba Arabic is geographically linked to area of Juba, the capital of South Sudan and Central Equatoria State, wherein it represents the main language. Although void of an official standard orthography, Juba Arabic is broadly written in Latin script (Manfredi and Petrollino 2013).

the urban population (Nakao 2018: 275). The exact number of its speakers is difficult to be estimated: according to Manfredi (2017a: 7), JA is spoken as a primary language by 47% of the population of Juba, whereas it is also used as a second or third language by the majority of the population of the country.²³ JA emerged as a military pidgin during the Turkish-Egyptian government around 1820 and later it developed into a creole during the second half of the 20th century, especially in urban areas (Veersteegh 2014: 212). The use of JA increased after the end of the first civil war (1956-1972), due to the resulting displacement of South Sudanese refugees (Miller 2014: 355). Nowadays, JA is considered as “the Arabic of the South” by both Southerners and Northerners (Miller 2003: 26). As previously stated, JA emerged from the contact between Sudanese Arabic and local languages in the second half of 19th century (Manfredi and Tosco 2013a: 798). Prior to this, a military variety of Egyptian-Sudanese Arabic – later called Bimbashi Arabic²⁴ – was spoken in Anglo-Egyptian camps between Upper Egypt and Sudan during the 19th century, by Arabic-speaking officers and local recruits²⁵

JA displays the general structural features of creole, such as the semi-complete avoidance of morphology, the absence of gender as a morphological category, the relexification of uninflected verbal forms, the presence of invariable preverbal markers and basic SVO order (Manfredi and Tosco 2013b).²⁶ New speakers of JA are tempted to modify their own realization, thus resembling a more prestigious way of speaking: in this context, “decreolization” – the result of continued exposure to the superstrate language – may occur. Furthermore, JA has been largely exposed to contact with Sudanese Arabic, the dominant language of the former unified Sudan (Manfredi 2017). Hence,

²² Language contact may produce different linguistic outcomes, such as pidgins, creoles and trade jargons (Thomason and Kaufman 1988). A “pidgincreole” is defined as an intermediate category, in which an earlier pidgin becomes the first language for a part of its speakers (Bakker 2008: 139). Along with this, a pidgin is characterized by a limited vocabulary and it is classified as a “contact vernacular”, i.e., an intermediate variety (Romaine 1988; Manfredi and Tosco 2013a). Nowadays, JA can be described as an example of stable pidgin (Tosco 1995), since its use is not discontinued and it shows an own linguistic distinctiveness.

²³ Juba Arabic is also the idiom of Nilotic mother-tongue speakers, such as Bari or Dinka. Moreover, diaspora speakers were reported in Sudan, Egypt, Britain, United States, Canada and Australia (Manfredi and Petrollino 2013).

²⁴ The variety of Arabic spoken by early Anglo-Egyptian troops (Tucker 1934). From the Ottoman noun *bimbaši* “officer”, it referred to the lowest military rank. Kaye and Tosco (1993) introduced the name of Early East African Pidgin Arabic with reference to this variety.

²⁵ I.e., from Nilotic tribes such as Mundu, Dinka, Shilluk, Bari, Lugbara (Owens 1985).

²⁶ Broadly speaking, creole languages share the following features (Bakker 2014: 445): the lexicon is mainly from a lexifier (superstrate); the grammar system partially derives from the lexifier (some superstrate traits); partial grammaticalization of lexical items.

speakers of JA are currently part of a socio-linguistic continuum²⁷ with its main lexifier, Northern Sudanese Arabic (also called Sudanese Arabic).²⁸ Therefore, JA no longer represents an “isolated variety” (Miller 2003: 26): its relation with Sudanese Arabic implies a high degree of phonomorphological variation within the idiolects, whose differences reflect different “shades” of proficiency in the language, according to a number of descriptive categories, such as the speakers’ residence and their educational curriculum (Tosco 1995: 424). Additionally, the main factors of JA creolization can be observed *in situ* (Miller 2003: 2).

Generally speaking, pidgins and creoles have always been denigrated by users of dominant language, sometimes by their own speech community too (Jourdan 2003: 201). The external definition of a language takes into consideration the speakers’ perception and judgements, according to “what they perceive as the same language” (Tosco 2017: 237). A favourable perception generally combines with the identity of specific ethnolinguistic groups, since speakers can be linguistically dominant in a socially subordinate language (Winford 2005: 376).

The linguistic environment in Juba town was investigated for the first time by Mahmud (1983), although studies and descriptions of the Southern indigenous languages – especially on Dinka and Shilluk – had already been completed by missionaries, traders and explorers in the 19th century (Nyombe 1997: 103).

Prior to its foundation around 1927, the original area of Juba emerged from an indigenous nucleus of Bari villages (Nakao 2013: 142). Nowadays, the population of Juba includes mainly new South Sudanese citizens, who reached the city during and/or after the civil wars, and migrant workers from East Africa (Nakao 2013: 142). According to Nakao (2013: 139), the residential area of Malakia (Juba) displays some peculiar socio-linguistic features. Specifically, Malakian inhabitants represent the “old” urban nucleus: i.e. groups of ex slaves from Southern Sudan, which were described as “negroid but detribalized” (Nakao 2013: 145) by the British officers, since they were distant from ethnic other groups at that time. The Malakian community is closed “related” both to the diaspora South Sudanese communities in Northern Sudan and to the Nubi groups in East Africa (Uganda *in primis*). Hence, Malakians were deemed as the “native” South Sudanese (Nakao 2013: 139, 148) and, interestingly, they spoke Juba Arabic as their mother tongue. In some features, this

²⁷ This structural relation has been labeled as “Arabic interference” in the APICS online dataset (Manfredi and Petrollino 2013).

²⁸ However, Versteegh (2017: 17) argued the original lexifier of JA may have been a Bedouin eastern dialect, such as Šukriyya Arabic, formerly recorded by Reichmut in 1983.

“variety” of Juba Arabic resembles Ugandan Ki-nubi. In fact, Ki-Nubi and Turku,²⁹ two Arabic-based contact languages, are related with JA (Manfredi and Petrollino 2013). Ki-Nubi and JA are mutually intelligible, since they both exhibit the same substratum interference³⁰ from the local language spoken in Equatoria in the mid-19th century (Nakao 2018: 278), and a more complex structural development (unknown in Turku) (Miller 2003: 22).³¹ They had separate development since 1888 (Miller 2000: 5): hence, Ki-Nubi and JA “are autonomous and specific varieties, which cannot be confused with any other Arabic vernaculars” (Miller 2007: 607). JA is expanding its domain from a main oral dimension towards a contemporary “written” status. As a corollary to this, a number of grammars and dictionaries have been published since the 1970s³² and JA was the most common language spoken in Juba chiefs’ courts³³ in the early 1980s, as recorded by Miller (2007). Eventually, JA speakers display a clear metalinguistic awareness of their language, which they deem quite distinctive from Standard Arabic and Northern Sudanese Arabic, because of its own morphology. Accordingly, Juba’s citizens generally appreciate the use of “indigenous” languages and of English in formal and semi-formal settings (Manfredi and Tosco 2016: 2), since Arabic and English have largely co-existed as medium of instructions since 2011.

²⁹ Ki-nubi, or East African Nubi, is an Arabic-based creole, today mainly spoken in Uganda and Kenya (concentrating in Kibera of Nairobi, and Bombo and Kampala, in Uganda) (Luffin 2013). The name comes from the union of Arabic *nūbi* “black slave” with Kiswahili nominal prefix *ki-* (Luffin 2005: 15). Its origin lies in the period of the Anglo-Egyptian conquest of Sudan in the 19th century (Wellens 2005). Turku (Arabic *turk*, *turūk* for “Turkish”), a pidgin variety, was brought to the Chari river area in Chad, present-day, around 1879, by defiant soldiers from southern Sudan (Tosco and Owens 1993). The term Turku was used by Chadian people with reference to the newcomers, in spite of their different ethnic origin (Tosco and Owens 1993: 183). As far as we know, Turku does not show the grammatical expansion of Nubi and Juba Arabic (Miller 2003: 23).

³⁰ Type elements from the speaker’s native language are assimilated into the foreign language (Thomason and Kaufman 1988).

³¹ The homogenous group of Sudanic historical pidgins can be divided into two subgroups (on structural grounds): an eastern branch (Juba Arabic and (Ki-) Nubi) and a western one (Turku and Bongor Arabic). Their shared ancestor, traditionally referred to as “Common Sudanic Pidgin Creole Arabic” (Tosco and Manfredi 2013b: 253), emerged in the late 19th century (c. 1855-1880) in the southern Sudan, within an Arabic dominant but multilingual context (Owens 1996: 159). According to Owens (1996), East African Nubi and Juba Arabic equally arose as a result of the same historical circumstances from a shared precursor, which also fostered the development of Turku. Miller (2004), instead, argues that similarities between Ki-Nubi and JA arose later, in the second half of XX century.

³² The early published material in Southern Sudanese vernaculars, mainly of a religious nature, were written in Latin script, although unified rules of writing were missing (Miller 2010b: 387).

³³ The earlier formal chiefs’ courts (*lukikos*) were established in the 1920s, under the control of British officials (Leonardi 2013: 15).

3.3. The post 2011 society: (new) opportunities?

The latest “legitimacy” pact on multilingualism refers to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed in 2005 by the government of South Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (Power and Simpson 2011). The CPA accredited Arabic and English as official languages in Sudan, whereas so-called “indigenous” languages acquired the status of national languages. Notwithstanding the CPA’s outcome, language is yet a clear badge of ethnicity among Sudanese people, in the broad sense (Miller 2006: 2). After the signing of the CPA provisions in 2005, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (South Sudan), addressed for a revised “Language and Education Policy,” in order to ensure the learners’ mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the primary level (Grade 1 to 3) by law, with English taught as a subject (Spronk 2014: 5). In Grade 4, English represents the medium of instructions, while mother tongue is learned as a subject until the final year of primary education (Grade 8). In 2011, the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan mentions the “indigenous languages of South Sudan” but does not refer to ethnic groups and/or specific languages (Manfredi and Tosco 2016: 5). The international “Language and Education Conference,”³⁴ held in 2012 in Juba, advocated and encouraged the concrete implementation of mother tongues within this linguistic policy, in light of its pedagogical benefits, since the first language is the early medium of socialization for children and it affects the building of their cultural patterns (Nyombe 1997: 120). The conference, also the major international event in South Sudan since independence, gathered different experts from Africa and beyond (Miller 2018: 25).³⁵ On this occasion, a number of contributors acknowledged the benefit of a multilingual education,³⁶ which should comprise also JA as a native language (Calderbank 2013). However, the teaching of a selected number of Southern languages, even as a subject, is mainly ideal, due both to financial and political reasons (Miller 2006a: 9). In the last decades, English has not been considered a symbol of domination but rather a useful means to economic mobility and integration within the Sudanese society, since nowadays non-state actors and donors are largely delivering educational programmes, such as British Council. When literacy in English is limited between youngsters, JA can be more easily acquired as a dominant language, especially in small towns. Code switching phenomena are quite common, mainly among youngsters (20s-30s), who have been educated in one or two languages and are keen on the

³⁴ 4-7 March 2012, convened by the British Council. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/multilingual-education-africa-lessons-juba-language-education-conference>.

³⁵ Among them, experts from the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), UNESCO, UNICEF and SIL.

³⁶ I.e., the use of at least three languages (McIlwraith 2013: 59).

cyberspace, on new written systems (emails, chats, SMS) and urban musical practices. To young people, English still represents “a gateway language for entry” into the urban-based community (Kevlihan 2007: 514). However, some websites and blogs are currently written in JA, in particular foreign websites from South Sudanese diaspora members (Miller 2014: 375), such as the Facebook community Arabi Juba, which was opened in 2010, and the website Gurtong Peace Trust Project.³⁷ However, nowadays it is not still clear which language will be taught where and to who, in the single states of South Sudan (Manfredi and Tosco 2013a: 798). As a result, language pluralism is generally advocated and observed only in the first school years by “trained” teachers, who are not wholly equipped with basic literacy materials.³⁸ Given the criteria above, the absence of an operative federal system has lacked in the settlement of unified linguistic policy, in favour of local authorities’ provisions among the single states (Manfredi and Tosco 2016: 5).

Nowadays, JA embodies the cultural heritage of the “Southern identity,” albeit it lacks any special role or status within the 2011 Transitional Constitution (Manfredi and Tosco 2013a: 798). The choice of English, in fact, shows an “exoglossic” language option, i.e., a language outside the nation, as a language-planning strategy (Nyombe 1997: 125). In spite of its unofficial status, a demise of JA seems difficult in South Sudan since JA is not yet functioning as the official language within administration and education; however, its widespread use could act as an appropriate super-tribal membership marker in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the intergenerational language transmission would represent a leading issue for the next generation: the extent of JA acquisition as a formal language is yet uncertain, whereas its acquisition as a L1 or L2, within familiar contexts, is already acknowledged as a communication instrument.

South Sudanese citizens hold very different levels of Arabic proficiency (Miller 2014: 358): a number of Southern intellectuals, who were displaced or exiled abroad during the 1970s-1980s, consider Arabic the “colonial” language of Khartoum, whereas those intellectuals who moved to Northern Sudan or in Arabic countries, can properly speak Sudanese Arabic (henceforth: SA) and/or Northern Sudanese Arabic (henceforth: NSA), thus they are partly affected by an “Arabization” process within their productions and activities. With reference to Miller (2006), the spread of Arabic has increased ethnic consciousness, instead. Hence, mass migration and mobility heightened ethnic awareness and linguistic maintenance, since minorities have to deal with discrimination and/or

³⁷ <http://www.gurtong.net/AboutGurtong/tabid/146/Default.aspx>

³⁸ The majority of these materials have been edited and/or printed by SIL and other NGOs (Spronk 2014: 16).

marginalization (Versteegh 1984: 9), while the ravaging conflicts of the last decades prevented the emergence of an autonomous Southern culture, hence of a solid artistic environment.³⁹

To sum up, a South Sudanese linguistic framework is scarcely to be updated with consistency, due to the contingent politics and safety conditions within conflict-affected areas. Nevertheless, the current language policy does not conform to the political pluralism and the legitimacy of the new state (Tosco 2014: 172). The latest policies, designed to foster an embryonic nationhood, have instead affected the formation of a balanced supra-ethnic identity within South Sudan. As a result, an official endorsement is a priority for a multilingualism project after 2011, although the building of a national system and its related institutions is still challenging. The Southern government should, indeed, recognize and promote national integration by means of an inclusive multilingual linguistic policy, which should consider such domains as education, information and media communication.

4. Cymbeline, a renewed drama through a new language

4.1. The *janúbi* cultural and artistic scene: the XX century beginning

The leading Southern drama troupes comprise the Kwoto Group⁴⁰ and the South Sudan Theatre Organization (SSTO). SSTO is a no-profit cultural organization placed in Juba. Since its establishment after 2011, the association promotes local dramatists and engages theatre as a means of expression, by developing educational activities and workshops. The frontmen Joseph Abuk and Derik Uya are also activists and playwrights from Southern groups like the Kwoto Group and the Skylark Dramatist Association,⁴¹ which both supported displaced South Sudanese artists and started to combine traditional heritage with a new-born street one in the Greater Khartoum area (Lorins 2007). Following the 1980s displacement, Khartoum Region gathered together a wide number of Southern intellectuals and students, who established cultural associations and student unions, such as the afore cited Kwoto Group and the Orupaap Group (Miller 2002: 117).⁴² These groups began performing during celebrations and/or religious ceremonies, in both vernacular languages and Arabic.

³⁹ For almost a half century of civil war, South Sudanese people have witnessed with difficulty the emergence of a solid literary and cultural scenario, except for some popular intellectuals, who have experienced displacement as *Janúbi* people (JA “Southerner”) in Khartoum or in Europe.

⁴⁰ Kwoto comes from Toposa (Eastern Nilotic language). Kwoto refers to a specific sacred stone, which is a symbol of peace and reconciliation (Miller 2010 a). According to the tradition, any act of violence is prohibited near the stone (Lorins 2007: 257).

⁴¹ Established by Joseph Abuk et al. in 1979 (Lorins 2007: 257).

⁴² Musical band founded in 1987 by Stephen Affear Ushal (Miller 2002: 118).

Furthermore, their members managed to merge Southern symbols and figures, such as the rain-maker (*kujur*) and the ancestor's spirit (*junun*), with social realism. The resettlement of refugees increased notably the plurilingual landscape of Khartoum and its outskirts, since large groups of new inhabitants were bilingual or were speakers of a language different from Arabic or, to use a Sudanese word, a *rutān* (a local language with no written tradition). In the light of this, the choice of Juba Arabic acted as a precocious “sign of pan-Southern identity” (Miller 2010: 37).

Similar to SSTO's background, the Kwoto Centre included forty-five “mixed” actors, from eighteen Southern ethnic groups (Bor, Balanda, Anuak), which were academic students in Khartoum at that time (Miller 2010).⁴³ Kwoto became rather famous in Khartoum between 1980s and 1990s. Most of these groups performed during private events (mainly marriages, funerals) and religious celebrations, whose audience generally comprised displaced South Sudanese population of Khartoum. Successively, the group started to collaborate with peripheral churches in Khartoum and the Ministry of Social Affairs (Miller 2002: 118). With reference to donor agencies, Kwoto was financially sustained by the Ford Foundation (American private charitable organization) in the 90s (1993-1997) (Miller 2010: 38). Successively, Kwoto activities have been sponsored by the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in promoting seventy multilingual performances (Lorins 2007: 250). In spite of the lack of external funding, the cultural troupe has constantly aimed at its full “self-sufficiency” (Lorins 2007: 252). For the first time, Kwoto's drama comprised Juba Arabic in Arabic script (Miller 2010: 37). As well as drama, traditional South Sudanese songs and dances were involved to convey ethnic unity, opposed to the growing political division between parties. Thus, the group focused its activities on definite discourses, such as Southern displaced people, social cohesion, inter-ethnic dialogue, in a balanced manner. Albeit their experience as displaced or migrant people, Kwoto's members haven't fostered political issues throughout their productions.⁴⁴ The inspiration stem from the figure of Amona Kabasi, a World War II soldier who performed scenes and songs in JA as a pioneer (Miller 2010: 38).

⁴³ With the outbreak of the second civil war (1982-2005), Khartoum – the capital and the administrative centre of Sudan – affirmed itself as the leading destination of migrants' waves, whose actors were also students, intellectuals and artists. Khartoum's population steadily increased from 250,000 in 1950 to roughly 2,831,000 in 1993, and up to 4.5 million by 2005 (Tamis and Persson 2013: vii).

⁴⁴ Kwoto's artworks may be classified as “derivative traditional work”, i.e., “any work [...] applied to any form of indigenous knowledge, recognized by an indigenous community as having an indigenous or traditional origin, and a substantial part of which was derived from indigenous cultural expressions or knowledge” (Ncube 2018: 602).

Kwoto's theater reflects this project of hybridization and is an amalgamation of indigenous performances forms, Arabic language and Western theater [...], including absurdist drama, theater-for-development, theatre of the oppressed [...] (Lorins 2007: 201).

The Kwoto Group thought that the theatre was not only a place for leisure and recreation but a fertile ground for social development (Miller 2002: 118). Hence, Kwoto's creative vision envisaged social realism, absurd and progress, in spite of ethnic boundaries (Miller 2010: 41). Interestingly, in 1908 the Sudan Council of Churches Radio (SCCR) composed a number of short theatrical plays intended to broadcast basic sanitary or moral advices (Miller 2014: 367). Hence, SCCR - the only local radio in Juba, at that time - sustained the valorisation of JA within the community, since it purposely selected a basilectal JA for its social programs. As a matter of fact, the economic situation of Equatoria in the second half of the 20th century was too vulnerable to endorse a sensible cultural environment; hence, the most important Southern intellectuals started their activities largely in Khartoum and in Cairo. For instance, in the mid-1990s, the Akwa group performed songs in Juba Arabic in the Cairene district of Abbasiyya, which was a gathering place for displaced Southerners in Cairo (Miller 2010: 36). Similarly, every Sunday in Juba there were spontaneous groups of Dinka dancers near Hay al-Ghaba (Miller 2010: 33).

Nowadays, SSTO's projects follow the intellectual path of their East African mentors, Taban Lo Liyong and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: namely the choice of a vernacular language conveys a socio-political criticism (Wilcox 2012: 2). Despite the international visibility, SSTO official website is no more available from Italy, so the company is solely accessible via Facebook outside Africa. Even within the country itself, means of communication lacks, due the scarcity of internet connection and to the economic struggle, thus updates about their current activity are quite difficult. Hopefully, Internet would become an effective tool of communication and of education in the coming years, providing a real network in and out Africa. Furthermore, the European theatre represents a recent subject within Sudanese educational programme; the teaching of Shakespeare and other dramatists spread thanks to the opening of Bakht Ar-Ruda Teacher Training Institute in 1934 (Matzke 2013: 67). There is no evidence of financial supports from the South Sudan government for the "Globe to Globe" performance, actually most sponsorships seemed to have come from the company's international supporters and individual donations (Matzke 2013: 66).

On July 2012, Juba hosted TEDxJuba, an open conference, sponsored by UNICEF South Sudan, to celebrate the first anniversary of independence. The host speakers were invited to discuss the main theme of the event: "New nation, new ideas." As a speaker, Abuk made his own contribution, which he entitled "The Theatre: an Agent for Consciousness." The director talked about the educational

prospective of drama as a connection between various ethnic groups in the process of nation building. Furthermore, Abuk described their version of “Cymbeline” “an African jewellery” and how his company contributed to the idea of a distinctively South Sudanese nationhood (<https://youtu.be/LX7eW-S7MRM>). In the absence of larger programs, SSTO has not been producing international projects hitherto. It is hoped that post 2011 government would provide new cultural infrastructures, in order to foster educational and artistic intents on a national scale. Albeit the status of JA is officially moot within South Sudan, nowadays “Cymbeline” represents a landmark event in the development of JA as a written language. The project was a huge adventure for the SSTO: the discipline and the complexity of the Shakespearean drama is very different from the tradition of spontaneous street theatre and experimental Arabic drama they have experienced, although they have learned that the Globe Theatre of Shakespeare’s day was highly interactive.

In the light of the above, Abuk specifically chose a lingua franca as a way of artistic expression for this first cultural export. Abuk’s “Cymbeline” can be regarded as an enrichment of pidgin, since it has been the first experiment of that time. In spite of the difficulties due to the lexicon’s scarcity, when compared to the English source text, Abuk adapted it and chose Arabic words wherein Juba words were missing, in order to convey the same symbolism and metaphors.”

The choice of translating Shakespeare into JA is a point of departure: the authorship of Abuk’s “Cymbeline” definitely affirmed JA as a cultural heritage, in the light of 2011 after-effects. Furthermore, the match JA-English is symbolic: JA reflects a super-ethnic Southern feeling among its speakers, whereas English is acting a main role in wider (formal) communication. According to Joubin (2020: 25), approaching a foreign reality “is to ‘engage’ with the notion of ‘others within:’” translating a classical canon, moreover, displays inherent complexities and issues, even for Anglophone speakers. Translating and interpreting drama envisages the appropriation of “other” frames through the creation of “images.” With reference to Jakobson (1971: 261), translating involves “an interpretation [...] by means of some other language.” As a result, every literary translation involves the hurdles of approaching a piece of literature in a global way, which is susceptible to the world of meanings – out of context – of its receivers. Furthermore, we do not know exactly Abuk’s proficiency in the two languages. Hence, I decided to consider Abuk’s artistic outcome as an adaptation, rather than a translation tout court since I lack information whether the JA playscript has underwent revisions and/or suggestions by third parties.

4.2. An “African Cymbeline:” the point of departure

On May 2nd and 3rd 2012, the newly formed South Sudan Theatre Organization (SSTO) performed Shakespeare’s “Cymbeline”⁴⁵ at the Globe Theatre (London), according to the original script by Joseph Abuk, adapted and translated from Early Modern English into Juba Arabic.⁴⁶

The Globe to Globe Festival (G2G) took place from April to June 2012, as a part of the World Shakespeare Festival for the London 2012 Festival, namely a set of cultural events related to the London Olympic Games.⁴⁷ The 2012 festival, directed by Tom Bird, comprised thirty-seven productions of Shakespeare’s plays in thirty-seven different languages, adapted by international companies from English into their native languages; each day a different play was scheduled for six weeks. In detail, Tom Bird asked the applicants for their “native tongue,” in order to showcase how “Shakespeare’s narratives are capable of resonating with audience across cultures and times” (Joubin 2017: 424). The festival’s purpose was to explore the universality of Shakespeare as a source of human values (Mancewicz 2018: 237), in order “to engage the different ethnic communities of London [...] tell these stories using their own performance, culture and style” (Bird 2013).⁴⁸

The festival’s directors⁴⁹ selected the applicants, whereas only the visiting companies decided which play to perform (Joubin 2014: 199). The companies were also selected to capture viewers from the major ethnic realities in the city, which represent the first or second generation of migrants. “Global Shakespeare is not defined by nation states” (Joubin 2017: 439); Tom Bird aimed at combining, in a contemporary way, unrelated languages and cultures under the dome of Shakespeare’s fame:

⁴⁵ Cymbeline,” also known as “Cymbeline, king of Britain” or “The tragedy of Cymbeline,” is a play by William Shakespeare, supposedly written between 1609 and 1610. The plot is a hybrid set of events, neither a drama or a comedy *de facto*. The play was published posthumously (1616) and then it was included in the First Folio edition (1623) (Boitani 2014). King Cymbeline, the main character, refers to the eponymous Kymbeline who ruled south-eastern Britain in the era of Julius Caesar, roughly during the first century BC. Shakespeare’s main source is Holinshed’s *First and Second Volumes of Chronichles* (1587), as well as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136) (Wayne 2017). The leading figure of the plot, king Cymbeline, was the first ruler of the Britons to refuse payment of the fees owed to the Roman empire, therefore asserting an early form of British national identity. In addition to the theme of country’s affirmation, the main motifs are: feminine innocence, of jealousy and of the calumny plot (Wayne 2017: 7). In five acts, Shakespeare narrates the story of Cymbeline’s daughter Innogen, who refused to marry Cloten, the king’s step son, favouring the low-born gentleman Posthumus Leonatus instead. The two lovers are initially separated and, after a series of events and misunderstandings, the couple reunites. Eventually, the reign of Cymbeline and the Roman Empire put an end to their hostilities.

⁴⁶ Globe to Globe 2012 official website:

<https://globetoglobe.shakespearesglobe.com/archive/2012/plays/cymbeline/english->

⁴⁷ World Shakespeare Festival official website: <https://www.worldshakespearefestival.org.uk/>.

⁴⁸ For 83% of the applicants it was their first visit to the Globe (Joubin 2014: 200).

⁴⁹ Tom Bird, Festival Director, and Dominic Dromgoole, Artistic Director (Bird 2013).

“language was not merely the vehicle for performance, in this production: it was the performance itself” (Kenny 2014). G2G Festival and its new forms of adaptation have renewed the Elizabethan theater as a universal form of culture, which goes beyond colonialism and geopolitical boundaries. The whole event “[...] ushered in a new era of British appreciation of worldwide performances of Shakespeare” (Joubin 2017: 426), void of marker of (socio-ethnic) diversity.⁵⁰

In 2012 Joseph Abuk [MA SE HA UN ALTRO VERO NOME PERCHE’ NON E’ STATO SCRITTO PRIMA??], and Derik Uya Alfred Ngbangu,⁵¹ known as Derik Uya, were the co-directors and producers of SSTO. In 2011, the application to the Globe’s offices was approved and sent by the Ministry of Culture and Education in Juba. Regarding their application to the festival call, they stated *Cymbeline* was chosen because of the similitude with their country’s history: the conflict between Britons and Romans, finally signed with a peace agreement, evokes the Sudanese civil war which led to the independence’s result in 2011 (Wilcox 2012). At the onset of independence, President Salva Kiir claimed that “you may be a Zande, Kakwa, Lotugo, Nuer, Dinka or Shilluk, but first remember yourself as a South Sudanese” (Frahm 2012: 28). Hence, the SSTO directors chose Shakespeare – a myth within Western culture – to convey the role of their “national” language, i.e. Juba Arabic. SSTO project on *Cymbeline* began in March 2012, under the auspices of the British Council.⁵² The company aimed to represent their country in a good form to an international audience and to broad the attention on South Sudan today, in preparation for the foreign press coverage. By performing and participating in each other’s culture, the SSTC is embedding a new engagement between citizens and a sort of supra-ethnic storytelling. The SSTO’s purposes were to “put on a play that would be easily understood, culturally relevant and aesthetically pleasing both in their home city of Juba and in the host city of London” (Wilcox, 2012: 2), along with the focus on Shakespeare’s plot, concerning forgiveness and reconciliation, and the use of an indigenous language. Abuk and Uya decided to adapt the play in a simplified and shorter version: they needed just 10 actors, instead of the 18 characters of the original

⁵⁰ As Litvin, Walkling and Cormak (2015) affirm, G2G also hosted other Arab company: the Ashtar Theatre, which performed Richard II in Palestinian Arabic.

⁵¹ Derik Uya Alfred, a native from Western Bahr al-Ghazal state, started as an actor in 1980, while he was studying at Khartoum University. There, he was member of the Union of South Sudanese Actors. Since his graduation in 1985, he has been supporting performing arts as a means of national building within displaced groups in Khartoum district, while he also worked as a journalist and a political activist. (Lorins 2007).

⁵² British Council was established in 1930s by the UK Government. Along with the promotion of education and English language-teaching projects, in the late 1930s the association’s engagement also embraced performing arts and cultural venues under its scope. From the 1960s, British Council has promoted a series of drama tours abroad, including Shakespeare’s performance in Africa (Ritter 2015: 31, 48).

work, while the final script was performed in less than two hours. Additionally, Abuk narrowed Act V, thus lessening the last recited part on the stage. As a result, the final production moved beyond the script and the iambic pentameter of Elizabethan English. As distinct from the Shakespearian source, on the stage, the opening (Act I, Scene 1) is introduced by the entire cast, all wearing African traditional dresses, instead of the two Gentlemen (Scene I, Act I): following a collective dance, each character moves forward, to narrate and to announce loudly his playing role (Wilcox 2012).⁵³ The design has been enriched with traditional costumes, while the performance also included traditional songs and dances as interludes. Thus, the fictitious Southern setting hosted Romans in khaki uniforms – like the British imperial police in the 1930s – while the Britons were dressed in African garments, enriched with Nilotic beads and Bari skirts (Wilcox 2012).⁵⁴ According to Kenny (2014), all the companies were asked to accomplish three consecutive tasks:

1. to translate the source text into their own language;
2. to develop a performative language for a non-native audience;
3. to reflect on the spatial language of the Globe, by delivering facial expression and physicality as a complementary visual medium.

The technical support was minimal, as well as the scenery. Furthermore, to avoid distractions from the stage, the audience was given only general surtitles during the scenes to suggest the basic action and to head the attention, without a line by line translation. On the contrary – as Joubin (2017: 424) highlights – the Bard’s performances greatly rely on language rather than sheer materiality. The companies were not aware of the heterogenous type of audience they would expect, so they had to masterly merge Shakespeare and their culture into a performative experience. Each day comprised a succession of one play per language: hence, each production occurred for two or three days (afternoon or evening recital) (Joubin 2014: 201). In accordance with these instructions, Abuk partially adheres to Shakespeare’s dramatic techniques, for instance soliloquies and asides, although his translation is not in rhyme. The two directors highlighted a physical theatre, which consists of exaggerated gestures, trying to universalize the actions in a balanced way (Wilcox 2012: 5): as a result, the strength of the actors has properly led the audience throughout the performance. At the outset of

⁵³ However, Abuk’s playscript originally opens with a prologue delivered by the character of the Doctor, who is a traditional medicine-man (Abuk 2012).

⁵⁴ “Characters should look like South Sudanese in terms of their costumes, in terms of their movements, in terms of theirs gestures and so on, that it is actually our own story, our experience” stated Uya (May 2012). Dr. Christine Matzke interviewed Abuk and Uya on May 2012 in London (Matzke 2013).

the performance, the actors greeted the public with a high-pitched yell, while at the end, they celebrated their achievement with a powerful final dance. Furthermore, the directors agreed reducing the linguistic distance by adding English exclamations and fillers, such as “My love!” and “Oh my God.” In addition, Abuk chose repetition as a key device throughout its script.

The reception, intended to be mainly English-speaking, focused on the actors’ abilities, while the viewers were gradually encouraged to understand the meaning of uncommon words through gestures. The translation from English into a native language contributed to the companies’ own improvement, thus providing a mutual benefit for actors and audiences, within a “post-national” space such as the Globe playhouse (Kenny 2014: 32). Since some playwrights needed to translate a literary piece into their own language for the first time, they extensively operated to reduce audience’s disengagement and apathy. By and large, the Festival achieved a resounding success: more than 100,000 spectators attended the festival, 80% of whom had never previously been to the Globe Theatre.⁵⁵ Since 1990s, performing a multilingual Shakespeare has advanced different international companies and groups abroad and it has been the scope of various academic projects (Joubin 2014: 190).⁵⁶

To sum up, this kind of event successfully nurtured a rich *fil rouge* between the language of the actors and the texts itself, which would prove an effective cross-cultural sharing, in spite of national or ethnic tensions.

5. Final remarks

Abuk’s translation displays the complexity of Modern English against the rather “young” lexicon of JA. The writer chose to “lessen” the original source, for the sake of the final performance: the SSTO successfully introduced an original production, which collected the praise of JA’s speakers. Abuk adaptation is experimental and it has successfully paved the way for next literary forms in JA.

The large interference from Sudanese Arabic, which it is still deemed a prestigious variety among Southerners, led to the isolating morphology of JA, as compared to its main lexifier (Sudanese Arabic). More precisely, the level of the language within the script comprises a wide “Arabicized” Juba Arabic: this issue may come from the educational background of Mr Abuk and Mr Uya, who both have been lived in Khartoum for many years. Hence, the exposure to Khartoum Arabic has affected

⁵⁵ European Shakespeare Festival Network website: <https://esfn.eu/festivals/globe-to-globe-festival>.

⁵⁶ For instance, the MIT collaborative archive “Global Shakespeare”. <https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu>.

their mother tongue, i.e. a Southern Arabic. Their variety of JA is less basilectal than the rural varieties, which show a stronger Nilotic substratum (Manfredi and Petrollino 2013).⁵⁷ At the lexical level, almost 90% of lexical entries are Sudanese Arabic (superstrate language) (Miller 2003: 33). The remaining 20% consists of loanwords from Nilotic languages, mainly from Bari (Eastern Nilotic), which represents the main substrate/adstrate language of JA (Manfredi 2017).

In recent times, English in South Sudan is the modern result of the post-colonial development policies, which were overtly intended to preserve English as the sole official language. Even if it is not a real threat, English is also perceived as the language of Evangelical foreign organizations. In the age of globalisation, the matter of the language is a lively debate in South Sudan: nowadays, educated people can speak Standard Arabic, English, French and/or Kiswahili, whereas the majority of the population is under the literacy rate. Children from different mother tongues come together at schools and they are often educated in a language which is not their mother one: hence, the difficulty on establishing a shared national identity.

Nowadays, the evolution of JA is not so defined, due to its continuum towards Sudanese Arabic. The social differences among JA speakers have “shaped” acrolectal and basilectal varieties of JA, which cause a degree of phono-morphological variation (Manfredi and Petrollino 2013). For instance, Abuk’s “variety” of JA may be defined an acrolectal type, although it shows a great influence of Bari and of its semantic substrate categories. Furthermore, borrowings from English and Bari, along with code-switching towards English, are quite common in Abuk’s adaptation, as shown in appendix through the quotation of some selected lines from the 2012 playscript.

However, innovative features and the “social” engagement of JA as an identity marker, may advance a stronger differentiation from Sudanese Arabic in the near future. As a written language, Juba Arabic is still “in the making”: recently, Southerners media have public information and health awareness campaign in non-official languages, while website and social media are both written in English/Sudanese Arabic/Juba Arabic. Hence, a common standard for writing is welcome too. To sum up, the glowing praise of SSTOS’s *Cymbeline* highlighted the public attention on playscripts and songs in JA, whose first attempts date back to Kwoto Theatre Group’s performances in the 1980s. After the 2012 performance, importance grew in the country: they began an open civic initiative, by were running drama competitions among schools, to underline the importance of theatre as a civic engagement. Hence, SSTO’s project may promote the significance of Juba Arabic as a national lingua franca and it may foster its teaching at the primary level.

⁵⁷ As already stated, acrolectal varieties display a closer relationship with Khartoum Arabic (Manfredi and Petrollino 2013).

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Appendix

The following excerpt is drawn from the video output of the performance (the original playscript of Abuk 2012 is yet unpublished). The live performance in London did not truly follow the original playscript: hence, this analysis refers both to the recorded performance and to Abuk's playscript, since the video has no subtitles in JA.

The interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses aims at analysing the individual morphemes, in order to provide results on linguistic topics, such the level of grammaticalization and the influence of adstrates and/or substrates in Juba Arabic. The interlinear glosses the texts reflect the Leipzig glossing rules and Manfredi (2017a) glosses.

It must be stressed that prolonged exposure to Sudanese Arabic and/or Modern Standard Arabic has yielded mesolectal and acrolectal varieties in Juba Arabic whose use remains largely investigated.

In what follows, the structure of each texts comprises:

1. the text in the translated source (i.e., Abuk 2012).
2. the glosses of the text in 1. Accents have been outlined on all the disyllabic and trisyllabic occurrences according to Manfredi's reference grammar.⁵⁸
3. Shakespeare's original text (Boitani 2014).

Differences between Abuk's script and the video performance are marked by underlining. Slashes enclose codeswitched material; square brackets enclose missing material in Abuk's script played in the video performance, and round brackets scenic indications on the actors' movements.

⁵⁸ The positioning of stress accent is etymologically determined by the vowel length: anterior Arabic long vowel usually bear stress in JA.

“Nay, stay a little: were you but riding forth to air yourself, such parting were too petty. Look here, love; this diamond was my mother’s; take it, heart, but keep it till you woo another wife, when Innogen is dead.” (Giving the ring) (Boitani 2014:32).

Act II, scene I: Britain, in front of Cymbeline’s fortress

Iachimo tells Imogen that Posthumus has been unfaithful while in Italy and suggests she gets revenge by doing the same with him.

Fasil II, mash-had I: Britania. Giddam kasir Cymbeline

Doctor: *Ita asuma ali gali fi ajnab iwasulu wa fi kasir hassa.*

[seydí] *íta Ásuma al=i gáli fi ajnábi wásulu wa*

Sir 2SG Hear over-1SG dear EXS foreigner arrive and

fi kasír hássa

EXS castle now

“Sir, listen to me, dear: a foreigner has arrived and he is in the fortress now” (Boitani 2014: 82).

Act III, scene I

Fasil III, mash-had I

Melika:

almélik Ali65 íta zékir ajdád táki

the_king REL 2SG remember ancestors POSS.2SG

Al kan mulúk kúbra Wa íta fákir tabíya ta jezíra táki

REL ANT kings.PL eldest And 2SG think role GEN island POSS.2SG

Al shúga de wágif fi nus bahár ze jinéna ta ilah

⁶⁵ Al is an invariable relative pronoun and is derived from the Arabic definite article. JA and also its main substrate language, Bari, lacks a definite article (Manfredi 2017). The Sudanese Arabic article is replaced by a single proximal demonstrative *de*.

REL brave PROX.SG stand EXS half river like garden GEN God

Min háwa jibál ali tála tómon gówi

From wind mountain.PL REL raise POSS.3SG strong

“Remember, sir, my liege,

The kings your ancestors, together with the natural bravery of your isle, which stands as Neeptune’s park, ribb’d and pal’d in [...].” (Boitani 2014: 118).

Abbreviations

-	clitic	POSS	possessive
=	affix	PROG	progressive
ANT	anterior	PROH	prohibitive
ANT	anterior	PROX	proximal
EXS	existential copula	REL	relative pronoun
GEN	genitive	SG	singular
IRR	irrealis	VOC	vocative particle
PL	plural		

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