Michael Walling

Border Crossings: The First Twenty-Five Years

Michael Walling here looks back over the first twenty-five years of Border Crossings, the company he founded in 1995. The article explores the company's intercultural remit, placing it within the wider context of multicultural and intercultural performance and policy, and the relationship between intercultural theory and practice. Structural questions around finance and organization are juxtaposed with an assessment of the dynamics of cross-cultural devising and the ethics of these collaborations. This article also explores Border Crossings' text-based work, its curation of the ORIGINS Festival of First Nations and related ceremonies, and the company's direct engagement with policy in the European Union. It is accompanied by a comprehensive chronology of the company's productions. Michael Walling is Artistic Director of Border Crossings and Visiting Professor at Rose Bruford College. He has directed numerous productions across four continents, including opera as well as theatre.

Key terms: intercultural, Indigenous, slavery indenture, ceremony devising, food, festival, refugees, European Union, Platform for Intercultural Europe, India, China, Ghana, Mauritius, Ireland.

BORDER CROSSINGS are dangerous, disturbing, risky places. They are places where you are obliged to declare an institutional idea of your identity: where you were born, what your face looks like, where else on the planet you may have picked up bureaucratic stamps and visas. You are never asked what truly makes you who you are: never your creativity, your generosity, your love. Border crossings are places where you can be challenged, detained, and murdered because of that perceived identity, because of your supposed right (or not) to be there. When appearance, identity, and representation collide, sparks fly.

Yet, in the absurd lexicon of twenty-first-century officialdom, borders have come to be associated with 'security', and are held sacrosanct precisely because they divide humanity and space. Literally and symbolically, they come to define the limits of our lives so that we stand curtailed and apart. The border crosser, the migrant, the refugee, the undocumented, the stateless, the colonized, the Indigenous, the fluid, the undefined, the shape-changer, the trickster, the performer – these are the figures who, through their courageous actions, suggest the necessity for, and the means towards, the dissolution of the border. Beyond borders, we discover what Tim Prentki has called 'the ultimate expression of border-crossing, empathy'.[1] Beyond borders, we find a precious space that is not owned or walled, but shared and open.

The necessity of theatre in the twenty-first century is most clearly defined by its creation, through common, purposeful action, of a space that is profoundly shared. That is true of the people involved in making the work, and it is true of the audience too. At the heart of Border Crossings is this need to emphasize, through common, shared endeavours, that we are not alone, but stand in solidarity with the others who share our fragile planet. The theatre that we make or present is both an artistic response to, and an active part of, the wider human project of re-sharing the public space that has been so absurdly divided and privatized. It is this that aligns our most potent skills as theatre-makers with global movements to end 'othering' and to bring about a shared and communal approach to ecological questions. We need to engender a culture that allows us to share the space, the air, the water, the land and food.

The sharing of food has become an important part of our recent work. Near the beginning of *The Great Experiment* (2020), there was a scene about the nineteenth-century Indian famines, which formed the shocking background to the indentured labour migrations after the abolition of slavery. Scrabbling for grains of rice, a mother snatched a morsel of food from the mouth of her own child, in an horrific inversion of the cultural communion found at the shared table. When we ran a community engagement day for the same project at the National Maritime Museum, it centred on a shared Mauritian meal. *This Flesh is Mine* (2014) and its companion piece *When Nobody Returns* (2016) were preceded by the serving of Palestinian food – in the first case as a banquet that was disrupted by the arrival of Andrew French's furious Achilles.[2] By bringing the audience together through the sharing of food, and leading them into a promenade space that they would share with the actors, we found a way into the performance that emphasized engagement and participation. It is this social, cultural and political aspect of food that has made it so crucial to the company. Indeed, it actually defines what a 'company' really is: the word comes from the late Latin *companio*, meaning 'someone with whom you take bread': *com-panis*.

We came to learn about the value of food for our cultural events by producing the biennial ORIGINS Festival. Since 2009, ORIGINS has offered a gathering space for Indigenous artists and activists in London, the city from which many of their lands were once colonized, and a forum to highlight their distinct and vital viewpoints on the key issues facing the planet. It is very important that, when we welcome Indigenous people as guests to our city, we do so in a way that acknowledges the levels of respect and decorum (not to mention plain practicality) that they would themselves show to honoured travellers arriving on their lands. After long journeys, people are hungry, and that is why we welcome them with food. This needs to be food that reflects Indigenous ideas around respect for the Earth, for biodiversity and for the non-human beings with whom we share the ecosystem. We have found ourselves turning to Indigenous chefs like the late Joylene Fenikowski (Māori) or Lois Ellen Frank (Native American, Kiowa) for an understanding of food as integral to culture, health, ecology, and sustainability.

In 2015, the ORIGINS Lecture was given by the Ojibwe activist Winona LaDuke, founder of the White Earth Land Recovery Project and twice Green candidate for the Vice-Presidency of the United States, running alongside the visionary Ralph Nader.[3] LaDuke demonstrates very powerfully the links between food sovereignty, biodiversity, and cultural diversity. 'There is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity,' she explains. 'Wherever Indigenous people still remain, there is also a corresponding enclave of biodiversity.'[4] This simple but powerful idea, which has led to her campaigns for food sovereignty over wild rice and her involvement with the water rights protests at Standing Rock, presents a sharp contrast to the way in which most of what we eat is now produced. As Vandana Shiva has shown:

> Humanity has eaten more than 80,000 plant species through its evolution. More than 3,000 have been used consistently. However, we now rely on just eight crops to provide 75 per cent of the world's food. With genetic engineering, production has narrowed to three crops: corn [maize], soya, canola. Monocultures are destroying biodiversity, our health and the quality and diversity of food.[5]

There is nothing more dangerous or more stultifying than a monoculture. Just as it has almost destroyed ecological complexity and healthy food diversity in favour of short-term profit, so the neo-colonial project of late capitalist globalization tends towards the standardization and blanding-out of cultural expression, with the result that human thought and experience become as limited as diet. In a globalized theatre, mega-musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Lion King*, and *Mamma Mia!* are marketed as franchises, with the productions being reproduced in standardized form in major cities all over the planet.[6] Border Crossings' approach to theatre is like our approach to food: it stands in resistance to the encroaching monoculture, advocating for sovereign local produce, language,

and cultural practice as the means to generate a genuine, dynamic diversity within a rhizomatic international network.

Theatre that is made in this way is, of course 'intercultural', and that much-contested term features prominently on our website and in the various descriptions we offer of our work:

> Border Crossings creates new intercultural, multimedia theatre in response to the contemporary globalized world.[7]

> Border Crossings has created intercultural theatre to defend peace, justice, freedom of expression, gender equality and human rights since 1995. . . . We create new, multi-lingual, multi-disciplinary performances in collaboration with artists from different countries and different cultures. Our productions open up spaces for the expression of different viewpoints, ideas, and voices. They draw off a broad range of cultural traditions and innovations, shedding new light on the complex relationships generated by the globalized world.[8]

The company was set up in 1995, at a time when the 'intercultural' tended to connote large-scale, festival-circuit productions in which European companies and directors incorporated elements from what was termed 'the developing world'. Peter Brook's (in-) famous *The Mahabharata* of 1985 was probably the most prominent example, but the work of Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba, Robert Lepage, and (perhaps) Ariane Mnouchkine and Yukio Ninagawa could all be considered under this umbrella. Much of the cultural eclecticism that was fashionable at that time tended to combine elements of the 'exotic' with western dramaturgical structures with the aim of achieving something 'universal', expressing 'the human condition'. This approach to the intercultural, which was almost always facilitated by Euro-American structures and finances, was rightly criticized for its political naivety, its continued assumption (despite strenuous denials) of a western 'norm' from which 'Other' forms were 'divergent', and its tendency to appropriate elements of non-western cultures to suit its own exoticizing ends.

The route taken by Border Crossings was distinct from this, right from the beginning. I was fortunate that my only formal education in theatre was a short course at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1986: an experience that dispelled any naive and youthful notions of British theatrical superiority, and exposed me to a theatrical culture rooted in the specifics of colonial and postcolonial politics, at the same time as beginning to engage with wider European models of politically conscious performance. I was even more fortunate that the productions which shaped my directorial 'voice' and 'vision', in the years leading up to and shortly after founding Border Crossings, did not take place within the established structures of British and American theatre, but were either in non-western contexts or with companies occupying a critical periphery to the western mainstream.

Romeo and Juliet for Tygres Heart in Portland Oregon (1993) engaged with racial tensions on the American West Coast after the police assault on Rodney King, in a production that led to death threats from the radical right against SiSi Johnson (the Black performer who played Juliet) and myself. In the audience for that production was the Indian playwright and director Mahesh Dattani, who was struck by resonances with communal tensions in his own country, and invited me to direct *The Tempest* in Bangalore (1995). Two productions in Mauritius followed shortly afterwards: *Paul and Virginie* (1996) and *Macbeth* (1997). I was very fortunate that all of these productions demanded that I stay overseas for a prolonged period, submerging myself in the culture and enjoying profound dialogic interactions. I was also incredibly fortunate to experience extraordinary levels of hospitality, and this has been crucial in developing Border Crossings' approach to intercultural practice. Jacques Derrida famously said that hospitality is the basis of ethics, and I would add that it is also the basis of interculturalism.[9]

All but one of these productions made use of Shakespeare texts, although Border Crossings has itself only once mounted a Shakespeare production, and that was our 1997 *Twelfth Night*: a commission from the British Council in Mauritius and Zimbabwe, building on the positive response to the *Macbeth*, which I'd directed with local performers. I was, of

course, being asked to direct Shakespeare because I was a white Englishman, but it was precisely this 'status' that allowed me to subvert prevailing ideas about the canon, and about perceived linguistic, cultural, and political hierarchies. If I included passages in Kannada or Creole in a Shakespeare production, people would accept the perceived iconoclasm in a way denied to local artists. This extraordinary series of opportunities to work outside the recognized 'hubs' of cosmopolitan culture and to engage with other people's understandings of texts I had previously regarded with a degree of ownership were to prove crucial in enabling, indeed galvanizing, Border Crossings to pursue a very different idea of the intercultural.

Our earliest productions continued and deepened the creative relationships I had developed with Indian artists such as Mahesh Dattani, Angali Jay, and Prakash Belawadi; Mauritian artists such as Dev Virahsawmy and Nisha Dassyne (who also married me along the way); and Zimbabwean artists such as Lifati Harimedi. This meant that it was, from the beginning, an 'interculturalism from below', rooted in ongoing dialogues between artists from different backgrounds, and informed by potent overlaps between friendship and disagreement. Unlike the Eurocentric interculturalism that seemed to regard non-western cultures as unchanging, fixed in a romanticized if ahistorical exotic past, our approach has always given greater regard to the material and to the historical specificity of postcolonial politics, and so to theatre's role as a site of performative becoming.

This model for intercultural theatre-making demands equal status for all the collaborators as a prerequisite for any productive activity. Our Statement of Values begins with 'Equality', and lays down this guidance:

> Border Crossings fosters and promotes intercultural dialogue and international exchange between artists on an equal basis. We recognize and value the contributions made by all the artists and staff involved in our work, and seek to reward those contributions fairly.[10]

This is far more challenging than it may at first sound. What does it mean to 'reward those contributions fairly'? Does it mean 'to pay everyone the same'? That is basically what we have done throughout our twenty-five-year history. However, a few pounds above ITC Equity minimum rates means one thing in the UK, and quite another in Ghana or India. There have been instances of artists from poorer countries being astonished at the incredibly large amounts of money they were being paid. In at least one case, the flip side of this was a desire not to spend any of it in Britain because they would have so much less money when returning home, leading to a failure to eat and real health issues.

I have sometimes wondered if artists from poorer countries are so apparently keen to work with us because of the pay rates rather than for more idealistic and artistic motives. Certainly, it tends to take longer for UK-based performers to make up their minds to accept work with us: the same level of pay that places their African or Asian counterparts at the wealthy end of their profession is minimal here. I believe that this approach offers a necessary corrective to the pre-existing, historically rooted inequality, and to the global norm of 'responding to local conditions' in setting rates of pay for the citizens of different countries doing the same work.[11] It also offsets the psychological effects that these inequalities can have: artists from poorer countries come to a Border Crossings project with a sense that they are valued as highly as their western counterparts.

There have, however, been instances where we have not even known what some of the actors involved in a project are being paid. China, for example, is a society that sets much more store by the collective than the individual, and so, to collaborate with Chinese artists, we needed to work at a company level with Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre (SDAC) and Shanghai Yue Opera Company (SYOC), who usually preferred to pay their own performers directly.[12] This had many advantages, not least in their use of Chinese funds to support their side of the partnerships; but it also meant that equality in the rehearsal room was not a given resulting from financial parity, but was something towards which we had consciously to strive. In the case of China, the complex and strained history of relations between our

countries added significantly to the challenge. China is a very proud nation with a very long memory, and the humiliation by Britain during the Opium Wars has not been forgotten (one reason for the current tensions over Hong Kong). As a result, there is a surprising element of the postcolonial in Sino-British relationships – manifest in a powerful assertion of status on the part of the Chinese, sitting uneasily alongside their thirst for knowledge about British theatre practice.

The challenges of this were compounded by the role of international funders in facilitating our collaboration. The British Council financed a series of research visits under their 'Connections Through Culture' programme, and *Re-Orientations* (which we performed in China during the 2010 Shanghai Expo) was funded by a large Third Countries grant under the Culture Programme of the European Union. Our collaborators were very aware that these cultural initiatives were part of a wider political picture, as western economies, shocked by China's mushrooming productivity, jostled to gain favour with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). I remember Benny Chia, the director of the Hong Kong Fringe Club, saying at a British Council forum in the territory in 2007 that 'collaboration' has two meanings: 'to work together', certainly, but also 'to assist the enemy'.

Tensions of this kind are actually incredibly useful, especially in devised work, provided that they are acknowledged openly and allowed to become part of the emerging dynamic. That is also particularly challenging in China, where the cultural imperative not to 'lose face' (**面子** or *miànzi*) overrides all other considerations. The route towards a genuinely equal, shared space is therefore the creation of a permission to disagree on a profound level. We cannot achieve an intercultural theatre that represents a moral force if we limit ourselves to a banal exchange of 'who we are' and 'where we come from'. Rather, we need to foreground and exchange our differences, with all the potential for misunderstood thoughts and wounded feelings that this implies. As I wrote in our twenty-first birthday publication in 2015:

> Border Crossings has from its inception been about creating an equal space for creative dialogues and dynamic interactions. It accepts and embraces the human realities of multiple truths, the catalytic energy of difference, the theatrical intensity of ferocious and tender contradiction.[13]

The necessity of equality has another pitfall, which is that equality is itself a western value, laden with cultural assumptions. Many non-western societies are far more hierarchical, and this is reflected in their theatre practice. During rehearsals for *Dis-Orientations*, Zhang Ruihong took a lead in choreographing Yueju-based sequences and thought nothing of slapping other performers into the correct stance. Working on *Bullie's House* with Indigenous Australian performers, the authority of the Elder, Stephen 'Baamba' Albert, was immediately apparent, particularly in relation to anything culturally specific. In one scene, Heath Bergersen, playing Bullie, had created a ceremonial dance sequence (Figure 1). Seeing the dance in rehearsal, Baamba said that he didn't like it, and proceeded to demonstrate a simpler, less flamboyant choreography. From then on, that was what Heath unquestioningly performed.

Both of these instances are quite clear-cut because they are concerned with the authenticity of traditional performance forms included in the evolving production; but they also suggest deeper cultural understandings of creativity, agency, and artistry that are not egalitarian and which do not embrace difference except as something marked by form. Asian performers in particular have a culture of deference towards the director. During the various devising processes of *The Orientations Trilogy*, I was frequently asked 'What do you want?' and I know that at least one Chinese performer became incredibly frustrated at my failure to give clear and precise directions.

I am very aware that the artists involved in these processes who moved forward with the productions, and ended up as deviser-performers, were the ones who embraced most fully our egalitarian approach to devising, taking responsibility for their own, individual creative decisions. Perhaps this made them the most adaptable to western values,

Figure 1. Stephen 'Baamba' Albert as Dallie, and Heath Bergersen as Bullie, in *Bullie's House* (2004). Photo: Dave Ennis.

with the result that the attempt to work through, and towards, equality in reality contained another form of hierarchy? Perhaps the potential for a genuine intercultural exchange was undermined by this element of assimilation into perceived equality? I'm not sure I have answers to these questions, but I do know that it is essential to keep asking them as our practice continues to evolve, and as the global context morphs and shifts around it.

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These ethical and political concerns are perhaps even clearer in relation to Border Crossings' community work, which has been led since 2012 by Lucy Dunkerley. Her projects with young refugees, with London's Chinese communities, with Muslim women, or with the community around Grenfell Tower all have overtones of the humanitarian intervention, with its inherent hierarchical structures. Lucy's approach is to be playful and open, working in a sustained way over as long a period as possible, blending into the community rather than intervening in it, so as to facilitate creativity and self-expression. This is particularly telling in her work with refugees, whose social and political status often requires them to 'perform' the story of their own exile as a route to acceptance, whether to the authorities in a formal hearing, or in many participatory arts projects (though not ours). By shifting the emphasis away from the refugee's past, and towards the refugee in their current situation – their performance of an evolving self in a new context – this ongoing work enables equality and difference to emerge as a positive dynamic within the microcosm of the workshop space, so encouraging the participants' confidence to operate in the same way in the larger socio-political space of their new home.[14]

There remains the undeniable fact that the person who is enabling this process, Lucy, is a white woman, and that the person who initiates and directs our professional projects is myself, a white man. In the face of recent causes célèbres around perceived cultural appropriation (for example Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B*, the RSC production of *The Orphan of Zhao*, Howard Barker's *In The Depths of Deep Love*, and Robert Lepage's *SLĀV* and *Kanata*),[15] it has sometimes felt quite uncomfortable for a white director to be involved with intercultural work at all. Whiteness, which has for so long been treated like an absence of race rather than a racial identity, a 'normal' blank page from which all other identities are 'divergent', is now being interpellated, challenged, called out for the privileged status it has been accorded by the violence and acquisitiveness of colonial histories. In *The Great Experiment* (2020), which dealt with the legacy of slavery and indenture through fictionalized versions of the people making the play, the character Hannah (played by Hannah Douglas) expressed something of this in a phone call to a (fictional) Chinese friend:

So there's two Mauritian actors, there's a Black guy and there's a slightly older white guy and me.

Yeah. Yeah. There are Chinese people in Mauritius. Yes.
No, no . . . No Chinese actors in the show . . .
I know. Typical.
The director?
Middle-aged white guy . . .
Went to Oxford . . .
Yeah, I know, it sounds really bad, doesn't it? I know!

The structure of *The Great Experiment*, using naturalistic scenes derived from our own direct experiences of the present to frame the performance of the colonial histories that have shaped that present, permitted us to take liberties with the representation of historical figures precisely because we had established the real tensions existing around ethnicity and culture and embodied by the actors in the present. Our honest (and unresolved) confrontation of our own racial politics facilitated the performance and embodiment of historical figures far removed from the racial (and age and gender) identities of the actors presenting them (Figure 2). A direct engagement with the issue of my own racial and cultural identity, and those of the others involved in the devising process, seemed to be the only way to make theatre about this essential subject in 2020. Our last performance was on 23 February at the Museum of London Docklands, beside the 'London, Sugar, and Slavery' gallery; on 7 June the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston was toppled in Bristol.

The received position in the academy and among arts funders seems to be that intercultural subjects should only be dealt with by non-white directors and writers, but to my mind this is at once an abrogation of responsibility and a perpetuation of division. As I said to Claire Trevien, who interviewed me about *Westway Solstice* (the production we made with the community around Grenfell Tower, directed by Anishinaabe dance artist brian solomon//ELECTRIC MOOSE):

> You know, there are some people who say that a white man shouldn't even be doing what I'm doing, that an Indigenous festival should be curated by an Indigenous person and that a play about (say) Africa should be directed by an African director. And I can understand where they are coming from – after centuries of colonialism and oppression, we really do need to hear these voices. But I don't think it's going to help anybody if those voices are kept in a separate box if we label them 'diverse' or 'multicultural', and so cut them off from any wider dialogue and engagement. We can't carry on into the third decade of the twenty-first century still saying that only Chinese people can talk about China, only Indigenous Australians can talk about Australia, and so on – because that's just perpetuating the divisions, and the problems we have are global problems, so we have to have really inclusive, global conversations through our arts and culture. But that means I just cannot be a 'director' in the old-fashioned sense of someone who has this pre-conceived vision of a show or a festival, and who makes that happen with other people being pawns in the game. I've got to spend most of the time listening to people who actually know, and seeing if I can help build some bridges.[16]

This stance has been evolving with our creative and curatorial work, and will no doubt continue to develop with the shifting context of the next twenty-five years. Some of our early plays could perhaps be criticized for following a 'heart of darkness' colonial trope, with a white, English-speaking central character journeying into a challenging foreign space in which they learn through suffering. The American PhD student Robert, seen attempting to learn Hungarian at the start of *Double Tongue* (2001–2), is one example of this, although the politics of the play come to question his 'detached observation' of the eastern European 'other', and by implication the audience's own observation too.[17] *Bullie's House* (2004), the play by Thomas Keneally that saw our first engagement with Indigenous cultures in 2004, derives from an anthropological study of Aboriginal Australians living on a mission station in the 1950s, and the play features an anthropologist and a missionary, who debate and interpret the actions of the Indigenous characters.[18]

In the first two parts of *The Orientations Trilogy*, the first half of the play is centred on white travellers: the young dancer Linda, who travels to India in search of her lost lover in *Orientations* (2003–4), and the arts manager Julian, looking for his daughter Alex, who has disappeared in Shanghai in *Dis-Orientations* (2006). Not only are both

Figure 2. Tobi King Bakare as The Earl of Derby in *The Great Experiment* (2020). Photo: John Cobb.

these characters white and British (Linda, like the deviser-performer Lydia Baksh, who first created her, has an Indian grandfather), they are also cultural workers. It isn't too difficult to see how these 'starting-point' characters represented a route into the intercultural material for the British devisers and myself.

In each case, the second half of the play switches the focus to an Asian character, whose story is told to the white figure, so framing it for the audience. Retrospectively, this structure feels problematic, as it constructs the Asian characters and their stories as 'other', and fails to recognize the interconnection of cultures and people, even within a comparatively simple narrative. In *Re-Orientations* (2010), things got a lot more complex, with multiple storylines developing from and expanding upon the first two plays in which the Chinese and Indian characters became protagonists, and spoke their own languages. This made the third play a stronger framework of intercultural encounter in which multiple audiences could see themselves reflected and challenged (Figure 3).

Co-producing Ama Ata Aidoo's 1964 play *The Dilemma of a Ghost* with the National Theatre of Ghana in 2007 was an important step for us in moving beyond the Conrad model. In this play, the character with whomthe audience identifies most clearly is Ato, the young man who has returned to Ghana after studying in an American university, and has brought his Black American wife Eulalie with him. Eulalie is certainly a westerner journeying into Africa, and her optimism at returning to 'the very source' is soon assuaged by the realities of life there.[19] However, because it is Ato, rather than Eulalie, with whom the structure of the play invites identification, the intercultural becomes specific and embodied as something personal (Figure 4).

We employed a similar approach in the devised play *Consumed* in 2013. This play has only three characters. Su Chen, a Chinese woman, speaks no English; and John

Bartholomew, an English man, speaks no Chinese. The key figure therefore becomes Tong Zheng, a Chinese man who left the country in the late 1980s and returns to do business in 2013. Zheng's bilingualism makes him the play's trickster and dangerous border crosser, as he is able to go beneath the surface of the emotions underlying each of the other characters' participation in a burgeoning affair, and the computer codes that hold their business world together (Figure 5). That John turns out to be the greater deceiver is a further complication in the construction of the play's elusive interconnectivity.

In our most recent play, *The Great Experiment*, the issues around identity, identification, cultural and historical inheritance became manifest in the devising process from an early stage, and so fed into the performance itself. The play was based on the history of indentured labour migrations from India to Mauritius in the aftermath of slavery, and we worked closely with historians, some of whom seemed keen to emphasize the agency, even entrepreneurship, of indentured migrants.[20] While I understood this position within historical debate, I found myself concerned that it could sanitize the politics of the piece. Faced with concerns of this kind, I have two oracles that I like to consult. One of them is our patron, Peter Sellars; the other is the great Indian scholar of intercultural theatre, Rustom Bharucha. Responding to my thoughts on *The Great Experiment*, Rustom wrote:

> I share your discomfort that in the attempt to make the history of slavery academically respectable and something worth acknowledging as part of one's 'heritage' (whose heritage?) that the bottom line would seem to be that 'slavery was something that some people needed to pass through . . . and, at the end of the day, it was not such an ugly phenomenon'.
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> One reason why some academics never seem to fully confront the pain and shame of particular events and realities is that they don't want to own up to the current responsibilities of redressing the past. I am thinking in particular of practices relating to reparations and formal apologies for atrocities in the past – these are often seen as messy and

Figure 3. *Re-Orientations* (2010). The Company. Photo: Patrick Baldwin.

Figure 4. *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (2007). Shonel Jackson as Eulalie and Seun Sote as Ato. Photo: Neil Libbert.

redundant interventions. Activists would think otherwise.

Your production is bound to open up a can of worms, but good luck to you as you persist in asking the difficult questions. Your production will acquire more nuance and power if you make the dramaturgy as reflexive and disturbing as possible.

I guess that, in essence, what I was trying to say is that we need to confront the phenomenon of slavery in our individual life-histories across the spectrum of race and class.

I hope that this helps.[21]

It certainly did help – particularly the idea that the dramaturgy had to be 'reflexive and disturbing'. By understanding the history in relation to ourselves, we could make a play that really confronted the violent past that formed our intercultural present. Our subject matter had very clear and immediate relevance for the two Mauritian deviser-performers, Nisha Dassyne and David Furlong, and the Mauritian designer, Shiraz Bayjoo, whose own encounters with family and national histories became key elements in the piece. For the white members of the team (Tony Guilfoyle and Rosanna Lowe, later Hannah Douglas) and for the Black African member (Ery Nzaramba, later Tobi King Bakare), things were a lot less direct. Both Ery and Tobi were very resistant to performing a slave, looking instead for a less schematic and radicalized approach. Similarly, whenever we tried to make material involving the white actors playing settler-colonists, everything fell straight into cliché. As our discussions went on, it became ever more apparent that the real drama was in the conflicts arising between contemporary identities in an intercultural space, and the real politics were in the ongoing inequalities and injustices resulting from the history.[22]

It was this that led to the development of the play-within-a-play structure, with dramatized variations on our own debates framing and problematizing the more stylized (and cast-against-type) scenes presenting history. A key moment was the discovery, on Professor Catherine Hall's database of British slave owners, that people with my far from common surname had owned slaves in Barbados.[23] This concrete evidence that,

far from being neutral, whiteness signified a position of historical and economic responsibility was crucial to the emerging play, in which the revelation was transferred to the character called Hannah. On the other hand, Tony was at pains to point out that, as an Irishman, his place in the imperial narrative was not as colonizer but as colonized. This also went into the play, where character-Tony asserts that he doesn't have 'white privilege', only to be confronted by the fact that character-Tobi is also Irish. Tobi *is* Irish: he was born to parents of Nigerian heritage near to Dublin, and has an Irish passport. As a dramatization of intercultural tension and an engagement with the emergence of new cultural forms in contemporary cosmopolitan spaces, *The Great Experiment* is probably our most complex, satisfying and equally authored piece to date.

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Professor Graham Harvey has written perceptively about the way in which our ORIGINS Festival of First Nations also makes manifest this egalitarian, difference-driven, and dialogic approach to interculturalism, so I will quote him at length:

> The opening ceremony is conducted according to protocols that Indigenous people recognize as respectful ways to initiate events. Visiting performers and participants are greeted, speeches of welcome are offered, and references are made to location and ancestry. The festival director, Michael Walling, does this in concert with Indigenous colleagues. They always include an Indigenous Associate for the festival, someone who lives in London (or nearby) but is authorized by an Indigenous nation or community to represent them in some capacity. In 2019 the Associate was Stephanie Pratt, Cultural Ambassador of the Crow Creek Dakota Nation. Alongside her at the opening ceremony, the GAFA Arts Collective adapted the customs of the Samoan Ava ceremony to greet invited performers, artists, speakers, and other festival participants. Crucially, this involves the pouring of libations honouring the larger-than-human community and ancestors before participants drink from the bowl ceremonially offered to them. Much of this could happen on Indigenous lands. That it happens in London makes it distinctive.

Figure 5. Ning Li as Tong Zheng in *Consumed* (2013). Photo: Richard Davenport.

Colonialism in its many forms and manifestations is not ignored. ORIGINS is not about decorating the dominant culture with spectacles of diversity, and appropriation is discouraged. In his opening speech, Michael Walling uses words like *conversation*, *equity*, *justice*, *complexity*, and *provocation.* When he speaks of loss, he does not evoke an imaginary pre-contact purity and subsequent disappearance, but addresses the diminishment of all lives and cultures under the continuing impact of colonization. He speaks of London's shameful bankrolling of such colonization. Bringing Indigenous people to London is part of his ambition to 'offer a space for a true diversity of languages, experiences, ideas and actions' in order to deepen a conversation aimed at 'allowing the Earth to become a space that we can all jointly inhabit in a sustainable, just and equitable way'.[24]

Graham continues:

> Indigenous contributors to the ORIGINS programme often continue this negotiation between respecting their hosts and contesting colonization. With considerable generosity and characteristic (somewhat edgy) humour, performers respond warmly to the possibility of speaking back to 'the Empire' and of encouraging audiences to consider the potential of different ways of relating to the world. For example, in the 2019 programme book Madeline Sayet introduces her *Where We Belong* performance (at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse at Shakespeare's Globe) by saying, 'I share this story to honour [Mohegan ancestors, Mahomet Weyonomon and Samson Occom, who came to London in the 1700s], to offer voice to the many moments when we were all silenced. To remind the world that there is no such thing as the Last of the Mohegans. That not only are we here, but we may be in places you least expect.'[25]
>
> Crucially, her performance arose from the experience of abandoning UK-based doctoral research about Shakespeare, going home, and finding that she missed England. Wondering if this made her a 'traitor', she explored ancestral and present-day journeys and relations, exploring 'questions that connect us in a world that seems set on building borders to divide us from one another'. In ways like these, Sayet and other Indigenous participants in ORIGINS offer careful respect to London hosts as well as forcefully sharing their discomfort with past and present colonialisms that diminish efforts towards increasing democracy.[26]

As a scholar of Religious Studies, Graham was usefully placed to read the Opening Ceremony of ORIGINS (Figure 6), but it could just as productively be discussed as a theatrical event in itself. Theatre, after all, has its origins in religious ritual and has always been a social ritual, so it isn't surprising to find overlaps between the two, particularly when the context is one in which two or more distinct cultures meet. Through the parallel (and converging) journeys of curating the festival and directing intercultural performances, I have found myself thinking of performance-making more and more in terms of ceremony and its social, cultural, and spiritual role. Part of me would like to stop describing the pieces we make as 'productions' altogether – it is such a capitalist concept, as if a performance were something that came out of a factory, branded, packaged, and mass-produced. To think of the performances in terms of ceremony is much closer to what they actually are and what they actually do, because ceremony is a profound process of generating trust, which in turn leads to a deeper understanding of sharing space. Ceremony intervenes in the quotidian, attempting to shift future realities through an awareness of shared experience. It recognizes the presence of realities beyond the immediate and material: it invokes the dead.

For most of history, in most cultures, theatre was not for the living at all, but for the ancestors. Performance was a shamanic invocation of history, a recognition that those who went before are still among us, and that they have shaped who we are. A communal engagement with history permits a fuller sense of the self and the other as mutually dependent inheritors. It is from ceremony, an opening and cleansing of shared space, that we can truly begin a free, equal, and honest dialogue, and maybe work towards the elusive goals of healing and reconciliation.[27]

During the 2017 ORIGINS Festival, we held a ceremony at Syon House in memory of Pocahontas, who had stayed there on her visit to London 400 years before. The ceremony was created by three Native American women, all of whom had travelled to Britain, and saw her history as in some way a reflection of themselves. This ceremony (or performance) was itself profoundly intercultural, as the three women came from widely different cultural backgrounds (Lakota, Kwakwa̱ka'wakw, and Wampanoag), and their collaboration was described by one of them, Sierra Tasi Baker, as 'unprecedented'.[28] That it took place on lands

Figure 6. Samoan Ava Ceremony at *The Origin of ORIGINS* (2017). Photo: John Cobb.

far from their own, in the former imperial space, made it all the more complex and all the more potent.

In the aftermath of that profoundly healing event, we were able to generate one of my favourite participatory projects, *Pocahontas and After*, in which local schoolchildren, refugees, and Indigenous people living in London worked in response to colonial photographs of Native Americans to create their own performed photographic self-portraits (Figure 7).[29] Early photographers like Edward Curtis and Geraldine Moody posed their subjects to represent what they perceived as a 'dying race', but the participants in our project often perceived the subjects' contestation of that gaze, even within the image itself, and generated complex and politically aware images in response. The project was deeply intercultural, and risked being accused of cultural appropriation, but the level of respect and care shown by the participants towards the Native people, and their clear critical awareness of colonial framing, made it the very opposite. This was what the Hopi photographer Victor Masayesva has called 'photography as ceremony, as ritual, something that sustains, enriches, and adds to our spiritual well-being'.[30]

During ORIGINS 2019, we presented *Ino Moxo* at the Southbank – an extraordinary ceremonial performance from Peru's Grupo Integro, with the Ayahuasca shaman Rawa at its centre. The full houses were doubtless due to publicity around the hallucinogenic drug, which predictably obsessed the press;[31] but what the audience actually experienced was an intense, sustained, dark, and provocative ritual that offered a direct engagement with nature, with the Amazon, with non-human beings, and with mortality. Discussing the piece for *The Lockdown Dialogues* in 2020,[32] it seemed a prophetic, essential act of ritual cleansing, a way towards acknowledging on an emotional level the vulnerability of the human animal and of the larger ecosystem of which we are a part. At a moment when a

global pandemic was seeing so many depart without ceremony and laying waste to Indigenous communities, while the Amazon forest was itself ablaze, *Ino Moxo* fulfilled the tragic impulse towards a form of redemption through the acknowledgement of our place within a far wider formation.

Our own theatre pieces have also contained ceremony. *Bullie's House* had at its heart the ritual bringing out of the 'Ranga', the most sacred totems of a fictionalized Aboriginal community. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, there was a ceremony of the 'Sprinkling of the Stools' – a ceremony to remember the dead, taught to us by the senior actress Adeline Ama Buabeng – and an overall narrative structure, framed by poetry, that served to mythologize the contemporary action. At the centre of Brian Woolland's *This Flesh is Mine* was King Priam's plea to Achilles to allow a funeral for his son – a plea made all the more potent by the personal ceremonies that Iman Aoun as Hecuba and Razan Alazzeh as Briseis created in other, solo scenes, rooted in their Palestinian traditions. These ceremonial elements have always been the most moving moments in our performances, connecting the contemporary to the historical, the living to the dead. We have learned from these ceremonies, and in our devised pieces we have started to explore how theatre can make the connection between past and present, bringing history into the shared space of the current moment with the full force of a hungry ghost.

At the heart of *The Great Experiment*, there was another ceremony for the dead (Figure 8). The scene began with simple accounts of specific incidents from the lives of indentured labourers, deliberately performed by actors far removed in gender, age, and (usually)

Figure 7. Paired photos from *Pocahontas and After* (2018). The Misses Simeon. Photo: Byron Harmon, 1907, British Library. Rose Al Saria with her sister. Photo: John Cobb, 2018.

Figure 8. Ceremonial scene from *The Great Experiment* (2020). Photo: John Cobb.

ethnic and cultural identity from the people they presented. As the scene grew, the actors started to hold a photograph of the person whose story they were telling in front of their face so that it became a simple mask. The music underscoring the scene grew louder, and the words faded, as more and more of these masks processed towards the audience. After each mask had been presented, it was tacked to a board at the rear of the stage, where Nisha was creating a chalk drawing of the island as a focus for the growing shrine around which candles were placed. It was a simple and powerful evocation of forgotten people, marginalized from history, whose struggles had been immense, and whose legacy was embodied both onstage and in the many Mauritians in the audience.

Music is probably the most crucial element in making these explicitly ceremonial sequences within our work (I say 'explicitly' because at some level the whole performance is ceremony, and these sequences are simply the most overt). The fact that I also direct opera is probably important to this: I think opera has made me very conscious of the mythic scale, the emotional depth, and the positive energy added to a staged event by the mere act of its being set to music. The moment music enters the performance space, there is an instant economy of physical and vocal action, a sense of dialogue with something larger than the self, and (even if the music is atonal) a spiritual dimension.

Sometimes the music for our productions is specially composed. In recent years, Dave Carey has been a wonderfully responsive and open collaborator, particularly in his scores for *Consumed* and *This Flesh is Mine / When Nobody Returns.* Sometimes, as in *Re-Orientations* and *The Great Experiment*, the nature of the devising process makes it more useful to draw on a library of pre-existing music so that it can be added instantly to a scene as it is improvised. For *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, we worked with the Ghanaian seprewa player Osei Korankye, who improvised live in the rehearsal room, and was able to give his

Akan harp-lute the cosmic scale of a Wagnerian orchestra. Alongside its spirituality, music also proffers a moral and political imperative: it creates a space we cannot choose but share. United in an awareness that the same sound is encompassing them all, our intercultural audiences find themselves embodying democracy.

*

It is no accident that theatre and democracy were invented by the same society: they have a great deal in common. They are both spaces intended for clear and focused communal thought, spaces in which disagreement and contestation are considered productive, where difference is celebrated, and where equity is a given. They are also both cultural practices that have become more and more tarnished by commercial imperatives and ossified institutionalism. It is a commonplace that theatre is political, but it is much less common for theatre to engage directly with policy. That has, however, been the case with Border Crossings.

Since 2008, a key factor in our work has been that interculturalism forms an official policy of the European Union. One significant initiative to emerge from the Year of Intercultural Dialogue was the Platform for Intercultural Europe, which linked organizations working interculturally with one another and with EU policy-makers, as one of the Commission's Structured Dialogue partners. Border Crossings became active in the Platform quite early, and in 2010 hosted and curated its Practice Exchange event at Rose Bruford College.[33] We were able to participate in the Platform's Forums, including writing reports, and to join delegations to regions including Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia as working parties on the role of the arts in peace building.

After the Platform was disbanded in 2014, many of its members remained in close contact, and participated in other EU policy consultation processes. The 2016 *Voices of Culture* consultation on the role of culture in relation to migration was particularly important as an example of engagement in policy-making: I wrote the Introduction to the report submitted to the Commission by representatives of the cultural sector,[34] and was subsequently invited to address the 2017 European Culture Forum in Milan.[35] We have also led EU-funded projects engaging with key issues around the arts, culture, and policy, which have enabled cross-sectoral and international dialogues and led to detailed policy recommendations. *The Promised Land*, which ran from 2017 to 2019, explored how theatre, academia, museums, and business were responding (and should respond) to new migrations into Europe, ranging across the (greater) continent from Turkey's borders with Syria to the UK with its 'hostile environment', and generated recommendations for policy.[36]

The EU is sometimes castigated as an undemocratic institution run by 'unelected bureaucrats', but this assumes that democracy consists solely of elections, and that all government structures are supposed to look like those of the UK or US. 'Democracy' in those countries (and most others) has been tarnished and debased by its reduction to the demands of the electoral cycle, and the huge roles played by those who finance the campaigns, engineer the algorithms, and generate the slogans. A fuller, more mature democracy consists in ongoing processes of consultation and dialogue with citizens, engaging in policy-making according to their particular areas of concern, experience, and expertise. The EU systems are very good at this aspect of democracy; the UK ones are terrible.

This is not to say that our engagement with EU policy has always been supportive of the prevailing views. The interpretation of 'interculturalism' varies immensely between different member states and cultural organizations, making a clearer definition in itself a key policy matter. The Council of Europe's 2008 White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, *Living Together as Equals in Dignity*, seemed to offer a productive framework:

> Managing Europe's increasing cultural diversity – rooted in the history of our continent and enhanced by globalization – in a democratic manner has become a priority in recent years. How shall we respond to diversity? What is our vision of the society of the future? Is it a society of segregated communities, marked at best by the co-existence of

majorities and minorities with differentiated rights and responsibilities, loosely bound together by mutual ignorance and stereotypes? Or is it a vibrant and open society without discrimination, benefiting us all, marked by the inclusion of all residents in full respect of their human rights?[37]

This appeared to represent a wholesale rejection of earlier multicultural policies, which institutionalized segregation, in favour of a more dynamic and dialogic intercultural model. In practice, however, little seemed to change beyond the further promotion of exoticized 'ethnic' performances, and some laudable efforts to diversify personnel in cultural organizations, particularly on stage. It's undoubtedly positive that the arts and culture are more representative of the societies from which they emerge. But I can't help feeling that a lot of this apparent 'diversity' is – literally – skin deep, and that people of colour are performing, both on and off stage, in exactly the same way as their white counterparts.

I recognize that second- and third-generation migrants may well feel themselves to be as fully European as white people, but that doesn't stop me questioning whether it is really 'cultural diversity' if the cultural product itself remains essentially unchanged, and therefore the cultural and social assumptions remain intact. Theatre (and other cultural work) that does not itself shift in response to changing demographics is not intercultural but assimilationist, compounding the blasé assumption that it is the duty of migrants and minorities to learn to live in 'our' society. The language of the 'inter-' surely requires two-way relationships and cross-fertilization.

The challenge I have constantly encountered in policy discussions is that migration and diversity are regarded as problems to be solved rather than as opportunities to be embraced. The sense that a different cultural perspective might influence a change in European ideas or policies for the good is very rare. This, of course, is a mindset derived from colonial ideas: the 'white man's burden' of civilizing the rest of the world is proving very difficult to shake off. We did make some progress with this in the Platform, to the point that Vladimir Šucha (Director for Culture and Education, European Commission) responded to our ideas by speaking of 'the disease of western civilization'[38] and the need to find new cultural models of equitable exchange. However, the refugee 'crisis' of 2015 shifted the predominant tone back towards rhetoric of defensiveness against the 'threat' of the 'outsider', with parties of the radical right gaining traction across the continent in response. The language in which policy discussions were couched became that of 'integration', which appeared very close to assimilation. The potential to regard new citizens as positive contributors to our cultures seemed to have been lost.

As I wrote in the *Voices of Culture* report:

> This report highlights key areas where cultural interventions lead to tangible benefits. Some of these are clear and immediate, in relation to language learning, social skills, therapeutic benefits, employability, etc. Such projects, conducted with newcomers, can lead to short-term gains in terms of inclusion in the context of migration, and are to be encouraged. However, this approach is not by itself a sufficient response to the nature of the current crisis, or a sufficient contribution to the longer-term development of an intercultural Europe. Without a wider cultural strategy to develop an open and equal dialogue between new citizens and their host cultures, the entire onus for 'integration' will be placed on the newcomers themselves. The inference could be drawn that they simply need to 'become European' – to abandon their original identities and fully adopt the modalities of host communities. We would dispute both the sociopolitical efficacy and the moral tenability of such a policy. If refugees, asylum seekers and migrants find their welcome limited to an education in the cultural norms of a pre-packaged European model, they are likely to feel that their legitimate status and human dignity are undermined; that their own values and cultural rights are devalued; and that European society, far from being open and democratic, is in fact xenophobic and insular. Such are the conditions that encourage the growth of exclusion, violence and extremism/radicalization on both sides.[39]

The *Voices of Culture* group first met in Brussels on 14–15 June 2016. By the time we met again in September, the UK had voted to leave the EU. It did so in a referendum that was an extreme example of debased democracy, playing off xenophobia, Islamophobia, and a misplaced nostalgia for Empire and a supposed former greatness. It was a deeply painful moment for everyone involved in Border

Crossings and for the wider cultural and political movements towards intercultural and creative dialogue of which we form a part, smashing with the utmost brutality any prospect of genuinely shared space.

Our response has been to recognize that Brexit, and its parallels around the world, while making our work more difficult, also make it even more necessary. We have developed further our work with refugees and asylum seekers, with a renewed emphasis on a networked, international approach. We have produced two further ORIGINS Festivals since the referendum, with additional emphasis on establishing direct dialogues between Indigenous people and British communities, particularly young people, so as to inculcate a habit of learning from people whose cultures are different from our own and who carry that difference with pride. We have increased our engagement with museums and historians so as to challenge the imperialist myths that have poisoned the public discourse, and to emphasize the need to address the historical crimes that led to current inequalities and injustices. We have created more complex and provocative performances, both professional and community, offering an alternative space of democratic tension and productive conflict. There is a renewed urgency to all our work.

We have also set up a sister organization under the Border Crossings name in the Republic of Ireland.[40] An immediate reason for this is, of course, that it allows an ongoing engagement with the EU, accessing productive partnerships and funding. But it also signifies a recognition that the old models of culture and politics are in their death throes, and that Brexit signals the final collapse of the former imperial centre, and indeed of any notion of any centre. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, we also abandoned our official company base, opting for an environmentally sustainable home-working model. The twenty-first century is Deleuzian, and its cultural systems will be ever more rhizomatic and networked. Creating theatre that is both local and international, operating from multiple bases in a way that embraces the temporary and the transient while engaging deeply with a broad range of artists and communities, seems both a strategic and artistically meaningful response to the current moment.

It is also a kind of homecoming. My own intercultural journey began in Ireland, more than thirty years ago. At that time, the colonial legacy was still dominant, with the Catholic Church dictating moral positions in the Republic, and armed conflict on the streets in the North. Today's Ireland still has its Protestant and Catholic factions, but it is essentially a secular society, and now has its own migrant communities, who are not there because of any former colonial links but because of economic opportunity or the need for asylum. Brexit threatens the fragile peace in Ulster, but also perhaps affords an opportunity for new paradigms of Irishness to emerge across the island as the North's links to Westminster become less tenable. The role of interculturalism and performance will be crucial in imagining a new polity, a new culture, a new shared space. The role of intercultural theatre, drawing on both Ireland and Britain within European and global networks, will be to offer dynamic models for collaboration and joint creation. That's why the first project of the Irish Border Crossings is a European exchange of practices around intercultural devising. Our partners are The Fence, the Teatro dell'Argine, and the Théâtre du Soleil. It is called *Cre-Actors.*

This is where the next twenty-five years begin.

Border Crossings: Chronology of the First Twenty-Five Years

1995 Border Crossings is incorporated as a Company and Registered Charity.
Judgement by Barry Collins (directed by Richard Allen Cave) performed in London and Pisa by Martin Head.
Faith Healer by Brian Friel (directed by Richard Allen Cave) performed in Brazil, Egypt, France, and Hungary.
Fool For Love by Sam Shepard performed at Old Red Lion, London.
Departures / *Arrivals* performed on tour in UK.
Michael Walling (hereafter MW) directs Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in India.

1996 *Bravely Fought the Queen* by Mahesh Dattani performed at Leicester Haymarket, Battersea Arts Centre, and Watermans Arts Centre, London.
MW directs *Paul and Virginie* by Eric Appapoulay and Christopher Hawes in Mauritius.

1997 MW directs Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in Mauritius.
Twelfth Night by Shakespeare performed in London, Leicester, Hereford, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

1998 Revival of *Twelfth Night* (revival director Olusola Oyeleye) performed in Zimbabwe.

1999 Development workshops for *Mappa Mundi.*
The Suppliants After Aeschylus After Kosovo by Tamantha Hammerschlaag (directed by Elli Papakonstantinou) performed at the Edinburgh Fringe.
Toufann by Dev Virahsawmy performed at the Africa Centre, London.
Short film *Flying Home* created with Sudeep Sen and David Wheeler.

2000 *Mappa Mundi* opens as a co-production with Hereford Courtyard and tours England.

2001 *Double Tongue* by Brian Woolland performed at Old Red Lion, London.
Revival of *Mappa Mundi* tours England and Tamaulipas International Festival, Mexico.
MW begins to direct *The Ring* for English National Opera.
Border Crossings' translation of *Toufann* published in *African Theatre 2.*

2002 Revival of *Double Tongue* tours Hungary and England.

2003 MW's first research trip to Australia.
Orientations development workshops in Bangalore, India, and community workshops in London.
Orientations performed at Watermans Arts Centre.
Border Crossings Publications established with publications of play texts.
MW completes *The Ring* for English National Opera.

2004 *Bullie's House* by Thomas Keneally performed at Riverside Studios, London, Sheffield Crucible, and on tour.
Revival of *Orientations* performed on tour and at Oval House, London.
MW directs *The Handmaid's Tale* for Canadian Opera Company in Toronto (original director Phyllida Lloyd).

2005 Workshops with Muslim community in Nottingham.
Uniforms and Hoodies, Education Project for Patti Smith's Meltdown at Southbank.
Border Crossings Laboratory established, first workshop led by Farid Paya. (Laboratory workshops have been held regularly ever since in the UK and overseas.)
MW's first research visit to China.

2006 First version of *Dis-Orientations* developed and shown with final year students at Central School of Speech and Drama with Associate Ma Haili.
MW makes research visit to Ghana.
Peter Sellars becomes Patron of Border Crossings.
Dis-Orientations re-developed for co-production with Shanghai Yue Opera Company and performed at Riverside Studios, London: the first Border Crossings production to involve Tony Guilfoyle.

2007 *The Dilemma of a Ghost* by Ama Ata Aidoo tours UK as a co-production with the National Theatre of Ghana.
Dzifa Glikpoe (Artistic Director, National Theatre of Ghana) is hosted by Border Crossings on an Arts Council International Fellowship.
Border Crossings publishes *Theatre and Slavery.*
MW directs *Nixon in China* for Greek National Opera in Athens (original director Peter Sellars).
MW makes two more visits to China, and visits Broome and the Dreaming Festival in Australia
ORIGINS Festival launched through a week-long consultation with Indigenous artists and launch event at Australia House, London.

2008 MW directs Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, USA, music by Kelvin Mockingbird.
MW makes research visit to Canada.

2009 First ORIGINS Festival at venues across London includes Native Earth's *Almighty Voice and His Wife*, Taki Rua's *Strange Resting Places*, Native Voices' *Salvage*, Yirra Yaakin's *Windmill Baby*, lecture by Alanis Obomsawin, and workshop by Ondinnok.
Development workshops for *Re-Orientations* in London, with Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre.

2010 *Re-Orientations* performed at Soho Theatre, London, and Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre as part of Expo 2010; on tour in Sweden.
Border Crossings publishes *The Orientations Trilogy – Theatre and Gender: Asia and Europe.*
MW makes research visit to Australia and New Zealand.
Border Crossings hosts Platform for Intercultural Europe Practice Exchange, *Interculturalism: Arts and Policy*, at Rose Bruford College, London.
MW made Visiting Professor at Rose Bruford College.

2011 ORIGINS 2011 features Noel Tovey's *Little Black Bastard*, Robert Greygrass's *Walking on Turtle Island*, Pacific Day on Hampstead Heath, and workshop with Marie Clements. First ORIGINS education programme with the London Maori community.
Capacity building grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation creates Associate Director and General Manager roles.
MW leads community drama workshops in Botswana

2012 Development workshops for *Consumed* held at Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre.
Dr Alastair Niven LVO OBE joins the board, becoming Chair in 2013.
MW writes report on Platform for Intercultural Europe Forum, *Participation and Citizenship.*
Division: project with young refugees in Plymouth leading to performance at Drum Theatre.
MW makes research visits to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Germany.
Lucy Dunkerley joins Border Crossings as Associate Director.

2013 *Consumed* co-produced with SDAC and Tara Arts; tours England.
Intercult: young people's project to complement *Consumed.*
ORIGINS 2013 includes Marrugeku's Gudirr Gudirr, Victoria Hunt's Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka, Big hArt's Namatjira. EcoCentrix exhibition, and lecture by Fiona Foley.
Day of the Dead participatory project accompanies ORIGINS.
MW and Brian Woolland visit Beirut for development workshops on *This Flesh is Mine* with Zoukak Theatre.
MW makes research visits to Sámi Festival Riddu Riđđu and Présence Autochtone, Montréal.
Lucy Dunkerley leads workshops with Chinese students in Shanghai and Ningbo.
Border Crossings sets up London 21 Consortium for Arts Council Catalyst funding with Tamasha, Tiata Fahodzi, Company of Angels, and Ice&Fire.

2014 *This Flesh is Mine* by Brian Woolland co-produced with Ashtar Theatre, Palestine, performed in Ramallah and London.
Dreams and Shadows, participatory project with Muslim women.
MW makes research visits to Australia and Canada.

2015 ORIGINS 2015 includes Grupo Sotz'il's *Oxlajuj B'aqtun*, the Voladores da Papantla, Ilbijerri Theatre's *Beautiful One Day*, lecture by Winona LaDuke, and Border Crossings' first collaboration with the British Museum, *Indigenous Australia.*
Hidden Histories: school-themed week and oral history projects to accompany ORIGINS.
V&A holds Study Session on Border Crossings' work in Palestine.

2016 *Hidden Histories*, documentary film narrated by Mark Rylance.
When Nobody Returns by Brian Woolland, co-produced with Ashtar Theatre and presented in repertory with revival of *This Flesh is Mine.*
MW contributes to EU *Voices of Culture* consultation on *The Role of Culture in the Refugee Crisis.*
The Red Balloon, participatory project for diverse and disabled young people at Chickenshed Theatre, London.

Border Crossings commemorates twenty-first anniversary with publication of *21 Faces of Border Crossings.*
Kristine Landon-Smith joins the board.
MW makes research visit to Canada.

2017 ORIGINS 2017 includes Tanya Tagaq's *Nanook of the North*, Vou's *Are We Stronger Than Winston?*, Cliff Cardinal's *Huff*, Grin & Tonic's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, lecture by Marcia Langton, and a ceremony to remember Pocahontas at Syon House.
The Great Experiment devising workshops.
MW platform speaker at the European Culture Forum in Milan.

2018 *Pocahontas and After*, participatory photography project in response to ORIGINS. Exhibition at Syon House wins British Library Award.
European collaboration projects led by Border Crossings: *The Promised Land* and *More Than Words.*
ORIGINS *Offshoots* events at National Maritime Museum, London.
MW makes research visits to Australia and Ireland.

2019 ORIGINS 2019 includes Grupo Integro's *Ino Moxo*, Madeline Sayet's *Where We Belong*, AVA Dance Company's *No Woman's Land*, workshop with Maree Clarke, and brian solomon//ELECTRIC MOOSE's participatory dance project *Westway Solstice.*
Under The Whaleback by Richard Bean, directed by Lucy Dunkerley and co-produced with Et Nordfriisk Teooter (The North Frisian Theatre) in Husum, Germany.
The Promised Land e-book published.
Kristine Landon-Smith leaves the board.
Border Crossings established as a company in the Republic of Ireland.

2020 *The Great Experiment* performed in venues across London.
The Great Experiment community workshops and collection day.
More Than Words film released.
Border Crossings releases production videos online during Covid-19 lockdown, accompanied by *The Lockdown Dialogues.*
Artaud's *Theatre and the Plague* released as a podcast, read by Alaknanda Samarth.
Magnetic North at British Museum.
First workshops with Border Crossers, a participatory group for young refugees and their peers.
Jatinder Verma MBE joins the board.
Border Crossings registered as a charity in the Republic of Ireland.
Border Crossings (Ireland) awarded EU funding for *Cre-Actors*, a practice exchange around intercultural devising with The Fence, Teatro dell'Argine, and the Théâtre du Soleil.

Unless otherwise stated, productions were directed by Michael Walling; participatory work after 2012 by Lucy Dunkerley. Where no author is named, the production is devised.

Notes and References

1. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, *The Applied Theatre Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 251.

2. I wrote detailed articles about these two pieces written by Brian Woolland and co-produced with ASHTAR Theatre, Palestine, respectively, in NTQ 123 ('Achilles Comes to Palestine: Border Crossings' *This Flesh is Mine*', August 2015 p. 252–62) and NTQ 131 ('Odysseus under Occupation: Border Crossings' *When Nobody Returns*', August 2017, p. 227–39). For this reason, I shan't write much about them in this piece, but they are absolutely central to the Border Crossings story.

3. For a podcast of the lecture, see <https://anchor.fm/border-crossings/episodes/Winona-LaDuke---The-ORIGINS-Lecture-2015-ek23mv>.

4. Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press 1999), p. 1.

5. Vandana Shiva, 'Moving Beyond Monoculture', in *New Crowned Hope*, ed. Peter Sellars (Vienna: Folio, 2006), p. 324.

6. See Dan Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 39–46. It is telling that Rebellato uses the metaphor of fast food when he calls this 'Mac Theatre'.

7. See <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk>.

8. See <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work>.

9. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 19.

10. See <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us>.

11. In the case of some EU-funded projects (for example, under the Erasmus Plus programme), this inequality is embedded in the funding structure itself and so becomes very difficult to avoid.

12. SDAC was our co-producer on *Re-Orientations* (2010) and *Consumed* (2013); SYOC co-produced *Dis-Orientations* (2006).

13. *21 Faces of Border Crossings* (2015); available at <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/sites/default/files/21%20Faces%20for%20website.pdf>.

14. For a fuller discussion of Border Crossings' work with refugees, see *The Promised Land: Intercultural Learning With Refugees and Migrants*, ed. Efe Efeoglu and Michael Walling (Border Crossings, 2019), <https://issuu.com/border_crossings/docs/the_promised_land_e-book_issue>.

15. I have written more extensively about some of these cases on the Border Crossings blog. *Exhibit B* seemed to me a particularly fraught affair, which directly confronted issues of racism and representation, in the process being itself accused of the very malpractices it was exposing. See <http://bordercrossingsblog.blogspot.com/2014/09/exhibit-b-response-to-closure.html>, and <http://bordercrossingsblog.blogspot.com/2014/12/performed-in-paris.html>.

16. See <http://www.westwayarts.org/decolonizing-the-body-on-westway-solstice-and-the-origins-festival/>.

17. Written by Brian Woolland, a frequent collaborator with the company, *Double Tongue* toured the UK and Hungary with very different audience reactions as a direct result of identification with different characters. See <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/speaking-fair-folk-and-wickedly-behind>.

18. The play was based on real events that had happened on Elcho Island in the 1950s, described by the anthropologist Ronald Berndt. Keneally made some alterations to his 1980 text for our UK production so as to distance the piece further from its Elcho Island references. See <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/thomas-keneally>

19. Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa* (London: Longman, 1987), p. 24.

20. I should add that, once we were in the workshop, my concerns were quashed: the historians involved were all incredibly supportive, and deeply aware of the moral and political issues involved.

21. Private communication by email, 8 August 2017 (quoted with permission).

22. For a more detailed account of this devising process, see Rosanna Lowe's blog post: <http://bordercrossingsblog.blogspot.com/2017/10/the-great-experiment-guest-blog-on.html>.

23. See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>.

24. ORIGINS programme (2019), p. 2.

25. Quoting ibid., p. 6.

26. Graham Harvey, 'Indigenous Rituals Re-make the Larger than Human Community', in *Reassembling Democracy: Ritual and Cultural Resource*, ed. Graham Harvey, Michael Houseman, Sarah M. Pike, and J. Salomonsen (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 69–85.

27. These developing ideas around ceremony benefited from a discussion with Peter Sellars, Patron of Border Crossings, as part of our 2020 series of online talks, *The Lockdown Dialogues*. There is a recording of this talk at <https://vimeo.com/425812341>

28. See <https://originsfestival.bordercrossings.org.uk/videos/remembering-pocahontas>.

29. The catalogue can be downloaded at <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/sites/default/files/Pocahontas%20and%20After%20-%20Catalogue.pdf>.

30. *Hopi Photographers / Hopi Images*, ed. Victor Masayesva and Erin Yonger (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1983), p. 11.

31. See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jun/14/psychedelics-dance-steps-and-giant-snakes-inside-the-ayahuasca-show>.

32. See <https://vimeo.com/423525957>.

33. The report on this event is available at <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/sites/default/files/201012-pa-london-report.pdf>.

34. See <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/sites/default/files/VoC_full%20report_Final.pdf>.

35. See <http://bordercrossingsblog.blogspot.com/2017/12/european-culture-forum.html>.

36. See *The Promised Land*, ed. Efeoglu and Walling.

37. See <https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf> (p. 4).

38. Michael Walling, Report on the 2012 Forum: <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/sites/default/files/2012%20PIE%20Forum%20final%20report.pdf> (p. 22).

39. *Voices of Culture* report: <https://www.bordercrossings.org.uk/sites/default/files/VoC_full%20report_Final.pdf> (p. 4).

40. See <http://bordercrossings.ie>.