

THEATRE AFTER EMPIRE

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Megan E. Geigner and Harvey Young

In the weeks preceding the opening of *Hamilton* in London, Lin-Manuel Miranda publicly fretted about how his award-winning musical would be received. He wondered whether West End audiences would be interested in an ostensibly American story. Whereas the mythology of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson loom large in the United States—and the duel-to-the-death of Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton often captivate US schoolchildren—Miranda understood that these historical figures might be less familiar and, more worrisome, less interesting to theatre-goers in the United Kingdom. What especially concerned him was how audiences, who continued to revere the British monarchy, would respond to the portrayal of George III, the British king under whose reign the American colonies won independence. George III in *Hamilton*, as *The Guardian* reports, “is a figure of ineffable absurdity.”¹ Miranda’s anxiety was unfounded. Audiences were dazzled by his fusion of rap and R&B music in a multicultural retelling of an episode of US history. They laughed and sang (and rapped) along as they watched a musical that called attention to the *after empire* status of their nation.

This collection places an emphasis on a range of theatrical performances that emerged in the wake of collapsed imperial regimes. Unlike Miranda’s musical, which was created centuries after the American War of Independence (or the Revolutionary War, as it is called in the United States), the performances featured in this book were created either in the midst of or in the decades following their decline. A focus on theatre after empire offers an opportunity to appreciate the imbrication of art and politics in periods of uncertainty, when ideas of nation, the inheritance of culture, and the imaginings of the future were contested.

“After” Not “Post”

We offer the concept *after empire* to account for the shifting political, cultural, and geographical zones that emerge as dominating regimes collapse and ideas of independence assert themselves. Whereas theories of colonialism and postcolonialism anchor themselves in specific historical moments—the arrival of non-indigenous settlers (even within already inhabited territories) or the signing of agreements to mark a region as a colony, territory, or commonwealth—*after empire* reminds us of the ways that systems of power do not upend in the blink of an eye. In East Africa, as Joshua Williams asserts in this collection, *uhuru* (“freedom” in Swahili) from the United Kingdom did not mark an end to imperialism in Kenya, Uganda, and (what became) Tanzania but rather seemed to suspend time itself as a decolonial transition took place. Or, as Jessica Nakamura observes in the pages that follow, Korean migrants permanently residing in Japan could not unfasten the yoke of Japanese imperialism despite no longer being colonial subjects after World War II. *After empire* enables a more fulsome appreciation of the *feeling*, the “justified unease” as Tejumola Olanuyan terms it, resulting from an acknowledgment that colonialism can continue within allegedly postcolonial settings.

It is our belief that *after empire* helpfully revises the binary framework that often exists within popular conceptions of postcoloniality: center-periphery, metropole-colony, colonizing nation-colonized people. These pairings have resulted in rich analyses and provided compelling and effective ways of interrogating a range of similar experiences across national settings. However, they do not account for the full sweep of empire. Alongside more traditional colonial arrangements, there are other regions that have been subjected to external domineering influence despite formally never having been colonized. As Katherine A. Zien points out in this book, the United States occupied part of Panama (the Canal Zone) beginning in 1903, but never “colonized” it. And yet, even when the last US soldiers left the country, and the United States handed over the Canal Zone in 1999, a “colonial logic” endured. The expansiveness of *after empire* as a critical framework renders visible operations that otherwise would have been overlooked (or would be easier to overlook) from a purely colonial perspective.

Furthermore, it allows for transnational, transglobal, and, what Mina Kyounghye Kwon calls, “transcontextual” analyses. In addition to addressing the unidirectional or bidirectional movement of culture, *after empire* encompasses a multidirectional flow. It is sufficiently capacious, as this book demonstrates, to include South Korean playwrights embracing Theatre of the Absurd style as a means to address the aftermath of Japanese imperialism; American authors who write about the experience of Vietnamese refugees in the United States, which also imagines a pre-migration, pre-refugee presence informed by French occupation; and the revitalization of Indonesian puppet theatre after the exit of missionaries, traders, and colonizers from Europe and Asia who inhabited the archipelago for centuries. We have included original essays that spotlight the circulation of big ideas, often sufficiently generous to exceed the binary formations

present in postcolonial literature. In this configuration, empire is not just an issue of territory and the people occupied or occupying that territory, but instead a more inclusive idea that embraces a larger set of diverse global experiences.

While scholarship on postcolonial theatre and performance focuses on recovering or making new identities, lands, and nations when a ruling force leaves, postcoloniality as a conceptual category does not apply smoothly to all peoples who experienced empire. As American Indigenous Studies scholar Jodi A. Byrd points out,

For those within American Indian and indigenous studies, postcolonial theory has been especially verboten precisely because the ‘post-,’ even though its contradictory temporal meanings are often debated, represents a condition of futurity that has not yet been achieved as the United States continues to colonize and occupy indigenous homelands.²

Furthermore, while postcolonial theory provides useful analysis for discussions of sovereignty, power, and indigeneity, Eric Cheyfitz observes that the field tends to eclipse the experience of those peoples outside former European nation-states and their former colonies.³ What is to be done with groups of people who are no longer experiencing a colonial occupation from a pre- World War II empire but continue to live under deep settler or arrivant colonialism?⁴ Within this same lexicon of postcolonialism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has interrogated the idea of “liberal multiculturalism” arising from the misunderstandings of postcolonial thought, emphasizing that an idea of many cultures living side by side in the former metropole is strikingly different between London and New York, and that failing to specify which type of multicultural one is speaking about flattens any insight.⁵

In addition to making room for multiple multiculturalisms and the successes and failures of them, this collection also allows for conversation across ideas of postcolonialism and diaspora. While postcolonialism and diaspora studies come together around notions of identity-making, both generally tie back to a time and place wherein the territory was precolonial and indigenous people had not yet been forced to scatter. The vocabulary of homeland and hostland does not neatly apply to a pre-Mao and post-Mao China or to Turkey’s experience pre- and post-Ottoman Empire. Hence, our idea of *after empire* allows the contributors in this volume to make arguments about the nature of the art made by peoples for whom the idea of “homeland” still resonates and to do so while also in conversation about the art made by peoples who have long occupied their “home.” Similarly, much of postcolonialism offers rich frameworks for understanding race and racialization within European nation-state colonization of the Global South models, but limits the fluid way non-territorially based ideas of power affect race when the ruling and ruled do not hail from disparate global locations. As George Lipsitz makes clear, “relations between races are relations between places,”⁶ but plenty of purveyors and subjects of empires did not employ racialization as a

tactic. In the case of the former Soviet Union, for example, Russian leaders used rhetoric of pan-Slavic brotherhood as a means to wield power and obligation from the client states behind the Iron Curtain. Additionally, former colonial powers now (seemingly) celebrate diverse racial populations through rhetoric of asylum and liberal democracy with consensual citizenship.

All of this is to say that imperialism and postcolonialism as schemas rely on marked territory, clear nation-states, racial differentiation, and dichotomies of ruler and ruled. By creating a framework of *after empire*, we release some of this rigidity to look at the similarities and differences between those who have experienced different types of empire in a way that embraces the theatre and performance practices of those still displaced by (deep) settler colonialism, those not racialized, as well as those not directly subject to the power of another nation but who are nevertheless engaged in economic, military, or cultural relationships with outside powers in an unbalanced way. This allows for a sidestepping of what Lisa Lowe calls “a brute binary division,” to instead allow for multiple considerations of time, space, and power across histories of “indigeneity, slavery, industry, trade, and immigration” and how that affects theatre and performance.⁷

While the focus on imperialism in explaining much of modern theatre history has provided useful criteria to analyze the relationship of the arts with politics and oppression, this collection of essays explicates lacunae in conceptions of theatre when viewed as nationalist, independence, colonialist, and/or postcolonialist expression. Certainly twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre and performance remain in relation to the state and to politics while no longer being best described by any of these monikers. By introducing the category of *after empire* theatre, these essays provide a framework for relationships between performance and government that trouble the paradigm of support versus resistance, metropole versus colony, and national versus global. Furthermore, it allows scholarship to speak across dissimilar political situations to instances of related theatre-making. Finally, these essays depict how citizen-subjects embody post-empire politics by migrating elsewhere and/or shifting their national or imperial identities in performance.

Bracketing Empire

Empires, by definition, exceed the limits of national borders. They encompass large portions of continents. They cross oceans. Indeed, they can be sufficiently expansive—as the saying goes—that it seems like the sun may never set on them. Books, in contrast, are constrained. There is a start and an end; a title page and an index. Unfortunately, it is not possible to engage with every instance of empire within a single book (or, at least, within one that you might want to carry with you). There simply are too many compelling potential case studies. In this collection, we present a selection of performance after-effects of empire around the world with the aim of revealing how theatre and dance have reflected and responded to changed political and socioeconomic circumstances in parts of

Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. Although their significance cannot be overstated, we have elected not to center the British, French, and Russian empires.

The link between empire and theatre in a manner that centers western Europe has benefited from extensive scholarly engagement. In *Theatre & Empire*, Benjamin Poore “concentrate[s] primarily on Anglophone theatre produced or performed in the UK” to introduce his reader to a range of plays and performances from the display of people in “human zoos” in London to the tours of English productions, such as Henry Irving’s Lyceum Company to Canada in the early nineteenth century, to more contemporary works, such as Kwame Kwei-Armah’s *Statement of Regret* and Jimmy McGovern’s *King Cotton*, which look back upon England’s engagement in and, later, abolishment of, the transatlantic slave trade. Poore asserts—and we agree—that “theatre is one of the few places where sustained reflection is possible on what an empire is.”⁸ He adds,

Empires cannot be seen in their totality. What theatre does is to pick our moments, situations, individuals, props; tiny parts that stand in for the whole. Through this synecdoche, theatre lends abstract concepts like conquest, liberty and subjugation a temporary solidity for the duration of the performance.⁹

Tristan Marshall, in *Theatre and Empire*, looks back to the early seventeenth century to trace the development of the concept of empire alongside the emergence of Great Britain. Marshall highlights two facets of empire, imperium and empire, which structured early ways of thinking about the nation-state in the world. The former (imperium) was primarily internal, emphasizing how Great Britain sought to be a “kingdom free of outside influence or interference.”¹⁰ Rather than seeking to expand borders, this perspective strived to maintain independence and self-rule against external influence. For example, imperium offered a way to conceive of early England as a nation-state desiring insulation against attack (by the Scots among others) and religious doctrine (by the Pope). In time, as Great Britain expanded, dominated and claimed territories around the world, the concept of empire, with its assumption of a colonizing impulse, began to take hold and gain traction.¹¹

The expanse of the British Empire was considerable. Claire Cochran, in *Twentieth-Century British Theatre*, writes, “[it] occupied one-fifth of the land surface area of the globe and had a population of 400 million, 300 million of which lived in India.”¹² Its size was sufficient to touch every inhabited continent. It is difficult to write about theatre both past and present in Ireland, the United States, Canada, and Australia among other places without acknowledging the cultural inheritance of English theatre. However, the flow of culture was not unidirectional. Even as the writings of William Shakespeare among others traveled to British colonies and territories, the styles of other places were imported back to the imperial metropole. The result was a blending—which, at

best, demonstrates the powerful mosaic of influences that can emerge through empire and, at worst, could catalyze a biased, nationalist fervor increasingly threatened by multiculturalism.

Today, it can be difficult to appreciate the scale and significance of the French Empire. Despite being overshadowed by the largesse of Great Britain, France managed colonies and outposts around the world, from Haiti to Tahiti to Indochina. At its peak, it also asserted influence over significant portions of Europe: “from Hamburg in the north to Rome in the south [... with] a population of 44 million.”¹³ Unlike Great Britain, the French empire was remarkably elastic as a result of shifting political ideologies in the country (such as the rise and fall of monarchist and republican sentiments) as well as the independence campaigns of colonial outposts. In *Narratives of the French Empire*, Kate Marsh notes, “There was no single monolithic French colonial project; over the course of four centuries, the French colonial ‘empire’ expanded and contracted to encompass territories across five continents at various times.”¹⁴ Often in flux, the French Empire did not create the narratives of power the British Empire did, and, in fact, select independence campaigns within it, particularly Haiti, chipped away at its grandeur. Marsh writes, “the revolutionary overthrow of French imperial rule by slaves was an embarrassment that lent itself to national amnesia....the ‘unthinkable’ event was either written out of French history (notably the historiography of the French Revolution) or its significance was diminished.”¹⁵ Despite its lack of narrative staying power, the French Empire proved significant in its enhancement and circulation of art and culture. In *Building the French Empire*, Benjamin Steiner places a spotlight on the creative people who lived and worked at the center of French colonial outposts. He draws attention to “the builders of empire at the construction site itself: the engineers, artisans, experts, workers, and slaves—all those builders who were responsible for the establishment of material constructs that formed the backbone of the modern French empire.”¹⁶ In so doing, he makes a persuasive case that the French Empire was fundamentally an empire of culture which was never unidirectional (empire to colony) but comprised of myriad interconnected circuits. Evidence of this influence appears in, as Marsh observes, “[t]he emergent political, literary and philosophical resistance to the psychological effects of colonialism on the colonized saw the establishment of a black Antillean literary tradition, not least in the form of *negritude* in the mid-twentieth century.”¹⁷

Although Russian contributions to theatre history are most frequently summarized by the late nineteenth-century innovations of Konstantin Stanislavski and the international tours of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT), a recent wave of scholarship has emerged to discuss the theatre created a century after the MAT and following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. Jessica Hinds-Bond, in her study of contemporary Russian theatre, writes, “The era of Perestroika (1985–1991) and the fall of the Soviet Union (1991) was marked in the Russian theatre by a turn from the grand theatrical institutions of the Soviet era to smaller, often-short-lived studio theatres” (18–19). Within

studios, a new generation of playwrights revisited literary classics and, unfettered by government censorship, began to explore contemporary Russian identity. Hinds-Bond notes, “Russia’s literary canon, freed from its Soviet-approved interpretations, has provided rich material for this generation of playwrights and theatre practitioners in their quest to represent and interrogate life in their new country” (14). This new studio approach “quickly died out” after only a handful of years. However, a new drama movement would continue for a few additional years before being shortened by a return of overt government oversight. Julia Secklehner, offering an overview of “some of the most important Russian speaking drama of the last 25 years,” highlights Olga Mukhina’s *Tanya Tanya*, Natalia Vorozhbyt’s *Tomorrow*, Yaroslava Pulinovich’s *Somnambulism*, and Pavel Pryazhko’s *The Locked Door* as prominent examples of Russian theatre during this period. However, the political rise of Vladimir Putin in Russia led to a re-embrace of earlier authoritarianism which, ultimately, proved unfriendly to the performing arts. Joshua Yaffa notes, in a 2020 *Guardian* article, that a political shift began in 2011 which “blended conservative values, anti-western resentment, disdain for urban elites and an elevation of the Orthodox church” and ultimately “heralded the end of the state’s enthusiasm for experimental and avant-garde artforms.”¹⁸

There are additional regions with *after empire* innovations that are not featured in this book. Australia may be the most prominent example with its fraternal tensions of colonialism: white Australian antagonisms with both white Britishness and Aboriginal history. Concerning the latter, Helen Gilbert writes, “The 1988 bicentennial celebration of European settlement (invasion) put Aboriginal issues on Australia’s theatre agenda in an unprecedented way.”¹⁹ Reflecting on the emergent theatre of the 1990s, Veronica Kelly notes that the decade “[saw] a partial dissolving of the central theatrical narrative of ‘national identity’ and its simultaneous reinscription as indigenous, regional and new ethnic and gay voices continue to erode distinctions between ‘mainstream’ and alternative repertoire.”²⁰ In decentering frequently and well-studied regions in favor of others which comparatively have received less scholarly attention, our aim is to expand the conversation on the influence and effects of empire on theatre and performance. Simply put, there are more scholarly considerations of British, French, Russian, and even Australian theatre than of Uganda, Panama, and South Korea among others. By bracketing select well-known regions, we create space for other experiences of colonialism, postcolonialism, and empire.

A Short History of Empire

To understand the way people who are featured in this collection have dealt with theatre and performance *after empire*, some cursory understanding of the timelines, territories, and geopolitics of the major global empires is helpful. The modern era of empire as a world-organizing principle began in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern periods in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.²¹

The Mongol Empire, one of the world's largest empires, began in what is now Mongolia and Central China in the early 1200s, and, by the turn of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, stretched from the Sea of Japan to the eastern Mediterranean Sea. In the middle of the fourteenth century, the Jolof Empire gained the rule of a large swath of western Africa. European imperialism began near the same time; Portugal gained control of the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula and began exploring the west coast of Africa and set up a trading post in Morocco. As the Mongol Empire receded in the early fourteenth century, the Ottoman Empire began in western Turkey. Between 1300 and the late 1600s, the Ottoman Empire controlled all of the African coast of the Mediterranean (except Morocco), most of the Balkan Peninsula, the Levant, a significant portion of the Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea, all of what is modern Turkey, all the land around the Black Sea, parts of Iraq and Iran, and portions of eastern and central Europe.

The Russian Empire began expansion in the 1300s by claiming the areas east of Russia in north central Asia. With the rise of the Romanovs at the turn of the sixteenth to seventeenth century, Russia moved further east to claim Siberia, expanding Russia to the Pacific Ocean. By the early nineteenth century, Russia had claimed most of Central Asia (including modern-day Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan), part of China, countries in Europe (including modern-day Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland), and Alaska in North America.

Just after and contemporary to these developments, the European Age of Discovery—100 years between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries when European ships traversed the globe “discovering” and claiming parts of the Americas, Africa, and Asia—began. By the mid-fifteenth century, Portugal had trading posts, *feitorias*, on ports on both the west and east coasts of Africa, in India, Indonesia, and China. They claimed ownership over Brazil. Spain and Portugal became the Iberian Union of Spain and Portugal between 1580 and 1640. Spain had already colonized parts of Italy, the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific, most of what is now Central America and the Caribbean, the western coast of South America, and most of Mexico by this time.

Not to be outdone by the Iberians, France, the Netherlands, and England (later Great Britain) colonized parts of the Americas, Asia, and Africa in the same period. The British Empire began with plantations on the island of Ireland in the early sixteenth century, and expanded to North America and the Caribbean in the early seventeenth century. Also in the early seventeenth century, England and the Netherlands created the East India and Dutch East India Companies, joint-stock companies, to help fund their colonial interests and fight the French, Portuguese, and Spanish empires. In the same period, France colonized parts of North America, South America, the west coast of Africa, and islands in the South Pacific. France increased its holdings to include parts of northern Africa; Madagascar; and parts of Southeast Asia, including Vietnam.

By 1750, England had overpowered Scotland to become Great Britain, and the British Empire controlled much of South Asia (including modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), Southeast Asia (including modern-day Malaysia, part of Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and New Zealand), Hong Kong, parts of the Arabian Peninsula and Mediterranean (including modern-day Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, and Israel), many countries in Africa (including modern-day Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Cameroon, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Gambia), small holdings in South America (including Guyana, Honduras, and the Falkland Islands), much of the Caribbean (including Bermuda and the Bahamas), and huge swaths of North America (including the east coast of the United States and all of Canada).

In the late nineteenth century, when this collection begins, Japan and the United States had also developed empires. Japan claimed the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan near the end of the nineteenth century. By World War II, Japan also claimed the Mariana Islands and portions of eastern China. Embracing ideas of manifest destiny and calls to “Go West,” the United States expanded from the east coast of central North America to the Pacific Ocean after making treaties with the French, Spanish, and indigenous people of North America throughout the nineteenth century. At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States also gained Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines from Spain. By the 1950s, it had also taken possession of Hawaii and Alaska.

In the second half of the twentieth century, much of the world was caught between two dueling empires—the United States and the Soviet Union—waging a Cold War. This period (through the present day) is defined by the rise of dictatorships and theocratic movements as well as resistance to them. After World War II, European countries formed alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact). The Cold War played out in Asia in China, Korea, and Vietnam with battles and military overthrows. The United States, fearing the rise of communist countries, engaged in wars in Korea and Vietnam, and the period left Southeast Asia unstable. These incidents led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia during and after the Vietnam War, the partitioning of Korea, and the dictatorship in Myanmar (Burma). Perhaps the region most affected was Latin America where a number of dictators took power including in Argentina (Jorge Rafael Videla), Bolivia (Hugo Banzer), Brazil (João Figueiredo), the Dominican Republic (Rafael Trujillo), Chile (Augusto Pinochet), Cuba (Fidel Castro), Colombia (Gustavo Rojas Pinilla), Ecuador (Guillermo Rodríguez Lara), Guatemala (Carlos Castillo Armas), Haiti (Jean-Claude Duvalier), Nicaragua (Anastasio Somoza Debayle), and Panama (Manuel Noriega). The Middle East and Africa were not immune to this wave of dictators; many countries became (theocratic) dictatorships including Iran (Ruhollah Khomeini) and Iraq (Saddam Hussein), Libya (Muammar al-Gaddafi), Egypt (Hosni Mubarak), Syria (Hafez al-Assad), and Uganda (Idi Amin).

It is with this backdrop that our chapters unfold.

Chapter Overview

The collection begins with Joshua Williams's analysis of a series of plays written in the 1960s and 1970s in post-independence East Africa. Williams argues that once Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania had *uhuru* (freedom), the nations began a morbid interregnum, a time wherein "the old is dying and the new cannot be born." As such, the plays of Peter Nazareth, Mĩcere Mũgo, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ebrahim Hussein, Francis Imbuga, John Ruganda, and Robert Serumaga demonstrate woundedness and monstrosity to survey the damage of colonialism and postcolonial dictatorships. Williams employs the metaphor of "wounds" and "monsters" to capture the lacunae between temporalities; while the past is over, its end is not as triumphant as those in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania had hoped, and the yet-to-arrive future seems to haunt the present moment. As the character Dr. See-Through in Francis Imbuga's play *The Successor* states, "I do not look back, I only fight with the future."

Katherine A. Zien articulates how South American artist and activist Raúl Leis Romero used theatre as a tool of postcolonial planning and decolonial world-making during and after the US military occupation of the Panama Canal Zone in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While Panama gained independence from Colombia in 1903, Zien explains how coloniality of power—or deep-rooted racial hierarchies, extractive processes, and core-periphery models of modern capitalism—has pervaded Latin American countries. Leis's theatre for social change resisted Panama's neocolonial relationship with the United States by celebrating African descent and indigeneity, making the poor the protagonist of the nation, and protesting *pentagonism*. By turning to folk performance and sociodrama, Leis encouraged audiences to throw off the colonizer's culture.

Mina Kyounghe Kwon gives a transcontextual view of absurdist plays from Nigeria, Korea, and North America in the 1960s and 1970s. As she explains, Nigeria gained independence from Great Britain in 1960, Korea gained independence from Japan in 1945, but Native North Americans are still subject to deep-settler colonialism. Kwon analyzes how the plays from these three regions use the absurd joke, or a joke that mocks the teller and the audience, to tell *after empire* narratives. She chronicles how each of the playwrights in her chapter—Ola Rotimi (Nigeria), Oh Taesuk (Korea), and Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa and Delaware)—turn to Theatre of the Absurd to communicate the disillusionment of occupation, colonialism, and national leadership. She shows how these populations are an example of minor transnationalism, hovering between authoritarian and grassroots models of resistance to negotiate and navigate the stresses of empire.

Gibson Alessandro Cima investigates three post-apartheid plays in twenty-first-century South Africa: Martin Koboekae's *Biko: Where the Soul Resides* (2008), Aubrey Sekhlabi's *Mantolo: The Tenth Step* (2009), and Mike Van Graan's *Return of the Ancestors* (2014). Cima argues that these plays engage in embodied historiography, or the idea of processing history and memory through performance. He observes that

artists in the post-post-apartheid moment faced the challenge of no longer having resistance as a central theme as well as pressure from politicians to “get over” apartheid. His choice of plays allows for an exploration of how plays can or should present national heroes (such as Steven Biko and Neil Aggett) posthumously and how they should make space to interact with freedom fighters who are still alive (such as Sibusiso Masuku) in a time when democracy seems to have failed much of the population.

Eleanor Owicki and Megan E. Geigner bring Irish playwright Brendan Behan into the *after empire* conversation. While Ireland was subject to English rule for centuries (and some Irish counties remain under the rule of Great Britain), Ireland was never classified as a colony. Generations of Irish fought against the British, but once Ireland gained independence in the 1920s, the country fell into civil war. As a youth, Behan was part of the fight, something he learned from his family. His two 1950s plays—*The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage*—do not bask in a post-freedom glow, however, but instead present the feelings of emptiness, lack of change, rejection, and letdown of Irish nationalism in the generation after independence.

Elif Baş explains the history of the development of Turkish theatre in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Baş centers theatre as both an outlet for and tool of the struggle to create a distinctive Turkish identity in the years just before, during, and after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. She shows how conflict between those fighting for a constitutional government in Turkey, those pushing for an Islamic state, and those clinging to Ottoman identity played out in the push to revive traditional performance (*karagöz* or puppet theatre; and *orta oyunu*, a performance style) and storytelling (*meddah*) against ongoing efforts to import and imitate Western theatre, which had been introduced to Turkey in the Tanzimat period (1839–1876). She provides the example of a young Ottoman newspaper editor and actor, Namik Kemal, who staged nationalistic plays to use theatre as an ideological tool and political weapon to rouse the masses. Baş also explains how after independence in 1923, those in power used Western-style theatre to impose patriotic ideals on a new nation. Baş tracks how traditional Turkish theatre forms faded as nationalists adopted Western-style plays as political propaganda.

David Donkor explores the role of the Ghana National Theatre Movement in defining the “African Personality” after independence from Great Britain in the 1950s. Like other chapters in this collection, Donkor demonstrates that political sovereignty did not free Ghanaians from a colonial mentality. The nation’s leaders—namely Kwame Nkrumah—hoped theatre would help shatter this mindset by revitalizing precolonial traditions. Donkor gives examples of the plays that the National Theater Movement inspired in the 1950s and 1960s including Michael Die-Annang’s *Okomfo Anokye’s Golden Stool* and Efua Sutherland’s *Foriwa* and *Edufa*. But he also offers a critique of the movement and of the movement’s critics. Donkor argues that the failure to take the *concert party*, a form of itinerant popular theatre, seriously resulted in the Movement not being able to reach the people.

Siyuan Liu gives a sweeping history of theatre in China, Japan, India, and Indonesia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Liu unpacks the link between

coloniality/postcoloniality and modern Asian spoken theatre's relationship with indigenous performance. He marks a split between spoken drama genres developed after or during contact with the West (such as Japanese *shingeki*, Chinese *huaju*, and Indonesian *teater moderen*) and traditional performance or hybrid genres (such as Beijing Opera or *sangeetnatak* [Indonesian music dramas]). Liu tracks the tension between these forms through modernist movements in the 1920s, the communist movements in the 1930s and 1940s, independence and nationalist movements in the mid-century, along with more recent coups, cultural revolutions, and shifts in law, politics, and government in Asia through the end of the twentieth century. Looking at this larger trend to revitalize traditional theatre while still producing Realism, Liu analyzes the work of specific twentieth-century theatre artists in each country.

Jessica Nakamura uses Chong Wishing's 2008 play *Yakiniku Drago* to illustrate the intersections between persisting imperial influences and theatre's ability to reveal power dynamics even in domestic, quotidian life. The play is about an ethnically Korean family (*Zainichi*) living in Osaka in the years leading to Expo '70. Nakamura argues that *Yakiniku Drago* showcases the way that the home is a site where empire remains, and, as such, can be a place to confront its painful history. Furthermore, Nakamura contends that the play's staging of poor *Zainichi* challenges Japanese postwar logic claiming empire as an aberration, a detour on the way to economic prosperity. Embracing Homi Bhabha's theorization of *unhomely* moment and Karen Shimakawa's concept of *national abjection*, Nakamura provides a picture of lingering empire creating diffused, generational subjugation.

Victoria Fortuna investigates the effects of dictatorship and exile in relationship to legacies of empire in Latin American countries from the independence era to the global Cold War. Specifically, Fortuna provides a reading of performance genres in Fernando Solanas's 1985 film *Tango: El exilio de Gardel*. The film is about a group of Argentinian political exiles living in Paris in the 1980s, but it makes reference to nineteenth-century figures in Argentina's struggle for independence. They stage a *tanguedia*, a performance combining tango, tragedy, comedy, and *rioplatense* (Argentine and Uruguayan) traditions. Fortuna reads the movement styles both as capturing the fractured and violent experience of exile and as a tool of resistance to cultural imperialism that sexualizes Latin American bodies. Fortuna's observations about the way the film blurs time periods, space, reality, and fiction reveals the power of dance to offer embodied social critique.

Kareem Khubchandani introduces the debut production of Harvey Virdi 2017 play *Miss Meena and the Masala Queens* in England. Khubchandani explores how Meena Kumari, a Hindi cinema legend, became a diva and a repository of queer feelings to sustain diasporic South Asians. The play, Khubchandani argues, creates spaces that do not actually exist—namely gay bars specifically geared toward South Asians living in England—demonstrating the kind of world-making that theatre and performance can do. By providing a reading of the nostalgia of Bollywood, the historical context of Meena Kumari's life and

the ways her acting reference pre- and postcolonial Indian performance genres, this chapter shows how performance allows space for collectively *feeling Brown* in the midst of the melancholies of migration, colonization, displacement, and heteronormativity.

The final chapter is Esther Kim Lee's analysis of Qui Nguyen's play *Vietgone*. Lee argues that the unconventional use of language—hip hop by the Vietnamese characters and gibberish by the white American characters—and music in *Vietgone* point to a broader history of Asian American theatre. In a world that privileges Western language, appearance, and sound, Nguyen flips the script. Lee shows how conceptions such as refugee, foreigner, and even war still maintain imperial structures and highlights how theatre can be a tool to unmoor stereotypes, create community, open up casting possibilities, and resist cultural imperialism.

These case studies—moving from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries and from East Africa to a Vietnam War refugee camp in Arkansas by way of Panama, Nigeria, Korea, the United States, South Africa, Ireland, Turkey, Ghana, China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Argentina, France, and England—illustrate a breadth of *after empire* theatre and performance. Despite differences with respect to time, place, and form of imperialism, common themes emerge. The first is the recuperation of folk tradition, whether pre- or post-empire, such as *karagöz*, *kabuki*, and *jatra* (pre) and concert parties, Hip Hop, and diva worship (post). The second is the development of hybrid performance such as Beijing Opera, *tanguedia*, and social drama. And the third is the turn to the absurd as a way to deal with incoherent time and policy. Finally, each chapter makes the case for the social impact of theatre—to form national identity, to protagonist the subaltern, to process pain, and to make a new world where the future becomes the present.

Notes

- 1 Michael Billington, "Hamilton Review: Revolutionary Musical a Thrilling Salute to America's Immigrants," *The Guardian*, 23 December 2017. www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/dec/21/hamilton-review-musical-london-victoria-palace-lin-manuel-miranda.
- 2 Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxxii.
- 3 Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xxxii.
- 4 Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xix.
- 5 Sara Danius, Stefan Jonsson and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Boundary 2* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 24–50, 40–41.
- 6 George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), 6.
- 7 Lisa Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 8 and 11.
- 8 Benjamin Poore, *Theatre & Empire* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 8.
- 9 Poore, *Theatre & Empire*, 43.
- 10 Tristan Marshall, *Theatre and Empire: Great Britain on the London Stages under James VI and I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 10.

- 11 In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri use the term “imperialism” to define the model of power prevalent from the early modern period to the twentieth century, wherein nation-states claimed lands beyond their borders as their own. In contrast, we use the word “empire” to mean this. Hardt and Negri then define “empire” to mean a more contemporary idea of “decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule.” Our conception of *after empire* includes this apparatus. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- 12 Claire Cochran, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22.
- 13 George Rude, *The French Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 155–156.
- 14 Kate Marsh, *Narratives of the French Empire* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), 4.
- 15 Marsh, *Narratives of the French Empire*, 4.
- 16 Benjamin Steiner, *Building the French Empire, 1600–1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
- 17 Marsh, *Narratives of the French Empire*, 5.
- 18 Joshua Yaffa, “‘They Will Destroy You’ in Putin’s Russia, How Far Can Artists Go,” *Guardian*, 17 January 2020.
- 19 Helen Gilbert, “Reconciliation? Aboriginality and Australian Theatre in the 1990s,” in *Our Australian Theatre in the 1990s*, ed. Veronica Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 71.
- 20 Veronica Kelly, “Old Patterns, New Repertoires,” in *Our Australian Theatre in the 1990s*, ed. Veronica Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 8.
- 21 Much of this section is informed by the animated maps at Nancy Jacobs and Rolando Peñate, “Animated Atlas of African History, 1879–2002,” brown.edu/Research/AAA.com and at “The Map as History,” the-map-as-history.com. Additional resources that informed this section include David Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Empires 1414–1980* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).