

# MIGRATION IN FRENCH THEATER HISTORY: TRACES OF A THEATRICALITY IN EXPANSION.<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The study focuses on the theater that was practiced by migrant workers in the 1960s and 1970s, and an actualization of this discussion from the recent studies about decolonial representation in French arts. We highlight the political role of the migrants' native language and culture, emphasizing the role of the playwright Kateb Yacine as an *avant-garde* representation of decolonial engagement in theater. In the pedagogical context, the investigation describes the interventions made by Augusto Boal and CETTFADE during the 70s and 80s, as an expansion of a new look about the immigration theme, where the migrant protagonism was the center of the artistic process.

**Keywords:** Immigrant Theatre; Political Theater; Decolonial Theater.

## MIGRAÇÃO NA HISTÓRIA DO TEATRO FRANCÊS: TRAÇOS DE UMA TEATRALIDADE EM EXPANÇÃO

**Resumo:** O estudo foca no teatro que era praticado pelos trabalhadores imigrantes durante os anos de 1960 e 1970, e a atualização dessa discussão a partir dos recentes ensaios sobre a representação decolonial nas artes francesas. Nos sublinhamos o papel político da cultura e da língua nativa dos migrantes, destacando o papel do dramaturgo Kateb Yacine como uma vanguarda na representação de um engajamento decolonial no teatro. No contexto pedagógico, a investigação descreve as intervenções feitas por Augusto Boal e o CATTTFADE durante os anos 70 e 80, como uma expansão de um novo olhar sobre o tema da imigração, onde o migrante era o protagonista central do processo artístico.

**Palavras-chave:** Teatro Imigrante; Teatro Político; Teatro Decolonial.

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## IMMIGRANT THEATRE IN FRANCE: ADDRESSING A VOLATILE CONCEPT

Migrant status has generally been discussed in the context of human sciences and political issues. This notion has a mutability linked to economic demands and often to workforce needs. In France's case, the recent history of the country is marked by waves of openness and restriction regarding migrants.

The migration issue as a subject represented by french theater, was revisited with fresh vigor after the migratory crisis of 2015. Turning attention to the crisis on the European borders, made known largely by the media through the cases of deaths in the mediterranean sea, helps us identify the aesthetic and political approaches and stance of many of the french theatrical productions identified in compiling of this research.

In the field of social sciences, the research agenda developed by the anthropologist Michael Agier in *École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EDESS)*, in his project *"Babels, l'atelier public des villes-frontières"*, involves monthly meetings of researchers on the theme of contemporary migration in Europe. With the intention of publishing seven works on the subject of migration in Europe, the work *"La mort aux frontières de l'Europe: retrouver, identifier, commémorer"* helps to size up the complicity of migratory processes, highlighting a lack of attention by public authorities, humanitarian support and also monitoring of official registration.

The same author, now in a project devoted to the study of the refugee category, outlines the status that proves pivotal in understanding some theatrical narratives in this section

Refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, but also war refugees, economic migrants, illegal migrants are all apparently descriptive terms, but are underpinned by epistemology and politics of institutional, media, popular and academic classifications. Their analysis must be undertaken, while none of these classifications can claim to be an absolute definition that is universally holds true. (Agier and Madeira, pg.5, 2017)

Contemporaneously, the immigrant figure is intertwined with that of refugee in the popular imaginary. The frequency with which the deaths in the mediterranean are disseminated, as well as the internal disputes within the European bloc about accepting the vessels, makes the term both present yet open to broad interpretation.

The French sociologist, Abdelmalek Sayad (1979), developed a concept of the immigrant which embodies the elastic approach of this process encompassing: a movement of people and their cultures from a new territory. His categorization is especially attentive to the invisible hands of state and economic power, and their manipulative creation of the image of immigrants in the social imaginary.

What then is this definition? What is an immigrant, after all? An immigrant is essentially part of a temporary transitory workforce. By virtue of this principle, an immigrant worker (both worker and immigrant, in this case almost a pleonasm), even if born for life (and for immigration) into immigration, even if called to work (as an immigrant) throughout their life in the country, even if destined to die (in immigration), as an immigrant, they remain a worker defined and treated as temporary, i.e., dispensable at any time. (Sayad, pg.54 1979 free translation)

Sayad's view, based largely on the French reality with an emphasis on immigration from Algeria, which he cited as an "exemplary case"<sup>3</sup>, provides focus on two dimensions of the immigration process determined by the contemporary French state: the transitory situation of immigrants; and their existence labelled as workers.<sup>4</sup>

Sayad's approach helps understand a theatrical representation in which work, culture, and existence are the most sensitive themes in the first theatre offering organized by immigrants, mostly from Maghreb or Portugal in the Festival of Immigrant Workers in Europe.

In French theatre studies, there are recent highly structured studies linked to a historical and militant perspective of the immigrant representation by French theater. Authors of the likes of Neveux and Le Gallic, were attentive in portraying a background where this militant, vibrant theatre, through its early de-coloniality, was not silenced following the disappearance of the occupied theatrical spaces.

Neveux, in his paper "Apparition d'une scène politique: le théâtre révolutionnaire de l'immigration (2007)", presents the struggles of immigrant theatre in 1960s and 1970s France. The context of an organized political scene

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<sup>3</sup> Sayad was specific about de Algerian colonization because he defended the idea that as an intensive colonization model, it served for instance to the other french colonies. The Algerian colonisation extended between 1830 to 1962 period, and language, property and culture were systematically affected by french state.

<sup>4</sup> Sayad points out that the existence of the immigrant is constantly associated with the need for labor, in this sense their status as citizens was fragile, since they were often placed in precarious working conditions and governed by migratory policies that privileged provisory status of residency for the Algerian immigrants.

with strong atomization of the alternative spaces for representation, produced and managed by immigrants, operates as a parallel reality of mainstream theatre. This same author, in another article entitled "Le théâtre de la décolonisation (2007a)" draws the attention of the reader to a particular aspect in professional theatre in France from the sixties and seventies: the rare engagement in sensitive and tense issues involving Algeria's occupation.

Some individuals of the theater field chose robust solidarity: the actor Jacques Charby, General Secretary of the Theater of the City of Villeurbanne and Jean-Marie Boëglin, both soon banned and exiled in Algeria. In September of 1960, several figures of the theatrical world, such as Roger Blin, Alain Cuny and Laurent Terzieff, declared the right to insubordination in the Algerian war (known as the "121"), which led to professional reprisals. Overall, however, the theatrical world was somewhat mute (Neveux, 2007a, pg.28 free translation)

This disconnect between a theatre scene with formal recognition among peers, and an informal and amateur one organized by immigrant workers, presents an interesting aspect in the addressing of this being a politically sensitive issue for the professional theatre practice in that moment in France. Neveux's article also exhibits argumentation that provokes reflection on imperative exploration of new forms or a poetry linked more closely to the idea of decolonial theater, albeit embryonic.

Therefore, this historical analysis helps to provide an overview about a theme which includes: the non-subjugation to the theatrical stage and its spatial formality, a review of the reverential french language and the space given to repertory of movements based on a non-eurocentric body.

In a profounder investigation, Le Gallic (2013) conducted an in-depth study with focus on immigrant theater promoted mainly by Maghreb immigrants in non-professional spaces, like the "Festival de théâtre populaire des travailleurs immigrés de Suresnes" and the numerous performances given by non-professional theatre groups, such as La Kahina and Al Assifa.

In her article "Le théâtre de l'immigration algérienne en France dans les années 1970: Un espace de représentation et de témoignage", Le Gallic addresses immigration theater in a manner that portray the daily life of this group. The theater companies, most of which were the authors of their own dramaturgy, would take to depicting the scene of the daily routine of immigration. Language,

body, and theme would be based on testimony about the processes experienced by this population.

Returning to the subject of linguistic pluralism, the historical posters mentioned below, reveal a lack of reverence for the language of the host country.



Poster of the theater play *Ça travaille, ça travaille mais ça ferme sa gueule* and  
Poster of the 4<sup>th</sup> Festival of Immigrant Workers in Europe<sup>5</sup>

In the first poster, the bilingualism of the French and Arabic languages is evident, in the announcement of the play *Ça travaille, ça travaille mais ça ferme sa gueule*, by the *Al Assifa* theater company which, as Le Gallic commented (2015,p186) “Al Assifa (the storm), is a reference to the armed wing of the Palestinian national organization Fatah, founded in 1959 by Yasser Arafat. This

<sup>5</sup> Images available on the *Odysseu Repository*. Access: <http://odysseo.generiques.org>

is also the name of the French newspaper, published from 1972 to 1973 for the Arab Workers Movement” (free translation).

In the second image, the presence of Portuguese emigrants, who were also part of the French migratory wave in the 1970s, is even clearer. The poster, written in three languages (French, Arabic, and Portuguese), announces the immigrant workers' theater festival. This event was responsible for bringing together professional and amateur<sup>6</sup> theater in the dissemination of this shift from the hegemonic space of theater culture.<sup>7</sup>

Both Neveux and Le Gallic, helped rebuild a historical context, where documents, images, interviews provided the background for the topic explored, the construction of an emergent theatric aesthetic removed from the predominant and well-structured French drama of the time.

In the particular case of Le Gallic's theses, the author develops the hypothesis of a theatre culture "in between". Besides raising awareness on sensitive themes for the immigrant community, the amateur or semi-amateur companies also strongly influenced by the history of French drama, through a shift that ushered in new forms and theatrical languages.

The theatrical aesthetic outcome of postcolonial immigration can be characterized as an aesthetic shift, in a play of patterns of identity, time and space while reconfiguring them: they become discontinuous, moving and dynamic entities. (Le Gallic, 2014, pg 229, free translation)

One of the cases mentioned in her research is the *La Kahina* company. This was an example of a rare engagement in the specific themes of female migrants and the tension between the culture of origin and the society of the host country. This company was directed by second-generation migrant offspring and was formed by ten females and two males. All documentation about this group cites the two performances given in the seventies: *Pour que les larmes de nos mères deviennent une légende* (1975-1979) and *Famille Bendjelloul, en France depuis 25 ans* (1979-1982). In the first performance, the focus was the life of the

<sup>6</sup> In the French context it is considered a professional of the performing arts, a person who exercises its artistic activity in a remunerated way and obtains from there its main source of income. In 1968 local labor legislation drafted a special unemployment insurance scheme for this category, ensuring a relative stability to this group of workers.

<sup>7</sup> Festival focused on the engagement and exposure of immigration issues. It brought together theater companies from several nationalities and languages, with diversified professionalization levels among professionals and amateurs.

Algerian women in France and their recent past, still strongly linked to the history of colonization of French Algeria. The second performance provides a platform for the children of the migration. The tensions and contrasts between the new generation and their family cultures was the central conflict of interplay of two cultures in the constitution of individuals involved in this cultural mix.

This pioneering role in the histories of migrant theatre enters a symbolic realm. This constituted a clear engagement in the female gender issue at a time when all the research and political organizations were focused on the male role in the migration process.



Images of the La Kahina theater company and poster promoting the play

Initially, my creed was immigration and the young people who came from it, because we were all invisible. In 1974, I put together the troupe of women "Kahina" and the play, so that the pond of our tears could become a legend, in a portrayal of our specific issues, especially those of our mothers, who had fought during the Algerian war and were later relegated "to the kitchen". It struck me as totally unjust. In addition, society was simply conditioned to seeing "immigration in male terms" and to denying our existence and problems. So to denounce this, I shook up the scene with a dozen films and three boys addressing the taboos to which we were

subjected: forced marriage, legalized rape under the wedding band, wife battering (Amara, free translation). Show pamphlet.

This company, described as a semi-professional group by Le Gallic (2014), addressed not only a still untouchable theme, but also made moves towards poetic decentralization.

Here the aesthetic does not correspond to the hegemony of the French theater and also, as mentioned by Salika Amara, the second-generation daughters were developing a creative process in which their drama was written and represented. In this case, with no representation in any major theatre scene, it was necessary to develop their collective and poetic voice. This started with the name chosen by the theater company, which harks back to popular legend in which Kahina features as a 7th-century Berber religious and military leader who led the resistance of her people to Arab expansion in North Africa, then known as Numidia, and present day Maghreb.

Historically, the period of the 1960s and 70s marks a movement of sensitive interests in the decentralization aesthetic in French theatre. From the perspective of exchange, there were waves of influence from a theatrical poetry with different engagement in terms of the colonial imagination at the time. In this context, theater productions in the dominant language constituted one of the major symbols of imposition on the immigrant culture. This discussion was a sensitive subject for Kateb Yacine, one of the most attentive playwrights to the processes of territorial detachments and their linguistic impositions.

## **KATEB YACINE: LANGUAGE AND AESTHETIC FORMS FOR BATTLE**

Brecht's theater is didactic. It does not depict or engage directly with current events. This does not imply it cannot also be called "real political theater". But ours is even more direct, deeply political, in that it mirrors reality and the audience feels it in a vital way (...) (Yacine, pg. 160, 1994)

Kateb Yacine, an Algerian novelist, poet and playwright, worked for most of his life in France, with the French language serving as the main vehicle disseminating his literature. At the heart of his writings lay the Algerian culture, essential for understanding his political trajectory, since he was arrested during the colonial period of the French occupation in Algeria. His memories and political conflicts were a central theme in his narratives.



The author debuted in the theater with the play *Le Cadavre encerclé*, performed in 1958 at the Théâtre Molière - Brussels. The first presentation in French territory occurred only in 1960, and was a private event. Aouadi helps us understand the way this presentation came about, "the event, unannounced openly, had attracted a large number of people, including many specialists, who had secretly given the word to divulge the date and place of the show" (Aouadi 2006, p.1026 free translation).

Not organized as a public event, this historic moment provides an idea of how sensitive the theme of the colonization of Algeria was at the time, including in the context of professional theatre.

In Kateb's discourse, there are recurrent lines alluding to the place of the Algerian culture and the influence the French language has in his work. Chergui (1999), in his preface, presents the works of Kateb written in popular Arabic during the seventies. It places the author in a context of literary production, where the revival of the language and recognition of its cultural power was not an movement limited to Yacine alone.

Kateb Yacine created a new cultural legitimacy: translating the language literally enabled the popular dialectic languages to rise to the status of the written language. The practice of writing by a world-renowned man of letters literalizes popular languages (Chergui, 1999, pg.20 free translation)

However, the author pointed out that this action is involved in a process of rapprochement with the popular culture since, even in Algeria, popular Arabic was not widely publicized.

Moving away from the French language, to undertake the challenge of writing in Arabic, was a joint effort with the *Théâtre de la mer*, theatre company, located in Algeria. Chergui (1999) cited the process of writing and rewriting ancient texts, Kateb ends up first addressing text-oriented corporeality, to then arrive at the word.

In *Mohamed prends ta valise (MPV)*, the author accompanies the work in the popular Arabic language, with focus on the subject of the fragility of the Maghreb migrant. Developing plays that closely resemble a journey, like all the percussion of transformation, reflection and with the aesthetics of a social fabric, strongly represented by the choir and allegories, such as *TAPAGE NOCTURNE* et *VISAGE DE PRISON*. This portrays the trajectory of a population

represented in the figure of Mohamed and his suitcase which is violently discarded in several scenes.



Images from the play *Mohamed prends ta valise* during its tour in France<sup>8</sup>

MOHAMED:  
 I'm walking  
 In the first subway,  
 And I changed at the station.  
 St. Lazare  
 I ended up running out,  
 I arrived at work late (...)  
 CHORUS, singing:  
 "Does not matter,  
 He is Algerian.  
 Who works a lot  
 And who does not eat anything ..

<sup>8</sup> Images available on the MC2 repository. Access: <https://webmuseo.com/ws/mc2/app/collection/record/7833>

CORYPHÉE:

Take the pick!

Take the pick

"Pick up the pick!

Take the pick!(...)

Choir:

"This is the fate of the workers

Whose country is released,

Where is your youth, O Allal?

Your house is full of bloodsuckers.

(Yacine, pg.299, 1999, pp.229 free translation)

This playwriting clearly draws on the processes and effects of colonization in Algeria. Mohamed helps us navigate the anguish of being a native in a colonized country and, subsequently, the hardships of being an immigrant in the colonizing country.

Kateb exploits the reflexive potential, adopting direct language and using the classic feature of the choir. In this work, there is a role that echoes the reflection on present events, helping the protagonist and therefore also the audience, grasp the deeper layers of the narrative.

*Mohamed prends ta valise* had a successful season around Algeria and later travelled throughout France, becoming renowned as one of the first professional theater shows to center on the dramatic theme of immigration.

After a premiere in Algiers in 1971, the Théâtre de la Mer toured France with the play, where it was performed in factories, workers' dormitories and schools. The play was subsequently adapted by ACT, who performed it numerous times in Algeria and completed a second tour in France. By 1975, the group claimed to have staged the play before over 350,000 spectators. (Doshi, 2013, pg.75)

Returning to Yacine's discourse at the beginning of this section of the text, this *rapprochement* with the classic form or even theatrical popular tradition of Maghreb proved the most effective way for the author to engage the audience in direct discussion. Language and aesthetic forms were for Kateb, tools for raising political awareness.

## CEDITADE: EXPRESSION OF THE THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED IN THE FRENCH CONTEXT<sup>9</sup>

Our research mapped theatrical events that focused on the representation of the immigrant figure in the context of political conflict. A particular case is Augusto Boal, the Brazilian playwright, theoretician and theater director who lived in France in forced exile during the military coup. During the 1978-1986 period, Boal worked in France and developed a large network, through which he disseminated his techniques of the THEATER OF OPPRESSED (TO). In 1979, he created a group called CEDITADE (Centre d'études et de diffusion des techniques actives d'expression) and, in 1980, published the book *Stop ! c'est magique* by Éditions Hachette. This French edition provides access to passages and meetings where the TO was practiced in Europe. Our research draws heavily on the content of these books published in France, with special emphasis on the prefaces, seeking to elucidate part of his trajectory from these volumes. In Augusto Boal's prefaces, we identified a reflexive characteristic of his practice, and in this particular case, a special description of his actions in the French territory.

Addressing the French public, in this introduction, Boal presents his conception of the TO and makes a point of dissolving the notion of oppressor and oppressed. This notion is revisited in *L'Arc-en-ciel du Désir*, rethinking his conception of oppression more associated to individual subjectivity. In developing his experience with groups of oppressed women, factory workers, and immigrants, Boal recognizes that they suffered from the same oppressions that existed in Latin America: racism, sexism, dire working conditions, and police violence. Nevertheless, in the European context, the predicament is aggravated by solitude, the inability to communicate, and a feeling of emptiness. He revisits his experience in Europe, mentioning the large number of mental illnesses, cases of suicide and highlights the high number of "mental oppressions". In his words: "And, in imagining the suffering of the one who prefers to die, to continue to live with the soul of emptiness or the anguish of loneliness, I forced myself to work on these new forms of oppression and to accept them as such" (Boal, 2002, pg.14, free translation).

Dealing with a new broad concept of the oppressed, Boal's reflection on the immigrant case shows this to be a sensitive issue in the French context. During

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<sup>9</sup> We thank the Augusto Boal Institute's support, in the person of Cecilia Boal, who provided us with the "Yellow Dragon" text. The volumes of the CEDITADE magazines were provided to us by Jean-François Martel vice-president of the TO network in France, without who we wouldn't have had the chance to access these historical documents of the utmost importance.

his period of exile in France, the CEDITADE was a space for practice and research of The Theater of Oppressed in Europe. This group put on multiple shows and trained professionals from different backgrounds, such as teachers, social workers and militants, to work with the Theater of the Oppressed (TO) in Europe.

The activities of this center were also recorded in newsletters produced by his group over a 5-year period. The contents of these documents reveal a highly productive group and an autonomous network built in partnership with the CEDITADE and other social actors, such as teachers, social workers and leaders of rural and urban communities. Our focus was on actions linked with the immigrant theme, where most newsletters described interventions in workers associations, factories and unions. It can be assumed that a significant number of immigrant workers were influenced by the aesthetic and political experience proposed by The Theater of Oppressed (TO) in their respective work places. Although we recognize this possibility, our mapping was confined to interventions linked directly with the immigrant issue.

The table below shows five time periods in which the theme features in the practical actions described in the newsletters:

Year of publication	News-letter number	Practice	Group	Issue	City
1979	1	Image Theater and Forum Theater	Children, women and immigrants	Immigrants, racism, youth, feminine oppression and labor conditions	Dijon FR
1983	10	Image Theater and Forum Theater	Residents of 20 <sup>th</sup> Arrondissement in Paris	School, immigration and associative life	Paris FR
1983	10	Image Theater	Mixed	Immigrants' expression	Dijon -FR

1983	10	Image Theater and Forum Theater	Theater Group, immigrants and local residents	Racism against immigrants	PoitiersFR
1983	10	Forum Theater	Theater Group	Expulsion of immigrant workers	OrléansFR

The experiences described in the newsletters were presented in a variety of forms, given the texts were written by groups that reported their experiences in different levels of detail. The marked participation of the immigrant population in these reported experiences is clear, sometimes as actors or spect-actors<sup>10</sup> involved in forum theater.

A major experience reported was the forum run by the professional group *Théâtre du Tèfle* in Dijon. The group mentions the difficulties addressing the issue of immigration and racism in forum theater. The report is very attentive to the deeper layers of the problem, highlighting two possible approaches to the discussion:

From two paths indissociable for practice: 1. Based on the culture of a population and, with this population, evoke memories, sensitivities, contradictions, through creation. 2. Come with a different culture towards this same population, by a previous course, slow, sensitive, durable, plural. The process is as important as the end (CEDITADE. pg.30 1983, free translation)

The culture of the immigrant is one of the central themes developed by the group. The description of this process reveals the intent on incorporating the culture of the immigrant in the creation of the work. A specific instance is Mohamed's participation, mentioned as a reference for the entire group, that chooses to develop a dramaturgy based on their personal diary. The narrative of the process by the group highlights the interest in incorporating Mohamed's culture and the objective conditions of social adaptation experienced by him in his daily life. This results in the group presenting a show whose theme is sensitive

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<sup>10</sup> Spect-actors is a concept developed by Augusto Boal and practiced in his Theatre of the Oppressed. It's based on the idea that any spectator can act and should be stimulated to do so. In theater forum performances, viewers are encouraged to take the actor's place on stage and finalize the performance from their point of view.

to the cultural conflicts experienced by the community portrayed. The example of the experience featured in the CEDITADE book echoes the emphasis of Boal in the preface of *Stop ! c'est magique*.

In this preface, Boal mentions the need for an aesthetic, not just thematic, revolution. He discusses the possibility of devising an artistic production that presents decentralized cultures and recognizes the central theme of peasant and immigrant. In this argument, he includes the need for dialogue between those who produce art and those who appreciate it, suggesting direct participation of the spectator in the artistic process.

His questioning is directed toward the traditional culture of the theater, which holds that the effect of catharsis should be contemplative, discouraging active involvement of the spectator. This notion is central to understanding the whole methodology of forum theater. However, this logic also hinges on the understanding that dominating cultures will impose their aesthetic logic on the dominated culture.

Following this propositional logic, Boal wrote the dramaturgy *Le Dragon Jaune et la famille sourde* (1978 - 1980), where he developed the notions of immigration, cheap labor imports, structural racism, and power concentration.

The dramaturgy in question stems from a metaphorical language, the narrative of a Chinese village, led by a deaf, rich family. The village depended on the work of French immigrants, and the vested interest in their presence is soon shown by the narrator of the show:

CONTEUR- (Chinese music) Once upon a time, 3000 years ago, there was a Chinese family living in China (...) All three were always very happy because they were Princes and all the rest of the peasant population obedient (...) They engulfed all the power; on both the right and left sides of the Great Black River bathing their country. When one is very rich, one needs many servants. As the other Chinese were also quite affluent, no one wanted to accede to the menial jobs. So the Princes had the wisdom to import French workers, because in France, at that time, there was terrible hardship! The French have arrived and immediately found happiness! (French arrive) Français - We are so happy! FATHER - (as a speech) My dear friends, welcome. Here we are all equal, we live fraternally in all liberty. FRANÇAIS - Thank you, good Prince. The French immediately set to work. In the kitchen, washing the floor, working the land. The Chinese resume their rest (free translation).



The presence of a dragon who is set on eating the immigrants and later the natives, and finally the rich, deaf family, depicts the circle of inequalities and racism that can develop in society. As in his pretensions of aesthetic dialectical action, Boal exercises in this drama (produced during his time in exile), imbued with the migratory tensions pertinent to the European continent during these years. The metaphorical language, almost childlike, yet replete with a political background, allows visualization of the circularity of events.

We recognize in the action articulated by Boal through *CETTITADE* an innovative practice where theatrical pedagogy was at the service of a compound dramaturgy starring the immigrant. The processes that the *THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED* put into practice in the actions pointed out in the picture, draw an action focused on giving voice to the immigrant and not translate it from a colonial perspective. The *TO* prioritizes the recognition and the beginning of disruption of the process of oppression through theater practice, its penetration in the theatrical practice in France is still recognized in social theater actions. However, the techniques as theater forum often circulated detached from its purpose and from the theory proposed by Boal. This essay intends precisely to point out the importance of this action in time elaborated by Boal and his collaborators.

Currently the debate on decoloniality and theatrical representation take new vigor from the recently published essays, such as “Race et Théâtre: un impensé politique” de Sylvie Chalaye et “Decolonisons les Arts” organized by Françoise Vergès, Leila Cukierman and Gerty Dambury. It is under discussion the diversity representation absence regarding French society, through stage and theatre traditions that would not be in dialogue with the current French context:

If we want to summon to the stage the French society with all the rainbow palette that constitutes it, in other words to give to the polychrome youth also the taste of the theatre and name not the impression that it is a bourgeois amusement of another age that does not concern it, we must first of all think in terms of contemporary vibration, rhythm and energy. The public must be able to recognize the vibration of its time (Chalaye, 2020, p 142 free translation)

Chalaye reminds us about the diverse color palette of the of French society, heiress of a variety of migratory waves and composed by a diversity of theater references that extrapolate the traditions of Molière’s stages.



A review of the immigrant speech investment, done by the theatre troupes of the 1960s and 1970s, the spread of a theatrical pedagogy committed by Boal and the members of CETITADE in the 1980s and the dispute for the resumption of language and theatrical form before the colonial heritage in Kateb Yacine, recall a movement anchored in immigration history in France and which still today strives to find soil to stabilize. In this way, we believe that at the center of the debate is a position taken beyond representation of the history of immigration, but an incorporation of its theatrical traditions and external references to the European context. The history of French theatre points out avant-garde lights, we propose that they can also be read as actions of decolonial aesthetic experience, echoes of a theatricality in expansion.

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