

BARBER SHOP CHRONICLES

Toolkit



EXPERIENCE
art.



Welcome!

This Toolkit contains a wealth of resources meant to engage deeply with Inua Ellams' ***Barber Shop Chronicles***, which arrives at the A.R.T. in December 2018 as a part of the US premiere tour.

Newsroom and political platform, confession box and stadium—for generations, barber shops have been places where African men gather to discuss the world. Leaping from London to Johannesburg, Harare, Kampala, Lagos, and Accra, Inua Ellams' dynamic new play traces the global ties between these spaces where the banter can be barbed and the truth is always telling.

Inside this Toolkit, you will find materials on the development and context of ***Barber Shop Chronicles***, including insights from the playwright and an overview of the play; information about the cities, language, and migration trends in the countries featured in the play; and more on the context of barber shop culture and masculinity in the African diaspora.

The articles, resources, and activities in this Toolkit are curated for the use of learners of all ages, in and out of the classroom, who are looking to take a deeper dive into ***Barber Shop Chronicles***.

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***Barber Shop Chronicles* TOOLKIT**

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Barber Shop Chronicles: In Production



The touring cast of
Barber Shop Chronicles

Photo: Ryan Hartford

This section of the Toolkit looks at the production of *Barber Shop Chronicles* as it arrives at A.R.T.'s Loeb Drama Center. A brief synopsis in “About *Barber Shop Chronicles*” (pages 5-6) gives a bird’s eye view of the geographically expansive yet intimately personal story of the play. Then, A.R.T.’s Dramaturgy Apprentice, Elizabeth Amos, interviews playwright Inua Ellams in “Culture and Kinship in the Barber’s Chair” (pages 7-9) about his inspiration for the work and the themes present in the play. Finally, “Staging The *Barber Shop* Across the World” (pages 10-12) explains the history of the production and the creative challenges of touring a production of this size across continents.



Tuwaine Barrett and
Patrice Ntambona of
Barber Shop Chronicles

Photo: Ryan Hartford

About *Barber Shop Chronicles*

For generations, African men have gathered in barber shops. Sometimes they have haircuts, sometimes they listen, more often than not they talk. Barber shops are confessional boxes, political platforms, preacher-pulpits, and football pitches... places to go for unofficial advice, and to keep in touch with the world.

Mixing English with Pidgin English, the play explores contemporary black masculinity across these countries. The barbers of the tales are sages, role models and father figures, they are the glue that keeps men together. The script was written by Inua Ellams following a period of research visiting barber shops in Africa and South London, talking to clients and shop owners.

The narrative of the play:

Over the course of a day on which Chelsea plays Barcelona in the finals of a [soccer] championship, we visit five African cities—Johannesburg, Kampala, Lagos, Harare, and Accra—and London in a compilation of snapshot scenes that reveal the many connections between these various places, spaces, and their clientele, with a particular emphasis on the relationship between Africans

IN PRODUCTION

About *Barber Shop Chronicles* (cont.)

living in London and those on the African continent.

Barber Shop Chronicles is a story with a big heart and plenty of laughter. All of the characters are connected in some way, be it through family, place, history or a common joke. At the centre of the plot is the story of Samuel and Emmanuel at Three Kings barbers in London, where the day represents the three-year anniversary of Samuel's father's imprisonment for, as Samuel later discovers, stealing from the business. Alongside this narrative the play explores contemporary black masculinity across the six countries, raising children, education, supporting football teams, sex, marriage, and homosexuality.

This article is provided by Fuel, National Theatre, and West Yorkshire Playhouse.



Culture and Kinship in the Barber's Chair

An interview with *Barber Shop Chronicles* playwright Inua Ellams

*Born in Nigeria, **Barber Shop Chronicles** playwright Inua Ellams is an artist in multiple media: he has worked as a poet, playwright, performer, graphic artist, and designer, and he is the founder of The Midnight Run—an arts-filled, nighttime walking journey through urban spaces. He is the author of multiple published volumes of poetry, and his latest book, #Afterhours, is published by Nine Arches Press. Before **Barber Shop Chronicles**' arrival in Cambridge, Ellams spoke by phone from the UK with A.R.T. Dramaturgy Apprentice Elizabeth Amos in October 2018.*

Barber Shop Chronicles covers a lot of ground geographically—the play takes audiences to England, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, and Ghana—but the setting in all these locations is a barber shop. What unites these spaces despite their distance?

The barber shop has two resonances. In the UK, as I imagine it is in America, there aren't many spaces where Black men can congregate without suspicion.

Culture and Kinship in the Barber's Chair (cont.)

The barber shop is a space where we can sit, chill for hours, and loiter in public space without fear. On the African continent and here (in the UK), they are safe spaces for men to speak about things associated with masculinity. It's also where men go for advice on sexual health, finances, career, and relationships. That harkens back to traditional African communities where men would gather to talk and, now and then, someone would cut their hair. Those were the earliest barber shops—just shaded areas of the villages; outposts like rocks or cliffs or trees. It started there, in pre-colonial times, and from generation to generation it's grown in relevance.

Many of the men in *Barber Shop Chronicles* are migrants and immigrants, part of the African diaspora. Would you mind sharing a bit about your own immigration story?

My father was a Muslim when he married my mother, who was a Christian. We lived in northern Nigeria. My father went to Mecca for the pilgrimage, and when he was there, he saw some things that he wasn't too pleased with. When he returned to Nigeria, he said he was reconsidering his faith, that he didn't want to be a Muslim anymore. Shit hit the fan. Life became very difficult for my family: a few people tried to kill him, and us, so we disappeared. That's the story in a nutshell. And the story only ended this year when, after twenty-two years, my family was given indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Just this morning, my little sister had her application for British citizenship approved. She's gotten across that hurdle. The rest of us have to wait a year or two before we can apply.

Can you talk about the generational themes in the show, such as gaps in understanding between younger and older people and the pressure of familial expectations?

A strong element of African childhood is to be around your elders—to keep quiet and listen, even when they're saying really problematic or questionable things. It's part of knowing how to comport yourself in the wider public. It was important for me to show those relationships within the play, through an indigenous African lens, but also through a migrational one. The conversations men had around me in my youth still happen in barber shops. I wanted to put those on stage for all the Black men, specifically the young Black men, who grew up without their father figures around. There are a disproportionate number of Black men who are incarcerated. Statistically, here in the UK, Black men are incarcerated more than they are in America. That's how parallel this discourse is; this absence in the family exists on both sides of the ocean. I wanted those young men to come to this show and find kinship and camaraderie, to hear these conversations on stage and not feel so alone.

Culture and Kinship in the Barber's Chair (cont.)

One of the conversations in the play is about the politics of language: its evolution, translation, and preservation. As a writer, what is your position in this conversation?

I think it's so fascinating how much culture is locked in language and, subsequently, how much cultural erosion happens when a language dies. As a poet, I'm engaged with the work of preservation. I create word machines that communicate a narrative, but they also exist as an archive of the interplay between the nuance, suggestion, and precision of a language. This is becoming increasingly important because of globalization. Languages are merging together, or erupting, or dying in some cases. I wanted to reflect those notions in the play. Even in the theater, there are different types of languages: poetic discourse, dialogue, the physical body, lighting, music. All of those things are a part of the construction, creation, and communication of a play. I wanted to pin that down, and bring it right down to cultural erosion, especially in the context of colonization, which all the countries represented in the play experience at the hands of the British.

As the show tours North America for the first time, what response do you expect from American audiences?

I expect everything and nothing. The play is about men talking—primarily, men talking about what it means to be a man. I think there's a universality to this story. If you've ever belonged to a family, or sat down in a room quietly, or wondered about what it is to be someone else, then you have a gateway into the play. What the play doesn't do is touch on barber shop culture in America. That subject is just so vast that the only way I could have done honor to it is to entirely rewrite the play. What I'm hoping is that Americans can find parallels between the conversations they have and conversations happening on the African continent. In those parallels, we might discover just how global, how similar, we are.

This article originally appeared in the A.R.T. Winter 2018/19 Guide.

DISCUSSION

- Inua describes the British colonialization of the African countries featured in play as a form of “cultural erosion.” What does he mean by this?
- Inua discusses the importance of respecting one's elders in African culture. Does American culture value a respect of elders in the same way?
- If the barber shop is a place of community and conversation for African men, is there a place in your community that provides such camaraderie and connection for you and your friends?



Photo: Marc Brenner

The staging of *Barber Shop Chronicles* at the National Theatre. Note the seating on all sides.

Staging the *Barber Shop* Across the World

By James Montaña

A Brief History of the Production

The production of *Barber Shop Chronicles* on the stage at the American Repertory Theater is one leg on a varied and exciting journey for this production. Coming from London, the production has completed a tour across the UK, toured to Australia and New Zealand, and began its US tour in Tempe, Arizona this October. Like the journeys of the characters in *Barber Shop Chronicles*, the production has evolved, changed, and found new voice in the different countries it has briefly made its home.

London-based, Nigerian-born playwright, poet, and visual artist Inua Ellams had initially crafted a very different work. He had imagined a spoken word and visual arts project to be staged in a barber shop that would play with many of the ideas present in the current play. But when he struggled to find financial backers for the work, he took a different approach. Inua remolded the work into a story of twelve men, spread across seven different barber shops, intertwined by a love of soccer, the need for a haircut, and the connection that comes in the shops.

IN PRODUCTION

Staging the *Barber Shop* Across the World (cont.)

Having written a few plays before ***Barber Shop Chronicles***, Inua Ellams developed the work with Fuel Theatre Limited, which involved a series of workshops in the UK and a journey for the playwright himself. In 2014, he spent six weeks travelling across the African countries featured in the play, visiting barber shops, spending time with barbers in their homes, and engaging in wide-ranging conversations about politics, language, family, and masculinity with the many owners and patrons of the shops. He recorded his journey as a series of travel blogs on his website, which are fascinating reads themselves. [One such blog entry can be found here.](#)

The first step in the development of the play was a preview performance in February 2017 at the Cut Festival, an arts festival that, appropriately, takes place in East London barber shops. The production then moved to London's National Theatre in June of 2017 where it garnered glowing reviews and played to sold-out audiences, before moving to the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds. A mere six months after its National Theatre run, it returned to the Theatre in November and sold out again. The production began a tour of Australia and New Zealand in early 2018 before starting its North American tour in October of 2018.

The Tour

The nature of touring productions usually requires shifts from the original production. For example, the National Theatre production was originally staged in one of the theater's smallest stages, called the Dorfman Theatre. The stage at the Dorfman Theatre is one of the most flexible—seating around 450 people but capable of changing into almost any configuration. The original staging style of ***Barber Shop Chronicles*** was in an arena-style arrangement, with audiences on all sides. When the actors were not in a scene, many times they sat near or amongst the audience, participating as spectators as well. This type of staging in a smaller theater naturally makes the production more intimate, with the actors and action occurring mere feet away.

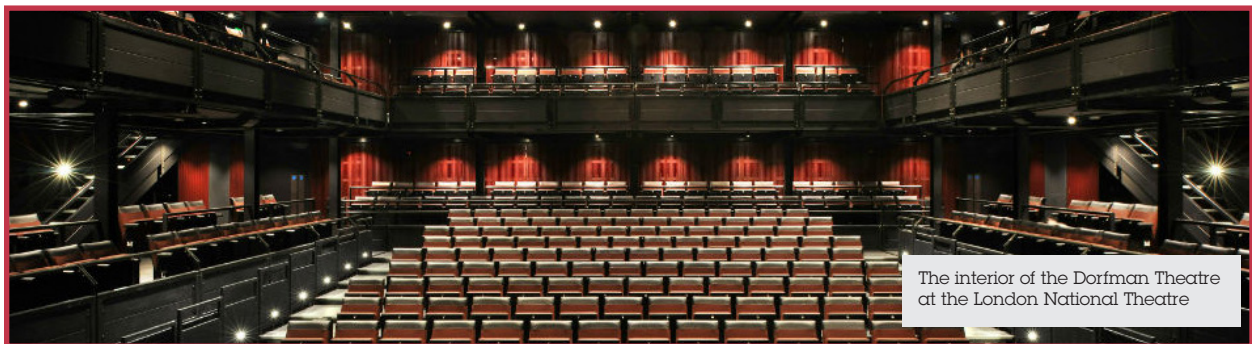


Photo: nationaltheatre.org.uk

Staging the *Barber Shop* Across the World (cont.)

But what happens when that show travels to theaters that are not so small or flexible? The production team takes this into consideration and have designs in place for each type of theatrical space. Take, for example, its first U.S. tour stop, which was a single night performance in Tempe, Arizona at the Arizona State University's Gammage Theatre this October. The Gammage Theatre has a capacity of 3,011 and is often used to stage large touring shows. This required a shift in the style of performance for the actors and in the overall design of this intimate show. Actors need to make their performances larger to encompass the much larger space and designers have to shift the placement of set pieces to make everything visible and legible to the audience.

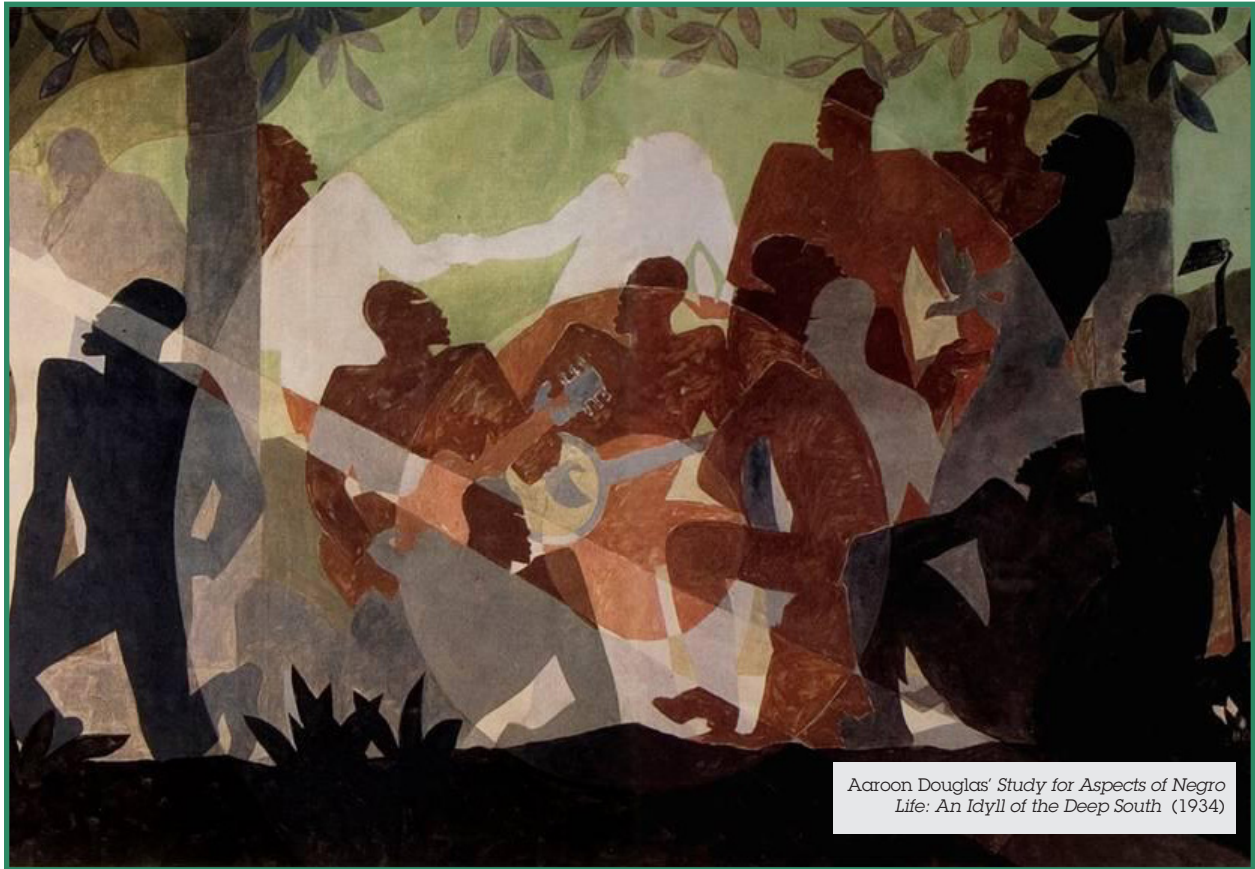


Photo: Gage Skidmore from Peoria, AZ, United States of America
[CC BY-SA 2.0]

Similarly, unlike the arena style staging at the National Theatre, the A.R.T. production will keep most of the audience in a standard proscenium arrangement, with the performers on the stage with most of the audience in front of them. However, to retain the feeling of intimacy in the original production, there will be seating around the sides of the stage, where the audience will be up close to the action and the actors.

Every production is the work of many hard-working people, and a tour even more so. Beyond the designers and cast—many of whom are new to the production themselves—the show brings technicians and stage managers to each locale, even for single night shows such as their Arizona performance. All of this to tell a story that is very personal and culturally specific in its setting but universal in its message, so that audiences in East London barber shops, in Sydney, Australia, or in Cambridge, Massachusetts can bond over the shared experiences of family, home, and needing a haircut with a little conversation.

The Diaspora



The African diaspora, or migration of African people away from their homeland, is one of the central themes of ***Barber Shop Chronicles***, and this section dives deeper into the context of diasporic movements, how cultures shift as they adapt to new environments, and the languages and traditions that are maintained across borders.

In “Discovering Africa in London” (pages 14-17), Dr. Hakim Adi discusses the histories of migration to London from Africa. Next, “Wetin Dey: Nigerian Pidgin” (pages 18-21) explains the unique language that comes from Nigeria and is used in the play. A brief guide in “The Cities in ***Barber Shop***” (pages 22-26) takes us through the countries represented in the play. Finally, a profile of former President Robert Mugabe—a dictator who has left an indelable mark in “Zimbabwe in The Rise and Fall of Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s Longtime Dictator” (page 27).



Image: Tarquin Binary [CC BY-SA 2.5]

Discovering Africa in London

*Dr. Hakim Adi, scholar of the African Diaspora, on the histories of migration informing **Barber Shop Chronicles**.*

By Hakim Adi

“I discovered Africa in London,” wrote Paul Robeson, the famous African American actor and singer who devoted his life to the struggle for African liberation and human rights for all, recalling his experiences in London in the 1920s and 1930s. A visitor to London today might expect to have very similar experiences in the district of Peckham, or throughout many parts of London where Africans and those of African and Caribbean heritage often comprise at least 25% of the entire population. Peckham today is often known as “Little Lagos,” or “Little Nigeria,” the place to buy Nigerian culinary delicacies and as famous for its association with Hollywood star John Boyega as it is for the tragic death of Damilola Taylor.

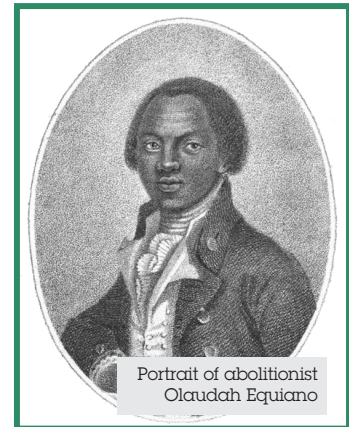
In much of south London today, the population of those from the African continent is the dominant Black demographic, outpacing the Caribbean population in the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, and Greenwich. Indeed, throughout the capital it is a similar picture, with growing populations

Discovering Africa in London (cont.)

of those from Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, and many other African countries that have outstripped the previously dominant Caribbean population. It is a phenomenon that is causing many to question the dominant narrative which associates all Black Londoners with the docking of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury in 1948, an event commonly credited as having kicked off mass post-war immigration from the Caribbean and other parts of the empire to the UK.

Before Empire Windrush, the African and Caribbean population of London was certainly not as large as it is today, but that does not mean it was any less significant, nor is its size any justification for hiding a history which predates the Roman occupation of Britain. There were Africans living and working in London in Shakespeare's time and throughout the following centuries; indeed, Shakespeare is supposed to have fallen for an African woman, Lucy Morgan, and celebrated her beauty in his sonnets.

In the eighteenth century, Africans, led by Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana, even formed their own organization, the Sons of Africa, to contribute to the mass popular campaign to end Britain's trafficking of millions of African men, women, and children across the Atlantic. At the end of the nineteenth century, London was the venue for the first Pan-African conference, organized by African and Caribbean residents to demand human rights for Black people throughout the world. It featured music by the famous Black British classical composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who was born in Croydon, London.



Portrait from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789). Public Domain.

Members of London's populations of African and Caribbean heritage contributed to mobilization efforts in both world wars, even when racism and the color bar in the services made it difficult for them. Others, like the Jamaican carpenter Isaac Hall, refused to fight. In 1916, as a conscientious objector, Hall was sent to Pentonville Prison and tortured but refused to renounce his principles.

Wartime service by African and Caribbean volunteers led to many returning to Britain to settle in the period after 1945. Britain's colonial rule produced poverty and no opportunity for higher education, so many others made the journey to Britain to better their lives and those of their families. The most well-known voyage was that made by the Empire Windrush in 1948, but many other ships made the journey from the Caribbean before and after that date. They were further encouraged when the newly created National Health Service (NHS) began to recruit in the Caribbean in 1949, followed

Discovering Africa in London (cont.)

by London Transport in 1956. Britain's post-war demand for labor led to tens of thousands of people settling in London from the 1950s onward. The barber shop/hairdresser became and remains one of the most visible signs of this settlement, which was established in different parts of London—Brixton, Croydon, Peckham, as well as Harlesden, Hackney, Notting Hill, and Paddington.



The continental African population of London arrived in the capital for a variety of reasons. Nigerians and Ghanaians were sojourning in the capital in the 1950s and 1960s, drawn by the need to gain qualifications or working in such sectors as the NHS. Some had arrived much earlier and were amongst those who helped Paul Robeson “discover” Africa in the 1920s and

1930s. In that era, Robeson became the patron of the West African Students' Union (WASU), which had been founded in 1925 to campaign for the rights of Africans in Britain's colonies Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and Gambia and to campaign against the infamous color bar: at that time, racism was legal in Britain, and Africans might be barred from hotels and public houses and denied employment. Even African women training as nurses sometimes found it difficult to secure positions in London's hospitals. The WASU therefore established its own hostel in Camden Town, which also provided the capital's first African restaurant, amongst other things adopting and adapting ground rice for Nigerian culinary purposes. The WASU also provided one of the first modern African barbers.

In those days, Peckham was known as the place of residence of Dr. Harold Moody, a Jamaican physician, and the headquarters of the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP), of which he was president. Whereas the WASU united West Africans, the LCP's membership included those from the Caribbean as well. Moody campaigned on behalf of nurses and other victims of the color bar just as the WASU did. Such was the situation facing London's African and Caribbean population at that time, a population that contained students and professionals but also many others who existed as seafarers, or earned a living as best they could.

Africans settling in London during this period were pulled and pushed by the same factors as those from the Caribbean. Though the numbers were not as

Discovering Africa in London (cont.)

large, thousands came to study with the aim of soon returning home but later remained. Others came to seek employment. Before the 1962 Immigration Act, all colonial subjects were entitled to British citizenship and residence. Even after that, many Africans came as refugees and asylum seekers following civil wars in Nigeria in the 1960s and Somalia in the 1980s and onward, as well as other conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, and Eritrea in the last decades of the twentieth century. Still others were directly recruited, especially by the NHS, which initiated a program for this purpose in the mid-1990s. By the start of this millennium, the largest African communities originated from Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, and Zimbabwe, located particularly in south London but also in boroughs such as Newham, Hackney, Brent, and, more recently, Barking, and Dagenham.

Although there are distinct African and Caribbean communities within London, there is also a common “Black” experience based on living in the city and, increasingly, on being born to parents, and growing up with family members, who may also be native Londoners. The barber shop/hairdresser is another of those common experiences, along with remittances, holidays “back home,” and increasing familiarity with what might be described as Pan-African cuisine and, of course music, from Highlife and Calypso in the 1950s to Reggae and the more recent Afrobeat. It is now increasingly common to find young Nigerians taking Congolese partners, Sierra Leoneans with Jamaicans, and every other Pan-African combination. The fluidity of Afropolitanism, we are told, is in vogue. Yet, as at the start of the twentieth century and long before, it is often the common problems facing all those of African descent—poverty, racism, eurocentrism, neo-colonialism—and their solution, that create the conditions for the most passionate discussions, whether in the barber’s or elsewhere.

Professor Hakim Adi (PhD SOAS) is Professor of the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of Chichester. He has appeared in many documentary films, on TV and radio and has written widely on the history of Africa and the African diaspora. He is currently writing a history of Pan-Africanism, to be followed by a book on the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain. hakimadi.org

This article is provided by Fuel, National Theatre, and West Yorkshire Playhouse.

DISCUSSION

- Hakim says that “Afropolitanism...is in vogue.” What does he mean by this? Do you see this in pop culture, art, or in your community? Where?
- The article discusses the neighborhoods in London that are made up of people from different ethnic groups that arrived from Africa and the Caribbean. Do you think this is common in America? Are there such communities in your area?



Image: Igwatala [CC BY-SA 4.0]

Wetin Dey: Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin and Its Many Pikin

By Kólá Túbòsún

Over 500 languages are spoken in Nigeria today, according to most accounts, although many of them are dying, endangered, or near-extinct. Three major languages spoken more widely than others are Hausa in the north (with about 70 million speakers), Igbo in the east (with about 24 million), and Yorùbá in the west (with about 40 million speakers). Other languages include Edo, Fulfude, Berom, Efik, Ibibio, Isoko. Because of the multiplicity of languages in the country and the need to communicate among different ethnic groups, English, or Nigerian English, has served as a connecting tissue, but only in formal circles: schools, government, courts. In the informal sector, however, where most Nigerians function every day, in the markets, on the streets, at restaurants, Nigerian Pidgin (NP) has emerged as a crucial and important feature.

Nigerian Pidgin doesn't have its roots in English, but in Portuguese. In about 1482, when the first Portuguese ship reached Senegal via the Gambia river, Sierra Leone about four years later, and other parts of the region in due time, it made contacts with famous kingdoms like Benin, Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. At the time, Benin, now in present day Nigeria, was said to be one of the oldest and most highly developed states in the coastal hinterland.

To trade with these kingdoms and establish a cordial relationship beneficial to

Wetin Dey: Nigerian Pidgin (cont.)

both parties, a mutually intelligible language had to be employed. It is unclear what kind of Portuguese these sailors spoke, but it is possible (and even likely) that they spoke a crooked and unrefined one, befitting that societal class of illiterate seamen. The contact of that pirate-type ship-lingo Portuguese with the language of the coastal Africans resulted in what eventually became Pidgin, and later Nigerian Pidgin.

At the time, however, it was a mere contact language, retaining elements of both cultures, enough to facilitate communication along with hand gestures and other universal signs. But it got the job done and helped cement the relationship between the seafaring Portuguese and the West African kingdoms. So when the British showed up hundreds of years later, they found it easier to communicate with the indigenes, through a later version of this language which, likely, had undergone sufficient evolution. This later contact with the British, via the slave trade, missionary invasion and colonialism further improved the intelligibility of the language, with English words added to supplement the earlier Portuguese ones.

The use of the word ‘pidgin’ in identifying the language as it exists in Nigeria today has added some confusion to understanding its current state. To linguists, a language is a pidgin only in the initial state of its creation, when it serves as the lubricating vessel of communication between two strange peoples (in this case, between the early Europeans and Africans). After a generation of contact, the language begins to evolve, filled with words and phrases from either language and others, and give the language a unique character. At this stage it stops being just a ‘contact language’ and becomes a living one. We call this stage ‘creolisation’.

The creolisation of Nigerian Pidgin happened gradually, with the adoption of the language not just as a contact lingo with Europeans but as a native language of contact and of trade with other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This is the characteristic of the language that helped it become the most used language in the country by the time it got independence from the British in 1960. By then, coastal communities, though with other native languages of their own, had adopted NP as a full native language and spoke it among themselves and to their children.

The syntax of Nigerian Pidgin is more similar to the local West African languages than the European ones. That probably explains why it used to be called ‘Broken English’, or ‘Broken’ for short, when it was perceived to be a language of the unschooled, unsophisticated people, a language spoken by those unable to grasp the complexity of English. To say ‘I am leaving’ in NP, one would say ‘I dey go’, which is a lean and simple rendering of that basic

Wetin Dey: Nigerian Pidgin (cont.)

action. ‘I will be right back’ is rendered as I dey come. This simple syntax, covered with the fleshing of English, makes it easy to use by Nigerians who eventually adopted it as a local language.

However Portuguese still has some influence. Words like *sabi* and *pikin*, which came from Portuguese *saber/sabir* and *pequeno/pequenino*, words for ‘know’ and ‘little child’ respectively, have remained in NP, to mark the true origin of the language. So, for example, *You sabi dat pikin?* means ‘Do you know that child?’ As you’ll notice, the pronunciation has also evolved as well, so that a ‘th’ is pronounced instead as a ‘d’.

There are also many different dialects of Nigerian Pidgin today, depending on where it is spoken. Words are borrowed from each of the languages that have influenced NP – words like *àbí* (a question marker) and *sé* are more common in the west, while words like *nna* and *unu* come from Igbo in the east. The Niger Delta has the highest concentration of NP speakers and here the version spoken is widely regarded as the most authentic form, sometimes as a first language. Places like Sapele and Benin are regarded as norm-producing communities, where the language has the most root and influence.

And of course, because of the diasporic migration of Nigerians to other parts of the world, there are more refined NPs spoken today across the world, from Peckham to Chicago, Houston to Baltimore. They are not markedly different from the Nigerian versions, except in accent, influenced by their new environments and company.

It is estimated that NP is the most spoken language across the Nigeria today, spoken as a first language by over 30 million people, and as a second language by the rest of the country (about 140 million). However, the language has never enjoyed the respect of the country’s elites. It currently has no official status and is neither used in education, nor governance. But in the early 60s, through the efforts of early Nigerian writers in English like Wolé Şóyínká, Chinua Achebe, JP Clark and Cyprian Ekwensi, fully formed Pidgin-speaking characters were introduced to Nigerian literature. This helped elevate the language a bit more into the mainstream.

In Nigeria today, NP functions in an informal capacity, lubricating contact and communication between people of all classes, gender, ethnic groups, and educational status. It is the language of the streets, and of uneducated market women in cosmopolitan cities. The flavour infused in each expression from the speaker’s original ethnic background continues to enrich the character of each individual output.

Wetin Dey: Nigerian Pidgin (cont.)

Where NP has dominated is in the informal sphere of television and radio entertainment, in Nollywood and the Nigerian music industry, which reaches not just all Nigerians, but also most Africans. On the streets of Nairobi, Johannesburg or Accra today, one is likely to hear ‘Wetin dey?’, ‘Wetin dey happen?’ or ‘How far?’, or any one of NP’s common greetings (meaning: ‘What’s up?’, ‘What’s going on?’, ‘How’re you doing?’) even in the mouths of non-Nigerians. This has happened through the influence of Nigeria’s entertainment industry.

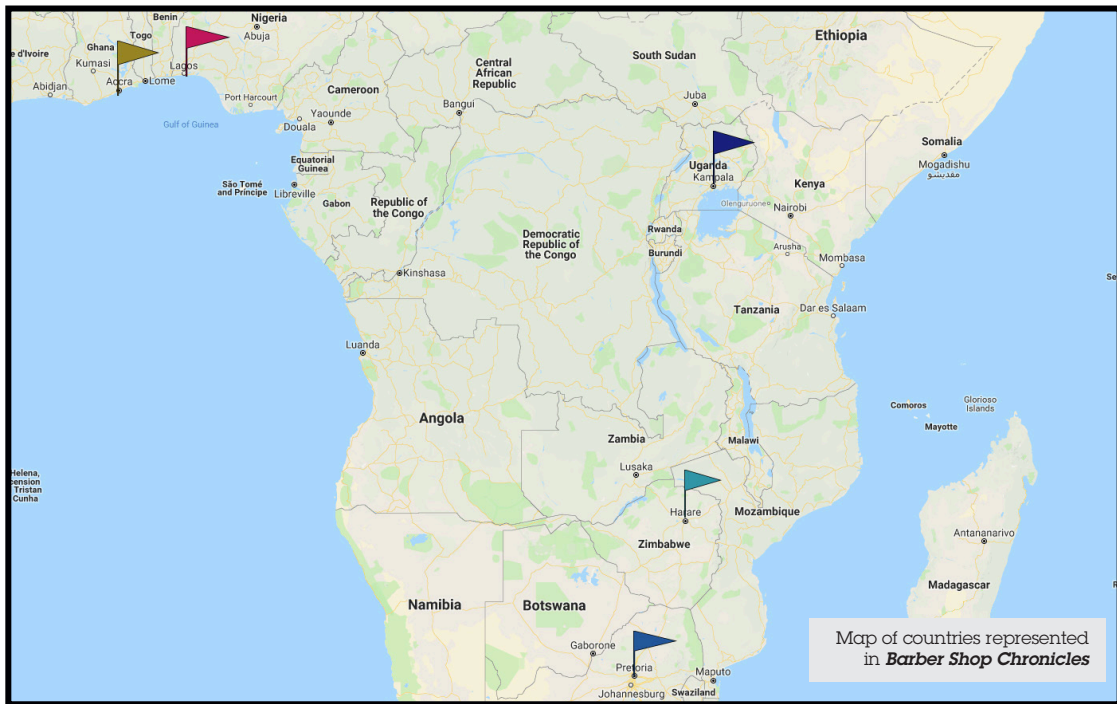
In 2009 a Conference on Nigerian Pidgin at the University of Ibadan proposed to drop the name ‘pidgin’ altogether, and call the language ‘Naija’, a nickname once reserved for referring to the country in an endearing way. This has not caught on beyond those academic circles, and it likely never will because of the tension between what the academic intervention represents (stiffness) and what NP truly is (dynamism). It is the jolly playfulness, accessibility and musicality of NP that continues to help convey the convivial spirit of Africa’s most populous country, along with colours and sound, to the rest of the continent.

Kólá Túbòsún is a Nigerian writer, linguist and editor, with work and influence in technology, education, and journalism. He is a Fulbright Fellow (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 2009) and recipient of the Premio Ostana Special Prize for Mother Tongue Literature (2016) for his work in indigenous language advocacy. He writes and translates in Yorùbá and English. His chapbook, Attempted Speech & Other Fatherhood Poems (September, 2015) was published by Saraba Magazine. He is the founder and head lexicographer of YorubaName.com and can be found on Twitter at @kolatubosun

This article is provided by Fuel, National Theatre, and West Yorkshire Playhouse.

DISCUSSION

- Kólá discusses the “norm-producing” communities for Nigerian Pidgin dialect. What does he mean by this? Is there a “norm-producing” dialect of English? If so, what?
- Kólá describes Nigerian Pidgin as possessing a playfulness and musicality. How does a language have musicality? Are there other languages that you perceive as having similar qualities?



The Cities in *Barber Shop*

Accra, Ghana

- Time zone: GMT (no daylight saving)
- Language: English is Ghana's official language. The most widely spoken local languages are Ga, Dagomba, Akan, Ewe and Twi
- Ghana's exports: gold, cocoa beans and timber products
- Food: chichinga, red red (a type of bean curry) and banku (made from fermented corn)



Accra is the capital city of Ghana, with an estimated population of 2.27 million.

The Republic of Ghana takes its name from the medieval Ghana Empire of West Africa. Ghana was the title of the kings who ruled the vast kingdom. The region is known as The Gold Coast due to the abundance of the precious metal.

During the seventeenth century, the ports in Accra passed through the hands of the British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese. They were considered valuable tactical strongholds that would aid expeditions to extract natural resources and, more devastatingly, the triangular slave trade. Britain bought Christiansborg (now Osu Castle in Accra) from Denmark in 1851, before capturing Accra in 1874. In 1877, Accra became the capital of the 'British Gold Coast'.

The Cities in *Barber Shop* (cont.)

Modern-day Accra centres on the communities surrounding the three colonial forts: James Town and the British James Fort; Osu and the Danish Christianborg Fort; and Ussertown and the Dutch Usser Fort.

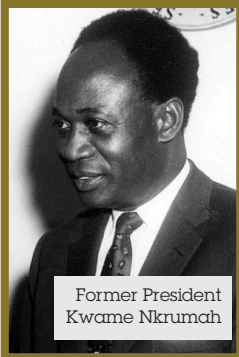


Image: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. Public

Did you know?

In 1957, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana became first African nation under British colonial rule to achieve independence. Nkrumah is widely celebrated for his achievements, as the hope of a generation and leader of the pan-Africanism movement, galvanising other African leaders struggling for self-governance. The independence ceremony held in Accra was even attended by Martin Luther King, Jr. and many other leaders of the era.

Lagos, Nigeria

- Time zone: GMT +1 hour (no daylight saving)
- Language: English is Nigeria's official language. Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa are the dominant native languages. Pidgin is commonly used in ethnically mixed areas
- Nigeria's exports: mineral fuel (including crude oil which is largely exported to India), cocoa and wood.
- Food: jollof rice, akara (deep-fried bean cake), igbin (land snails), banga (palm fruit based soup)



Lagos is the former capital city of Nigeria (from 1914 to 1991) and has since been replaced by Abuja. Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria, estimated at 21 million people.

Originally a port town on Lagos lagoon, its name comes from the Portuguese for 'lakes'. During a period of urban expansion the city spread to the west of the lagoon, leading to the classification of Lagos into two main areas - the Island and the Mainland.

Lagos officially became a British colony in 1861, but the lines that mark the nation of Nigeria as the country we now recognise were not officially drawn until 1914. Between the 1850s and early 1900s many freed slaves made the long journey from Brazil to Lagos where they quickly integrated into Nigerian society. Their Portuguese links had a major impact on a lot of architecture in the town and can be seen today. Perhaps more tellingly their presence

The Cities in *Barber Shop* (cont.)

undoubtedly has shaped Pidgin with many words being an amalgamation of Portuguese and English.

Did you know?

The Eyo Festival is a Yoruba festival, unique to the city of Lagos. Performers dressed in robes and costumes covering the face and body, take to the streets in procession. Dressed in white, participants pay homage to those who have passed. This and other masquerades are thought to have influenced many modern-day carnivals.



Image: Slashme [CC BY-SA 3.0] (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)

Kampala, Uganda

- Time zone: GMT +3 hours (no daylight saving)
- Language: English is the official language, with Swahili the country's second language
- Uganda's exports: coffee, tea, cotton, copper, oil, and fish
- Food: rolex (made from chapatti, eggs, onions and pepper), eshabwe (similar to a ghee sauce), luwombo (a meat dish cooked in a banana leaf)



Kampala is the capital city of Uganda and the 13th fastest growing city in the world, with an estimated population of over 2 million.

Before the arrival of the British, Kampala was part of a hunting ground for the Kingdom of Buganda, and home to several species of antelope, including the impala. The British named the area 'Hills of the Impala', which eventually merged with local languages to become Kampala.

In 1905, Uganda was came under control of the British Colonial Office. Kampala became the country's capital city in 1962, when Uganda gained independence. Before this, Entebbe was the capital city.

Kampala was originally built across seven hills. Due to the increasing population, the city now sits on ten hills—and continues to grow.



Refugees in transit to southern Uganda

Did you know?

Uganda has one of the world's most generous refugee policies which grants migrants land to build their own homes, rights to travel and work that are almost unheard of elsewhere.

Image: DFID - UK Department for International Development [CC BY 2.0]; via Wikimedia Commons

The Cities in *Barber Shop* (cont.)

Johannesburg, S. Africa

- Time zone: +2 hours of GMT (no daylight saving)
- Language: South Africa has 11 official languages: Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga. While English is normally used for business, only 9.6% of South Africans speak it at home. The most popular language in the home is isiZulu, spoken by 22.7%
- South Africa's exports: corn, diamonds, fruit, metals, sugar and wool
- Food: droewors (air-dried sausage), malva pudding (a sponge pudding), boerewors (a coiled sausage)



Johannesburg is the largest city in South Africa, at over 4,434,827 people (in 2011). It is the capital of Gauteng province, the wealthiest province in South Africa.

Even though settlements had existed around Johannesburg for centuries, gold found on a farm in 1884 triggered a gold rush, and the founding of Johannesburg in 1886. Within a decade, the population had shot up to over 100,000 people. As the mining industry expanded the segregationist government built shanty settlements on the outskirts of the city to house the black population who made up the majority of the workforce.

In the 1970s, Soweto was a separate township from Johannesburg where residents were only afforded temporary residential status, but was absorbed into the city in the 1990s. Soweto has seen much unrest including a famous uprising in 1976, in which students challenged the imposition of Afrikaans in the education system and dismissal of their own indigenous languages.

Did you know?

Johannesburg is the world's largest city not built on a coastline. It is also considered the cradle of humanity: over 40% of the planet's human ancestor fossils have been found in the area.

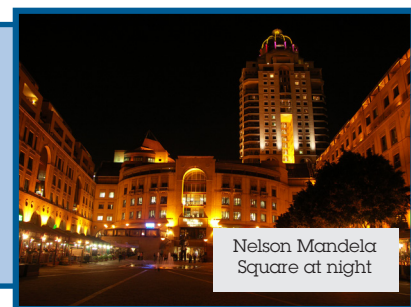


Image: NJR ZA [CC BY-SA 3.0]
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)

The Cities in *Barber Shop* (cont.)

Harare, Zimbabwe



- Time zone: GMT +2 hours (no daylight saving)
- Language: Zimbabwe has 16 official languages. English, Shona and Ndebele are the most widely spoken
- Zimbabwe's exports: gems, precious metals, tobacco, ores and sugar
- Food: dovi (peanut butter stew with vegetables and meat), Mapopo candy (made from papaya), nhedzi (a soup of wild mushrooms)

Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe, with an estimated population of nearly 2 million.

In 1890 British settlers founded the city, which they originally called Fort Salisbury after the then Prime Minister, the third Marquess of Salisbury. It wasn't until 1982 – after independence and recognition of the Republic of Zimbabwe in 1980 – that the name of the city became Harare.

The city is the financial and commercial centre for Zimbabwe, with exports including tobacco, maize, cotton, citrus fruits, and manufactured goods including textiles and steel. Gold mining is also a feature of the area, and some link the region with the Kingdom of Ophir, where King Solomon is said to have received an abundance of precious ivory and stones. There is also rich history of pottery and ceramic making in the region.

Did you know?

Chimurenga (roughly translated as revolutionary struggle) is a Shona word that has multiple uses but was originally linked to the first war of independence in 1896, known as the Second Matabele War. It also refers to a genre of music that became popular in the 60s, during the pan-Africanism movement, and is still popular today.

This article is provided by Fuel, National Theatre, and West Yorkshire Playhouse.



U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jesse B. Awalt/Released [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

The Rise and Fall of Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's Longtime Dictator

Some characters of the ***Barber Shop Chronicles*** come from or live in Harare, Zimbabwe under the rule of President Robert Mugabe, who was recently deposed. Mugabe is still a divisive figure in his own country and abroad—seen by some as a brutal dictator and by others as a protector of the Zimbabwean people. This debate heard in barber shops, over dinner tables, and on the news across Zimbabwe, finds itself on the stage of ***Barber Shop Chronicles***.

Writer Becky Little examines the life and times of Zimbabwe's former president in this fascinating article from History.com.

[Click here to read the article.](#)

Men: In and Out of the Barber Shop



Maynard Eziashi and Patrice Ntambi in *Barber Shop Chronicles*

Photo: Ryan Hartford

The barber shop is a center of communication and community for many men across the world. This section explores that place and its importance for men in the US and abroad. Director of last season's A.R.T. production ***HEAR WORD! Naija Woman Talk True***, Ifeoma Fafunwa, reflects men and the structures of masculinity in parts of Africa in "Fresh Cuts" (pages 29-31). Then, psychiatrist Baffour Ababio probes into the challenges that Black communities have discussing mental health in the UK and other parts of the African diaspora in his article "Strong Black Male" (pages 32-36). Next, "Straight Razors and Social Justice" (page 37) travels through the fascinating history of Black barbering in America—a compelling story of slavery, enduring racism, and the building of a community. Finally, in "A Cut Above: Photographs from the Barber Shops" (38-40), a short photo essay looks at the different barbers across the real settings of the play.



Patrice Njambana, Kenneth Omole, and Ekow Quartey of *Barber Shop Chronicles*

Photo: Ryan Hartford

Fresh Cuts

Finding bravado, and vulnerability, in barber shop masculinity

By Ifeoma Fafunwa

Please note: This piece contains racial slurs.

A barber, a chair, two mirrors, a generator, and a Chelsea versus Barcelona match are all that is required for a fully functioning African barber shop. Like churches, barber shops exist on almost every city street in Africa. From Lagos to London, Accra to Johannesburg, then Kampala and Harare, Inua Ellams' ***Barber Shop Chronicles*** takes us on an exhilarating and revealing journey through realistic barber shops and into the hearts of African men. This beautifully written play offers an engaging and timely view of the usually guarded vulnerabilities and dreams of strong Black men. It's up close and personal, and it is happening now, when the world shines hard lights on patriarchy and yet queries the systemic discrimination reserved for Black men living in the West.

Wielding clippers and swirling protective capes with matador precision, refreshingly honest characters speak passionately and with a political incorrectness that is becoming scarce in the West. There are impassioned

Fresh Cuts (cont.)

conversations about the treatment of gays in Uganda, the advantages and disadvantages of a jobless Black man choosing to date a white woman over a Black woman, the deterioration of Pidgin English, the unresolved anger stemming from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and even what “nigger” versus “nigga” means in America. Energetic scene changes with gloriously loud music and dance punctuate this deep and fluid discourse. Yet it’s the recurring themes of failed leadership and futile father-son relationships that tug at the heartstrings. These men tell of fathers who have been either absent or dishonest, harsh disciplinarians or simply uncaring. Fathers who, like our leaders, have been selfish—failed leadership which has left men with no choice but to leave their mothers and motherlands in search of a living wage, and who are now vulnerable and open to judgement from the rest of the world.

However, in a world where men must be men, toughness is required to prepare young men to take up position and maintain the structures of patriarchy: toughness, bullishness, intense masculinity, and proven sexual prowess. Yet, in the struggle to be an alpha male, men themselves become casualties of the competition. And where men are expected to be physically, mentally, and spiritually superior to women, reality often falls painfully short—especially when “bigger” and “badder” men leave the average man without access to the resources he needs to reign supremely within his home.

Still, irrespective of socioeconomic class, African men are culturally privileged and pampered by the women in their lives. I know from having three sons that barber shops are sacred spaces for maleness, so in the play we don’t see the contributions of mothers, sisters, and wives in the lives of these men. Nevertheless, Barber Shop Chronicles leads us towards progress and parity by gently unfurling limitations of patriarchy and asking thought-provoking questions: “If a man is an Island, is he still a man?” “How do we move forward? What do we do next?” Answers are skillfully revealed just beneath the telling when the writer pulls into focus a collaborative resilience and special kind of tolerance between these men of different African nations. It is then that answers emerge; empathy sneaks in through the door; kindness drifts in on a line just before respect is punctuated—respect for the struggle they know each man is going through. As one character observes in the play, speaking partly in Nigerian slang, “Even for dark times, the barber shop na lighthouse, a beacon for the community where men come to be men mehn!”

In the end, to use the Nigerian saying quoted in the show, “Who no know go know”: we all leave with a better understanding of what we need to do for an improved world. Barber shops are places where weary men, like cars at a mechanic shop, are patched and spruced up, given a fresh look and a pat on

Fresh Cuts (cont.)

the back to go back out there and face the toughness of an unreasonable world—perhaps even safe spaces where men can let go of worries and just sit beside their humanity.

I say “Kudos” to Inua for this entertaining and important play!



*Ifeoma Fafunwa is the Director of **HEAR WORD! Naija Woman Talk True**, produced at A.R.T. in January 2018. She was the 2017-2018 Mary I. Bunting Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. She is also the founder and creative director of iOpenEye, a Nigerian production company driving social change through performance art.*

This article originally appeared in the A.R.T. Winter 2018/19 Guide.

DISCUSSION

- Ifeoma states that, “men become casualties” in their struggles to become alpha male. What does she mean? And do you agree?
- In what ways are the structures of the patriarchy limited? In what ways are they perpetuated?



Photo: Ryan Hartford

Elliot Edusah in *Barber Shop Chronicles*

Strong Black Male

Baffour Ababio looks at why men in Black communities avoid speaking out about mental health

By Baffour Ababio

Fear predominates in conversations about mental health issues. It is used in connection to people's perception and knowledge about the range of treatment options available. It is linked to the spectre of being sectioned under the Mental Health Act, of the police being involved, of the effects of antipsychotic medication, of stories of individuals with mental health problems inexplicably dying in police cells.

Amongst London's ethnic minority groups, this fear mutates when it intersects with ideas about mental illness from their various countries of origin. In Ghana's capital, Accra, for example, the perception of mental health problems conflates sometimes with the mysterious happenings behind the walls of the Accra psychiatric hospital; a perception reinforced by the sight of mentally ill people wandering the streets begging, wearing rags, sometimes naked.

Most languages use derogatory terms to talk about their mentally ill. In Lagos, Nigeria the Yoruba term were (meaning insane) is linked to the Yaba hospital, while the Shona word Benzi (meaning stupidity) is used to talk about the SASCAM hospital in Harare, Zimbabwe, adding further stigma to these much-

Strong Black Male (cont.)

feared – and usually urban – psychiatric hospitals. The attitudes towards mental illness in these developing countries vary between the urban and rural areas. In the rural areas communities seem more settled with the dynamic existence of familiar, caring relationships with the mentally ill person.

Recently, I have been struck by memories of the stereotypes I held growing up in Accra and of using the Ga term *Sekeyelor* (meaning mad person). I recall visits to Banjul in The Gambia in the 1980s where in Wolof, they say *denga mankeh* – similar to ‘one missing a screw’.

When I arrived in the UK I experienced disorientation followed by a period of profound sadness, and this was partly instrumental in my decision to train to become a psychotherapist. But I also made the choice because of the prevailing fear, stigma and shame within the black community (‘black’ in this article is used in reference to black British, African Caribbean and African), which places a lid on psychological problems, stemming their expression and thwarting access to timely treatment. There seems to be a notion that once an individual is touched by mental illness, they can never return to the way things were; that they are marred for life.

When I started training, there were very few professional spaces to engage black people in talking therapy, and the mental health treatments offered were geared largely towards medication and hospitalisation, often seen as necessary treatment in the context of the stereotype of the ‘black, dangerous male’. As one of the few black, male psychotherapists in the UK, I felt I could play an important role in helping other men talk about their problems.

Until the 1980s it was difficult for members of the black and ethnic minority groups in the UK to access psychotherapy or counselling. Places like Nafsiyat Intercultural Therapy Centre set up stalls during that period, to work with them. Black and ethnic minority groups were excluded from traditional psychotherapy because of the idea that they were not ‘psychologically minded’. My training came about through a collaboration between Nafsiyat and UCL and it challenged me to confront the racism implicit in much medical and psychotherapeutic theory. Intercultural psychotherapy acknowledges the reality of mental illness but argues that the course, recovery, outcome and symptoms are shaped by the cultural and social context.

There is an urgent need for early intervention in issues of mental health, particularly as the black community in the UK operates under the pressure of striving to be seen as capable of survival and of becoming financially successful. The link between this pressured environment impacting underlying

Strong Black Male (cont.)

vulnerabilities and widening psychological fissures is a strong one. The stress of racism, migration, vestiges of the colonial experience, the fragmentation of communities and the processes black men experience in the mental health system, stoke the fear of addressing the early signs of mental health problems, contributing to increased rates of mental illness.

Racism has its overt expressions but is also experienced as micro-aggressions. A black male client who consulted me for psychotherapy talked about his internalisation of the stereotype of the 'dangerous black male'. He described running the gauntlet to work daily: observing the empty seat next to him not being readily taken, the frustrations of disempowerment at work, walking home late and hurrying to overtake the white woman in front – to reassure her. He would arrive home and snap at his wife and children, unwinding with a drink. He realised his anger was displaced. He went to the dentist; a white, female dentist put a temporary fix on his molar and cautioned him not to chew any bones. He left the dental surgery angry but confused – was he being too sensitive? Why did she refer to 'bones' and not 'any hard foods'?

The concept of the strong, black man – interpreted to mean an aversion to talking about emotional problems – results in the accumulation of stress. And the stereotype of the strong, black male inevitably seep into spaces where male interaction often occurs, such as sport (participating or watching), the barber shop and the gym. This could mask or inhibit vulnerability and further discourage men from opening up, due to the fear that it might be deemed an indication of homosexuality or bisexuality. This silence also indicates the community's position not to air its 'dirty linen' in public.

Barber Shop Chronicles describes the setting within which the barbering occurs. The client sitting in the chair, a cloth wrapped around him, introduces a degree of intimacy and vulnerability in the interaction. It resonates with my work as a psychotherapist and made me consider the possibilities of collaborations between barbers and therapists.

I remember visiting my barber the day before my wedding on the pretext of getting a good haircut for the big day. I now see my barber as the 'best man' no one knew about, and our talk that day prepared me for my rite of passage. For my clients, too, the barber shop can provide a place of refuge.

'John', who saw me for psychotherapy, had left his country of origin in Africa – a country where he was exposed to the brutalities of civil war. He arrived in the UK and found a job in transport, met a black British woman, got married and had children. His in-laws did not approve of him and thought his spoken

Strong Black Male (cont.)

English was not up to par. Eventually John embarked on an affair and took to drink, becoming alcohol-dependent.

During this time, John developed a rapport with his barber and would travel to north London to see him. He enjoyed sitting in the chair – akin to the counselling chair, perhaps – as his barber stood behind him, cut his hair and conversed with him. Despite this interaction, John's drinking spiralled out of control, into domestic violence, arrest and a breakdown. His marriage ended and so did his relationship with his children.

With proper support, the trust and routine of this weekly session with the barber could have enabled John to seek help sooner from his GP, who could have facilitated a referral to an appropriate psychological, medical and cultural intervention to complement the barber's time with him.

When I saw John for psychotherapy, it was clear that the cause of his breakdown was multifactorial and intersectional. Amongst other things, he had unaddressed issues from his encounter with the civil war in his country of origin. His sense and experience of community had already been fragmented before he arrived in the UK and he attempted to recreate a family around him. His marriage was in part undermined by the internalised colonial issues of fluency in English and the stress of getting a middle-class job to placate his in-laws. John also struggled to strike the balance of being vulnerable with his wife whilst remaining the 'strong man' he felt he had to be.

In my work with John, he disclosed his fear of breakdown and of being diagnosed with schizophrenia. This fear is real insofar as it is based on actual reported cases within the black population, where patients are two to three times more likely to be involuntarily hospitalised under the Mental Health Act.

In relation to their numbers within the general population, black people are over-represented in psychiatric hospitals; particularly in locked wards, probation services and prisons. Black men are over-represented in the diagnosis of serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, resulting in labelling and reinforcing mistrust and suspicion of mental health professionals. These experiences enable negative perceptions of mental illness to be directed towards places of help, like The Paterson Centre for mental health in west London.

It is a fear which deters people from seeking help. To change this, we need to find ways to raise awareness of local mental health resources, particularly culturally appropriate services in black communities – and this could mean

Strong Black Male (cont.)

collaborating with barbers. What if we could work to embed a working knowledge of signs, symptoms and treatment of mental illness within these communities? It's not entirely about focusing on deficits, it is also about acknowledging existing strengths within these communities, its people, its resilience, its contributions, its coping mechanisms and facilitating and celebrating them.

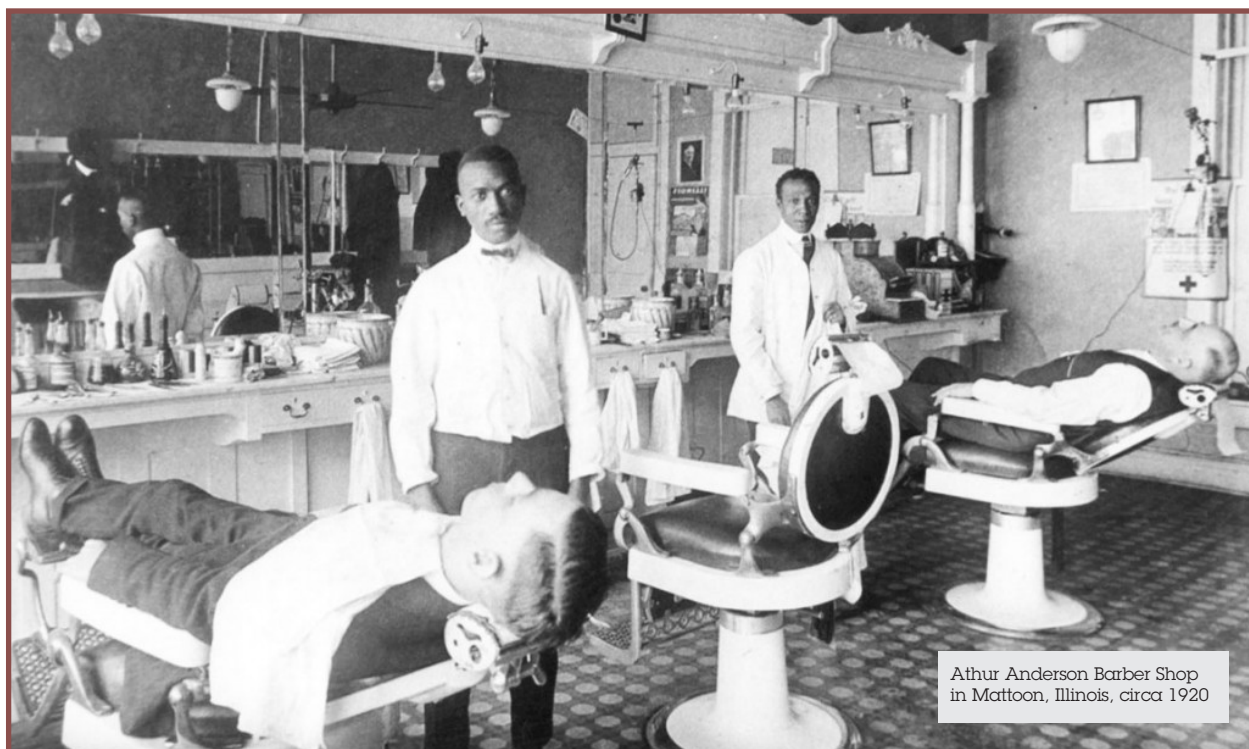
Baffour Ababio, May 2017

Baffour Ababio is a Psychoanalytic Intercultural Psychotherapist and clinical supervisor in private practice and at NAFSIYAT Intercultural Therapy Centre, where he has also worked as Head of Clinical Services. Alongside his clinical role, he has also developed a career in managing mental health services, integrating a community-based response to support recovery from a broad range of mental health problems. He completed his training at University College London and The Guild of Psychotherapists. He is a member of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and The British Association for Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Supervision (BAPPS).

This article is provided by Fuel, National Theatre, and West Yorkshire Playhouse.

DISCUSSION

- Baffour Ababio discusses the struggle John experiences trying to balance being vulnerable with his wife and being a “strong man.” Are there similar double standards that you see in your own cultural constructions of gender roles?
- How does your community acknowledge mental illness? Is the stigma described in the article similar to your community or your family?



Athur Anderson Barber Shop
in Mattoon, Illinois, circa 1920

Photo: Artist Unknown. Public Domain.

Straight Razors and Social Justice: The Empowering Evolution of Black Barbershops

The history of barber shops in America is a history of racism, slavery, Black empowerment, and, ultimately, community. But before becoming a locus of Black male community, the barber shop once excluded Black men as customers despite the barbers themselves being Black. Barbering, however, became one of the few ways that Black men could gain financial capital and sometimes exert political influence in their community. With the arrival of waves of German, Irish, and Italian immigrants to the United States in the late 1800s came competition in the barbering profession and kicked-off the professionalization movement, which intended to formalize schooling and certification of barbering while slowly excluding Black barbers—who had long been the sole American barbers up until the early 1900s.

In his 2013 book, *Cutting Along the Color Line*, historian Quincy T. Mills explores the complicated and compelling history of Black barbering in the United States. Writer Hunter Oatman-Stanford interviewed Mills about this history for *Collectors Weekly*.

[This wide-ranging and informative interview can be found here.](#)



Photo: Isabel Sommerfeld. CC Attribution. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/> via Flickr.com

Laurenzo the Barber: Boys of the township
Bridgetown, Cape Town
By Isabel Sommerfeld

A Cut Above: Photographs from the Barber Shops

By James Montaña

The singular set of **Barber Shop Chronicles** takes us through a variety of barber shops across Africa and London. Its posters, furniture, and barbering props reflect the myriad of styles of décor or tools that could be found in each place. This photo essay takes us into the real shops across Ghana and South Africa to explore the diversity of barber shop businesses and the barbers that run them.

A Cut Above (cont.)



Photo: Alan Flowers. CC BY 2.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/> via Flickr.com

Soweto salon
Johannesburg, South Africa
By Alan Flowers



Photo: Nemethdani93 [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons

Open air barber in Accra, Ghana
By Nemethdani93

A Cut Above (cont.)



Photo: hiroo yamagata [(CC BY-SA 2.0) via Flickr.com]

Barber shop in Tamale

Tamale, Northern Ghana

By hiroo yamagata



Photo: Brian Snelson. [(CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.com]

Mr Cobbs, The Barber

Schotschekloof, Cape Town

By Brian Snelson

Educational Activities

Lesson Plan Index

EXPLORING MIGRATION

Pages 42-46

In this activity, students will understand the various causes of migrations across the world and will use that knowledge to interview others about their own or their family's migration story. Students will use the information gleaned from these interviews to examine trends in migration.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Barber Shop Chronicles**.*

OPPOSING VIEWS ON WORLD NEWS

Pages 47-48

In this activity, students will gain an understanding of international political figures and wrestle with varying public opinion on the figure. Utilizing research by various means, students will present the pro and con opinions concerning a controversial leader to their fellow students.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Barber Shop Chronicles**.*

HONORING THE STORY

Page 49-51

*In this activity, students will interview a person who influenced their life. Students will learn about the process of interviewing and transcribing stories, then reframe the interviews by dramatizing them, similar to the development process of **Barber Shop Chronicles**.*

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Barber Shop Chronicles**.*

RESOURCES

Page 52

Lesson Plan: Exploring Migration

OBJECTIVES

Students will understand the causes of migration across the globe and use that information to develop an interview with people in their community regarding their own migration story. Students will analyze the migration narratives and unpack the data as a group.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Barber Shop Chronicles**.*

SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

*MA CH.PCH.13.a -- **Interdisciplinary Learning Objectives** (Laws & Policy. Connects with History & Social Science: Geography) Identify the reciprocal relationships among social and economic factors and practices and ecological health.*

*MA CH.PCH.14.c --**Interdisciplinary Learning Objectives** (Laws & Policy. Connects with History & Social Science: Chronology & Cause) Analyse the reciprocal relationships among social, economic, and environmental factors and community and public health.*

MA RCA-H.9-10.1 --Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

TIME

2 Class periods
Class one: 10-15 Minutes
Class two: 45 Minutes

MATERIALS

- Worksheets (provided)
- Whiteboard or chalkboard
- Masking Tape
- Marker
- Index cards (enough for each student to have 5 or 6)
- Computer, monitor, or projector for PowerPoint

PROCEDURE

Introduction

[Review the “Introduction to Migration” PowerPoint in class to understand the key concepts present in this activity.](#)

Distribute Student Worksheet 1 and the World Outline Map to your students. Each student should interview the same number of people, using the questions on the worksheet. It is suggested that each student interview three to five people in order to have a large amount of data to use in the activities that follow. For the best results, each subject should not be interviewed by more than one student. Students should record the answers they are given on separate sheets of paper, clearly labeled with each interviewee’s name.

Review the following three terms before beginning.

1. **Emigration** means that you left a place where you lived to go somewhere else, while immigration means that you came to a place to live there. If your family migrated to the United States from Spain, they *emigrated* from Spain, and *immigrated* to the United States.
2. **Ancestors:** members of your family who came before you: your parents, your

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grandparents, your great-grandparents, etc. are your ancestors.

3. **Ancestral language:** the language spoken by your ancestors or family before immigrating to the country where you live now. In some cases, this may be the same language that you speak now. In other cases, it may be different.

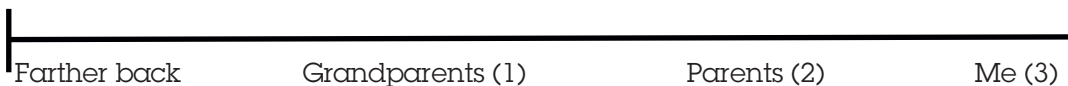
Have students interview their subjects. Primary activity will occur following the completed interviews.

Primary Activity

1. Distribute index cards to each student (each student should have one card for each person that they interview). The student should write the name of one interview subject on each card large enough to be read from a distance. Students should have each interviewee's info with them to be able to complete the activity.
 - Explain to students what a spectrum is. Tell them they will explore migration trends by plotting each subject on the spectrum.
2. Place a 10- to 15-foot long piece of masking tape across the floor in the front of the class. On the chalkboard behind the spectrum, label the ends of the spectrum as shown:

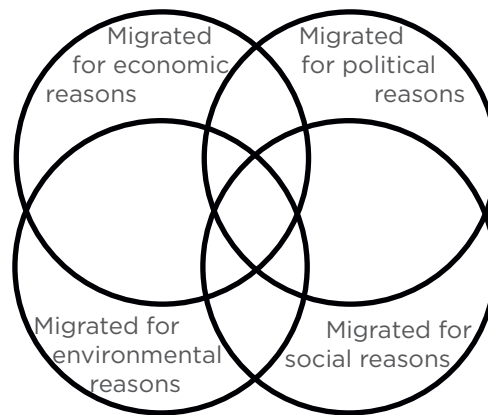


- You may also want to demarcate years in 50 year intervals. Have each student place each of their index cards on the spectrum to indicate when their subject immigrated.
3. Ask the class to identify patterns on the spectrum graph. In what year(s) did large numbers of people immigrate at the same time? Students may do additional research to determine if there is a historical event that took place either in the home country or the host country that would prompt large numbers of people to migrate.
 4. Create a second spectrum labelled:



- Have each student look at Question 3 in the “On your own” section of their worksheet. On the back of each index card, students should write a 1, 2, or 3, indicating how many generations their subject’s family continued to speak his or her ancestral language. Then have each student place the card at the appropriate place on the time line.
 - Compare the results of this spectrum to the immigration time line. Can you observe any patterns? Do people who migrated more recently tend to speak their ancestral language more than people who migrated a long time ago? Why do you think that might be? Are there any exceptions to this? Why?
5. The final activity uses the Venn Diagram below. You may choose to draw a large Venn Diagram on the chalkboard, or to create one on the floor using tape, chalk, or other materials. Students can place their cards in the appropriate place, draw an X, insert a pushpin, etc. to indicate the reasons that their subjects migrated.
 - Have students analyze the patterns on the diagram. Are there any trends? For example, some African-American subjects will have identified forced migration due to slavery as the reason for emigration. Have students try to identify the reasons for other noticed trends.
 6. On the chalkboard or a flip chart, have students identify the countries from which their subjects’ families emigrated. Tally up the numbers. Which country represents the largest number of immigrants? Which has the smallest?

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- Have students with subjects whose ancestry lies in the country with the largest tally recreate the above spectrums using those subjects and identify any patterns. Repeat this with the second largest country. If patterns have emerged, have students research and identify reasons for them. Why did emigrants leave their country? What did they do when they came to the U.S.?

REFLECTION

- Did you know the varying reasons for migration before today?
- Do you know your own family's migration story?
- Does the news media reflect the varying reasons for migration in its coverage of migrations? Why or why not?
- Where do you hear debates about migrants?

*Lesson plan adapted from the University of Texas at Austin
[Original plan can be found here.](#)*

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Student Worksheet #1

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

Assignment: Interview five adults about their family's origins in this country. Ask them all the questions and write the answers below or on an index card. Fill in all of the blanks, even if your subject doesn't know the answer or is unsure. Some people may have more than one answer for some of the questions—if so, try to keep the answers in order.

Subject's Name: _____

Subject's Age: _____

Were you born in this country (yes / no)?

If no, where were you born?

Where did your family come from (specify country)?

When did your family immigrate to this country?

Why did your family immigrate?

Did your entire family migrate at once? If so, do you know why? And if not, do you know why not?

Does anyone in your family speak their "ancestral" language? Do you? Do your parents? Your grandparents?

On your own: On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions for each of your subjects:

1. Calculate how many generations your subject's family has been in the country. Count "1" if your subject immigrated, "2" for their parents, "3" for their grandparents, etc. If you can't tell, write "unable to calculate."
2. Classify the reason that the subject's family immigrated. Did they immigrate for economic reasons? Political reasons? Social reasons? Environmental reasons? If they migrated for a combination of reasons, list each of the classifications.
3. Calculate how many generations your subject's family continued to speak their ancestral language. Count "3" if your subject still speaks his/her ancestral language, "2" for their parents, "1" for their grandparents, etc. If you can't tell, write "unable to calculate."
4. Using a blank outline map of the world, you should color in the country or countries where your subjects have their origins. Create a key that uses different colors to indicate how many subjects have family origins in a particular country.

Student Worksheet #2



Color in the country or countries where your subjects have their origins. Create a key that uses different colors to indicate how many subjects have family origins in a particular country.

Exploring Migration

Lesson Plan: Opposing Views on World News

OBJECTIVES

Students will learn how to explore both sides of an international news story. They will use various methods to gather research on a contentious political figure in world history. Using this research, they will prepare a brief presentation of their findings.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Barber Shop Chronicles**.*

SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

MA RCA-H.9-10.6--Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

MA RCA-H.11-12.2--Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

MA SL.9-10.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, vocabulary, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose and audience.

TIME

45 Minutes

MATERIALS

- Computers
- Poster sized paper/posterboard
- Pens/pencils
- Paper
- Whiteboard or Chalkboard
- Printed article on Robert Mugabe

PROCEDURE

1. On a piece of paper have students create a chart with two columns. One column should state "Technology is ruining our lives." The other side should state, "Technology is improving our lives." Prompt students to fill out the chart with as much support for each statement as possible. After giving students time to write, discuss what students wrote, pro and con technology.
2. Discuss the importance of looking at both sides of an issue, especially regarding politics.
 - Ask if it is possible that equivocal statements like "is ruining" or "is improving" are too small. Could technology possibly be doing both?
3. Move into a discussion on political leaders and political movements. Prompt the students to give examples of controversial political leaders and movements.
4. Students are then given some information on recently deposed President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe from this helpful primer on the former leader: <https://www.history.com/news/the-rise-and-fall-of-robert-mugabe-zimbabwes-longtime-dictator>
5. Ask about the opposing views of Robert Mugabe from the article's content.
6. Divide the class in half. Half the students will research work in support of Robert Mugabe and the other half researching opposition to Robert Mugabe. Students are then given time to research their side. This part of the assignment could be done as homework, with step 7 occurring at a separate class time.
 - Each of the two groups should subdivide into smaller groups to gather information

Opposing Views on World News

from as many different kinds of sources as possible to support their side's view from social media, articles from varying countries, interviews, news stories, blogs, etc.

7. Groups should then create a powerpoint or poster presentation containing as much research in support of their topic as possible and present to the class.

WRAP-UP/HOMEWORK OPTION 1: Choose a different world leader from any time period and develop a list of support/opposition to them using the different kinds of sources that were used in class. Provide references.

WRAP-UP/HOMEWORK OPTION 2: Find a recent news article/TV news story and develop a chart like we did in the beginning of class. Fill in the chart to determine how much the article/story addresses both sides of the issue at hand.

VARIATION

Students could debate their sides either as a class, or in pairs from either side.

REFLECTION

- What was most interesting about the research you found?
- What was the greatest challenge you experienced in doing your research?
- Did you find it difficult or easy to only research one opinion on Robert Mugabe?
- Do you think that most of the news that you read/watch/hear today looks at both sides of an issue? Why or why not?

Lesson plan by Lexi Auth.

Lesson Plan: Honoring The Story

OBJECTIVES

In the style of Verbatim Theater, students will observe a story told. They will note the elements of the story and transcribe its telling as accurately as possible. Students will then exercise the process of interviewing by interviewing one another and engaging a story important to the interviewee.

Students will identify a person in their life who influenced them. They will interview that person, utilizing the techniques developed in the class. Similar to the storytelling in **Barber Shop Chronicles**, the students will honor the stories by dramatize the interviews.

This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Barber Shop Chronicles** and will provide students with a firsthand context for the construction of the play.

SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework

Writing Standards 9-12 3. Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. 5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Speaking and Listening Standards 9-12 1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively 2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

Theatre Learning Standards PreK-12 1 Acting Students will develop acting skills to portray characters who interact in improvised and scripted scenes. 2 Reading and Writing Scripts Students will read, analyze, and write dramatic material. 5 Critical Response Students will describe and analyze their own theatrical work and the work of others using appropriate theatre vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation. 18 Apply appropriate acting techniques and styles in performances of plays from a variety of dramatic genres and historical periods 9 Drawing on personal experience or research, write a monologue for an invented, literary, or historical character 19 Identify and describe, orally and in writing, the influence of other artists on the development of their own artistic work.

TIME

Students will need time to interview community members. The lesson can be a two-day activity.

MATERIALS

Picture from Facilitator to display
Recording Device/Cellphone for interviews (optional)
Paper and writing utensils for note taking and drafting

Honoring the Story

PROCEDURE

Terms To Know:

- **Verbatim Theater:** A form of documentary drama which employs tape-recorded material from the 'real-life' originals of the character and events to which it gives the dramatic shape. Recordings are used as the primary source of the play, and players commitment to the use of vernacular speech.
- **Playback Theater:** a form of improvisational theatre in which audience or group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted.

Process

1. In the style of Verbatim theatre, Facilitator will guide students in the following exercises to prepare them for the interview they will uncover in this process.
2. **Exercise 1:** Facilitator will bring in a personal picture that holds a story and display it to the class. All of the students must scribe or record the Facilitator's story as it is being shared. Their job is to honor the story, making sure they get as many details as possible.
3. Students will then have a minute or two to revise any pieces of their writing. Volunteers can share their writing. Once shared, the student volunteer must ask, "Did I miss anything?" Facilitators may add or correct any parts of the story. The student then thank the Facilitator for sharing.
4. **Exercise 2:** Pair off students. Have the students decide who will be 'A' and who will be 'B'. Using recording devices, or having 'A' as the scribe, student 'B' will have one-minute to share a story. Facilitator may use a prompt for the story, but students should have a minute or two to think of one to share. Once they have selected a story, 'B' will share, while 'A' records everything said, including verbal fillers (like, "um", "ahs"). Student 'A' will then try to honor the story of 'B', by playing back the story as recorded. Pairs may share the stories with the class at the end of the session. Once shared, the student volunteer must ask, 'Did I miss anything?', their partners may add or correct any parts of the story. The student then thank their interviewee for sharing.
5. Students will expand upon this learning by identifying a person in their life who is important to them.
6. Students will then interview the person, using a specific prompt, such as, "Can you tell me of a moment when you felt you were not being heard?" Students will record/ scribe the moment using the techniques established in class.
7. Students will then build a dramatic scene or monologue based on their interview and rehearse it with a peer in class.
8. The scenes or monologues will be presented to the class, utilizing any costumes, sound, lighting, or props the students deem necessary to flesh-out their performance.

Variation

Students could perform the interviews in teams and establish the performance together.

Things to Consider

- Performance of another can easily fall into imitation. It is best if the interviewee is not the performer, but rather is in the role of Director/Playwright in the process.
- Though every detail of the interview, including verbal fillers, should be captured, accuracy isn't as important as truth. It is ok in the final performance portion to remove the verbal fillers as they usually make performance stilted.

Honoring the Story

REFLECTION

- What is the purpose of Verbatim theatre?
- How did the techniques in class help prepare you for the interview?
- What are some moments during this process that you felt that you were honoring the story of your interviewee? What were the moments when you felt you struggled to honor their story?
- What were some of the highlights or challenges of this process?

Resources

VIDEO:

- [Playwright Inua Ellams' TEDxBrixton talk called "Redefining black masculinity."](#) The creator of Barber Shop Chronicles discusses his inspiration for the play and his process.
- [Barber World TV's look at Black barber shop health outreach programs.](#) Early studies are showing great success with health screenings and prevention for Black men at the barber shops.
- [Historian Quincy T. Mills briefly discusses the history of Black barbering in the United States.](#)

AUDIO:

[Black Boys & Men: Changing the Narrative.](#) This podcast is a compelling examination of Black masculinities from the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research.

[An interview with Jocelyne Muhutu Remy, a journalist tracing the many stories and lives of people in the African Diaspora.](#) From the Talking Heads Podcast.

READING

["The power and politics of the black barbershop" by Jason Parham](#) from *Fader*. This article is a personal photographic journey into the space for communion and healing in the Black barber shop.

["5 black barbers on why barbershops are sacred spaces" by Rawiya Kameir](#) from *Fader*. A short photo essay on barbers' deeply held beliefs about the shops.

[Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America](#) by Quincy T. Mills from University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. A fascinating book tracing the history of Black barbering in America—from slavery to the current era.