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## The Rockefeller Connection: Visualizing theatrical networks in the Cultural Cold War<sup>1</sup>

This article examines how the Rockefeller Foundation funded theatrical initiatives in developing countries: the Philippines and Nigeria. Using visualization software, in this case the open source application Gephi, we demonstrate how personal and institutional networks underpinned the cultural, specifically, theatrical development strategy of the foundation. It discusses the principles underpinning historical network analysis and analyzes two case studies, Severino Montano's Arena Theatre in Manila, and the establishment of a School of Drama at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

keywords: historical network analysis; visualization software; Gephi; Rockefeller Foundation; University of Ibadan; Severino Montano; Arena Theatre; Theatre in the Round; Cultural Cold War

In the aftermath of the Second World War, amidst growing superpower tensions, the US embarked on a massive soft power initiative to counter Soviet influence. Known today as the Cultural Cold War, for the first time in the nation's history substantial state funding for the arts was channelled abroad not only through the State Department but also via covert channels. The latter were mainly funded and coordinated by the CIA which established a network of front organisations to dispense American largesse. The most famous of these was the Council for Cultural Freedom which played a central role in the 1950s and 1960s. Although mainly active in Western Europe it also promoted the arts and literature in some developing countries.<sup>2</sup>

American philanthropy, especially the Big Three (Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie) assisted in this hearts and minds war. While not directly subordinate to the State Department or the CIA, their aims were often congruent – establishing liberal democracy across the world – and the personnel interchangeable. Between 1950 and 1970 American philanthropy channelled funds into developing countries to support the arts, especially theatre, by building infrastructure, implementing drama programmes, and supporting promising artists. The connections between philanthropic organisations, American foreign and cultural policy,

<sup>1</sup> This article has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 694559 – DevelopingTheatre).

<sup>2</sup> See Frances Stonor Saunders: *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, London 1999.

academic institutions and individual artists and scholars were multitudinous and often difficult to grasp. This activity was held together by networks, both personal and institutional. In this paper we shall endeavour to make these networks visible in order to better understand the dynamics of Cultural War politics as it related to theatre in developing countries. Network analysis can provide a better understanding of the relationship between the prominent individuals and the often, invisible support structures enabling this prominence. We shall analyse two examples of how the Rockefeller Foundation funded theatrical initiatives in developing countries: the Philippines and Nigeria. Using visualization software, in this case the open source application Gephi, we shall demonstrate how personal and institutional networks underpinned the cultural, specifically, theatrical development strategy of the foundation.

### 1. Historical Network Analysis

Historical network analysis adapts social network theory and applies it to historical phenomena. Almost all network theories work with concepts of nodes, edges and hubs (or their terminological equivalents). Nodes are entities (people, events, places etc.) that stand in a relation of connectedness to other nodes. These connective relations are known as ‘edges’. Hubs are usually understood as nodes with a particularly high degree of connectedness: they have an unusually large number of edges. Because edges can differ greatly in their intensity and degree of importance for a network they are differentiated according to three main categories of centrality: degree centrality refers to the number of edges radiating from a specific node; betweenness centrality designates the importance of a specific node in a network (usually the number of connections it enables), while closeness centrality refers to the proximity of a node to other nodes; this might influence a person’s access to information.

Aided by a growing selection of software, network analysis has the ability to visualize large amounts of data in order to demonstrate the various connections that exist between nodes: not only their relation to one another but also the degree or intensity of the relations. Numerous studies have demonstrated the potential of visualizations to represent ‘centrality’ as defined above. Historical network analysis enables us to plot ties, relations and connections. We will see that the many Rockefeller offices and officers and their personal contacts, if we view them as a global network, had multifarious edges. They intersected not just with the artists they supported but with universities, field officers, government officials, and artists and administrators in the US. The elucidation of these varied and often complex connections is a central task of this article.

Networks can be structured in many different ways. Ego networks tend to radiate out from individuals or specific events. Business networks connect individuals with companies and products. Following one of the insights of actor-network-theory, which is loosely related to historical network analysis, we could also

construct a network around objects or material things, which in the epistemological world of ANT can have as much agency as human subjects.

They should and can be located as nodes in networks. One such object to be explored here is a now forgotten book, *Theatre in the Round* by Margo Jones (1951), which in the first phase of Rockefeller theatrical funding attained a high degree of agency as it was financed by Rockefeller and served in turn as a blueprint for models of experimental theatre in a number of developing countries. Margo Jones was an American stage director and producer with a strong interest in regional theatre movement and community theatre; in 1944, she obtained a Rockefeller grant for studying the American theatre scene, and for exploring Dallas as a potential place for establishing a “theatre in the round” as she called it, i.e. a stage in the form of an arena catering to a broad audience outside the cultural capitals of the U.S. Her book, *Theatre in the Round*, can be read as summary of her vision and initiatives to “decentralize” theatre, and was often recommended by Rockefeller officers and professors in the field of drama in the years after its publication.<sup>3</sup>

In the following case studies the visualization software Gephi will be employed. It can transform and map raw and complex data (names, places, events etc.) into networks demonstrating features such as centrality and clustering.<sup>4</sup> Data is usually prepared in a spreadsheet format such as Excel, Numbers or Google Docs. The application must have the ability to generate CSV (comma separated values) files, which Gephi can then read. Data is prepared in two versions: as a ‘nodes’ file which identifies the main topics of the network and as an ‘edges’ file which specifies the relationships between the nodes which are rendered by numerical values. By combining the two files users are able to manipulate the structures, shapes and colours to reveal hidden patterns. This is particularly important for large data sets; but even for much smaller ones, such as will be presented here, the ability to represent a network visually and also to specify the differential weighting of connections, means that hypotheses can be formulated and conclusions drawn on the basis of the visual representation.

## 2. Historical Context

In the 1950s and 1960s private American foundations, especially Rockefeller and Ford, expended considerable sums of money and provided expertise and advice to developing countries in the area of theatre.<sup>5</sup> In this period high culture, especially theatre, was on the agenda of international development thinking. As David H. Stevens, staff member of the Rockefeller Foundation's Division of the

<sup>3</sup> Margo Jones: *Theatre-in-the-Round*, New York 1951.

<sup>4</sup> M. Bastian, S. Heymann, M. Jacomy (Hg.): „Gephi: an open source software for exploring and manipulating networks.” International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (2009): <https://gephi.org/users/publications/>.

<sup>5</sup> See Inderjeet Parmar: *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power*, New York 2012.

Humanities, put it: next to radio and film, the “international possibilities of drama” needed to be scrutinized. “These means of *powerful influence in the cultural life of nations, as of individuals*, have”, so Stevens, “uses beyond their commercial applications that are recognized but not widely realized. How far these forms of expression can be made socially influential toward better appreciation in the arts is an important question today.”<sup>6</sup>

The Rockefeller Foundation alone was involved in funding theatrical activity in sixteen developing countries and provided assistance ranging from study trips for individuals to large scale institutional funding (especially in Nigeria and Chile). Preliminary research based on the analysis of the annual reports of the Rockefeller Foundation reveal patterns of assistance that extend throughout the developing world with a particular emphasis in West Africa with Nigeria being the second largest recipient of theatre-related funding after the USA itself. The Philippines was also identified as an important country for geopolitical reasons.<sup>7</sup> Recent biographical research into the two Nobel laureates, Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott, has provided some indication of the depth and complexity of Rockefeller’s importance in not only supporting but actively building a professional theatre scene in the Caribbean and Nigeria, which went beyond mere travel grants for ‘promising’ young writers.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1959 and 1967 Rockefeller also funded Derek Walcott’s Trinidad Theatre Workshop, providing the major source of subsidy for the company, funding that was not forthcoming from the Trinidad and Tobago government. In 1962 Rockefeller awarded the University of Ibadan a major grant of \$ 200,000 for the development of a drama programme. It also gave money to a dozen other theatre projects in recently decolonized nations. This meant that a private US charity with strong government ties was effectively funding the teaching, research and artistic practice of theatre in newly independent former British colonies.

It is important to investigate the policies and direct influence exerted by such organisations and how support of professional theatrical activity was organised via academics, theatre artists, and government bodies. Preliminary research indicates that apart from Nigeria, Chile and the Middle East are productive sites for reconstructing the techno-politics of Cold War theatre funding. In India, the Ford Foundation’s field office attained considerable influence on Indian development

<sup>6</sup> David H. Stevens, RF Humanities Program Reviews, 1939–1949, Preface, 15 April 1948 (Rockefeller Archive Center, Stevens Papers, Humanities Program Reviews, 1939–1949, IV 2A34 Box 4, Folder 13).

<sup>7</sup> See meLê yamomo, Basilio E. Villaruz, “Manila and the World Dance Space: Nationalism and Globalization in Cold War Philippines and South East Asia”, in: Christopher B. Balme, Berenika Szymanski-Düll (ed.): *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War*, Cham 2017, pp. 307–323.

<sup>8</sup> See Bernth Lindfors: *Early Soyinka*, Trenton (NJ) 2008; and Bruce King: *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama: Not Only a Playwright but a Company, the Trinidad Theatre Workshop 1959–1993*, Oxford 1995.

policy, including the fine arts, its involvement in theatrical activity remains, however, under researched.<sup>9</sup>

The extent of Rockefeller’s involvement in funding theatre in developing countries can be demonstrated in Fig. 1.

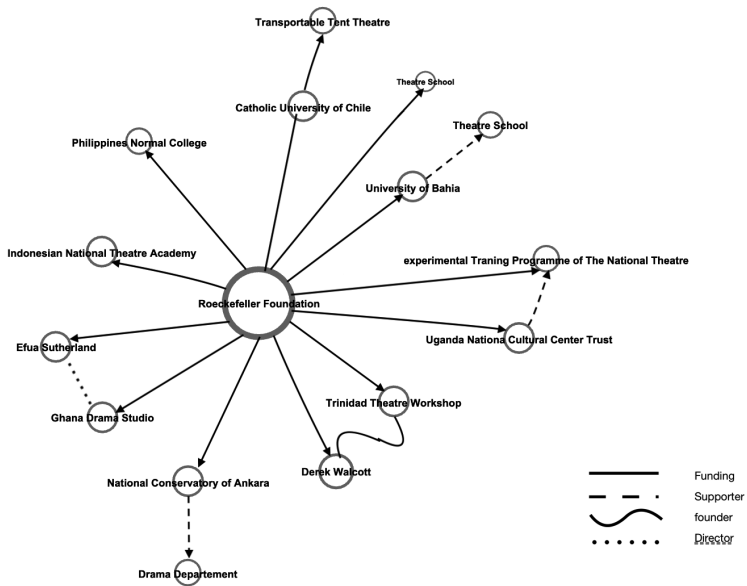


Fig. 1: Rockefeller theatre-related funding in the developing world 1959–1969

Whether in Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Jamaica, Trinidad, Indonesia or the Philippines, in these countries and more we find a concerted strategy to fund arts-based theatre. Funds were allocated in support of the Ghana drama studio directed by Efua Sutherland, to the Trinidad Theatre Workshop founded by Derek Walcott, to the University of Bahia to support a theatre school, to the Catholic University of Chile to fund a transportable tent theatre; to the Indonesian National Theatre Academy; to the Philippines Normal College in Manila to support a drama programme; the provision of teaching materials to the National Conservatory of Ankara in Turkey for use in the Drama Department, to the Uganda National Cultural Centre Trust for an experimental training programme at the National Theatre. The list can be continued. Across the world we see that Rockefeller (and in other countries the Ford foundation) was funding theatre activities that were not just

<sup>9</sup> See Nicole Sackley: “Foundation in the Field: The Ford Foundation New Delhi Office and the Construction of Development Knowledge, 1951–1970”, in: Ulrich Herbert, Jörn Leonhard (ed.): *American Foundations and the Coproduction of World Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2012, pp. 232–260. On the fine arts, see Leela Gandhi: *The Ford Foundation and Its Arts and Culture Program in India: A Short History*, New York 2001.

artistically focused but in many cases emphatically experimental. Apart from personal stipends, which were mainly used to assist faculty and artists to visit the United States and other countries, support for infrastructure occupies most of the funding. Some monies went to sending experts abroad to these countries, but most was invested in the people on the ground. Expertise could be imported by bringing in people with special training but it could also be actively fostered by enabling “key individuals” to form networks with other high potentials and thus contribute to the development process.<sup>10</sup> This was the age when it was believed that expertise was the key to development and this held true not just for the construction of hydroelectric dams but also for theatrical infrastructure which required investment in skills and knowledge.

### 3. Case Study 1: Severino Montano’s “Arena” and the “National Theatre” in Manila in the 1950s and 1960s

Personal and institutional networks go hand in hand in the case of the Rockefeller funding of the Philippine playwright, actor, director, theatre manager and educator Severino Montano (1915–1980) and his Arena Theatre at the Philippine Normal College (PNC) in Manila in the 1950s. Montano’s support from the Rockefeller Foundation is two-fold: he receives individual *ad personam* grants for his study trips and training, as well as grants for the development of his Arena Theatre and theatre management and educational programs at the Philippine Normal College in Manila and the surrounding provinces.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.1 Severino Montano

Montano is not well known outside the Philippines where he is remembered, if at all, for his best-known stage works, including *Sabina*, *The Merry Wives of Manila* and *The Ladies and the Senator*. Yet in 2001, he was posthumously proclaimed National Artist of the Philippines for his services and achievements to the Philippine theatre; his portrait adorns a 2015 stamp of the Philippine Post Office. The Rockefeller Foundation supported Montano’s work as a writer, theatre practitioner and pedagogue from 1949 to the early 1960s. Born in Manila in 1915, Montano developed an interest in theatre at a young age when he was inspired by Marie Leslie Prising, a British actress of the Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's Company. In 1931, he became president of the Dramatic Club of the University of the Philippines and began teaching there after earning a bachelor’s degree in education with a major in English. In 1940 he left his homeland to study drama, directing and economics with a scholarship in the USA and Great Britain. In 1942 he

<sup>10</sup> Peter Benson uses the phrase “key individuals” in connection with Rockefeller funding to explain why the German lecturer at Ibadan, Ulli Beier, received a Rockefeller travel grant; Peter Benson: *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa*, Berkeley 1986, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> An example of the latter is the “grant in aid for appointment of a director of a program in drama” at the PNC, approved on August 11, 1953. Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Philippines Normal College, Drama, Arena Theatre, Severino Montano; 242R.

received a Masters' degree in Fine Arts with a focus on playwriting from Yale University, where he also took part in the famous 1947 playwriting workshop (among his teachers was Theodore Komisarjevsky of the Moscow Art Theatre). He then went to Washington, D.C., to work under President Manuel Quezon and General Carlos Peña Romula for the Philippine Government in exile (1943–1946). In 1946 he was sent to the United Nations Conference in London as a technical assistant of the Philippine delegation and became a follower of economist and political scientist Harold Laski. In 1948, Montano completed his MA in economics from the American University in Washington D.C. with a thesis on "Broadway Theatre Real Estate," and was awarded a doctorate in public administration a year later.

### 3.2 Research Material and Threads of the Network

The total amount of funding by the Rockefeller Foundation is quite modest, yet Montano's Rockefeller connection is characterized by a stable continuity over the period of a decade. Detailed information on the Foundation's funding and Montano's applications as well as their correspondence are documented in the files of the Rockefeller Archive Centre in New York. Montano's work in Manila is also extensively documented in the files: on the one hand in the reports and letters Montano regularly sent to the Foundation to document his work and the need for support; on the other hand via the meticulous diaries of the Rockefeller field officers, represented mainly by Charles Fahs, Boyd Compton and James Brandon, Compton's assistant. These 'diaries' are de facto detailed reports that the respective representatives and programme managers prepare on their travels to sponsored institutions and scholarship holders. In addition to descriptive parts, they always contain critical notes and explicit recommendations for follow-up grants or adjustments in the allocation of grants. With regard to all of the Rockefeller Foundation's funding measures, it can be observed that the Foundation itself forms at least two main networks, some overlapping, some functioning autonomously: 1) an official network that is open to the funding recipients, and 2) a network that is hidden from the fellowship holders. While the former discloses and transparently communicates strategies and requirements, the latter, 'subcutaneous', network is constituted by confidential communication with 'advisers', persons and institutions (e.g. UNESCO, the General Education Board, Universities, other foundations, etc.) close to or known to the person to be sponsored<sup>12</sup> as well as by internal agreements within the foundation. Within this network (see

<sup>12</sup> As David H. Stevens puts it in his reviews of the Humanities Programme of the Rockefeller Foundation: "Advisers are a great resource, as in awarding of fellowships, wherever the sources of information are highly critical or unusually close to the contact equally. There the officer has an alternative for his own primary evidences of considerable value. On his own, however, he will talk with the individual repeatedly, if possible, and will care less about secondary sources of opinion, which may be friendly or unfriendly, casual or judicious." RAC, Stevens, Humanities, Program Reviews, 1939–1949, Series IV ZA34, Box 4, Folder 13, p. 39.



fig. 2), information and recommendations are obtained, problem areas discussed, measures considered that have an impact on the funding – and all this without the knowledge of the beneficiaries. Severino Montano's own network in turn comprises various connections of a professional, artistic, family and political nature. His artistic and academic career is shaped by the interweaving of these networks – and at the same time this connectedness provides the foundation of his career. In order to fully grasp the network qualities, it is necessary to disentangle the interwoven threads, nodes and edges. The visualization carried out here with the help of Gephi can only be a provisional, one, which will possibly change as the level of knowledge and information on the Montano case expands.

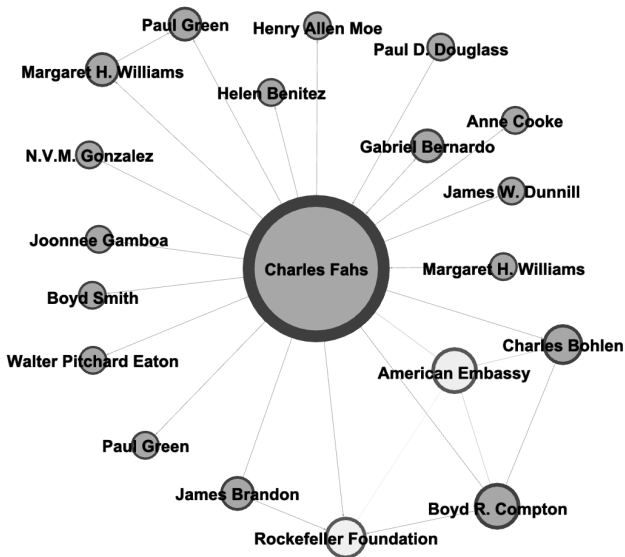


Fig. 2: The Rockefeller Foundation's 'hidden' network in the context of funding for Severino Montano. In the centre: Charles B. Fahs, officer in charge at the Foundation's Humanities Programme.

Montano's and the Rockefeller Foundation's networks are of different geographical and temporal nature and extend from the Philippines to the United States and across Europe, spanning Montano's years of education and career as a writer and teacher. The links between the United States and the Philippines existed since the American occupation of the islands at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Also, in the 1950s (the Philippines gained independence in July 1946) many Americans settled in the Philippines while locals left for study, education or political service in America. In the context of this essay, these permanent exchanges between the USA and the Philippines, the decades-long transatlantic connections



and relations between educational institutions and their graduates are crucial for understanding the dynamics of network relations.

In the case of the Rockefeller Foundation, an essential factor for its efficacy was the geographical reach and the number of experts and consultants that grew over time. In addition, there existed the specialist knowledge and personal networks of Charles Fahs, Boyd Compton and James Brandon who were responsible for the Humanities Programme of the Foundation between 1950 and 1960. Their diaries reveal that they spent weeks travelling in the Southeast Asian region, visiting and consulting not only the sponsored individual, Severino Montano, his Arena Theater and the institution hosting it, the Philippine Normal College, but also other institutions and persons, including the American Embassy, the Art Museum, Ateneo University, Magsaysay Foundation, Philippine National Museum among others. In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation maintained ongoing contacts with local informants in order to keep themselves informed about the progress of the activities of the sponsored persons from third parties.

### 3.3 Individual and institutional funding: a travel grant through Europe and Asia and the Arena Theater at the Philippine Normal College

Montano's nearly ten-year sponsorship by the Rockefeller Foundation began with a request from Charles B. Fahs, Director of the Humanities Division since 1950, to Montano in March 1951. In a letter dated March 19, 1951, he wrote to Montano, at the time lecturer in Speech and Drama at the American University in Washington D.C., that he had been referred to him by Gabriel Bernardo of the University of the Philippines "as one of the people with whom I should talk with regard to the development of drama in The Philippine Islands."<sup>13</sup>

The Rockefeller Foundation was looking for an expert in that field to develop the theatre landscape in the Philippines and Montano seemed to be a suitable candidate for this mission. Montano's reply to Fah's request is positive, because he, for his part, was flirting with the idea of returning to his home country after twelve years of education and training abroad for family reasons, but also because of his motivation to use the knowledge he gained abroad in theatre practice, management and economics for cultural work in the Philippines. Within the framework of the various networks involved here it is noteworthy that Fahs not only approached Montano on account of his expertise; in addition to the recommendation that he had received from Gabriel Bernardo, he also asked Montano's superiors and former colleagues to comment on his expertise. On 23 May 1951, for example, he approaches Paul F. Douglass, President of the American University Washington, for a "confidential comment with regard to his [Montano's] ability as a teacher, a writer, and an administrator of drama programs. Mr. Montano does not know that we are writing to you and what you say will, of course, be kept

<sup>13</sup> Charles B. Fahs to Severino Montano, American University, Washington, D.C. RAC, RAC Montano, Severino, (drama), 242 R, 1951–August 1952.

confidential.”<sup>14</sup> Such inquiries about the potential scholarship holders are not uncommon and are found in numerous files about the potential candidates and institutions for funding. These contacts to consultants or intermediaries are an important part of the ‘hidden network’ of the Rockefeller Foundation. Further references for Montano in connection with the first grant are Boyd Smith, Walter Pritchard Eaton (North Carolina, Chapel Hill) and Anna Cook (Harvard).

Triggered by Fah’s request, Montano subsequently submits several concepts and travel study plans. After some adjustments following proposals by Rockefeller in 1952 he is finally granted an individual scholarship, an “Ad Personam Grant in Aid for a theatre observation itinerary in Europe and South East Asia, including India, en route back to the Philippines.”<sup>15</sup> By visiting cultural centres in 98 cities in Europe and Asia, and observing European theatre, “I strongly believe that the Philippine theatre can best be organized along plans similar to the national theatre system,” Montano argues in his application. Montano sees his journey at the same time as a preparation for his “commission” by the Rockefeller Foundation, namely “the development of drama in the Philippines”. He identifies three “most pressing needs of the Philippine drama”, that he considers indispensable for such development:

1. The need for broad technical leadership which can help formulate and guide the fundamental policies in the rounded development of Philippine dramatic art in all its various aspects.
2. The need for a teacher who can impart the methods of playwriting as practiced in the modern theatre and during the golden periods of the theatre history of both East and West.
3. The need of a leader who can inspire freedom of thought in the theatre, and who can relate this growth to the activities of the free world.<sup>16</sup>

By formulating these “pressing needs” he simultaneously formulates the programme for his own work and recommends himself as the “broad technical leader”, the “teacher who can impart the methods of playwriting as practiced in the modern theatre”, and as a “leader who can inspire freedom of thought in the theatre”.

With the help of this grant – mainly travel funds amounting to \$3,500 –, Montano travelled from August 1952 to important theatre centres in Europe and Asia on his extensive way back to Manila. Immediately after his arrival in Manila in December 1952, he activates his family and professional networks there. As early as 1949 he had given a workshop in theatre and rhetoric at Philippine Normal College. After his return in 1952 he continued and expanded his work at the same

<sup>14</sup> Charles Fahs to Paul F. Douglass, American University, Washington, D.C., 23 May 1951, RAC, 242R Montano, Severino (drama) (1951–August 1952).

<sup>15</sup> RAC, 242R Montano, Severino (drama) (1951–August 1952).

<sup>16</sup> Severino Montano to Charles Fahs, Rockefeller Foundation, January 17, 1952, RAC 242R Montano, Severino (drama), 1951–August 1952.

institution. His vision, major project and goal was the establishment of an “Arena Theater” involving systematic professional training of theatre-makers and educators who would teach at the schools of the surrounding barrios and make theatre or teach culture, language and communication with theatrical means and techniques. The principle of the Arena Theater – a form of ‘Theatre in the Round’ as described by Margo Jones in her 1951 book of the same name (see above) – provided Montano with a dual benefit: first, as a real stage for the performance of theatre texts by Filipino authors, written and performed in English and Tagalog; and second, as a training forum for theatre professions, communication and language.

The location of the Arena Theater at the PNC corresponded with Montano’s request to bring theatre and rhetorical skills to the provinces of the Philippines. Teachers who studied at the PNC could attend Montano’s workshops and training sessions and then act as multipliers of the Arena Theatre philosophy at their respective schools in the barrios. The Philippine Normal College opened in September 1901 as Philippine Normal School (PNS), as “the first institution of higher learning established during the American occupation of the Philippines”. Under the presidency of Elpidio Quirino (the godfather of Montano’s sister Jesusa M. Sadam), the PNS was renamed Philippine Normal College. Even after its renaming, the government-financed institution aimed primarily at providing teachers for Philippine schools and saw itself as a “training ground for democratic ideals and democratic ways of living”.

As early as April 1953, an article in *The Manila Times* reports on Montano’s return:

Doctor Montano returned from the United States with the intention of helping establish an indigenous theatre in the Philippines. He believes that much can be accomplished along this line by working through the Philippine Normal College because its graduates will be stationed in all parts of the country, even in remote barrios, and will deal with the ordinary people.<sup>17</sup>

The Rockefeller Foundation had identified Montano as a potential candidate to develop theatre in the Philippines. His extensive knowledge of playwriting, theatre making, theatre construction, communication and management seemed ideal for this task. At the PNC he used all these skills and abilities to turn his vision into reality – supported by a collegial network of directors, theatre managers, drama teachers, lighting engineers, etc. In 1953, the Rockefeller Foundation provided further support for the further expansion of the Arena Theater at the Philippine Normal College, a “Grant in Aid to the Philippine Normal College, Manila, for appointment of a director of a program in drama” was granted on 11 August, 1953.<sup>18</sup> The amount awarded is “\$7,200 over three years at the rate of \$2,400 per

<sup>17</sup> *The Manila Times*, 7 April, 1953, p.10.

<sup>18</sup> RAC, Montano, Severino, (drama), 242 R, 1951–August 1952, Folder 161.

year”, and is intended to be “for the part-time salary of Dr. Montano” with the three-year funding period expiring on 31 August, 1956.

The respective letter of approval with the subject “Rockefeller Foundation 52201 Grants in Aid – Humanities” explained the framework:

[Montano] intends to emphasize plays by Philippine authors on Philippine themes. This and the economical arena style of production makes the drama program he is developing particularly suitable for imitation in schools and communities around the Philippines. In addition, the program has already shown that it can make an important contribution to the strengthening of English language work at the Normal College.<sup>19</sup>

With the help of the grant, Montano employed various measures during the 1950s to promote professional theatre and theatre education. From the very beginning, he was supported by his colleagues, some of whom he knew from his previous academic years or professional context in the Philippines and abroad. One of his close supporters and companion was Naty (Natividad) Crame Rogers, who reports in some articles after Montano’s death about the beginnings of the work at and for the Arena Theater. She had studied at Stanford, her teachers, Norman Philbrick and Nicholas Vardac, were former fellow students of Montano, who, as she notes, had recommended the Arena Theater, the ‘Theatre in the Round’, as particularly suitable for developing countries. It is relatively clear that the two had come into contact with Margo Jones’ work and writing. And even though Montano doesn’t deal with Jones’ *expressis verbis* in his writings, it can be assumed that he knew about Jones’ idea and book as an author, director and manager, who was not only interested in theatre, decentralizing and democratic ideals that the Theatre in the Round represented, but who was also in the USA at the time of its publication.

Within a short period of time, Montano established a graduate program for the training of playwrights, directors, technicians, actors, and designers, launched the Arena Theater Playwriting Contest, initiated and organized the first drama festival in the Philippines in Pangasinan, 110 miles north of Manila; among his innovations in theatre education were the training of actors, business managers, theatre technicians and seminar programs for the teaching of specific theatre techniques, as well as the training of performers who were taught to teach in English, Tagalog and other dialects.

Montano’s greatest and most lasting achievement, however, apart from his success as a playwright, was to be the Arena Theater established in 1953. As Montano’s nomination as National Artist of the Philippines in 2001 emphasized: “Through the arena style of staging plays, Montano sustained an inspiring vision for Philippine theatre appropriate to local traditions and conditions, thereby integrating his passionate lifelong commitment to, in his own words, ‘bring drama to

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

the masses”’. The Arena Theater had a branch in Bulacan, another one was planned in Laguna; the concept prospered and was in demand because of its simple and economic layout. Thus, from the Arena Theater at the PNC, Montano’s star-shaped idea diffused into the surrounding educational institutions and theatres. The idea of a decentralized theatre life, as Margo Jones had described it, seemed to be realized here. Authors and theatre practitioners, some of whom were later to be declared National Artists of the Philippines, enjoyed their training at the Arena Theater.

In the late 1950s, Montano even had the idea of turning the Arena Theater into a national theatre for the Philippines on the grounds of the PNC in Manila. The designs for this theatre came from architect C. J. Abgayani. Yet the idea was never realized, probably due to the exorbitant costs.

During the 1950s, further applications and approvals followed, most of which related to the extension of his salary, books, media and technical equipment at the AT and PNC. In the letters of approval and correspondence, the Rockefeller Foundation repeatedly points out that sooner or later the College itself or the Philippine government would have to assume financial responsibility for the theatre development initiatives. This demonstrates that the Foundation saw itself only as a funding institution that provides seed money; the sustainability of the project needed to be guaranteed by a third party. As a diary entry by Boyd R. Compton on 8 September 1958, has it:

Philippine Normal College President Emiliano Ramirez took BRC and CBF to breakfast and then to school. He apparently wanted to show his good will and interest in the Arena Theatre program, but nothing much more. [...] He has high hopes that more “pork barrel” money will be found for the theatre building. In his view, the AT movement is already an integral and important part of the PNC curriculum. With the present Board of Directors and Department of Education policy, the AT has strong support and can be considered permanent. It will be difficult, however, to get Severino Montano a full faculty position for next year. ER assured us that he will get the funds for SM’s “item” soon.<sup>20</sup>

#### 3.4 Nodes, edges, and loose threads – subject to further research

Since 1952, the Rockefeller Foundation had granted Montano a total of almost USD \$ 32,000. A Rockefeller Foundation report from 1959 states: “Since 1952, a total of \$ 31,410 has been given to the Philippine Normal College to support Montano’s Arena Theater program. Most of this money has been used for the salary of Severino Montano, ‘the brilliant but somewhat controversial person who has started and propelled the Philippine arena movement’”.<sup>21</sup> Funds were also

<sup>20</sup> RAC Compton, Boyd R. 1958–1959\_Diary South-East Asia\_905 Com 1958, 8 September 1958, S. 51.

<sup>21</sup> RAC Philippines Normal College, Drama, Arena Theatre, Severino Montano; 242R 1.2 242 Box 20, Folder 165.

provided for Montano's travel, books and technical equipment. In the years of funding, the Rockefeller Foundation regularly consulted with local experts and American delegates in the Philippines about Montano's progress. In 1954, almost two years after Montano had begun his work in Manila, Charles Fahs, in a letter, asked Gabriel Bernardo whom he had asked for recommendations for a suitable candidate for the "Development of Philippine Drama" in 1951, for an assessment. In the same matter, he contacted Mrs. Margaret H. Williams, Chief Cultural Affairs Officer of the American Embassy in Manila.

The end of the fifties also meant the end of Montano's support by the Rockefeller Foundation. He still received some grants for his travels to the barrios; altogether the Rockefeller Foundation had seen itself primarily as a start-up financier for Montano's endeavours for the development of drama in the Philippines. The PNC and the government were expected to guarantee the continuity of the infrastructure and personnel.

Montano came to the United States and Great Britain to study drama, communication, administration and for governmental services. The network he created abroad proved essential for his future career in his homeland; the networks of Montano and the Rockefeller Foundation intersected in Washington, D.C., which would become fundamental for his vision and mission to "develop drama in the Philippines". The connections traced in this case study can only provide a snapshot of the current state of research. Further research and in-depth analysis of the networks are necessary in order to get to the bottom of the then close interlocking of academic, theatrical and cultural-political networks, their individuals and institutions.

#### **4. Case Study 2: Rockefeller and the Drama Department, University of Ibadan.**

In March 1961 Robert W. July, Assistant Director of Humanities for the Rockefeller foundation, visited the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, to hold talks with university administrators, lecturers, and some artists as part of a three-month field trip to Africa. He was on one of his many trips to the region for the foundation. In his diary he records in great detail these meetings which reveal part of the personal network.<sup>22</sup> Here he met with Wole Soyinka, Ulli Beier and lecturers from the English Department such as Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham who would go on to be the key staff for a new drama department. The trip included an outing to Oshogbo via Ife with Beier and Soyinka where they watched a touring student production of a Molière play written partly in pidgin English directed by Axworthy. They also inspected the Mbari Club, founded by Beier and Soyinka, that was still under construction. July noted prophetically in his diary: "it could develop into an important literary centre for it will be well directed and is in the middle of

<sup>22</sup> Robert W. July: "An African Diary February-April 1961". *Rockefeller Archive Center* RG 12, F-L (FA392), Box 240.

the biggest African city in the whole continent.”<sup>23</sup> July also witnessed and was impressed by a performance by the Yoruba travelling theatre troupe of Kola Ogunmola whom Beier regarded as a “first-class theatre man who could make a successful full-time business of his troupe were he to get a six-month stake.”<sup>24</sup>

A year after July’s visit Rockefeller earmarked \$ 200,000 to establish a School of Drama at Ibadan. The School was established in the 1962/63 session, opening with its first intake of 30 students in 1963. In the same year Kola Ogunmola was granted a six-month attachment which culminated in the famous production of Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in April, 1963. Fig. 3 shows the flows of Rockefeller funding to individuals associated with the new School of Drama and the associated network. Robert July is a pivotal figure. He was instrumental in negotiating the large grant for the drama department and is connected with most other individuals on the network. The founding director of the school was Geoffrey Axworthy. Other founding members of the school included Ebum Odutola (later Professor [Mrs] Ebum Clark), a graduate of Rose Bruford School of Drama, Bill Brown (a Harvard-trained technical director), Demas Nwoko (the theatre designer, artist and architect who had trained in Paris), the dance scholar Peggy Harper, Martin Banham, Joel Adedeji (who had also trained at Rose Bruford) and in 1967 Dapo Adelugba, who had studied at UCLA.<sup>25</sup>

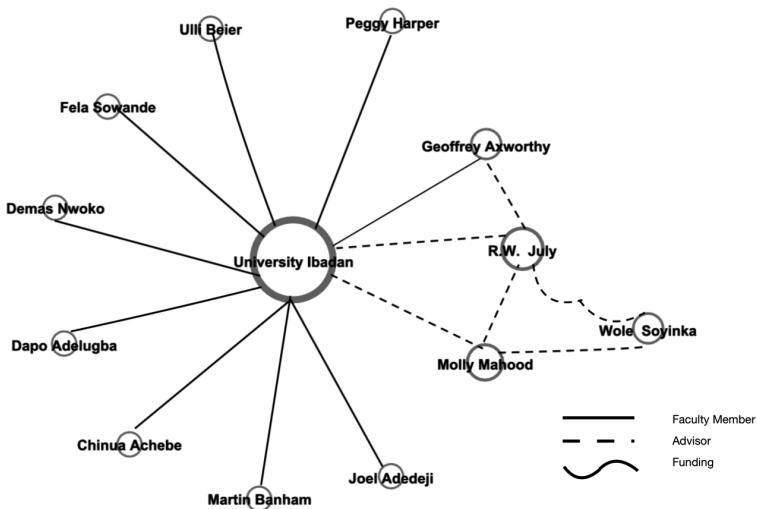


Fig. 3: Network of Rockefeller funding of Nigerian artists and scholars in the field of theatre 1960-67.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> For this information, see <https://www.ui.edu.ng/content/1st-geoffrey-axworthy-lecture>. In 1969, the School of Drama was upgraded to a Department, with Wole Soyinka as the first African head.



The School of Drama continued to receive annual direct grants and additional grants were given to individual faculty members until 1969. In 1962 Geoffrey Axworthy received a travel stipend to consult with theatre specialists and visit drama centres, mainly in the United States in connection with the development of the university's program in drama.

Rockefeller's support for Axworthy illustrates how the network functioned. Because of its extremely high betweenness-centrality, the Foundation functioned as a conduit for contacts between a lecturer in English in a newly independent African nation to prestigious US universities. In a letter of 19 March 1963, Chadbourne Gilpatric, Deputy Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, wrote to Abbott Kaplan, Director, University Extensions Southern Area, UCLA, introducing Axworthy who was searching for new faculty:

This is to introduce in advance Mr. Geoffrey Axworthy, who is in charge of the drama program at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, for which this foundation has provided substantial support for its development over the next few years (sic!)... Thus the purpose of this present visit for one month in the United States is to make contact with a few centres like U.C.L.A. and individuals who might help him in recruiting the kind of "experts" he could bring to Ibadan.<sup>26</sup>

One such "expert" was a young Nigerian, Dapo Adelugba, a graduate of Ibadan, who was enrolled at UCLA and would go on to become a central figure at the School of Drama in various functions.

In the same year, Martin Banham, a lecturer in English, also received a travel grant to visit centres of theatrical activity in the United States in connection with the university's proposed School of Drama. Also, in 1962 the University of Ibadan was given \$5,900 for the development of an itinerant theatre, under the direction of Kola Ogunmola. Other recipients included Ulli Beier, Peggy Harper, Dapo Adelugba (Nigeria) and Ola Rotimi (Nigeria). Travel grants were allocated to the stage designer Demas Nwoko, to visit drama centers in Asia and North America and to Joel Adedeji to visit theatre centres in the United States. Between 1959 and 1969 grants to the University of Ibadan School of Drama and its faculty totalled \$423,202. As mentioned, this was the largest amount given to any one institution outside the US in the field of theatre.

If we look more closely at the people on the diagram (Fig. 3) we can see that overwhelmingly scholar-practitioners were employed and subsequently supported by Rockefeller.

Although the English lecturer Molly Mahood, who mentored Soyinka, questioned the usefulness of practical training at a university, the traditional division between conservatory-based training and research-oriented university education

<sup>26</sup> Rockefeller Archives, Box No 17 Folders Nos. 187-199, RG 1.2, 497R Nigeria, Folder 1.2 497 17 194.

was not one that made sense in the Nigerian context at the time (or indeed anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa).

If there was going to be professional arts-based theatre in Nigeria of the kind being espoused in the theatrical epistemic community of the global North, then it would have to happen at universities. A number of the new staff had in fact received conservatory training in the UK or US: Joel Adedeji and Eburn Clark at Rose Bruford College, while scene designer and artist Demas Nwoko had a period of training in scenic design in Paris at the Centre Français du Théâtre, run by the French branch of ITI. This sojourn was supported by the CIA-financed Council of Cultural Freedom.

In 1962 theatre or drama studies was still a fledgling discipline. The first degree-granting drama department was founded in England at the university of Bristol in 1947, a second followed in Manchester in 1961. In the USA theatre studies had been established much earlier, albeit in quite different permutations: in 1912 at Harvard as playwriting, in 1914 at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, followed by the first professional graduate programme at Yale in 1926.<sup>27</sup> Most such establishments were accompanied by debates over the tension between a broadly research-focused humanistic discipline and professional, vocational training better suited to a conservatory or academy. The School of Drama at Ibadan was a fusion of both camps and countries. Staffed initially by British-trained lecturers but funded and assisted by US philanthropy and experts including young Nigerians who had studied there, the Nigerian experiment resulted in a highly innovative model for a university-based discipline. Already at its inception the University of Ibadan had been provided with a fully functional Arts Theatre designed by the ‘tropical’ architects Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew in the mid-1950s.<sup>28</sup> It formed the focal point of a broad range of theatrical activity including a travelling theatre troupe. The hosting of Kola Ogunmola as an artist-in-residence, the practice of student theatre providing itinerant theatre and the cross-fertilization between academic research into African performance culture and artistic production all point to the emergence of a unique form of practice-based theatre studies at a time when it was not firmly established in either Britain or the US.

## 5. Summary

The two case studies analysed here demonstrate how network analysis can be used to illuminate both overt and covert structures of support and influence that were maintained American philanthropy in the context of the Cultural Cold War. The example of Severino Montano in the Philippines illustrates how his individual professional, artistic, political and family network intermeshed with the official and “subcutaneous” networks of the Rockefeller Foundation during the years of his support. By focusing on the networks, it also becomes clear that they were

<sup>27</sup> See Simon Shepherd, Mick Wallis: *Drama/ Theatre / Performance, New Critical Idiom*, London, 2004, S. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Hannah le Roux: “The Networks of Tropical Architecture,” in: *The Journal of Architecture* 8, no. 3 (2003), S. 337–354.

constitutive for his work. From a historiographical perspective, it can be argued that it is precisely the networks that allow an understanding of his activities and initiatives to be grasped and understood retrospectively. In Nigeria, Rockefeller actively intervened in promoting the idea of a School of Drama at the new University of Ibadan. It was seen as integral, even innovative part of Rockefeller's support for the arts and humanities for the newly independent nation.

The Rockefeller network analysed demonstrates how expatriate professors and lecturers as well as Nigerian "key individuals" such as the young dramatist Wole Soyinka and the visual artist Demas Nwoko were actively recruited in the spirit of knowledge transfer. All members were supported on numerous fact-finding trips, mainly to the US to improve their expertise. In both cases and throughout the Rockefeller files we find continual reference to 'experts' and 'specialists', both as individuals and collectives, without whom such activities would not have been possible. By focusing on expertise, Rockefeller sought to redefine theatrical practice in terms of 'knowledge flows' rather than as solipsistic individual inspiration. By looking at theatre in terms of knowledge Rockefeller actively promoted actual and metaphorical transfers of competencies, ideas of professionalism, and technological know-how, as professional or semi-professional theatrical institutions were constructed under an ideological agenda that promoted liberal democracy. Theatre was understood less in terms of a being politically detached autonomous sphere of artistic creativity than as an object of knowledge formation subject to political agendas.