

Exploring Intermediality as A Theatrical Strategy for Representing Emigration in Contemporary Ghanaian Playwriting

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines the intersection of intermediality and emigration in Ghanaian playwriting, exploring how multimedia techniques can enhance theatrical representations of complex social phenomena. Through a qualitative content analysis of selected Ghanaian playscripts, Faustina Brew's In Her Silence and The Prisoner, and the creation of an original playscript, Autarky, the study investigates how intermedial elements such as video projections, live telecasts, and digital soundscapes can deepen audience engagement with emigration narratives. The research employs Bolter & Grusin's Remediation Theory as a framework for understanding how new media refashion older media forms in theatrical contexts. A key finding is the development of the amalgam, a conceptual framework and dramatic form that integrates conventional dramatic elements with intentional intermedial embedding. Analysis of the selected plays reveals both innovative potential and significant limitations in current Ghanaian intermedial practice. While intermedial elements appear in some of the plays, they function primarily as narrative supplementation rather than transformative integration, remaining optional rather than integral to dramatic structure. This exposes a gap in Ghanaian playwriting: intermedial elements, when present, typically emerge from directorial choices rather than intentional script integration. In response to this gap, the study developed the amalgam, a conceptual framework and dramatic form that intentionally integrates three core components: conventional dramatic elements, subject matter, and deliberately embedded intermedial elements. The amalgam framework was applied in creating Autarky, a play that dramatises contemporary Ghanaian emigration trends. The study contributes to the growing discourse on intermediality in African theatre and provides a practical model for playwrights seeking to innovate within contemporary theatrical practice.*

KEYWORDS: Amalgam, Emigration, Ghanaian Theatre, Intermediality, Playwriting.

I. INTRODUCTION

Theatre has historically served as a powerful medium for social commentary, enabling playwrights to examine and critique societal issues through narrative, character, and dialogue. In Ghana, playwrights have long used the stage to address pressing concerns such as colonialism, political corruption, economic inequality, and migration (Lawan & Abubakar, 2018). However, the narrative techniques employed in Ghanaian playwriting have remained largely traditional, relying primarily on dialogue and live action to convey meaning.

Globally, contemporary theatre has witnessed a significant shift toward intermediality, the fusion of various media forms such as digital projections, audiovisual effects, recorded sound, and live performance into unified theatrical experiences (Farman, 2007). This approach disrupts conventional theatrical boundaries, creating richer, more engaging experiences for audiences. Scholars such as Kattenbelt (2008) and Balme (2004) have positioned intermediality as essential to theatre's evolution in the media age, arguing that the integration of digital technologies opens new avenues for artistic expression and audience engagement.

Emigration represents one of the most pressing social issues in contemporary Ghana. Economic hardship, unemployment, and the pursuit of better opportunities have driven unprecedented numbers of Ghanaians to seek lives abroad, particularly in Europe and North America (Amoah, Tetteh, Korle, & Quartey, 2022). This phenomenon carries profound emotional, psychological, and social consequences, dimensions that traditional theatrical forms may struggle to fully capture.

This article addresses a significant gap in Ghanaian theatre scholarship and practice: the limited exploration of intermediality in playwriting, particularly regarding complex social issues like emigration. While Ghanaian playwrights have addressed migration themes in works such as Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and Evelyn Anfu's *Edibles and Disposables*, these narratives have relied predominantly on conventional dramatic structures. Meanwhile, intermedial elements in Ghanaian productions often remain at the discretion of directors rather than being intentionally embedded within playscripts themselves.

The study pursues two interconnected objectives: first, to examine how intermediality has been used in selected Ghanaian playscripts; and second, to create an original playscript that incorporates intermedial elements to explore emigration. In combining analysis with creative practice, this study demonstrates how intermediality can offer deeper, more multifaceted representations of emigration while providing a model for other Ghanaian playwrights seeking to innovate within their craft. A central contribution of this research is the development of the *amalgam*, a conceptual framework and dramatic form that emerged from the synthesis of conventional dramatic elements with intentional intermedial integration.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Intermediality in Theatre

Intermediality has emerged as a critical framework for understanding the evolving relationships between theatre and media in contemporary performance. Kattenbelt (2008) defines intermediality as the mutual influence and correlation of different media, emphasising that media forms do not simply coexist but transform one another within the performance space. This distinguishes intermediality from multi-mediality (the simple combination of media) and trans-mediality (the transfer of content across media), highlighting its unique capacity to create new aesthetic and perceptual experiences.

Rajewsky (2005) elaborates that intermediality recognises media forms as intricately connected and mutually influential rather than isolated entities. This convergence reflects broader cultural shifts in which traditional disciplinary boundaries are increasingly blurred, particularly as digital technologies permeate artistic practice.

The historical roots of intermediality extend beyond contemporary digital experimentation. Grammatas (2015) traces intermedial practices to ancient Greek tragedies, where visual art, oration, and music were intricately woven into the performance fabric. Higgins (2001) identifies early twentieth-century avant-garde movements as instrumental in breaking down barriers between arts, experimenting with synthetic theatre that integrated text, movement, sound, and visual elements. These foundations accelerated trends, enabling seamless creation of multi-layered artistic expressions.

Intermediality and Social Issues in Theatre

Scholars have increasingly recognised intermediality's potential for addressing complex social and political themes. Giannachi (2004) argues that integrating documentary footage, news clips, and digital projections can

provide historical and cultural context that enriches narrative, while also enabling counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses and amplify marginalised voices.

Jenkins (2006) contends that while traditional plays can be effective, intermediality enhances storytelling by engaging multiple senses and providing more immersive experiences. This multimodal approach deepens audience understanding of characters' journeys and fosters empathetic responses, particularly for multifaceted themes such as emigration, displacement, and identity.

Global theatre practitioners have demonstrated intermediality's power in migration narratives. German director Falk Richter's *My Secret Garden* (2018) interweaves personal stories with video projections and recorded interviews to explore displacement and dislocation. British director Katie Mitchell's *The Forbidden Zone* (2014) integrates live video and recorded interviews to connect historical conflicts with contemporary migration issues. Lebanese-Canadian artist Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched* (2003) uses projections and multimedia to juxtapose personal narratives with larger political events, illustrating emigration's impact on individual identities and collective memory.

Playwriting and Emigration in Ghana

Ghanaian playwrights have long engaged with migration. Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) explores tensions between tradition and modernity, addressing cultural identity and displacement as a Ghanaian educated protagonist returns home with his African American wife. The play examines the challenges of cultural assimilation and the disconnect between home and the diaspora.

Similarly, Evelyn Anfu's *Edibles and Disposables* dramatises how Western influence, brought through educational migration, disrupts traditional values in Nzemaland. The play explores the tension between tradition and modernity, the impact of Western influence, and the consequences of neglecting cultural heritage. These works offer critical lenses through which emigration's emotional and societal ramifications are examined.

However, despite addressing migration themes, these plays rely predominantly on conventional dramatic structures. Intermedial elements, when present in Ghanaian productions, typically emerge from directorial choices rather than intentional script integration. Brew's *In Her Silence* (2023) and *The Prisoner* (2021) represent notable exceptions, incorporating projected screens and video flashbacks to convey internal thoughts and juxtapose past and present.

Remediation Theory

This study employs Bolter and Grusin's (2010) Remediation Theory as its analytical framework. Remediation refers to the representation of one medium in another, the way new media refashion older media forms. Bolter and Grusin identify two core logics: *immediacy* (the desire to make the medium "transparent" and create an immersive experience) and *hypermediacy* (the fascination with the medium itself, making the audience aware of its presence).

In theatrical contexts, remediation illuminates how live performance incorporates and transforms other media. When a playscript integrates video projections, the live body of the actor remediates cinematic conventions, while digital screens remediate theatrical presence. This dual logic creates productive tension: audiences simultaneously experience immersion in narrative (*immediacy*) and awareness of mediating technologies (*hypermediacy*).

Remediation theory proves particularly valuable for analysing emigration-themed theatre because emigration itself involves remediation, the refashioning of identity, memory, and belonging across geographical and cultural boundaries. Just as media transform one another through remediation, emigrants transform and are transformed by their movement between contexts. This parallel makes remediation theory especially apt for examining how intermedial theatre might capture emigration's complexities.

Conceptual Framework: The Amalgam

A key contribution of this study is the development of the *amalgam*, a conceptual framework and dramatic form that emerged from synthesising the research findings on intermediality and emigration. The amalgam represents a deliberate integration of three core components:

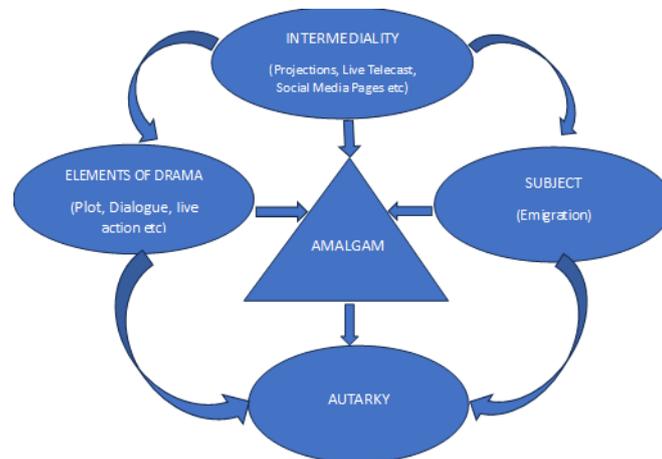


Figure 1: Visual Illustration of Amalgam (Asamoah, 2025)

Conventional Dramatic Elements: The amalgam retains fundamental Aristotelian elements, plot, character, theme, diction, music, and spectacle, ensuring a solid dramatic foundation. These elements provide the structural integrity upon which intermedial experimentation can build.

Subject Matter: While the amalgam was developed through exploration of emigration, the framework is adaptable to various subjects. Playwrights using this form can explore any topic of interest, with the framework providing structure for thematic development.

Intermedial Integration: The defining feature of the amalgam is the deliberate, intentional incorporation of intermedial elements as integral components of the playscript rather than optional additions. These elements, video projections, live telecasts, digital soundscapes, and social media integration, are embedded within the script's structure, making them essential to narrative development and thematic expression.

The amalgam emerged from the recognition that while intermedial elements appear in Ghanaian productions, they typically function as director-driven additions rather than script-integrated components. The amalgam addresses this gap by providing a framework for playwrights to intentionally embed intermedial elements within their scripts, ensuring these elements contribute meaningfully to dramatic structure and thematic development.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach, which enables researchers to understand social practices and meanings individuals ascribe to phenomena within specific cultural contexts (Patton & Cochran, 2007). The qualitative approach facilitates exploration of how intermedial elements function within playscripts and how emigration themes can be artistically represented.

Qualitative content analysis served as the research design, enabling systematic examination of textual and visual materials to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach allowed for in-depth analysis of playscripts' manifest and latent content, particularly regarding intermedial elements and emigration themes.

Purposive sampling was employed to select materials relevant to the research objectives (Palys, 2008). Two Ghanaian playscripts containing intermedial elements were sampled: Faustina Brew's *In Her Silence* (2023)

and *The Prisoner* (2021). These works were chosen because they incorporate multimedia techniques such as projected screens and video flashbacks, providing appropriate cases for analysing intermediality's application in Ghanaian theatre.

Additionally, the researcher created an original playscript, *Autarky*, developed through the amalgam framework that integrates conventional dramatic elements with intermedial techniques, including video projections, live telecasts, and digital soundscapes.

Document analysis served as the primary data collection method, enabling examination of written texts (playscripts) to extract meaning, gain comprehension, and develop empirical knowledge (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Analysis focused on identifying specific intermedial elements, exploring playwrights' intentions, and assessing possibilities, challenges, and limitations of intermedial approaches.

For *Autarky*, the creative process itself generated data about how intermedial elements can be intentionally embedded within playscripts through the amalgam framework. A play reading on November 28, 2024, provided additional data through audience feedback and post-reading discussion.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Intermediality in Selected Ghanaian Playscripts

Analysis of Faustina Brew's *In Her Silence* and *The Prisoner* reveals both innovative potential and significant limitations in current Ghanaian intermedial practice.

In Her Silence: Projected Interiority

In *In Her Silence*, Brew employs a projected screen to convey the internal thoughts of a central character who remains silent throughout the play. This technique creates a stark contrast between exterior silence and a turbulent inner world, offering audiences access to unspoken emotions that would otherwise remain hidden.

The projections allow the audience to access the unspoken emotions of the silent character, which would otherwise remain hidden in a traditional dialogue-driven play. This approach challenges conventional notions of communication, suggesting that what is left unsaid can often carry more weight than spoken words. (Asamoah, 2025, p. 58).

However, analysis reveals limitations in this intermedial application. The projections remain primarily textual and relatively static, appearing predominantly during moments of conflict. The play does not explore the full range of multimedia possibilities, integrating sound, movement, or interactive visuals that might deepen emotional resonance. This limits the sensory experience and restricts potential for sustained engagement with character interiority.

The Prisoner: Video as Memory

In *The Prisoner*, Brew uses video projections to juxtapose past and present through flashbacks of a character's life with a deceased loved one. These visual elements provide a poignant contrast between past joy and present grief, enhancing the audience's understanding of emotional states. *"The video clips serve as a reminder of the happiness the character once experienced, making their current struggles all the more heartbreaking"* (Asamoah, 2025, p. 59).

Yet analysis indicates that the video projections function largely as narrative supplementation rather than transformative integration. The clips fill narrative gaps and provide context, but they do not interact dynamically with the live performance. Significantly, the playwright indicates that these intermedial elements are not central to the script's functionality; the creative piece could hold meaning even without prescribed multimedia elements.

Patterns and Limitations

Both plays demonstrate intermediality's potential for enhancing character development by providing additional layers of insight into inner lives. However, patterns of limitation emerge:

- Intermedial elements are not consistently integrated throughout plays, limiting sustained exploration
- Multimedia techniques remain relatively one-dimensional, primarily textual or straightforward video
- Elements function as optional additions rather than integral narrative components
- Limited experimentation with dynamic, interactive forms restricts sensory and emotional impact

These findings suggest that while Ghanaian playwrights have begun exploring intermediality, its application remains nascent, often functional rather than transformative. This gap provided the impetus for developing the amalgam framework, which addresses these limitations through intentional script integration.

Creating *Autarky* and Applying the Amalgam Framework

Autarky is a full-length play developed through the application of the amalgam framework, intentionally embedding intermedial elements as integral narrative components addressing emigration themes. The play explores the complex intersections of emigration, governance, corruption, and national responsibility in contemporary Ghana through a fictional Emigration Tribunal.

The play weaves together multiple thematic threads: the hypocrisy of leaders who restrict citizen mobility while exempting themselves; the structural failures, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, and disability discrimination that drive emigration; the desperation that makes citizens vulnerable to fraud; the tension between individual aspiration and collective responsibility; and the possibility of accountability even for the powerful. The title's dual meaning, national self-sufficiency and individual self-determination, resonates throughout, questioning whether Ghana can achieve either without fundamental change.

Synopsis of *Autarky*

The play opens in a cabinet meeting where Mr President and his ministers confront a public relations crisis: international media coverage of Ghanaians queuing outside embassies is damaging the government's image ahead of elections. In response, Mr President proposes an Emigration Tribunal that would legally require citizens to obtain government permission before departing the country. Despite constitutional concerns, the proposal advances, with assurances that government officials will be exempted.

The play's central action unfolds in the Emigration Tribunal, presided over by Judge Mary Arthur. Through a series of cases, the tribunal becomes a microcosm of Ghanaian society:

- **Nii Okai Tagoe**, an engineering graduate unemployed for eight years despite countless applications, has secured a position in Florida but is denied permission to leave
- **Vanessa Asare's** marriage to a Dutch citizen is exposed as visa fraud through projected video evidence
- **Joel Ansah**, a deaf accountant, testifies about disability discrimination and systemic exclusion
- **Araba Lawson** arrives with packed luggage, expecting automatic approval based on her relationship with a minister
- **The Minister of Health** seeks surgery abroad, and is confronted with his own failures to equip local hospitals
- **Maame Dufie Ansong**, a retired teacher, is defrauded outside the tribunal by someone promising approval

- **Mr President** himself appears as the final applicant, his request to attend a wedding abroad denied in a dramatic climax

Scene Seven depicts mass protests outside the tribunal, where denied applicants unite with ordinary citizens. In her final speech, Judge Arthur challenges both leaders and citizens to recognise their collective responsibility: *“We cannot run away and expect the system to work by itself. The system needs all of us to work. We are the system.”*

Video Projections as Context and Critique

Applying the amalgam framework, *Autarky* integrates video projections as essential narrative components rather than decorative additions. In Scene One, the Minister for Youth and Sports employs projected videos illustrating growing emigration trends, displaying footage of long queues outside embassies:

“Just look at that. This is what is in the news. All those people queueing outside embassies, looking for a way out of this country” (Asamoah, 2025, Scene One).

This visual element underscores desperation driving emigration while reinforcing the urgency of the play’s central conflict. The projection functions remedially, cinematic documentary footage refashioned within theatrical space creates hypermediacy that makes audiences aware of the media’s role in shaping perceptions of emigration.

In Scene Three, during tribunal hearings, the government representative projects graphs and statistics concerning engineering job vacancies:

“Your honour, recent government reports indicate a significant rise in vacancies within the engineering sector. The Ministry of Labour reports a 15% increase in mechanical engineering jobs in the country” (Asamoah, 2025, Scene Three).

While ostensibly providing factual information, the projection’s credibility remains questionable within the play’s context, subtly critiquing state manipulation of information. This exemplifies remediation’s dual logic; the projection creates immediacy through apparent transparency while simultaneously fostering critical distance through awareness of mediating technologies.

Live Telecast and Media Integration

Scene Two deploys live telecast techniques as Mr President’s interaction with television host Trish Opong broadcasts on-screen, simulating live television:

This technique immerses audiences in unfolding political discourse while critiquing the media’s role in shaping public opinion. The play extends engagement through simulated audience call-ins:

CALLER 1: *“All I have to say is that the president and his government are a bunch of clueless people...”* (Asamoah, 2025, Scene Two)

CALLER 2: *“The entire system is simply broken, and their focus is on restricting the movement of people who are seeking better lives elsewhere”* (Asamoah, 2025, Scene Two).

These live telecast elements blur fiction-reality boundaries, positioning audiences as active participants rather than passive observers. Remediation theory illuminates how television conventions refashioned within theatre create hypermediacy that makes audiences conscious of the media’s role in constructing political reality.

Flashbacks and Investigative Projections

Scene Three employs strategic video deployment during tribunal hearings. When Vanessa Asare applies to emigrate to the Netherlands for marriage reunification, the projected video exposes her past relationship:

GOVERNMENT REP: *“Honourable members of this panel, this is a video of the man that Madam Vanessa says she was not married to, parading as her brother during her marriage ceremony”* (Asamoah, 2025, Scene Three).

This projection adds dramatic tension while underscoring governmental surveillance methods. Similarly, Scene Five projects news articles juxtaposing government luxury vehicle expenditure with healthcare system neglect:

GOVERNMENT REP: *“The cost of just one of those cars that you people received is around 800,000 Ghana cedis. Now multiply that by 300... just imagine the number of equipment that amount of money can buy and how many lives it could result in saving”* (Asamoah, 2025, Scene Five).

These projections create sharp contrasts, reinforcing themes of corruption and misplaced priorities, compelling audiences toward critical reflection on governance and accountability.

Multimedia Protest Sequences

Scene Seven’s climactic protest sequence merges live performance with multimedia elements for multisensory impact: Protesters carry placards with bold slogans while projected messages amplify grievances, ensuring visual and auditory elements work in tandem. This integration positions audiences within civic resistance, making the struggle against the fictional Emigration Tribunal feel immediate and tangible.

Music and Soundscapes

The final scene employs Uncle Ato’s song *Wonsuom* playing as the judge delivers a speech on collective responsibility:

“Building the nation is a collective responsibility. Let us move forward together, united in our commitment to a better future. We cannot run away and expect the system to work by itself. The system needs all of us to work. We are the system” (Asamoah, 2025, Scene Seven).

Music selection reinforces the play’s call for unity while creating lasting emotional resonance, urging reflection on migration’s broader socio-political implications.

The Amalgam as Transformative Practice

Findings from both analysed plays and the created script illuminate intermediality’s transformative potential when intentionally integrated through the amalgam framework. Brew’s pioneering work demonstrates a willingness to move beyond traditional dialogue-driven narratives, yet it also reveals how superficial integration limits impact. Autarky illustrates how intentional embedding, making intermedial elements integral rather than optional, creates richer narrative possibilities.

The amalgam framework addresses the limitations identified in Brew’s plays by ensuring that intermedial elements are: 1. Consistently integrated throughout the dramatic structure rather than appearing only in isolated moments; 2. Multidimensional in their application, combining visual, auditory, and interactive elements; 3. Essential to narrative comprehension rather than optional additions; and 4. Experimentally dynamic, creating genuine sensory and emotional impact.

Remediation theory offers an explanatory framework for these differences. In Brew’s plays, intermedial elements primarily serve as content-delivery systems; projections convey information but do not fundamentally transform theatrical experience. In Autarky, intermedial elements operate remedially, creating productive tension between immediacy and hypermediacy that engages audiences in both narrative immersion and critical reflection.

This aligns with Kattenbelt’s (2008) assertion that intermediality’s significance lies in its capacity to transcend traditional media boundaries, fostering new approaches to storytelling and audience engagement. When video

projections, live telecasts, and digital soundscapes interact with live performance, they create, as Chapple and Kattenbelt (2006) describe, “new aesthetic and perceptual experiences that challenge traditional media boundaries.”

For emigration narratives specifically, the amalgam offers unique affordances. Emigration itself involves remediation, the refashioning of identity across geographical and cultural boundaries. Just as media transform one another through remediation, emigrants transform and are transformed by movement between contexts. Intermedial theatre operating within the amalgam framework can capture these complexities by juxtaposing live presence with mediated absence, immediate action with recorded memory, and local space with distant places.

The study also reveals persistent challenges. Technical complexity, resource limitations, and the need for specialised training remain significant barriers in Ghanaian contexts, as Nelson (2008) and Giannachi (2004) have noted regarding intermedial theatre generally. However, the findings suggest that the amalgam framework can help playwrights address these challenges through intentional script integration that makes intermedial elements central to the narrative, thereby justifying investment in necessary resources and training.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of intermediality in selected Ghanaian playscripts and created an original work, *Autarky*, using the amalgam framework to explore emigration. Several conclusions emerge.

First, intermediality in Ghanaian theatre remains nascent but holds significant transformative potential. Brew’s *In Her Silence* and *The Prisoner* demonstrate a willingness to experiment with multimedia techniques, yet reveal limitations when intermedial elements are not fully integrated into the narrative fabric. The functional, often optional use of projections and video clips limits their capacity to create genuinely new aesthetic experiences.

Second, the amalgam framework, developed through this research, offers a practical model for intentional intermedial integration. In combining conventional dramatic elements with deliberately embedded multimedia techniques, the amalgam enables richer representations of complex social phenomena. *Autarky* demonstrates how video projections, live telecasts, flashbacks, multimedia protest sequences, and evocative soundscapes can work in concert with live performance to create multisensory engagement with emigration’s emotional, psychological, and political dimensions.

Third, remediation theory offers a valuable analytical framework for understanding intermedial theatre operating through the amalgam form. The dual logic of immediacy and hypermediacy illuminates how intermedial elements simultaneously immerse audiences in narrative while fostering critical awareness of mediating technologies, making it a particularly apt framework for emigration narratives that themselves involve remediation across geographical and cultural boundaries.

Fourth, the study contributes to the growing discourse on intermediality in African theatre contexts by introducing the amalgam as both an analytical framework and a practical model. While global theatre scholarship has extensively explored intermedial practices, African theatre studies have engaged less systematically with these developments. This research demonstrates intermediality’s relevance for African playwrights addressing pressing social issues, offering the amalgam as a tool for intentional, script-integrated multimedia practice.

Finally, the study underscores theatre’s potential to contribute to national development by addressing pressing social issues and advocating change. Using the amalgam framework to explore emigration, playwrights can stimulate public discourse, challenge societal norms, and prompt reflection on collective responsibility. However, realising this potential requires collaborative effort among theatre practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders to recognise the arts as vital tools for social engagement.

Future studies might explore the amalgam’s application to other African social issues, such as gender inequality, political corruption, and environmental degradation, while investigating its impacts on audience

engagement and the theatre's effectiveness as a catalyst for social change. Comparative studies examining intermedial practices across African contexts would further enrich understanding of how the amalgam framework might serve continent-wide theatrical innovation.

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