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# THE POETICS OF REVOLUTION, THE LOGIC OF REFORMISM AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: SAM UKALA'S TWO FOLKSCRIPTS

Ifeanyi Ugwu

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

## Abstract

*Currently in Nigeria, the word 'change' is often times used to ridicule the optimism with which it was conceptualized during political campaigns. In its really optimistic sense, the concept of change connotes a reversal of governance from administrative ideologies like clandestine democracy, capitalism and revolutionism, among others, to "African socialism", true democracy and reformism. The question now is: Since the idea of change has turned into a mere mockery of its true self in socio-political circles, which administrative strategy can be employed to reposition it on its authentic path? In response to this question, Sam Ukala's folkist, revolutionary aesthetics in some of his plays ironically points at the ideology of reformism as largely appropriate for a successful change management in Nigeria. These plays dramatize revolution in order to expose its follies and allude to the urgent need for reformism. Backed by Reader Response theory, this paper demonstrates how Ukala, through his plays, **The Placenta of Death** and **Iredi War** suggests reformism as a suitable ideology for change management in Nigeria.*

## Introduction

The form and contents of an artistic display or composition which depict a socio-political revolution can be referred to as the poetics of revolution or revolutionary aesthetics. For example, the features of a play which, not only portray the revolutionary dreams of some of its characters but also experiment with a combination of traditional and western dramatic forms are recognized as poetics of revolution or revolutionary aesthetics. The aesthetics, which emerged in Nigeria "since the 1970s" (Umukoro 21), became popular by the 1980s and picked diverse innovations by the turn of the millennium.

Various levels of socio-political mismanagement, class discrimination, oppression of the working class, corruption and injustice are showcased in the drama of this bent, while consciousness is raised against the evils. A notable

revolutionary dramatist outside Nigeria is Bertolt Brecht who initiated a revolution in European dramatic form while adopting the Marxist socialist ideology. He dropped the conventional realistic form and picked a technique he called epic theatre to differentiate it from dramatic theatre. The Marxist socialist ideology is a revolution oriented perspective.

Within Nigeria, some first generation radical (revolutionary) dramatists are Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Tunde Fatunde and Kole Omotoso who also followed the Marxist ideology and adopted the Brechtian, revolutionary, dramaturgical form known as epic theatre. Revolutionary writers of the later generation have in the forefront, Sam Ukala, whose new form known as 'folkism', which is neither a Brechtian technique nor a core follower of Marxist ideology, rates him highly as a folkist revolutionary dramatist. Folkism refers to what Ukala calls "the tendency to base literary plays in the history, culture, and concerns of the folk (people in general) and to compose and perform them in accordance with African conventions for composing and performing the folktale" (285). The folkist approach entails the employment of "folk linguistic, structural and performance techniques" (Ukala 38). Folkist revolutionary aesthetics, therefore, is the employment of African folktale compositional and performance techniques to dramatize the story of socio-political revolution while alluding to, passing comments or raising major ideas on how to manage the transitional consequences.

Reformism and revolutionism (the practice of or "support for" social or political revolution) are processes of change but they differ in their modes of operation. Reformism refers to "any doctrine or movement that advocates social or political change in a gradual manner, within a democratic framework rather than a revolutionary change" (Chambers 1028). Revolutionism is "the theory of or support for political, social, etc., revolution"; and the revolution refers to "the (sudden or abrupt) overthrow or rejection of a government or political system by the governed (Chambers 1053). Obviously, the idea of change is central to revolutionism and reformism but while the former implies the use of force, may involve violence, disorder, suddenness and anti-democratic principles, the latter is democratic and does not require violence or abruptness.

Democracy (democratic process or governance), here implies what Afolabi Ojo, describes as being "predicated on the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality... implies justice, fairness, equity and freedom ... presupposes peace through the protection of the rights and dignity of the individual" (qtd. in Fosudo 119). This concept of democracy tallies with the African perspective of socialism, which differs from the Marxist, socialist

ideology. The African perspective favours equal rights and justice as a sine qua non, hence, it is operational in both a poor and a rich community (Umukoro 31). The Marxist ideology calls for the availability of abundant wealth for equal rights in sharing of the abundance to be feasible. In other words, abundance of material wealth is a precondition for the Marxist socialism.

Revolutionary aesthetics, the logic of reformism, as well as the folkist dramaturgy and their relevance to change management are explored and enunciated here through a close reading of the study texts. Deriving from the authority of reader response theory, inferences drawn from the textual reading will be validated. This theory posits that the meaning of a text is contingent on the reader's interpretation. In the words of Eagleton, the reader is:

All the time engaged in constructing hypothesis about the meaning of the text. The reader makes implicit connections, fills in gaps, and draws inferences and tests out hunches.... The text itself is really no more than a series of 'cues' to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning .... The reader 'concretizes' the literary work, which is no more than a chain of organized black marks on a page .... (66)

Reader response critics such as Derrida (1985), Barthes (1974) among others have written to project the reader as being important in giving meaning to a literary text.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the reader response theory authenticates and fortifies the inferences this reader will draw from the cues supplied by Ukala's plays through their language and other structural features.

## **Textual Explorations: Revolutionary Aesthetics and Reformist Implications**

### ***The Placenta of Death***

This is a tale of one nation called Owodoland, which is under the leadership of Owodo III, the Oba of the land. During this regime, which is a "change" of leadership after the reigns of Owodo's predecessors (Owodo I and II), the nation is disturbed by internal forces, like class distinction and political mismanagement. Although the class differences existed in the land prior to the

period of Owodo III, they become more pronounced under his maladministration.

The class differences are marked by the existence of a slave tribe in the land, called the Dein tribe, of which the Umuolua family is part; two other different groups are the poor masses and the rich, oppressive class. Mismanagement of the “change” (the regime of Owodo III) emanates from the Oba’s abandonment of his administration to his slave wife, Ibo, who is hell-bent on swinging the leadership of the nation from the freeborn to the slave class. These major forces generate socio-political tension, as a result of their related evils of oppression, tribalism, injustice, stigmatization, fraud, and discrimination. Consequently, the situation degenerates into a forceful, violent and sudden overthrow of the oppressive regime and inadvertently causes the unity of the slaves and the poor.

The ill-fated reign of Owodo III here represents a political mismanagement of change while the unification of the oppressed classes symbolizes an optimistic, new change. The new dimension is prophetic of a future that would continue to change to better days but through reformism. If governance were orderly through reformism, there would be no room for revolution, which is violent and anarchical. These thematic explorations of *The Placenta of Death* are further accentuated by the folkist dramaturgical techniques of the play. The structural features of folktale composition and performance, such as the opening convention, the role of narrator, audience interjection, and others are obvious. The skill which the playwright uses in reflecting the folkist techniques, gives a vivid picture of a story teller displaying his art and making both the events and the characters alive, as practical illustrations of what he is displaying.

As a folkscript, therefore, the play opens when the narrator begins to arouse the audience with an opening call:

NAR: (from AUDIENCE) Tohio!

AUD: Ya ya, Ya ya, kpo!

NAR: (Rising) Tohio!

AUD: Ya ya, Ya ya, kpo! (13).

This call signals the narrator’s greetings to the audience and his request for “a song of the times” (p.13) which he conducts and gets everyone to join in singing. This exposition introduces the setting of the play as Owodoland and presents a resume of the socio-political condition of the nation: “A nation shredded by riches and strife ... and riches begat power and injustice, enjoyment and anguish. Riches became a high fence between brother and



brother. Nature strangely welded opposites in order to level them up. But levelling up created charring frictions” (13). This picture of the fictitious nation prepares the mind for the challenges of the land. Moreover, it not only points to some African nations, including Nigeria, which are facing similar conflicts, and therefore, demands constructive suggestions towards a relevant and workable ideological solution such as reformism.

After the exposition, the plot begins to unfold and can be explored in four levels: first, the issue of Owodo’s marriage to Ibo and Omon and the attitude of these two wives to the palace servants – Izagodo and Ebuzun. Second, the births by the two wives and the conflicts generated in that respect; third, the revenge of Omon; and fourth, the revolution. Because Ibo has, since her arrival as the Oba’s first wife, failed to bear a child, pressure mounts on the Oba to marry Omon, especially as Ibo is also a slave who “cannot bear an heir for Owodoland, even though the goddess of fertility resides in her womb” (14). But Owodo initially rejects the proposal to marry Omon simply because she is from a poor background. Later, however, he succumbs and takes Omon as his second wife, though Ibo receives her with stigmatic disgust. It is noticed that Ibo does not receive people well in the palace. Apart from her unfriendly and insulting attitude to Omon when she arrives, she lashes and scolds one of the palace servants – Izagodo – and disallows his freedom of self-defence. She curses and insults the servants. Ibo puts on this oppressive demeanour, not so much for being the first royal wife but because she is from a rich family; and this bloats her ego, even though she is a slave.

This oppressive attitude is rather contradicted by Omon’s humane treatment of the servants when she meets them after Ibo leaves. Her attitude inspires one of the servants Izagodo, to declare:

IZAGODO: Come on! Let’s make this place sparkle for Omon’s sake... (21).

Omon’s behaviour and the servants’ response, here, represent the play’s tacit extolment of even the least effort by the leadership of the country to respect justice, fair play and human rights, hence, an encouragement of democracy or reformism. The masses (represented by Izagodo and Ebuzun) are inspired to be more committed to the national interest if their rights and humanness are allowed a proper place in the affairs of the nation.

The births by Ibo and Omon, raise a number of issues that are causes of revolutionary attitude. The former, bore a son first. When Owodo prays over this good fortune, inviting the ancestors and gods to endow the child with wisdom, long life and prosperity “so he can rule Owodoland creditably after

his father would have been looked for and not found” (30), Iyasere – a prime minister in the nation reacts against the prayer. According to him “Owodoland cannot be ruled by a slave” (31). This evidence of class segregation is detested by Emeni (Ibo’s father) who denies being a slave. But when the Oba himself categorically declares him a slave, he gets angry to the point of rejecting the gifts meant for his house by Owodo, during the birth of Ibo’s son.

OWODO: Get seven fat nuts of kola, seven giant tubers of yam, a plump and virile he goat. Then ask our tapper to fill his largest pot with his best wine. Send all to Emeni’s house immediately (31).

EMENI: To the house of a slave? What dealings should a free born Oba have with a slave? Keep your gifts to yourself... (31).

Before he leaves in anger, Emeni threatens a revolutionary action against the Oba and his tribe who, according to him, enjoy “owning captives without a war” (31). Emeni’s riches make him arrogant and determined not to own up being a slave. Rather, he prefers to be called a captive. It is known that pride and insincerity have often contributed to anarchy and disquiet in a human society, such as Nigeria.

In consonance with the folkist aesthetics, at intervals, the M.O.A (member(s) of the Audience) throw important questions to the narrator, who promptly supplies the answers and makes the plot move logically. Example: when the narrator describes how Ibo deliberately shows a number of things to Omon – the second wife – and falsely claims that they are gifts from the Oba, the M.O.A ask:

M.O.A: How did Omon take all that?

NAR: She merely giggled Ti-hi Ti-hi .... (33).

Major trouble erupts in the story when the second wife of Owodo also bears a son and the Oba directs that the same quantity of gift meant for Ibo, be sent to her. But Ibo intercepts the gifts and fraudulently mandates Izagodo to replace them with roasted vulture, which she had earlier instructed him to kill and roast. This is sent to Omon. The consequences of this fraud instigate a revenge which moves the story to its climax. Omon declares: “I have eaten the vulture, the carrion eater. Now, Owodo will eat the carrion” (50).

She later succeeds in introducing human placenta into the soup which the Oba and some farmers who worked for him eat. When this crime is

uncovered, the Oba and his labourers begin to vomit. It gets to a point where one of the labourers dies.

The investigation that follows, leads Omon to confess her intrigue:

OMON.....

Owodo had guests

Samarhan

I put placenta in his soup

What Owodo did to me

Samarhan

Is what I've done to Owodo (67).

After denying that he sent a roasted vulture to Omon, Owodo proceeds to pass a death sentence on Omon, and this demonstrates injustice against the poor. Ibo and her father, who are rich, are absolved, despite their role in the crime. This level of discrimination has been a common experience in Nigeria since independence in 1960: The rich always manoeuvre their way to freedom at the expense of the poor. The poor sometimes suffer, even for crimes they do not commit. When the crowd expresses disapproval of Owodo's judgments, the Oba elects to take up his own fight. The battle that erupts leaves Ibo, Owodo, Iyasere and Emeni dead.

These deaths symbolize the demise of oppression, discrimination, injustice, capitalist exploitation, mismanaged administration, and therefore the ironical call for the option of reformist approach. The deaths also point at a new era, when the slave, the poor, and every one unite for a better future. This unification is achieved in the play when Olotu, a slave, refuses to fight Osaze (the symbol of the poor masses) in the above battle. In turn, Osaze refuses to shoot his pistol at Olotu as a mark of understanding that, as the latter puts it, "the slave and the poor are one..." (74). At the conclusion of the play, following the folkist procedure, the narrator makes a closing remark thus:

NARRATOR: Yes, Osaze, the slave and the poor are one (74).

Observably, Ukala employs what Abrams and Harpham call structural irony in advancing the logic of reformism as a suitable policy in change management. Structural irony refers to an author's use of "a structural feature that serves to sustain a duplex meaning and evaluation throughout the work" (166). His portrayal of revolution with its associated problems, ironically implies his suggestion of its reverse alternative, such as reformism. In view of this, revolution, which, as earlier stated, is forceful, violent, abrupt, and

undemocratic, inversely suggests and gives way to reformism, which is peaceful, gradual, and democratic.

### ***Iredi War (2014)***

The play is based on the conflict between a traditional African kingdom of Owa and the agents of British colonialism during the early 20th century. The attempt to impose colonial rule on the well-established political system of the kingdom is met with fierce opposition from the Owa people. This culminates in a war that leaves both sides writhing with the ugly experience of losing many able bodied compatriots in the battle field.

The play is considered revolutionary due to its portrayal of revolt and struggle by an oppressed, insulted and in subordinated people. The people are no other than the peaceful and united indigenes of Owa, who are revolting against the oppressive, arrogant and aggressive racist class of white colonial officers representing the British Monarch, king Edward VII. The oppressed class is denied her right to traditional authority. The tragic disruption of political and cosmic order is manifested in the insults directed at the revered monarch of Owa kingdom, Oba Igboba, and the burning down of the people's shrines and gods by the insensitive colonial agents.

The events of the story as presented below, demonstrate that tragic consequences of the racist approach could have been averted if the white man had applied reformist ideology in his administrative strategies within Owa kingdom. This would have encouraged him to be less coercive, more sensitive to the gains of justice and fair-play, and more respectful to human rights.

The revolutionary elements in the play are read here as ironical indices of their reformist opposites which are being advanced for change management. Hence, oppression points at the need for justice and fair-play, racism reversely recommends equal rights, absence of class discrimination and colour barriers.

As a folkscript, the play begins with the narrators' arousal call, which helps to keep the audience alert to the coming story:

NARRATOR I: *(Rises, and with her right hand, casts imaginary white chalk powder at the AUDIENCE).*

E ye m onu nzun! (I give you white chalk!)

AUDIENCE: I gwo, o re-e! (If you concoct, may it be efficacious!).

This opening call is followed by a song raised by the same NARRATOR I:

Luni ilu

Tell a tale

Ilu I – gboba	Tale of I – gboba
Do n’udo	Tug at the rope
Udo kpiri kpiri	it’s unsnappable (11).

Some of the performers accompany the song with drumming, while others dance. Many members of the audience join in singing, clapping or dancing.

After this arousal, the procedure of folkist performance is carried further when the narrator communicates directly with both the public Audience, and member(s) of the Audience (M.O.N) who are players seated in the audience. In this expository stage, Narrator I introduces the period of the story as June, 1906, while Narrator II outlines some of the characters of the play, such as Crewe-Read, who, Owa people address as “Iredi” or “Ikuru-Iredi”, Igboba, who is the Oba, and others.

The first major incident of the plot occurs in Owa palace court. The Oba and his chiefs are discussing with Crewe-Read who starts here to exhibit tactlessness and coercion in his dealings with the royalty. He disrespectfully addresses the monarch just as “chief” and when he (the Oba) wants to speak, he does not allow him to do so, but, instead, accuses him of rigmorole. Again, Crewe-Read is insulting in his statement:

CREWE-READ: Chief Igboba, your fathers were primitive,  
ignorant and uncivilized barbarians (16).

This degree of insult on people’s ancestral background, intertextually smacks of the tribalistic attitude in Ola Rotimi’s *The God’s are Not to Blame*, which spurred Odewale to give the lethal blow that killed a man in his farmland (Rotimi 46), and the deceased turned out to be his father. Also, this racist sarcasm echoes the tribal tendency which contributed to distrust and hatred that finally degenerated to Nigeria’s civil war in late 1960s.

At this level of Crewe-Read’s insults, one of Owa chiefs sums up his observations as follows:

IWEKUBA: But where is our friendship with the white  
man if we cannot share kola and palm wine with him? (17).

This remark, however, follows Crewe-Read’s rejection of the palm wine presented to him by Igboba, because drops of the wine were poured on the ground as prayer and respect for the ancestors.

Oppression of the blacks starts to rise with acuity after these initial insults. When the white man requests for fifty able bodied men to serve him as

additional carriers, the objection raised by some chiefs, attracts the following ominous threat from Crewe-Read:

CREWE-READ: Chief Igboba! Call your chiefs to order or I'll have them flogged (18)

Because the Townspeople express shock over this threat, Lawani, (a colonial police sergeant) and a constable, each with a horsewhip, rise and deploy themselves to observe TOWNSPEOPLE). What a humiliation! Other instances of insubordination and humiliation are spread in the play. But to add insult to injury, Crewe-Read declares finally that every adult citizen of Owa should pay a levy of two shillings only (p. 21).

This exploitative inclination generates protests from townspeople who urge that Crewe-Read himself should convey the message to the people directly. He agrees to do so at 5p.m the next day, but before this time, he leads the Christian soldiers and missionaries to set fire on every shrine in Owa kingdom.

Reacting to some interjectory questions posed by Member(s) of the Audience (M.O.A), such as “who were those missionaries? Why didn't Owa attack them?” The narrator responds: “our black brothers” (24). The youth leader is expected to give the answer to the second question, and that would be no other response than war against the white man.

The war becomes imminent after a royal palace encounter with the white man's team, who are sent by Crewe-Read to arrest the Oba. In the encounter, the Oba is denied of his royal greetings by Lawani and constables who have come to arrest him. The scuffle that erupts, leaves lawani's arm cut by the assistant youth leader-Uzun, who is, in turn, shot dead by Constable I. Onyela- the youth leader himself is arrested and dragged off to Crewe-Read, who dispatches him to Agbor prison. A new youth leader, Ebie, is appointed.

At Crewe – Read's camp in the forest, at night, arrangements are already being made to request for arms and other needs for an imminent war against Owa. While the white man plans to march on Owa at 3 a. m, the warriors of Owa are also getting ready for battle in front of Igboba's court. Back at Crewe-Read's camp, even before he receives any feedback on his telegrams sent to Asaba for arms and other materials, gun shots start coming from the direction of Owa, and panic engulfs the camp. At this early stage, Crewe-Read is shot dead, and the war rages on.

Consequently, both sides of the war suffer heavy casualties. But with reinforcements, greater fire power and unexpected military tact from the white man's forces, the warriors of Owa are suppressed, though, not without killing

more of their enemies. The last tough battle is fought in Igboba's palace during the white man's second attempt to arrest the Oba.

"Using his astral body", Igboba spears Lawani in the chest, killing him. After further attempts to arrest Igboba, and the failure to do so, RUDKIN, (the leader of the arrest team), and the soldiers run away, leaving Lawani's dead body behind. Later, Igboba and some members of his court are found in the District Commissioner's office at Agbor where they are being interrogated.

The interrogation is still going on when Igboba discovers that he and his household are rather under arrest. He defiantly attempts to depart with his people while an attempt is made to stop him, which fails. However, the Oba, with his people, is finally seen moving behind some prisoners who are in chains. This becomes an index of the Owa people's defeat. As usual, the narrators make a closing remark that signs off the folkscript:

NARRATOR I, NARRATOR II: see you then.

In the play, *Iredi War*, revolutionary aesthetics ironically point at reformist options. Hence, racism, oppression, aggression, cultural denigration and other insults, ironically cry for their respective reversals since they are dramatized not for their being desirable but to conscientize against their evils and sharpen the vision for reformist standards.

Therefore, racism which Amirikpa Oyigbenu succinctly refers to as "inhuman treatment of the black race, segregation along racial line" (18) or "a condition of oppression, discrimination, injustice and inequality that the African-Americans were subjected to for centuries" (26), is obvious in Ukala's play as demonstrated by the way the white man tries to muscle their force and authority over the blacks. Inversely, racism here cries for fair play, justice, human rights, cultural freedom, racial honour to the black man and humane attitude to all. These standards encapsulate the reformist opposition to revolutionist qualities. It therefore, becomes tenable to observe that if Crewe-Read were humane, level-headed and just in his dealings with the culture and personalities of the Owa people, it would have been easier for the colonial administration to manage his political vision of change. Totally, the reformist ideology would have largely provided the desired result while avoiding revolution.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the two study plays and discovered that they tacitly portray revolutionary indices like oppression, injustice, racism, class

discrimination and others, as their ironical pointers to the reformist demands for justice, fair play, equal rights, democracy and the African brand of socialism. The option of reformism in the plays which tacitly contradicts revolutionary choices in the management of change, cries out loudly that socio-political adjustments or transition should observe relevant democratic processes in order to forestall anarchy and violence. Policy makers and leaders in Nigeria, and other African communities will find Ukala's plays, *The Placenta of Death* and *Iredi War*, very instructive and useful as notes of warning against disorders and possible revolutions in their administrative areas.

In the two study plays, therefore, the playwright has dexterously demonstrated great creative ingenuity in employing his new, innovative, folkist dramaturgy to address the sensitive issue of change management. And through this achievement, he has opened up a new vista in the realm of modern African drama's socio-political commitment.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup>See Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, Second Edition, (London: Routledge, 2002) where these works by Derrida and Barthes are discussed in detail.

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# RESTRUCTURING NIGERIA FOR POSITIVE CHANGE: NOLLYWOOD AND THE BIAFRAN STORY

Emmanuel Onyeka Ebekue  
&  
Somtoo Obiefuna Arinze-Umobi  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University

## Abstract

*The Biafran/ Nigerian Civil War is a story of horror, of terror, of hunger, of valour and of so many other experiences that are associated with war and the struggle for survival and self-determination. Its hydra-headedness stems from the varied perspectives with which different factions involved in the war view the conflict. It is a truism that most civil wars and civil struggles of nations constitute invaluable sources of thematic materials for their narratives. Unfortunately, the story of Biafra continues to be neglected and side lined by the Nigerian film industry to the amazement of many pundits and theatre critics. The puzzle behind the negation of the potentials of the Biafra story for the evolving industry constitutes the problem of this study. It examines the potentials and trappings the Nigerian film industry can tap from this historic but enigmatic encounter. It also highlights numerous advantages the Nigerian society stands to gain if the story of Biafra finds its way into the mainstream media, especially at this time when Nigerians are clamouring for restructuring and change. The study adopts mixed method of research in sourcing and analysing its data. The conclusion reached is that the Biafra story has been underutilized and if adequately explored has the capacity to reposition not only the film industry of Nigeria but also the Nigerian socio-political narrative.*

## Introduction

Like Banquo's ghost, the past haunts us today, again. Forty-nine years after the civil war, we are still fighting the war. Some think the war is over. They are wrong. The war is with us because we are a nation of self-deceit. We lie to and at ourselves. We say peace whereas tribulation lurks and detonates everywhere. (Omaseye, par. 1)

Film is a social art that embodies in it the lives of a people, their experiences and their socio-cosmic disposition to the universe. The social nature of film endears it to be yearned after and accessed by the masses. This nature makes film a communicative tool that can create, influence and link a people's ideological leaning. Thus, Mehraj, Bhat and Mehraj believe that by having access to film which is a component of mass media, "people's attitudes and habits can be changed" (56). Change is of primary interest to this research. The world is on the wheel of change and morphs continuously to affect lives in different dimensions. Nigeria has continued to dillydally on the wheels of change which mostly roves around the perimeters of economic difficulties, socio-religious crisis and other numerous viruses that unsettle its citizenry. Most importantly is the question of Biafra that has refused to take a long lasting sleep. This, in effect, is the motivation behind this work that seeks to aid psychological restructuring of the country's citizenry by the use of the film medium. The researchers seek to prove that the tactical application of film in telling the Biafra narrative can effect a positive change in attitude among the citizenry especially among the pro-Biafra agitators.

The choice of film for this task is not without its merits. This is because the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, has blossomed over the years. Nollywood has become one of the most influential film industries in the world and ranks second in the global rating for output. To this effect, Adesanya posits that "Nollywood's appeal has reached far and beyond Nigeria, and its films are watched all over Africa and beyond" (qtd. in Fafiolu 22). Onuzulike corroborates this when he posits that Nigeria's material culture has become globally recognisable thanks to Nollywood (231). It is in this regard that this study seeks to show the endless advantages that Nigeria stands to gain if the story of Biafra is told variously from variegated perspectives by its foremost and most welcome film industry.

More so, events in recent times have begun to raise bold question marks on the continued existence and unification of the diverse nationalities that make up the civic giant termed Nigeria. Nigeria since independence has been badgered with crisis. Afegbua posits that:

Nigeria, being a multi-religious and ethnic society, had experienced massive ethnic, sectional, religious and political violence that has led to grievous socio-economic and political consequences on the psyche of the nation. These conflicts have led to the destruction of lives and

property and also brought untold sorrow on the people in the last fifty years of our nationhood. (13)

Udo reports that these crises are on the increase in recent times and that “lawless sects are raising the tempo of their campaign in various parts of the country” (3). These crises have continued to resurge time and after time. Odeyemi attributes these endless crises to the problem of ethnicity. He goes further to state that apart from the incessant crisis, “the ensuing complications of ethnicity have grossly impinged on the development of the country in all ramifications” (87). In recent times, these agitations have manifested in different forms of resistance and are manifesting in virtually every part of the country. Nwabueze reports that there is a proliferation of militia groups in the country along ethnic lines. He posits that “the Yoruba formed the OPC, the Igbo formed MASSOB, the Hausa/Fulani formed APC while the youths in the Niger Delta formed MEND, NDPVF and MOSOP, Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, etc.” (19). Amidst the ravaging effect of Boko Haram that has eaten deep into the material and human resources of this nation have arisen the herdsmen militia groups that operate in patches and pockets around the country killing innocent people and sacking survivors from their towns and villages. Governor Olusegun Mimiko of Ondo State posits that “Fulani herdsmen rampage had become a monster that is threatening the security and unity of the country” (qtd. in Oluwole, par. 2). He further warns that the activities of the Fulani Herdsmen sect are fast pushing the nation to the precipice (5).

All these are indications of a much deeper yearning for a restructuring, a renegotiation and an attitudinal polity change. However, change became the new mantra that enveloped the socio-political space of the Nigerian state in the wake of the merger that brought to life the All Progressives Congress (APC) that won the 2015 general elections. Onyecholem posits that the change was a popular call “in the light of almost two decades of horrendous governance under the PDP administration” (par.1). The just concluded electioneering campaigns impaled in the minds and hearts of the people a lingering hope, a transformational expectancy and hope for revolutionised modus vivendi. Unfortunately, increased nose dive of the standard of living and political atmosphere seems to be re-injecting despair and renewed hopelessness in the minds of the citizens. In the words of Alabi, “what we have instead is a “cursed change” that has taken Nigerians back to pre-civilisation era when constant power supply was a miracle, when fuel queues were 10-kilometres long and civil servants were not paid for over a year” (par.

8). As a result, there has arisen majorly in the eastern part of the country a determined struggle for self-determination and governance. These struggles arguably have been underground since the early 1990s but have gained a humongous velocity and mass popularity since the assumption of office by president Buhari. Thus, Aribasala sums it “within months of Buhari’s presidency, the Igbo demand for Biafra has become deafening.” Ratifying the reasons for the increased and burgeoning agitation for self-determination, Aribasala opines that:

...the Igbo have been hard done by. Since the civil war 45 years ago, they have been treated as if they were a minority ethnic group in Nigeria when in fact they are one of the majorities. No Igbo has been considered worthy of being head-of-state. The South East of Ndigbo is the only one of the six geopolitical zones of the country with five states. All other zones have six or more. Indeed, the number of local governments in the North-East is virtually double that of the South-East. As a result, the Ndigbo receive the smallest amount of revenue allocation among all the zones, in spite of the fact that some of the South-eastern states are among the oil-producing states. (par.8)

With this incendiary agitation for Biafra, the sovereignty and continued existence of Nigeria is threatened. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to address issues relating to Biafra and find ways to address it in order to forestall a repeat of the Nigerian civil war of 1967 -1970 or an eventual balkanization of the constituent units that makeup the federation. This however may not be very successful without going through the rubbles of history to review the events of the past so as to determine the major causes of the agitations and what best the country needs to do in order to mollify the aggrieved and restless spirit of Biafra which has continued to resurge since about forty years after the war. It is however unfortunate that the history of the Nigerian-Biafran war which is about the most serious dramatic event that has taken place in the country since independence has continued to be neglected and subjugated to a highly obscene background. Senator Ben Bruce bemoans the carefree attention with which the Nigeria civil war is meted with. He posits that part of the reason why the Biafra agitation is gaining momentum is because “we erase the civil war from our consciousness and so many generations do not know we fought a war and why we fought a war” (qtd.

Nwafor, par.11). Adichie also bemoans the neglect of this all important story and posits that she wasn't taught history in school. In her opinion, the Nigeria/Biafra war "is a part of our history that we like to pretend never existed, that we hide, as if hiding it will make it go away, which of course it doesn't. As if hiding it will make the legacies any easier" (par. 6). This therefore informs the bearing of this research on positioning Nollywood to play the all-important role of telling the Biafra narrative with the aim of achieving a psycho-social restructuring.

### **Biafra: An Overview**

... Our struggle is a total and vehement rejection of all those evils which blighted Nigeria, evils which were bound to lead to the disintegration of that ill-fated federation. Our struggle is not a mere resistance – that would be purely negative. It is a positive commitment to build a healthy, dynamic and progressive state, such as would be the pride of black men world over. (Ojukwu 6)

The quotation above curled from Ahiara declaration sheds a summative light on the principles on which Biafra the not long stayed state of Biafra was built. The concept 'Biafra' gained prominence in the later years of the 1960s. After the independence of 1960, the Nigerian political system was fast deteriorating under the civilian rule. Nigeria was blighted by corruption, religious and tribal crisis. The situation was a morbid show of depletion occasioned by greed, corruption and inordinate ambition to cling to power by political leaders in certain regions of the country. Achebe, describing the situation, opines that:

... Nigeria was a cesspit of corruption and misrule. Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation's wealth. Elections were blatantly rigged. The subsequent national census was outrageously stage-managed; judges and magistrates were manipulated by the politicians in power. The politicians themselves were pawns of foreign business interest. (51)

As a result, the military amidst the discord waded in to save the young republic from implosion within a decade of its existence. In his narrative of the coup, Ademoyega cites the reasons for the military takeover to include the fact that "the politicians had failed the people. In effect there was nothing to

follow the political chaos except the disintegration of the country unless there were men of good will who would rally round to fight for the survival of their country” (100 -101).

The Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu-led coup set the background for the civil war as it was totally rejected by the other regions of the country. It was tagged an Igbo coup because according to Amaechi Mbazulike, the Prime minister and the premiers of the North and West were killed while that of the East was not. As a result, a counter coup was staged in which General Aguiyi Ironsi was killed in retaliation for the first coup that was perceived as an Igbo coup in July, 1966. In furtherance of this, myriads of the Igbo were killed in the northern and the western parts of the country (qtd. in Ujumadu par. 1). Uzoigwe reports the pogrom thus: “in four successive pogroms terrifying in their hatred, barbarity and periodicity – May 29th, July 29th, September 29th, and October 29th – 1966, over 30,000 Igbo people domiciled in northern Nigeria as well as Igbo military officers were systematically ethnically cleansed” (2).

The carnage led to a mass return of the millions of the Igbo scattered all around the country as the federal government seemed to have lost control of the situation. Attempts at a peaceful resolution of the crisis proved abortive as the Gowon-led federal government refused to honour the terms of the Aburi peace accord held in Ghana between Col. Ojukwu-led eastern region government and the Gen. Yakubu Gowon-led federal government. Frederick Forsyth posits that Aburi was Nigeria’s last chance of averting the war (90). As a result, on the 26th of May 1967, the South eastern part of the country voted to leave the federal republic of Nigeria to become an independent nation. On the 30th of May 1967, Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu announced the Independent State of Biafra which according to map constituted all the eastern states and the Midwestern states. In reaction to this, General Gowon announced a ‘police action’ to quell the riot in the eastern region. This tottered to a full blown war which lasted for about two and half years. The war however came to halt in what the federal military government termed “no victor no vanquished”. Biafra was reabsorbed into the Nigerian federation on the 15th of January 1970.

### **Film as a Bearer of Collective Memory**

No memory can preserve the past, what remains is only that which the society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference. (Assmann 130)

Collective memory is a shared memory of past events. It is how a group remembers past events and incidents that affect it. Memory is akin to man and so man must remember either as an individual or as a group. When a group remembers and recalls experiences of its history and cultural evolution, it bears a collective memory of its evolution. According to Roediger and DeSoto, “collective memory refers to how groups remember their past” (par. 2). Group histories are usually cultural treasures that are handed down from generation to generation. Most times the collective memory of a group affects the group’s construction of its future. It also affects its worldview and determines its social relations both within and outside the group. It, therefore, becomes very pertinent to mind how a group remembers as its social outlook depends greatly on that. Espousing this, Sabnani opines that:

A tale becomes all the more valuable through retelling. The past is seen from a present location and each present moment modifies the past memory. By telling and retelling the past is forever brought into the present which makes way for and shapes the future. It also allows for reinterpretation of the past to ‘make sense’ of events and our responses to those events. New meanings emerge and memory is wrested from time. (2)

Film is a viable medium for ‘telling’ and ‘retelling’. It is a social medium that surreptitiously creeps into the psyche of its viewer. It is a propaganda medium and so can engender opinions and influence same on its adherents. Film, in effect, propagates ideas and influences policies across societies. Englehardt opines that “films of any genre, from documentary to drama, can have a dramatic impact on real life” (11). Films, therefore, have been used to propagate memories that embody group experience. Such films in themselves can have therapeutic effects as they help to open up such memories for discussion and understanding and possible remediation. Typical examples of such movies include *Sarafina* (1992) which deals with a narrative of the apartheid in South Africa, *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Sometime in April* (2005) both of which treat the Rwandan genocide from different perspectives. Indeed, films that embody collective memories are used to achieve “reconstruction rather than recollection” knowing full well that the present and future are highly “dependable upon our knowledge of the past” (Chedraui 12).



## **The Biafra Story in Nollywood**

Nollywood is one of Nigeria's most prized achievements in Africa. This is because of its geometric growth over the years. It has achieved in very short time what other sectors of the Nigerian economy find difficult to do. This feat has been possible because of its peculiar grasp of the African life and experience. Nollywood has traversed the bounds of geographical boundaries and has sold the Nigerian/African story to the global audience in the most outstanding of ways. In lauding Nollywood dominance, Haynes opines that "Nollywood is an example of Nigeria living up to its potential role as the leader of Africa" (par. 9). In a sense, this means that Nollywood has handled the African story and continues to tell the tales of Africa from the perspectives of the Africans. It has become the social prism, narcissistic mirror that appreciates not just the beauty and uniqueness of the African experience but also the hopelessness of its leadership, its failures and the desperation of its citizenry in the face of dwindling resources and low standard of living. This is exemplified in such movies as *Bloody Night* (2014) that exposes the humongous corruption and flagrant abuse of human rights by the Nigeria Police force. *Somewhere in Africa* (2011) is also a typical example as it exposes the sorry nature of leadership in Africa especially amongst the Heads of State who find it difficult to relinquish power. Nollywood has also explored and continues to explore the myriads of Nigeria's socio-religious orientations, the mystique of African metaphysics and the high dependency of the Nigerian populace in seeking solutions to issues in the metaphysical. This theme is best exemplified in films such as Ernest Obi's *Idemili* (2014) and *Calabash* (2015), Zeb Ejiro's *Nneka, the Pretty Serpent* (1992), Ifeanyi Ikpoenyi's *Karashika* (1996), Frank Rajah Arase's *Iyore* (2015), Kunle Afolayan's *Figurine* (2009), Obi Emelonye's *Mirror Boy* (2011), etc.

Nollywood has not also failed to tell about the Nigerian struggle, the daily struggle of the common man in the face of misrule and despotic leadership. It has not failed to tell the story of the ancient Africa before the eventual invasion by the Europeans. In fact, it has re-imaged the pre-colonial Nigeria and has coloured its story by keeping the memory alive amidst a fleeting history. These pre-colonial narratives are most apt in such films as *Igodo* (1999) by Andy Amenechi and Don Pedro Obaseki, *Izaga* (2004) by Andy Amenechi, *Egg of life* (2003) by Andy Amenechi, *Iyore* (2015) by Frank Rajah Arase, *Sango* (1997) by Obafemi Lasoede and numerous others. Nollywood has also aptly captured the recent upsurge in crime, terrorism and militancy that has characterized the new Nigerian experience in myriads of films such as *Isakkaba* (2001) by Lancelot Imaseun, *Murder at Prime Suite*

(2013) by Chris Eneng, *Most Wanted* (1996) by Bamishigbin Tunji, *Rattle Snake* (1995) by Amaka Igwe, *Glamour Girls* (1994) by Chika Onukwufor, etc. It has done a wonderful job of picturing the Nigerian living and engraving in its citizens a new consciousness. What is worrisome is that Biafra, which has been the most significant event and the most incendiary discourse in the Nigerian political space seems to be emasculated in Nollywood's narrative.

However, the boldest attempt at telling the story of Biafra by Nollywood has been Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013), a visual adaptation of Chimamanda Adichie's novel of the same name. The film was produced in 2013 and its release into the Nigerian film space was quite controversial because of its Biafra war thematisation. In his reaction to the repeated denial of approval for the screening of the movie by the Nigerian Film and Video Censor's Board, Biyi Bandele opines that: "One of the reasons Nigeria is more divided today – 40 years after the end of the war than it was before the war started, is because we have refused to talk about the elephant in the room" (par. 12). The elephant he talks about in this context is the Biafra-Nigeria war. Topics relating to this event have continued to remain extra sensitive in discourse circles around the country and so, it is avoided like a plague among the citizenry. Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a love story within the Biafra war setting. The film mirrors the travails of living, loving and building a home amidst a war torn humanity. *The Encounter* (2015) by Tolu Ajayi is another bold step at dusting the rubbles on the Biafran war experience. *The Encounter* is another bold attempt at resuscitating the Nigerian civil war narrative by Nollywood. The movie chronicles the event of the last discussion between General Emeka Ojukwu and Emmanuel Ifeajuna who was considered a traitor during the war. It is an attempt at giving a voice to Ifeajuna whose own account of what really transpired was never told.

Izu Ojukwu's *Across the Niger* (2004) is also an attempt at 'retelling' the story of the events of the Biafran war. In the film, contrary to the perceived hatred that existed between Biafra and Nigeria, Izu Ojukwu presents a controversial love affair between a Biafran soldier and a Hausa-Fulani woman. The two lovers defy hate and war to fight and be with each other against their people's opinion. The film is idealised to show the strength in diversity and love as the two lovers conquer the parochial hatred that exist between their tribes. These three films are exhaustive of Nollywood films themed on the Biafra war history. Considering the feat Nollywood has achieved in the international film space, it is pertinent to note that it is yet to take a swing in the right direction as it concerns the Biafra war experience.

## **Why should Nollywood Engage in the Narrative of Biafra?**

### **1. It will help preserve the collective memory of the Nigerian Civil War**

Films are often being used to raise larger issues from the past or contemporary society that did not surface in text books and/or are difficult to broach (Stoddard and Marcus 85).

Film plays an all important role of historical-cultural preservation. It does not only entertain but also engraves in the minds of its audience images and pictures of very important facts of human existence. Film being a sociological art mostly builds on the socio-cultural environment of its maker and, therefore, is themed on the human happenings within its situational enclave. According to Rabb “film conveys certain kinds of information (especially atmospheres and feelings) that written texts cannot provide. It can stimulate inquiry (even reading!) and educate through visual memory in ways that words cannot” (par. 7). In effect, films can help immensely in preserving collective memory of events. Therefore, Nollywood being Nigeria’s film industry has an all important role to play in the preservation and propagation of Nigeria’s history. Biafra being a most important rung in the development of the Nigerian state should have a good representation in Nollywood to help preserve its memory for the future generations.

### **2. It will enhance therapy and reconciliation**

Film becomes not simply a witness or recorder but an interpreter, which transmits the acknowledged painful process of traumatization. This painful process is as necessary for film viewers as for the witnesses themselves. There is a need to actively engage and confront the horrors of these many historical settings in order for each viewer to move on. (Mhando and Tomaselli 31)

Forty years after the war, Biafra still remains a very sensitive topic and Nigerians shy away from discussing it. This is because the issue is yet to be dealt with; people are still hurting and so much anger still lies untended by the continued treatment of the Biafra topic with a passive wave. There is the need to open up discussions on the topic and let people pour out their feelings in order to purge the troubling emotions. Omatseye laments the shabby handling

of the Nigerian post-war settlement of Biafra: “We just wanted to move on, like a child who walks into a party from a bathroom without cleaning up. The smell and mess linger” (par. 10). It is therefore pertinent that Nollywood through its medium should delve into this area and embrace themes of Biafra in order to enhance discourses and achieve emotional purgation needed for the country to move on.

### **3. It will help engender change and restructuring of Nigeria’s political space**

Nollywood’s thematisation of Biafra will bring about discussions of events that led to the war. There has been a continued call for a restructuring of the Nigerian system to achieve true federalism which was the major agreement of the Aburi Accord prior to the war in 1967. Thus Atiku Abubakar posits that “There is need, to review the structure of the Nigerian federation, preferably along the basis of the current six geopolitical zones as regions and the states as provinces. (qtd. in Olaleye par. 3). Abubakar is obviously not a lone voice in the wilderness; Akowe also reports that the “All Progressives Congress (APC) governors are backing restructuring and true federalism as a way out of the agitation for Nigeria’s break-up” (par. 1). Many political scientists and social artisans have blamed Nigeria’s problems on its structure and form. It is, therefore, necessary that a new consciousness be created towards engendering a revisit to the cause of the war that took the lives of millions of Nigerians. A narrative of Biafra through Nollywood will surely stimulate pertinent discussions towards change in the structure of Nigeria’s political space.

### **Conclusion**

Self-examination and appreciation is very necessary in the life of any nation. Nigeria, due to its multi-ethnic outlook, is faced with constant crisis bordering on political determinism. It is pertinent, therefore, to make concerted effort towards a continuous resolution and institutionalised system of maintaining its peace. Biafra has happened and its scars are still discernible in the life and political space of the country. Since Nollywood has become a giant whose strides are felt by the citizenry, it is apt that Nollywood be encouraged to delve into the narrative of the civil war in Nigeria so as to engender a psycho-social change.

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# **MEDIA CRITICISM AND AGENDA FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP: AN APPRAISAL OF NOLLYWOOD PRODUCTIONS**

**Charles Effiong**  
University of Calabar  
&  
**Bernard Eze-Orji**  
Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo

## **Abstract**

*Effective leadership has been the very concern of Nigerians, who see development as being slow and not commensurate with the huge human and material resources that abound in the country. To this end, questions arise on how the country can meet up with sustainable development plans that would see her deliver the goods at satisfactory level to all citizens. This contention has been the worry of most Nigerians especially in the advent of democratic governance which encourages collective. The media, which includes theatre, film, radio, television, newspaper, internet, and other traditional forms, known as the voice of the masses are placed in a position to ultimately encourage the people in playing participatory roles in governance; such that contributions on what they want, how they want it and when they want anything can be understood and delivered to them. This paper examines the extent the media such as the Nigerian home videos have played this role especially in the democratic era, to the extent of stimulating the masses' decision on the choice of their leaders based on the knowledge that the media can either twist the people towards positive or negative decision that may affect them and the development of their communities. The paper analyses some media productions such as films and other related media works to justify the role of the media as veritable organs that can stimulate change for achieving good leadership in the country.*

## **Introduction**

The society enjoys from the media some basic and traditional functions like education, information, entertainment, mass mobilization, sensitization, persuasion, clue to popular thoughts and awareness creation. Implicitly, the society is guided by the media in almost every action taken for whatever purpose that is of interest to them or otherwise. It is possible now to see people in both rural and urban areas cling to media sets such as radio, film,



television, newspaper and today's internet to be served by these organs according to their needs. Based on this development, media organizations have been created and established in almost every nook and cranny of the society. It is a fact that a number of private media stations especially in Nigeria are built in the outskirts of urban areas with proximity to the rural areas. The essence is basically to ensure that all the people at all the time can be adequately served with media products.

Good leadership has always been the crux of governance in Nigeria. At a time when the people are coerced to accept a new government in the country such as in coup d'état, and maybe have a feeling that they have elected a credible person to govern the country, it becomes a regrettable situation when in the long run they do not get what they expected from such leadership. Examples are clear in the military juntas of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha respectively; and in civilian regimes of Olusegun Obasanjo, Goodluck Jonathan and the present Muhammadu Buhari. It is safe to say here that the aftermath of the 2015 general elections is yet to prove to Nigerians the change that was promised in terms of good leadership style and the enjoyment of economic, political and social benefits that accrue from governance. As the fourth estate of the realm, the media are believed to be vital in ensuring that the people are led properly according to the dividends that are to be enjoyed across the country. In this direction, it is the media that ought to show both the leaders and people the way things should be in governance. The 2015 general elections clearly demonstrate the use of media campaign to persuade people and at the same warp the sensibilities of the political leaders and the led in whatever became the outcome of the elections.

Therefore, we can possibly tend to understand effective leadership as that which offers to the citizenry the essential things of life like shelter, healthcare, education, security and food. It can also be seen in the light of being accountable and responsible to the people, in which case the leadership keeps close contact in form of communication with the followers to show proof of transparency, accountability, corruption, respect for rule of law and obedience to due process. This can also be understood in relation to media in a terse form, as stated by Oso:

Communication in all its dimensions is central to politics and governance. The citizen needs to enable him/her participate in political process. Social and political actors need to disseminate information about themselves, their views, ideas and programmes. They need to mobilise groups and the general public for support. They need

publicity and visibility. Government programmes and policies must be communicated and publicized. (2)

Effective leadership, therefore, is in close affinity with democracy, which is the government of participation. The sense is that democracy encourages the contribution of every member in the society to choose their leaders and hold them accountable. Thus, democracy encourages choice of (effective) leadership, and “political leaders through election acquire the mandate of the people to plan and execute on their behalf, and whether or not they have been exercising the mandate satisfactorily is determined by the support given to them at the next election” (Ibanga 188).

Nollywood films, which have become global media products, have played great roles in engaging the minds of Nigerians on democratic issues. At a glance, the use of Nollywood artists and stars by political contestants and their parties during electioneering campaigns proves a point that the film medium is crystal strong to make or mar the chances of politicians as well as those of the people who follow them during elections. This paper also takes into consideration the effort of other media organizations such as African Independent Television (AIT), Channels Television and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in stimulating good leadership or otherwise for the people and in the leaders themselves.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Since the thrust of this argument is to show that the media are powerful in engaging people’s thoughts and opinions in a way that can bring about effective leadership, it is therefore safe to adopt democratic participant theory and the agenda setting theory to further espouse this position. Democratic participant theory or democratic socialist theory is said to be identified with Picard, who in 1985 identified the need for democratic government to serve the interest of the people (McQuail 172). Going by the date the theory is known to be very new among the normative theories of the media. According to its prescription, this theory also relates to the development media theory and Hasan opines that its main feature “relates to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the actual participant in a political society” (172). By implication, the development participant theory charges the media to get political actors especially the leadership of any country to provide the needs of the people to them as demanded by the constitution.

For agenda setting theory, known with Lippman, the issue is that the media must guide the people to know what they have to do in order to ensure

and sustain development in the society. Furthermore, Littlejohn explains that Donald Shaw, Maxwell McCombs and their colleagues in 1976 popularized agenda setting by stating that:

editors and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day to day task of choosing and displaying news...this impact of the mass media-the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking-here lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about. (341)

The above presupposes that apart from government or public issues, the media also guide the people to know about the society in terms of what the media feel is good for the people and the society. In the light of this, it is safe to agree that in agenda setting theory the media influence and determine what people think about as they read, listen to, and watch media contents, especially on political, economic, social and cultural issues (Sambe 216). In this context, films and other media organs especially in Nigeria have shown high propensity for the promotion of effective leadership through their products by stimulating the people in tune with what ought to be.

### **Media Products and Criticism**

Media products are basically the programmes and features that are shown and projected to audience by media organizations. They include film, documentary, news, interview programmes, editorial and many other programmes as may be considered fit by the organisation. These products need to be valued, appraised and criticised to aid in the promotion and protection of African and Nigerian democratic values and in the long run the people's cultural values. In this work, media criticism will be seen in terms of the ability of the media to guide the society in the direction of achieving effective and good leadership in a democratic Nigeria. In Nollywood, media criticism is necessary to further enhance and promote the popularity of the film industry in the country and African continent as a whole. For this reason, Ayakoroma in his *Trends in Nollywood* opines that Nollywood has captured the African film market through its product, Nigerian films, as well as that of blacks in the Diaspora because Nigerian films are watched all over the West

African Coast, in such a way that the film actors/actresses enjoy the glamour of stardom in many countries (103). Based on this position and in a more specific term, Nigerian films are expected to engage national audience toward the agenda of choosing effective leaders for the country.

*Brothers' War*, a Nollywood production of 2013, which treats family hierarchy, is a typical narrative that cuts across effective leadership and ineffective leadership in the family. The film which features Yul Edochie, Uche Oduputa, Evelyn Esin, Ebube Nwagbo and directed by MacCollins Chidibe, shows how the death of a father, who ensured peace among family members brought instability with the mother and the first son on parallel lines, and the last son in a dilemma of hopelessness. Typical of Nigerian audience, this narrative is capable of twisting their minds to the extent that both mother and son can be despised for the despicable attitude that introduces acrimony into the family. This is clear because leadership role that should have been provided either by mother or first son is not provided and in that respect serious disharmony thrives in the family. That is why the media are potent vehicles for the sustenance of peace in the society just as Ayobolu enthuses about the media as;

the people's parliament, a gatekeeper and the watchdog of the society, it's the duty therefore is to ensure a just and egalitarian society in which no section, tribe or religion is promoted at the expense of another, it is the duty of the press to check, analyse, interpret and ferret out the advantages and otherwise of news items, thereby contributing effectively to the building of a strong and virile society, where bitterness, misgiving and rancour will not thrive. (ngex.com par. 2)

In Teco Benson's *The Senator*, we are confronted with a picture of dishonest politicians and leaders in the Nigerian society and a campaign against ineffective leadership. The narrative culminates in the law of retribution brought upon a corrupt politician, Larry. This is a clear case that sends warning signals of untoward attitude by politicians. According to Ayakoroma, the film is a call for good politics and leadership:

It is apparent that the film acts as warning to the political class that there are better and more decent approaches to playing politics. Re-inventing the political process means engendering the kind of politics where the people would be highly enlightened to discern those who have the interest of

the masses at heart; where leaders seek political offices to actually serve and that which is based on personal gains; where leaders emerge from credible elections that would be acceptable to all parties, where leaders are truly accountable to the people and are held accountable by the people at every point in time; and where the generality of the people will be happy with the quality of the leadership...(20).

The above subscribes to the fact that films, as media products, are critical sources that tell the reality of things in the society and to a larger extent aids in the acceptability or otherwise of such issues. In development sense, such films like *Brothers' War* and *The Senator* can actually shape the society and guide the people to choose such leaders that can offer them good and clear results of governance that the people desire. Therefore, when films fail to answer or even guide the society on some wrenching problems, it would thus appear very critical that such films have failed to play the expected role in the society. This is further implied as follows:

Nobody needs to be convinced that film has been one of the most influential media...not only can you recall your most exciting or tearful moments at the movies, you can also probably remember moments in ordinary life when you tried to be graceful, as selfless, as tough, or as compassionate as those larger-than life figure on the screen. The way we dress and cut our hair, the way we talk and act, the things we believe or doubt-all these aspects of our lives are shaped by films. Films also provide us with powerful aesthetic experience, insight into diverse cultures, and glimpses of our new ways of thinking. (Thompson and Bordwell 1)

AIT, Channels Television and NTA have presented reasons for criticism of their products at various times. To be specific, these media organizations have received more criticisms since after 2015 general elections than they have had before that period. While the AIT and the NTA were considered as those that promoted the ideology and campaigns of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Channels Television was seen by others as pro-All Progressives Party (APC). The reason for what they did in television jingles, documentaries, interviews and news can be understood as attempts to set an

agenda for effective leadership. Whatever they did, whether right or wrong, they were able to influence decisions about choice of leaders. The actions may have been in deference to Chatman that media narrative especially film must have two features –description and point of attack, so as to be able to impart on the audience (436). Put briefly, every product-documentary, news, jingle and interviews that were handled by these organisations had these features, and they were perhaps promoted based on the words of Abraham Lincoln, ‘Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe’ (Elumelu, par. 16). It is undoubted that Lincoln was referring to good governance and effective leadership which is the responsibility of every government to give to the citizens of the nations. For the media, it is duty-bound that they ought to and must ensure that the people get this and government is responsible to the people and should be accountable for every failure and success in the governance of the country.

For Akinfeleye, the media remain the “watch-dog, check-on-to uncover and never to cover up corruption and/or wrong doings by the other three estates. They are also to monitor governance and make the other three estates accountable to people at all times” (2). It goes to show that corruption inhibits effective leadership and that countries that face such a situation have a challenge and threat of not enjoying good leadership and governance (Effiong 66). Media products need to be the beam of hope for the people because they are founded on the current situations that happen with and among the people.

## **Discussion**

There is no gainsaying the fact that the media have the strength to muffle the leaders and the led in the society. Depending on the theories of democratic participant and agenda setting, it can safely be agreed that the media owe the society the duty to interrogate, make findings and finally tell the people how effective leadership can be achieved. They have to get the people engaged and get government to be accountable through their programmes such as films. Srinivas affirms that film is founded “on a democratic promise and it develops around the notion of spectatorial rights. I not only have a right to be present in the cinema hall but have the further right to make demands of the narrative, the star, etc. the cinema has to acknowledge my presence and address my expectation” (qtd. in Ayakoroma 7). In the film *Brothers’ War*, resolution shows that amends were made between mother and son and by extension the younger son, and this demonstrated the compromise that Ejike, the elder brother, is the head of the family and all respects accruing to that position is sustained in him. We may accept here that the film has given a clue on how to

establish leadership and sustain it peacefully in our society. The example further stresses that under the theories that guide this piece, the media is able to suggest a panacea for ineffective leadership in the society.

As earlier noted, both theories charge the media on ensuring that the people should have a feel and be guided appropriately on what they want and expect from government. However, following the experience of AIT, Channels and NTA during the last general elections, where some media products were rather subjective, it appears the media as the pathfinder, role model and conscience of the nation, have been compromised by avaricious tendencies of some media owners especially in the private sector. When media that is supposed to guide the society according to how things should be suddenly turn around to be led by the society, and told what to do, how to do it, the society then finds itself in trouble. No doubt, the media are now a willing tool in the hands of politicians, proprietors and top editors to blackmail people for money, kill authentic stories and use their positions to solicit for political appointments. It thus further espouses the case of “he who plays the piper dictates the tone”, and to a larger extent kills objectivity.

Notwithstanding, the effort of the media in the same regard was equally able to make the people know the choice that can give them the leadership of their expectations. For Orji, the media have the verve especially when given freedom to guide the people properly. He notes that:

Access to information widens opportunities for people to make choices consistent their needs and priorities. It narrows the gap between the poor and the rich, the weak and strong. Availability of information equally helps in building confidence and trust between the government and the governed (xvi).

The above viewpoint can only be achieved by the media, which in their right element would ensure the promotion of good and effective governance which include respect to rule of law, due process, transparency and accountability.

## **Conclusion**

To achieve effective leadership in the world and Nigeria in particular is dependent on the amount of information that goes round to the people, because it is the people that can value the extent to which any leadership is effective. More so, the people need to know through information who can offer effective leadership to them in terms of provision of all social and

essential amenities that can ease life in the society. All these can only be made possible by the media, because they guarantee information to the people.

In guaranteeing information, they also educate, mobilise as well as persuade the people for what they are guiding the society towards. Therefore, the kind of information carried in films and television programmes ought to lead the people towards making effective leadership. This piece has attempted to demonstrate that the media are criticised based on the information they use to set agenda and draw the people's participation in governance.

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# SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PROPAGATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Osakue Stevenson Omoera**  
Ambrose Alli University

**&**  
**Heri Ryanga**  
University of Nairobi

## **Abstract**

*This article focuses on social media and the propagation of violence against women. It has been claimed that the power of the media to set an agenda, to focus public attention on key public concerns, including gender issues, is highly significant. This implies that the media can influence what the public thinks about. However, the foregoing is, to a large extent, in reference to the traditional or mainstream media. We live in a digital age. What about the new media or social media? Can social media platforms (SMPs) such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook be used to set the agenda for change in contemporary society? Can SMPs be used to focus the attention of the public on gender issues, particularly on how to address sexual and other forms of violence against women? Can these platforms engender social change or they are just tools for leisure or entertainment? It is in reaction to these issues that this article uses descriptive and observational methods to investigate three social media campaigns on Twitter and Facebook – **He For She, Bring Back Our Girls and My Dress My Choice** – with a view to assessing their capacity to set the public’s agenda towards combating sexual violence against women and whether social media is an effective tool to create awareness on what is at issue. While we argue that the social media is an acknowledged change agent which is capable of mobilizing the public to stand up against incidents of sexual violence, among other gender issues, the conclusion reached is that in the three instances we examined, the momentum is often short-lived.*

## **Introduction**

“Let it be known once and for all that women’s rights are human rights” (Clinton 1).

The above was the landmark statement made by the then United States of America's (USA's) First Lady, Hilary Clinton, at The Beijing Platform in 1995. Shortly after, sexual violence in war was recognized, for the first time, as a crime against humanity in the Bosnia and Herzegovina war tribunal in The Hague in 2000. Women were finally able to voice their disapproval of a system that condoned sexual and other forms of violence, especially in war; and they had the Rome Statute to back them up. Over the years, women and women rights organisations have continued this campaign to end all kinds of violence against women. However, there is a new method being employed. It has spread from the global West and East and has now taken root in Africa. It is the social media with emphasis on the hash tags (#). At any rate, a hash tag is a type of label or metadata tag used on social network and microblogging services which makes it easier for users to find messages with a specific theme or content (The Oxford English Dictionary, par. 19).

In contemporary Africa, many activists are seeking to use social media platforms (SMPs) as means to rally support from fellow activists, mobilize the populace and even pressurize those in power to act. The days of carrying placards and banners may be ebbing away to give rise to the era of the hash tag. Only recently, the #FeesMustFall was a rallying point for student protesters against increase in school fees in South African universities. This event ostensibly spiralled into a series of protests which led to the proposed drop of Afrikaans for English language as the language of instruction and teaching at Stellenbosch University after the wake of a viral video about the challenges and racism faced by black students in the institution.

Indeed, if the former USA's First Lady's statement had been made today, it would have swiftly become a full blown social media campaign complete with its own hash tag - #womenrightsarehumanrights. It is in the advent of such pacey circumstances that this article hopes to assess the social media's ability to set the public agenda towards combating sexual violence and whether it is an effective tool to create awareness on the same issue, using social media campaigns on Twitter and Facebook – *He For She, Bring Back Our Girls, My Dress My Choice* as templates of discussion and analysis.

### **Methodological and Theoretical Considerations**

This is a descriptive study. The researchers observed various social media outlets and their role in setting the agenda towards combating sexual and other forms of violence against women. Observational analysis was the means by which the researchers collected the data for the study. Selected Twitter Accounts and Facebook pages along with websites and blogs were analysed.

The accounts selected revolved around three campaigns that started in 2014 and are still ongoing. These campaigns revolve around equality for women and bringing an end to violence against women. They include the global *He For She* campaign launched by UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, Emma Thompson, the *Bring Back Our Girls* campaign in Nigeria and the *My Dress My Choice* campaign in Kenya.

The study is based on the agenda-setting theory of the media. This theory was enunciated by communication researchers - Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The theory was developed to explain the way in which the mass media can influence and even affect the perceptions and opinions of the public. It was based on a report of a study of the 1968 Presidential Campaign in the United States of America (USA). McCombs and Shaw compared voters' perceptions of key issues to the content published and broadcasted by the mass media. They found a correlation between the voters' view of pertinent issues and the mass media's focus on those particular issues. In other words, agenda-setting theory describes the "ability (of the news media) to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda" (McCombs and Shaw 176). At the time it was propounded the theory was a huge influencer of thought. However, it only applied to traditional or mainstream media such as newspapers, television broadcasts, radio broadcasts and magazines. Furthermore, recent changes in media orientation, including interactive media, trans-media and digital media have meant that there is need to investigate the role of new media forms such as social media in transforming and communicating development and social change in a fast-paced world.

At any rate, Eugene Shaw argues that although the media, whether traditional or new, may not always be persuasive, it is pervasive. One cannot escape it. It permeates every corner of one's life (98). This is a notion that is supported by Cohen (qtd. in McCombs and Shaw 176). Shaw contends that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (98). Although the media tells the public what to think about, the public decides what to think and form their own opinions based on other factors such as their religions, moral beliefs and customs. Even though it is only what the public thinks about that can be influenced, that is a powerful enough influence. After all, is it not thought that leads to conviction that in turn spurs action?

## **The Social Media**

We live in a digital age. The concept of agenda setting only in relation to traditional media needs to be broadened and interrogated. The social media should not be disqualified as a tool for agenda setting just because it does not fit into the category of media as prescribed by McCombs and Shaw. In today's digital age where nearly everyone is online, we can see the traditional media and social media crisscrossing and interacting in many profitable ways. For instance, mainstream media such as television broadcasting stations and newspapers have websites where the public can listen to news or read news and other stories online. Before we proceed further, it is necessary to conceptualise what the social media is. According to Dewing, the term 'social media' refers to the wide range of Internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities (60). Examples of these internet based services include: blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, Flickr, Waplog, RSS, My Space, Skype, 2go, WhatsApp, Hi five, among others (Okhakhu and Omoera 16; Ehiemua and Omoera 85).

Michelle Chmielewski offers that "social media is not about what each one of us does or says, but about what we do and say together, worldwide, to communicate in all directions at any time, by any possible (digital) means" (qtd. in Cohen, par. 2). By this definition, one may infer that the social media is the perfect tool to use to spread an agenda due to its wide reach of audience. The foregoing reinforces the premise for our discussion. If the social media is 'not about what one person says but what we say together', it provides a framework to investigate how SMPs are being used to pass these messages to affect change. That is the aim of setting the agenda after all – to influence what people think about, get them talking about it and have them act on their thoughts.

Although not given much thought in early years, the social media gained tremendous respect in the 'Arab Spring' that occurred towards the end of 2010. The Arab Spring refers to the Arab revolution that swept across several Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa such as Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The revolution was prompted by a Tunisian trader – Mohammed Bouaziz – who set himself ablaze in protest against the economic hardships in Tunisia and the general oppression of the citizens by the regime in place at the time (Xu par. 1). SMPs such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were used to organize demonstrations and invite people to join the protest. These SMPs were also used to share the plights of these countries to the international community. The governments of some of these countries

attempted to silence their voices by blocking some social media sites being used. When this happened in Egypt, Tunisians offered to host their sites and pages in solidarity. The public – fed up of oppressive conditions – were an easy target for agenda-setting by the social media. They just needed their thoughts directed to the injustices they suffer daily. They needed a trigger. Mohammed Bouaziz was that trigger. An activist in Cairo rightly put it, “we use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate and YouTube to tell the world” (Howard par. 5).

## **Social Media Platforms: Setting the Agenda to Address Violence against Women**

### **#heforshe**

On September 20, 2014, the newly appointed UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, Emma Watson, launched a global feminist campaign – *He For She*. The goal of this campaign is to promote gender equality and campaign against any form of sexual violence against women. This is to be achieved by involving men and encouraging them to stand against chauvinism and support the women’s rights movement. The *He For She* website states that the campaign aims to “put men at the centre of activism and dialogue to end persistent inequalities faced by women and girls around the world” (par. 2).

Furthermore, they aimed to recruit 100,000 men to fight for gender equality in the span of twelve months. The campaign nearly reached its goal in record time. The *He For She* campaign had acquired approximately 85,000 signatures - from men in support of it from across the globe - within 48 hours of its launch. Before its official launch, Emma Watson sent a message on Twitter on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 2014, advocating for gender equality and signed it with the hash tag #heforshe. Her account indicates that her tweet was *retweeted* over 27,000 times and was *favourited* – approved of - over 33,000 times. The number of *retweets* and *favourites* that the tweet got is an indication of the public finding the message relevant. The stage is set for the public to have their thoughts inclined to this campaign. According to analytics firm, Topsy, the #heforshe hash tag was *retweeted* over 160,000 times within the first month of the campaign’s launch (par. 5).

### **#bringbackourgirls**

On Tuesday 15th April 2014, 276 school girls were abducted from their dormitory at the Chibok Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, by the extremist Islamic militant group, Boko Haram. Weeks after the kidnapping of these schoolgirls, the story had little or no

visibility in the global scene. It was an atrocious act on innocent school girls, how come the story had not made world news? People wondered. This rapidly changed, however when the #bringbackourgirls campaign took the world by storm. The campaign took the slogan from a speech given by Oby Ezekweseli, the Vice President of the World Bank for Africa. It was touch-and-go from there. The campaign spread like wild fire across the globe.

SMPs such Facebook and Twitter were flooded with celebrities and world leaders holding up posters with the hash tag. Twitter was bursting with photographs of protesters all around the world bearing banners with the hash tag. Suddenly, the world was paying attention and even vowed to support Nigeria in its efforts at rescuing the abducted girls. The USA pledged to send a team, including military personnel, intelligence and hostage negotiators to help. Britain sent advisers and a Royal Air Force (RAF) surveillance aircraft to aid in the search. Analytics firm, Topsy, reports that within the first month of the kidnapping, the hash tag #bringbackourgirls, had been mentioned more than one million times all around the world (par. 3). The world was definitely poised to think about the plight of the kidnapped girls. Protests were held around the globe to show solidarity to the cause. Even influential people such as the immediate past United States of America's First Lady, Michelle Obama, and Nobel Laureate Malala joined the bandwagon and posted pictures of themselves with posters bearing the hash tag.

The world was suddenly urging the Nigerian government to act; to 'bring back our girls.' One may however, speculate on the exact expectation of the #bringbackourgirls campaign. The movement aims to see the abducted girls returned but who and how is this to be facilitated? The Boko Haram terrorist group demands the release of its captured militants/insurgents in exchange for the girls. At other times we understand that they (the insurgents) demanded for huge sums of money or the girls would be married to men who can pay against the girls' will. More recently, news made the rounds that many of the girls have been impregnated having been used as 'sex objects' with reckless abandon by male members of the deadly group. However, can one really trust their word? Even if one could, is the government really in a position to release the hundreds of people (including Chibok girls) captured by the insurgents or give huge sums of money out? To what end? That move would only see their enemy growing stronger. Or perhaps the expectation is for the Nigerian national army to venture a rescue mission and risk the lives of the captive girls? That is if they can find the hideout in the first place. Or perhaps the campaign is directed at the Boko Haram; sending a compassionate

plea for Boko Haram leader Mohammed Shekau to find the good in his heart and release the girls of his own free will; hardly a logical conclusion.

Three months after the abduction, Shekau posted a chilling video on YouTube where he disparagingly retorted that if the Nigerian government wanted him to #bringbackourgirls, then it should 'bring back our army!' With such a conundrum, one may wonder how else the social media campaign can be of use. It should be recalled that as distressing as the incident is, it is not the first occurrence on the continent of Africa. The Lord Resistance Army in Uganda abducted 139 school girls back in 1996. It just did not receive as much international attention as #bringbackourgirls (Taylor par. 7). Less than a year after the abduction, the #bringbackourgirls campaign slipped out of the world's focus. In spite of the massive international support it had accrued at the time, it was soon forgotten. The hash tag twitter campaign that went viral almost overnight is no longer centre stage in global news. Owing to the nature of the news cycle, it was overtaken by other atrocious events such as the infamous ISIS – Islamic State militia group – which is terrorizing citizens, especially women and children in Syria and Iraq (Ogene par.1), and more recently the European cities of Paris and Brussels. In spite of the global silence, in Nigeria, the epicentre of the campaign lives on. The movement has promised that the girls will never be forgotten. To date, over two years later, the Bring Back Our Girls movement is still holding protests. On the 1st anniversary of the abduction, 14 April 2015, the Empire State Building in New York lit up in purple and red in honour of the abducted school girls (Nagarajan par. 4). The movement further called for a week of action to commemorate the anniversary.

This campaign has also given the women in Nigeria a platform to lobby for their human rights and express their struggles against sexual and other forms of violence on an international scale. Where their voices were unheard before, now they had a 'microphone' and the world is listening. For instance, the case of Ese Rita Oruru, a 13-year-old girl who was allegedly abducted on August 12, 2015 by one Yinusa, an Hausa man in Bayelsa who took her to Kano and forcefully married her there without the consent of her parents (Ogbeche, par.1), came to dominate public discourse in Nigeria owing to the ingenious deployment of SMPs by civil society groups. Apart from the untold sexual molestations Ese might have gone through, she had been impregnated by the abductor by the time the Kano State government and the Federal Government of Nigeria waded into the matter after much pressure from civil society groups from within and outside the country. The case of Ese Oruru like the Chibok girls' abduction prompted many people around the globe to



show solidarity by organizing marches and protests in their own home countries.

### **#mydressmychoice**

The *My Dress My Choice* campaign that flooded the Kenyan social media scene in November 2014 was in response to the stripping of women who were accused of dressing inappropriately. The incidents occurred in broad daylight in Nairobi and Mombasa. The particular incident that sparked the national outrage was that of a woman who was stripped at a Nairobi bus station. The victim, a female vendor working near the busy bus station had gone to collect payment for some boiled eggs that she had sold to a regular customer earlier on in the day. The customer had not yet paid. She went to collect her dues. However, when she approached the customer, he called her a ‘whore’ and threatened to deal with her. Unperturbed, she persisted for her dues. It was at that point that the customer violently attacked the female vendor and started to shred her clothes. Several men in the area joined in the exercise and assaulted her to the point that she lost consciousness. The whole event was filmed using a phone and uploaded on SMP – YouTube and within minutes it went viral.

This was only the beginning. Soon after, a school girl was harassed and nearly stripped in a public service vehicle by three men. One of the men happened to be a police officer. This attack was also filmed on phone and went viral having been uploaded on SMPs of Facebook and Twitter. It led to the apprehension of the perpetrators; citizen journalism at its finest (Nyabola par. 2). On November 17, 2014, irate women activists took to the streets of Nairobi with banners and marched in protest. The protest saw women and men – in support of the cause – marching down Nairobi’s busy streets bearing banners with their hash tag. It conglomerated in Uhuru Park. In fact, SMPs such as Twitter and Facebook were abuzz with the latest on the campaign. Those supporting the cause quickly changed their Facebook or Twitter profile pictures to a purple ribbon to mirror the logo for the *#mydressmychoice* campaign.

The Twitter hash tag was the platform to rally people together to show their support for the victims and to also display their frustration at the continued violence perpetrated on women. The hash tag was a battle cry. It was a mobilizing agent that brought women and men together against this injustice. The stripping of women deemed indecently dressed has happened before; they just went unreported. This campaign however has brought the degrading practice to the forefront where it can be confronted by all (Cuddihy par. 3).

## **Preliminary Findings**

In the three social media campaigns (*He For She*, *Bring Back Our Girls* and *My Dress My Choice*) spotlighted for discussion in this study, different degrees of successes were recorded. While the thousands of retweets of *He For She* indicate public support for the United Nations led global message for gender equality, the *Bring Back Our Girls* campaign kept the Nigerian government on its toes even when a number of the girls have been rescued. The relentless global attention forced the Nigerian government to develop guidelines on gender based violence (GBV) and started the process of putting up legislation against sexual violence against women and girls. The hash tag was extremely helpful in focusing the public's thoughts on the atrocities faced by women in the country.

Furthermore, it was instrumental in marshalling the country in dialogues and protests. It gave the people a voice, one that might never be silenced again. In the case of *My Dress My Choice*, the Twitter hash tag was the main platform to rally people together to show their support for the victims and to also display their frustration at the continued violence perpetrated on women. The hash tag was a potent tool, which was used to mobilize women and men to rise against the injustice meted out on women and girls in parts of Kenya. These social media campaigns, aside from being used as tools for agenda-setting served other purposes which are hereby highlighted, albeit generally:

**Call to action** – They were powerful slogans, the band cries that stirred people to flood the streets across the globe in protest. They spurred the public to act.

**Create awareness** – the campaigns alerted the world about the situation on the ground. They were instrumental in giving updated information on any progress.

**Fortify activist groups** – as highlighted, the *He For She* campaign has strengthened the global feminist agenda while the *Bring Back Our Girls* campaign has given women in Nigeria a voice to speak out against the violence they face in their daily lives.

**Raise the frustrated plight of the public** – the *Bring Back Our Girls* and *My Dress My Choice* campaigns provided avenues for the general public to voice their exasperation over the atrocities that seem to be never-ending. If the

public had a voice that was audible to the government and the world, it took the opportunity to use it to the maximum.

**Rally international support** – the campaigns attracted international support with foreign governments pledging support in the *Bring Back Our Girls* campaign. Notable international figures came on board which propelled the cause to higher heights and brought it to the foreground of global debate.

We can infer from our discussion that these social media campaigns were or are mainly reactive rather than proactive. Important, too, is the fact that many of the social media campaigns often lose momentum after a period of time and are easily forgotten. Preliminarily, our investigation reveals that the activities or campaigns that are carried out on SMPs are sometimes iffy. Furthermore, the social media is not necessarily accessible to all, particularly in developing societies such as Nigeria and Kenya, where many of the people reside in the rural areas. Thus, traditional or mainstream media are still heavily relied upon for information by a greater number of the populace in these countries. Lastly, it is sometimes unclear to whom the campaign is being addressed as it often appears that everyone is talking and no one is actually talking.

### **Recommendations**

Instead of trying to stifle the social media (as we have observed in the case of the Nigerian Senate which tried to asphyxiate social media operations through unpopular legislation, which was in any case resisted by the Nigerian people), governments – especially in Nigeria, Kenya and other parts of Africa – should use it as a tool to interact with their citizens and address serious issues, including sexual violence against women. Activists and social campaigners should involve people at grassroots levels in order to ensure sustainability of campaigns. These campaigns should not be reactive but proactive. Some policy frameworks should be put in place in Nigeria, Kenya and other developing countries in Africa to make social media users and other ‘netizens’ more responsible and patriotic in their activities on social media platforms (SMPs). Such an effort is capable of making the use of SMPs a critical component of the strategic communication efforts of government at different levels towards effecting behavioural changes in society as well as managing such changes for sustainable development.

## Conclusion

In the three cases isolated for investigation in this study, the people identified some burning issues in their societies and the social media helped them to propagate their concerns. In other words, the people had their agenda and used SMPs to promote them. The public's thoughts in each of the cases were directed to the various instances of violence against women and this, in turn, prompted some action. One might deduce that this is indeed the end goal of agenda setting – to get the public to act in a certain way having been inclined to think about a particular issue. In spite of this, it does appear from our preliminary investigation that digital activism as expressed in the social media campaigns are more or less ephemeral.

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# INTERROGATING OBNOXIOUS WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES AND THE SCAPEGOATING OF WOMENFOLK: UCHE AMA-ABRIEL'S *A PAST CAME CALLING* AS PARADIGM

Samuel Okoronkwo Chukwu-Okoronkwo  
Abia State University

## Abstract

*There is no gainsaying the fact that many cultures in Africa are imbued with one form of prejudice or the other against women. Widowhood practices which encapsulate the rites performed for a woman after the death of her husband as enshrined in the different cultures of Africa are among the prevailing prejudices that have consistently impinged on the dignity and rights of womenfolk. Whereas the concept of widowhood essentially emphasizes the state of being a widow or widower, in most cultures in Africa, widowhood practices have become the exclusive preserve for widows, with associated elaborate and often gruesome guiding regulations, and not for widowers for whom little or no mourning rites are prescribed. This unfortunate trend does not only dehumanize and subjugate women to untold and unimaginable predicaments, but also institutionalizes their plights in our various cultures, thus marking them out as both socially and culturally endangered species. Through qualitative research approach and critical textual analysis, therefore, the study interrogates widowhood practices and the scapegoating of womenfolk in various Nigerian cultures, using Uche Ama-Abriel's *A Past Came Calling* as Paradigm; and highlights the various dimensions of dehumanization and scapegoating to which women are subjected as a result of obnoxious widowhood practices. Hence, clutching tenaciously onto obnoxious widowhood practices which impede than facilitate meaningful rehabilitation of widows in our society and consistently portray us in a bad light is utterly unacceptable. The study is essentially envisioned as a timely clarion call for proper reorientation of the society's psyche on the obnoxious widowhood practices, at a time when the commitment of all sundry is diligently employed in galvanizing and engendering not only ethical and political, but also socio-cultural transformation in the nation. This reorientation of psyche, if properly imbibed, will not only engender the auspicious wellbeing of widows in their rehabilitation as individual members of the society, but also the wellbeing of the society at large, and the advancing of its development.*

## **Introduction**

The fact that every enduring marriage ultimately ends with the death of either of the man or woman or even both cannot be overemphasized. However, the death of a spouse in itself may be the most extreme of life's crisis. The reason for this is not far-fetched; it naturally severs most of the deepest emotional bonds established in a lifetime. It cannot be gainsaid too that the impact of the death of a husband tends to be more overwhelming on the woman than on the man when he loses his wife. This, invariably, results from the enormous psychological trauma of such tragic a development on account of the harrowing experiences that await her as couched in widowhood rites, especially obnoxious widowhood rites. In the study of "Widowhood among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria", Korieh explains these rites as sets of expectations regarding the actions and behaviour of the widow; including actions by others towards the widow; as well as the rituals performed by or on behalf of the widow from the time of the death of her husband. This has, therefore, formed a significant aspect of most of the cultures in Africa, including Nigeria. However, while it may be argued that some of these rites have their merits, which is also dependent on the very society involved; it is quite instructive to note at this inception that it is the obnoxious aspects of these rites that actually form the focus of the author in this paper as shall be unfolded in due course, especially with regards to the selected reference text.

## **Scapegoating: A Contextual Perspective**

The term scapegoat commonly refers to a person who is *unfairly* blamed for problems or some sort of misfortune. Scapegoating, therefore, simply means the act of singling out of someone for undeserved negative treatment or blame as a scapegoat. The widow obviously is the scapegoat in the context of this study and she is scapegoated the very moment she starts receiving various degrees of taunting accusations, on losing her husband, from family members of her late husband, for having a hand in the death of their brother. Writing on "The Emotionally Disturbed Child as the Family Scapegoat" in 1960, Vogel and Bell, as relatively old as their study appear, have noted that the phenomenon of scapegoating is as old as human society. The scholars cite instances from James Frazer's records of public scapegoats from ancient times, both human and otherwise; where the phenomenon is seen as a process by which the evil influences of a society, tribe, village or town are embodied in a visible form or are at least supposed to be loaded upon a material medium, which acts as a vehicle to draw them off from the people. The Old Testament atonement ritual as recorded in Leviticus 16: 8-10, seen as the

origin of this act, corroborates Vogel and Bell's observation above as a goat used in the ritual was symbolically laden with the sins of the people and sent into the wilderness to be destroyed. Verse 26 of Leviticus is also careful to call the *medium* scapegoat (New Living Translation). Hence, the scapegoat, as obtained during this period, functions simply to effect a total clearance of all the ills that have been infesting the people. However, Leviticus' account of the act was a rather sacred injunction by God Almighty to absolve men of their depravity and sin and reconcile them back to himself, their Maker. Who then can question the authority of God Almighty? However, God also demonstrated his dynamic nature when such ritual was no longer necessary to fulfil its purpose, as he did not only have to jettison it but in fact abolished it to find for Himself a perfect alternative in Christ Jesus, to propitiate once and for all, for the sins of men.

### **Widowhood Rites and the Manifestations of the Act of Scapegoating of Womenfolk**

The concept of widowhood as already stated emphasizes the state of being a widow or widower. However, in most cultures of Africa, widowhood practices have become the exclusive preserve for widows, with associated elaborate and often gruesome guiding regulations. Widowers on the other hand have become but sacred cows, for whom little or no mourning rites are prescribed when they lose their wives. Hence, these reactions, as Fazoranti and Aruna (1) affirm, are culturally determined, as each culture determines the rationality of practices regarding a given situation. Widowhood practices have therefore turned into a very unfortunate trend by which the womenfolk are not only dehumanized and subjugated to varying untold and unimaginable predicaments, but also a means by which their plights have become consistently institutionalized in our various cultures, thus marking them out as both socially and culturally endangered species. In the light of the above, and having explained scapegoating as the act of singling out of someone for undeserved negative treatment or blame as a scapegoat, and further identified the widow as the scapegoat here, it becomes necessary to examine the various dimensions by which womenfolk, as represented by the widow, are scapegoated through widowhood practices. These include:

- i. Accusations of involvement in their husbands' death
- ii. Being compelled to swear an oath to prove their innocence
- iii. Scrapping of the widow's hair



- iv. Being compelled to lie on the same bed with the corpse of the deceased
- v. Being compelled to drink the water that is washed out of the deceased's corpse
- vi. Banning from inheriting the dead man's property, and sometimes forced to go, especially when she has no male child
- vii. Being compelled to wail continually for a considerable period of time
- viii. Being required to eat from broken plates and cook with broken pots
- ix. Being forced at times to abide by the levirate tradition of being remarried by a relative of her late husband, among others.

As Chukwu-Okoronkwo notes:

One of the horrendous nightmares that may confront a woman at the death of her husband in various African cultures is the oftentimes scandalous accusation from the deceased husband's relations of having a hand in the man's death irrespective of how peaceful they might have lived, especially when the woman had not been in good relationship with them. (72)

The implication of the above is that the very moment a woman loses her husband, she starts receiving various degrees of taunting accusations from the family members of her late husband, for having a hand in the death of their brother. Yet, death is often known to result from a number of factors including diseases, illnesses, accidents, afflictions or attacks and of course old age; but it does appear as if these realities are not taken into consideration in dealing with the widow when death comes knocking. When such a situation arises, therefore, such a widow is oftentimes made to swear on a juju, lie on the same bed with the corpse of her late husband or even be subjected to drink the water that is washed out of the husband's corpse, as "unhygienic" as this appears, or the scrapping off of her hair during this period (Kunhiyop 261). Other actions in line with the above experience as Fasoranti and Aruna reveal include barring the widow from sitting on anything that may afford her any form of comfort; thus compelling her to sit on bare floor or a mat at best but definitely not on a stool or a bed (68). In some Yoruba communities, as the researchers further reveal, the widow is expected to eat from broken plates and cook with broken pots, though the practice is not exclusive to Yoruba communities alone; and all these actions are taken in a bid to make the woman prove her innocence. In addition, the reality of the mandatory expectation from the

widow to continually wail at the death of her husband is common in most cultures of Africa, with the duration of such wailing marking the only significant variation. At times too, such widows and even their children are deprived of enjoying their husbands'/fathers' properties and inheritance as in-laws and relatives of the deceased take over such properties and inheritance; worst still, if she has no male child. The widow's dressing pattern is also affected during this period as she is not expected to wear what she would ordinarily like to wear. She is expected to wear a pensive look besides being clad in black attire when she appears in public; and in some places, she is degenerated to wearing what would pass for rags. However, there are more far-reaching effects of these dehumanizing acts on the widow both physically and psychologically which she may never really overcome or outlive. Society, therefore, owes this set of particularly disadvantaged group of women a great deal of compassion in order to enable them to cope with the situation they find themselves rather than do anything that would exacerbate their situation.

A critical consideration of the foregoing only reinforces the sheer negation of the common principle of justice by this act of scapegoating of women through obnoxious widowhood rites. What then is this justice? It is simply considered as fairness in the way people are dealt with. Rawls, in his *A Theory of Justice*, sees justice as what should be the first virtue of social institutions, just as truth in relation to systems of thought. He maintains that "a theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise, laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust" (3). Rawls apparently demonstrates his conscious understanding of God's heartbeat as traced in the earlier historic account of scapegoating mentioned above. His position here is unequivocally apt to the 'institution' of the obnoxious widowhood rites in the way they had made scapegoats of widows in the society. Temisan's dilemma in *A Past...* evidently portrays this reality; and she is not oblivious of it. Under the horrendous pressure of the weight of her in-laws' accusations and maltreatment in the face of their brother's (Temisan's husband) rather sudden death, she agonizingly queries her late husband whom she feels has abandoned her to her fate: "Were our fates reversed, would my people have made you go through what your people made me go through? (*A Past...* 49). The paper's philosophic stance, therefore, which is anchored on Rawls belief that "each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override" (3), is that the liberties of equal citizenship in a just society are not negotiable. After all, what is good for the goose is also good for the gander as

the English adage says. If it was necessary for society to approve the option of a substitution to comfort a man and douse the impact of the grief of her wife's bereavement; rather than hatred, malice, suspicions, condemnation, neglect and all sorts of inhuman treatment and ostracism which widows usually experience in the name of culture at the death of their husbands, there is a need for care and affection from society to them in order to cope with the tragedy in which they already find themselves.

### **Widowhood Practices and the Complicity of Womenfolk against Themselves**

The reality of the complicity of womenfolk against themselves on issues relating to widowhood practices and the way they have been scapegoated all along cannot be overemphasized. This may have prompted the very salient observation from Emery that "women do not have a unity of interests", which thus predisposes them to being "complicit in practices that are harmful to other women" (27). In his paper, "Breaking the Yoke of Patriarchy," Oyeweso further corroborates Emery's observation above with the report that some analysts posit that women are their own worst enemies. In the light of the above, it is quite unimaginable how society has so warped the consciousness of womenfolk against themselves by the instrumentality of the *Umuadas*, through whom the ordeals associated with widowhood practices are mostly perpetrated. The irony, however, according to Chukwu-Okoronkwo, is that these women who spearhead the administration of these obnoxious widowhood practices are themselves women and perhaps potential widows, who will in turn be subjected to such rituals (71-76). Although these women gain such position of power to do what they do by their position as supposed custodians of culture, Emery thinks it is imperative to work towards transforming how these women conceptualize their powers as to condition them towards investing such powers in finding less harmful widowhood practices that nonetheless maintain their symbolic function in our culture.

### **Interrogating Widowhood Practices and the Scapegoating of Womenfolk: *A Past Came Calling* as Paradigm**

There is no gainsaying the fact that widowhood practices which encapsulate the rites performed for a woman after the death of her husband as enshrined in our different cultures in Africa are among the prevailing prejudices that have consistently impinged on the dignity and rights of womenfolk. Widowhood, as defined by *BBC English Dictionary*, is the state of being a widow or widower. It could, therefore, be interpreted as the state of mourning the loss of one's

husband or wife by death. In most cultures in Africa, however, widowhood practices have turned out the exclusive preserve for widows with accompanying elaborate and often gruesome guiding regulations, and not for widowers for whom little or no mourning rites are prescribed. This section of the study, therefore, uses Uche Ama-Abriel's *A Past Came Calling* as paradigm, to interrogate widowhood practices and the scapegoating of womenfolk in our various cultures.

### **Synopsis of *A Past Came Calling***

*A Past Came Calling* re-enacts the emotion-ridden and tension-soaked confrontation between mother and daughter – Temisan and Rosemary. Both are circumstantial victims, severely damaged by unhealed wounds from their past-wounds that perhaps could never heal again, as primarily triggered by the unbearable pressure from a custom-sanctioned experience in which Temisan found herself. The experience is that of the retrogressive barbaric mourning tradition of her late husband's people – the culture of widowhood rites – which she must perform to absolve herself of the accusation of causing the death of her husband who had passed on in his sleep. This is against the belief that it is only a man whose wife is a witch, or whose wife sleeps with another, that would pass away in such manner. Dispossessed of every single property they had acquired during their union, Temisan is thus consistently hounded in such nerve chilling ordeals to publicly confess to killing her husband by his relatives.

However, her elasticity of endurance soon becomes over-stretched, as she flees in the dead of this particular night, with her 6 months old baby, just two days before another ordeal of the “verdict of the dead” – a process of some inexplicable demonic means whereby a corpse is made to rise up in search of the one thought responsible for its death. She is not ready to hang on and watch them do such thing to her late husband. Nonetheless, the burden of the innocent child strapped to her back as she flees becomes even more horrible and hounding on her as it relives in her every memory of her husband's family members' monstrous images. She has to make a clean break by shedding everything that connected her to them. So does she abandon her innocent child, without the least thought of what would befall her in the numbed state she, as the mother, found herself. Such is the circumstance in which mother and daughter are caught up in a vicious circle triggered off by cultural obligation.

When grown Rosemary, Temisan's abandoned daughter, eventually confronts her with the reality of the whole situation, she can only confess that

for the wicked, retrogressive and barbaric mourning tradition of her husband's people, she would never have gotten to that brink of insanity that propelled her to that senseless reaction that woeful night. With Rosemary's sordid experience in the play, therefore, a symbol of ruin of the result of that singular act of abandonment: raped, abused, decadent and infected by the AIDS scourge, it is only obvious that there are far more implications to the issue of widowhood practices than could just be imagined.

### **Widowhood Practices and the Manifestations of Scapegoating of Womenfolk in *A Past Came Calling***

A gender-analytical interpretation of the status of widows and the related problems encountered by widows in contemporary Nigeria society only reveals how age-long patriarchal social structure functions to oppress widows – a particularly disadvantaged group of women. Otherwise, why would a woman immediately become a primary suspect for her husband's death, as portrayed in *A Past...* for no just reason despite the trauma of her unfortunate experience?

In rueful reflection, Temisan informs her daughter, Rosemary, how rosy their marriage had been before her husband's death:

Temisan: Ours was the yardstick with which happy marriages were measured... Never a cloudy day... It was too good to last. (7 – 8)

However,

Temisan: Like a bolt out of the blues, the cold merciless hands of death descended one night and snatched my knight away. I was numb with shock. (8)

One is only left to wonder how such avowed rosy marriage relationship would suddenly turn into such scandalous suspicion of 'murder' at the death of one partner – the husband at this instance. What an irony? Temisan's numbing shock is only a prelude to the series of worst ordeals that await her. She further discloses to Rosemary:

Temisan: Like a pack of wolves, my furious in-laws descended on me. I had killed the goose that laid the golden egg and so, pay I must.

Rosemary: It was a natural death, wasn't it?  
Temisan: No one would believe that. Only a man whose wife is a witch, or whose wife sleeps with another would pass away in his sleep. From dusk to dawn, I was hounded to confess to killing my husband, so his wandering spirit would find its way back to the world of the gods. Every inhuman treatment imaginable was meted out to me. Every single property we acquired during our union was "inherited" by his brothers a week after his death. (8)

Temisan's traumatic experience does not stop at that: (...*covered in ashes. Her hands, blackened with layers of dirt. Totally alone in her solitude and misery, head on her palm, face tear stricken, she gazes listlessly into nothingness...Very forcefully, the door swings open. Two men and two women rush in. The men are armed with whips. One of the women bears a large cup and the other holds a twine. Pouncing on her, they drag her around the room, screaming and begging*). (9 – 10)

FEMALE 1: (*Slapping her*) As we bury my brother, so your peace will be buried.

OTHERS: Amen!

FEMALE 2: His restless spirit will haunt every male in your family and cut them short in their prime.

OTHERS: Amen!

MALE 2: (*Spits on her*) Say amen!

FEMALE: (*Grabbing her ear and twisting it*) Stubborn witch, confess or die! (*The men attack her with blows, legs, and whips...*)

MALE 1: My brother did not die a natural death.

FEMALE 1: Your harlotry sent him to an early grave.

FEMALE 2: Husband killer!

FEMALE 1 & 2: Witch! Witch! Witch!

FEMALE 1: Mourn! Mourn the man whose life you cut short...

ALL FOUR TORMENTORS: Louder witch! Louder!  
Mourn, mourn your husband!

FEMALE 1: You loved him, didn't you? Prove it then,  
drink the bath water of your husband's  
decaying body. (11)

Therefore: (*Ranting and raving all the while, one of the men grabs her legs and pins her to the floor. The others grab her hand and twist them to the back... the woman with the cup beckons to the other who immediately descends on Temisan and tries to pry her mouth open. Like one possessed of the devil, Temisan struggles to escape them and keep her mouth shut. She fails. Gulping and coughing, she downs the bath water of her husband's corpse. Their faces aglow with sheer satisfaction, they shower more blows, and insults on the helpless woman even as she wrenches her guts out in her desperate bid to rid her stomach of it's[sic] disgusting content*). (13 – 14)

What a cruelty? The big question is, does Temisan really deserve all that treatment for losing her husband? Where actually did she go wrong? What was it that she was supposed to do that she did not do? Could she actually have pulled back the hand of the clock on her husband's death that fateful night?

When Rosemary, contemplating on such monstrous treatment that is meted to her mother, seeks to know if her father's death was not natural, Temisan's response is quite unequivocal: "No one would believe that" (8). Reason! ... the outrageous belief that: "Only a man whose wife is a witch, or whose wife sleeps with another would pass away in his sleep" (8). Hence, all the imaginable inhuman treatment – dehumanizing, degrading and mind bending – meted out to Temisan on account of the death of her husband, even the dispossession from her of every single property they had acquired together during their union just a week after his death, all in the name of the tradition of widowhood practice, when all she just needed was love, support, protection, or even pity, amounts to nothing but sheer overwhelming scapegoating of the woman. How apt this is portrayed in these mind blowing interrogations by Temisan to her dead husband!

Temisan: Were you watching from the side line as  
your people accused me of killing you and  
made minced meat of me? ... for something  
I knew nothing about... (48 – 49)

Wait a second...Were our fates reversed,  
would my people have made you go through  
what your people made me go through? (49)

Again, Temisan's answer to the latter inquiry is unequivocal:

Certainly not. (49)

The reality of the crux of the matter from the above scenario only reinforces as earlier observed how age-long patriarchal social structure functions to oppress widows. Ahonsi sees this structure as invariably promoting "male domination and female subordination" (qtd. in Awuor 10). Ordinarily, if it was the man that had lost his wife, frantic efforts would immediately follow to offer him a substitution to comfort him and douse the impact of the grief of such a bereavement.

Temisan captures the sheer injustice of the above scenario in this manner:

Temisan:       *(Voice dripping with sarcasm)* Men should  
be treated with kid's gloves. (49)

Therefore, the reality of the situation in which widows find themselves as represented in *A Past...*, and in the light of this discourse, aptly illustrates gender inequality. Hence, widows are maltreated, disempowered and exposed to other forms of injustices not meted on widowers. Consequently, the death of a husband which is a natural phenomenon and a devastating natural tragedy as portrayed in *A Past...*, has been turned into an agonizing and dehumanizing cultural tragedy for Temisan.

### **The Need for Reorientation**

In the light of the foregoing manifestations of scapegoating of womenfolk as portrayed in *A Past...*, there is the need for a reorientation of the society's psyche on the obnoxious widowhood practices. It is high time the society stopped clutching passionately onto obnoxious widowhood practices which, as Chukwu-Okoronkwo opines, rather portray Africans as barbaric and uncivilized "in an age of vast sociocultural advancement" (75). This is largely because generations of intimidated women have not only continued to suffer but also died in silence and sent to their untimely graves by cultural and



traditional injustices (Okoye 240). Hence, rather than hatred, malice, suspicions, condemnation, neglect and all sorts of inhuman treatment and ostracism which widows usually experience in the name of culture or tradition, Babangida aptly captures the heartbeat of this study with her passionate caution that the widow “needs every care and affection from society” to be able to cope with the tragedy of the loss of her husband (7).

### **Conclusion**

Unarguably, this study has critically examined widowhood practices and the scapegoating of womenfolk in various cultures, using Uche Ama-Abriel’s *A Past Came Calling* as paradigm. The study strongly believes that African cultures should be dynamic; and dynamic enough to actually serve its dynamic role to improve the common good. Hence, clutching tenaciously onto obnoxious widowhood practices which impede than facilitate meaningful rehabilitation of widows in the society and consistently portray Africa in a bad light is utterly unacceptable. There is a need to consistently organize public-enlightenment campaigns on the negative effects of obnoxious widowhood practices and the need for their complete eradication. Government and non-governmental organizations are enjoined to carry out massive education of women on both their human and legal rights, especially in the rural communities, as education portends a veritable instrument of bringing about change to obnoxious widowhood practices. Women on their own part are enjoined to shake off the social construct which has consistently conditioned and predisposed them to believe that passivity, abnegation and submissiveness, even in the face of injustice, are the true mark of femininity. They must wake up from their age-long cultural slumber and reject all forms of cultural and traditional injustices.

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# LEADERSHIP AND CHANGING COMMUNAL VALUES IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *KONGI'S HARVEST*

**Tekena Gasper Mark**  
&  
**Remigius Anayochi Anyanwu**  
University of Port Harcourt

## **Abstract**

*It is a statement of fact that a nation without good and visionary leaders can hardly enjoy peace and social stability. More importantly, leaders are regarded as the custodians of customs and traditions of the people. However, problems are bound to occur when leaders fail in the duty of leading their followers to their established goals. Besides, most Nigerian leaders display an unreserved disrespect for their own culture and tradition, preferring the Western culture to their own because they lack the necessary cultural foundations to effectively lead the people. Consequently, African traditional theatre is continuously declining in terms of patronage due to the effects of modernism and neocolonialism. This transition into modern cultures instead of adapting the modern culture to suit their needs and aspirations results in change traditional societies. This study, therefore, examines how changing communal values, the cause of modern conflict, have affected African traditional theatre and African traditional societies. In examining the concept of leadership and the effects of changing communal values on African traditional theatre, the study undertakes a content analysis of Wole Soyinka's **Kongi's Harvest** and concludes that conflict would be largely abated if African cultures adapt, rather than adopt, received foreign cultures to suit local needs.*

## **Introduction**

This study examines how changing communal values, the cause of modern conflict, has affected African traditional theatre and African traditional societies using Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* as its primary text for analysis. For the purpose of clarity, it is necessary to define some key terms, as they would be used in this study. These terms are: communal values, conflict, African traditional theatre, society, social change, and leadership.

**Communal Values:** This refers to values derived from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective

experience or memory (english-heritage.org, par.1). This means that communal values are the core ideals tied to the culture of a group of people in a particular place and at a particular time; that they believe in, and which identifies them as distinct from other communities or groups.

**Conflict:** Conflict is defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interest or concerns (www.ohrd.wisc.edu, par. 1). It is some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unaccepted to one or more members of the group or another group.

**African Traditional Theatre:** African traditional theatre entails those forms of entertainments and theatrical nuances that were in existence before the colonization of Africans by the Europeans. African traditional theatre is an expression of the people, institutions and experiences of the African communal society (Krama 3). Traditional or cultural festivals are also part and parcel of African traditional theatre.

**Society:** Society refers to a collection of people at a particular place and at a particular time. It is seen as people in general, living together in organized communities with shared laws, traditions and values.

**Social Change:** This refers to the alteration in patterns of culture, social structure and social behaviour over time. It refers to the modifications that occur within social institutions, in social attitudes, beliefs, values and patterns of relationship and behaviour (Igbo 24).

**Leadership:** This refers to the act of guiding or directing a group of people towards the realization of established goals and objectives. It can also be conceived as a process of social influence in which a person can win the aid and support of a group of people, serving as their representative and head.

### **Social Change and Conflict and their Effects on African Traditional Theatre and African Traditional Societies**

Social change has been described as the alteration in patterns of culture, social structure and social behaviour of a people over time, which may be gradual or quick (Igbo 24). Conflict is therefore created when societies transit from one culture to another. This conflict arises largely from the lacuna created as a result of the loss in the shared values of groups in the course of their

transition. Hence, when traditional societies transit into modern societies or embrace popular culture, the inability of the transiting groups to live up to the dictates of the modern culture leads to conflict.

Since the advent of the Europeans to Africa, African traditional theatre and African traditional societies greatly suffered a major setback in terms of development. In this vein, Krama observes that the structures of modern society locate the Western culture as the “Super structure”, and the only frame of reference, and that it is the carrier of human excellence and civilization (76). Consequently, this places a limitation on the African culture and traditional theatre; and the resultant effect is seen in the attitude of most African scholars and urban dwellers who loathe African theatre or regard it as unacceptable (Krama 77). Hence, most African scholars would prefer to engage in researches aimed at improving the subculture (new culture) than on those geared towards developing African theatre or African traditional societies. This situation was further worsened by the coming of the Christian religion, which condemned and still condemns African theatre as barbaric and the Islamic religion, which frowns at any form of imitation, which is the base of African theatre.

African cultures thrive on communal existence unlike the modern culture that places more emphasis on the individual than on the community. Thus, an anomaly is created when Africans embrace the modern culture at the expense of their own traditional culture. A major cause of the changes in the value system of Africans comes from outsourcing; a tendency to prefer foreign-made goods and values over that of your home country. A typical example is seen in the consumption attitude of most Nigerians, who place more value on foreign-made goods, while denigrating locally made goods. African/Nigerian institutions and industries are involved in the production of social imageries that did not develop from their traditional culture, hence Western thought pattern and imageries are imposed on Nigerians, and since these were not generated from the people, conflict is bound to be created. Nigerians neglect the infrastructure (the culture of origin) and build on the super-culture (modern/foreign culture). Consequently, the indigenous culture which contains African ethnic values is abandoned, and this creates a battle between the subculture and the traditional culture.

Social change, which encompasses the noticeable differences, gradual or rapid alterations in the social processes or life of a people due to prevailing social circumstance, is thus induced by the presence and the threat of foreign culture, which destroys African core values, which form the foundation of African traditional society. This therefore endangers the development of

African traditional theatre. Hence, this new socialization produces personality crisis in the African/ Nigerian and a loss of his/her original identity because he/she now has two cultures to grapple with: the traditional culture and the modern culture. Therefore, modern conflict is created as a result of the changing communal values (African core values), which is orchestrated by the adoption of a foreign culture; and this is inimical to the growth and development of both African traditional theatre and African traditional societies.

This same problem is the cause of the leadership crisis facing modern African societies, as most African leaders adopt ideas that are alien to the people they are leading. Prominent among the problems facing Nigeria today as a nation is the lack of good leaders who have the interest of Nigerians at heart. These leaders find their way into political offices through political manoeuvres and with the help of political godfathers, whose instructions they obey to the letter as soon as they assume office. Consequently, since these leaders were not chosen by the people through their votes, it is not out of place for them to make decisions and laws that do not capture the needs and aspirations of those they are leading.

Furthermore, in as much as every society has the right to retain those cultural practices or modes of behaviour that agree with their perception and aspirations, the social imageries produced must secularize the traditional thought patterns of Africans if African/Nigerian theatre must survive. For Karl Marx, class struggle is the basis for social change, and every society has the right to recreate those experiences that are consistent with their beliefs and aspirations. For this conflict to be resolved, rather than 'adopt' the modern culture, Africans/ Nigerians must 'adapt' the modern culture to suit their own needs and aspirations. This will in turn create room for the growth and development of African traditional theatre and African traditional societies (modern African theatre and modern African societies).

To understand the differences between the traditional and the modern society, it is important to observe the views of some key theoreticians. Auguste Comte identified three distinct and progressive stages of the intellectual development of societies: the fictive theological stage- which is characterized by man's search to understand and explain his physical environment, the Metaphysical stage- when man exercised his mind and engaged in reasoning and conscious thought, and the Positive stage- which corresponds to the industrial society (modern society); marked by the adoption of positive thinking (Igbo 12-13).

For Emile Durkheim, the modern society is characterized by a complex division of labour with far much greater opportunity for individual development. It is characterized by organic solidarity (based on the dissimilarities between individuals and these dissimilarities is the basis for inter-dependence and it is upon this dependence that the division of labour rests). In this society (complex society), relationship between individuals is determined by the goods and services which they require from each other (qtd. in Igbo 16). In the same vein, Herbert Spencer divides societies into two main types: “Militant” and “Industrial” societies. Militant societies are characterized by external and internal coercion while the Industrial society is based on contractual relations. Industrial societies are characterized by voluntary cooperation rather than forced labour, individual initiative, constitutional protection of individual human rights, self-control and relative permanence of peace. In militant societies, social positions are inherited unlike in industrial societies (which are open systems), where social status or ranks can be achieved by anyone who works hard irrespective of parental background (qtd. in Igbo 22).

For Karl Marx, society evolved through several stages: the first stage was characterized by the ownership of properties by whole tribes or communities (communal ownership of property), in the second stage of evolution, private property emerged with the institution of social classes: the class of free citizens and the class of slaves. The third stage was the feudal stage. The feudal society was based on a complicated tenure system, in which the nobility owned the land, and the serfs (subjects) worked on the land for the feudal lords. The fourth stage was the rise of modern capitalism. The modern capitalist society is based on private ownership of the means of production (capital) (qtd. in Igbo 23-24). Marx believes that social change is created by the struggle between two major classes: the class that owns the land and means of production (the bourgeois) and those who actually produce (the proletariats). These two are in perpetual opposition. Igbo observes that the emergence of modern capitalistic society can be accounted for by economic factors and class conflict (24).

From the foregoing, the modern society is a complex one, driven by capitalism and contractual relationship between individuals unlike the traditional society, which is communal in nature and characterized by mechanical solidarity. These two societies are different, and so the values that obtain in one might not work for the other. It is therefore not possible that European values will work in environments that are completely alien to them (environments where these values were not produced). This thus creates a

problem and is the cause of conflict in modern societies. Modern conflict is therefore orchestrated by the inability of transiting (traditional) societies to effectively adapt to the social changes brought about by the alterations of their traditional values and an adoption of the values of a foreign, popular or mass culture.

### **Synopsis of *Kongi's Harvest***

The play is a satire on the rulers of a fictitious kingdom of Isma, somewhere in Africa, during the preparation for celebrations and aftermath of a New Yam festival. The ruler of Isma, Kongi is a repressive, ambitious autocrat, who is assisted by a ubiquitous Organizing Secretary. Kongi, advised by a fraternity of largely sycophantic Aweris and enthusiastically supported by a brutal carpenter's Brigade, puts some of his most powerful opponents including Oba Danlola, in detention and wants to usurp Danlola's position. He wants to receive the New Yam from the Oba's hand and present himself to the people as their protector and spiritual leader. He also wants Oba Danlola to acknowledge his supremacy. This position is challenged by his ex-mistress Segi, her female supporters and by Daodu, Danlola's nephew; a leader of a successful farming cooperative. Danlola is unwilling to give up his religious functions to Kongi but Segi and Daodu want Danlola to pretend to cooperate so as to draw Kongi to the public celebration, where they have planned to assassinate Kongi. However, their assassination attempt fails and Segi's father is killed instead. Kongi is shocked after learning about the conspiracy and chases away Daodu and Segi.

### **Leadership, Changing Communal Values and its Effects on African Traditional Theatre in Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest***

In Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, we find Kongi resolved to modernize the state of Isma and this means a sharp break from their (African) traditional values to that of the new regime (military dictatorship). Kongi imprisons Oba Danlola and dissolves the old Aweri council of elders, which acts as an advisory body to Oba Danlola. In Oba Danlola's words:

This is the last our feet shall touch together  
We thought the tune obeyed us to the soul  
But the drums are newly shaped and stiff arms stain... (10).

Kongi depends on the newly formed Aweri Fraternity as his factory of wisdom, as they debate on the idea of building a new image. We, however, notice that the fraternity is more interested in high sounding words and



making verbose statements than in performing their duty. The new regime depends for its continuance on its own propaganda ‘the government loudspeaker’, for which the Aweri Fraternity plays a key role, as a word-factory.

The play satirizes modern African dictators who suffer from megalomania; this is seen in the members of the Reformed Aweri, who propose that they be recognized as Magi, as this would automatically lead to Kongi’s elevation to the status of “God”. Kongi equates himself with Christ and wants his name in the forthcoming harvest festival to mark the beginning of a new calendar, and with everything else taking from it. Kongi’s image boosting is aimed at impressing the outside world. He thus creates an attractive picture, which hides his monstrous personality. We see him taking a variety of postures so as to get a good picture in the international community. Kongi represents a modern paranoid dictator, who maintains total control of all instruments of coercion. These instruments of coercion are well established and are represented in the Carpenter Brigade and in the Superintendent.

Kongi has the power but lacks the spirituality, which the office of the Oba holds and with Danlola’s surrender of the New Yam, continuity would have been maintained between the modern regime and the traditional predecessor. Kongi represents a decisive break with the past. This ascension spells doom for tradition itself. His intentions to replace the old superstitious festival by a state ceremony based on the principle of ‘Enlightened Ritualism’ means the destruction of what is truly African.

The play demonstrates the idea that conflict is bound to occur when societies (traditional) evolve into modern states (complex societies). Kongi decides to install a new government instead of working with the Oba, and this would have created the room to fully accommodate and maintain the traditional values of the people in the new regime. He covets the spiritual authority of the Oba, and this shows the powers traditional rulers have even in modern states. Kongi’s failure to achieve his goal buttresses the fact that a social change that does not meet with the perceptions and aspirations of the people is bound to fail. This is the problem with Nigeria. Nigeria has made a sharp break with tradition, embracing popular culture, and like *Kongi’s Harvest*, what we see is a failed New Yam celebration. Nigeria claims to be operating a democratic and federal system of Government, yet when stakeholders make decisions, it is for the interest of their ethnicity.

*Kongi’s Harvest* deals with African politics. It exposes the dictatorial tendencies of African political rulers, who in a bid to satisfy their selfish crave for power; employ every means possible to get this power and fulfill their

selfish desires, without giving a listening ear to the people. African dictators imitate other European states and thus want to replicate this in Africa, without giving a thought to the fact that a social product that is not produced in Africa cannot work or be successful as it is in Europe. Kongi destroys the established traditional authority, and installs his own version, worse than its predecessor. Furthermore, the excessive lust for power by African leaders is made clear by the Oba's refusal to relinquish his spiritual authority and by Kongi's plot to usurp the Oba's spiritual authority so as to make him the supreme leader of the state. This kind of cruel paranoiac black dictatorship whose origin can be traced to the Western world, is apparently new to the African experience, and endangers both African traditional theatre which is deeply rooted in the African tradition, as well as inimical to the growth and development of African traditional societies.

In an article titled "Kongi's Harvest of Intrigue and Hate" by Arthur Edgar E. Smith, it is observed that the clash between the modern and the traditional forces in an emergent modern African society is enacted between Oba (the traditional head) and the President, Kongi (the modernist and constitutional head), who is in himself a dictator (*Nathanielturner.com* par. 1-2). Kongi's modern dictatorship aims at absorbing the traditional system within itself in order to destroy it officially as a potential threat as well as capture its legitimacy, dignity, appeal and power. On this, Smith notes that clash manifests from the very start in the hemlock section of the play with the traditional forces being stifled by the propaganda and the paraphernalia accompanying Kongi's dictatorship. As suggested by the roll of drums which signifies the struggling between the two forces for supremacy (*Nathanielturner.com* par. 2). This is typical when societies evolve from simple to complex forms. Consequently, the mass culture (new regime) suppresses other cultures, and destroys alternatives so as to fully establish its superiority. This is the same problem challenging both African traditional theatre and African traditional societies. In *Kongi's Harvest*, the traditional forces are being repressed by Kongi's propaganda and instruments of coercion. Kongi seems to be winning the day as he has confined the Oba and his conclave of Elders to rot in prison, thereby confining the forces of tradition, and since the Oba cannot deal with Kongi directly, he is forced to battle with a junior representative, the Superintendent. Although Oba Danlola has been put behind bars and denied of his power to rule, he still retains mystical powers, dignity and symbolic values, which Kongi and his cohorts will sacrifice anything to get.

According to Smith, their complaints about the royal canopy taking too much silk and that the first of the new yams melted first in the Oba's mouth, is a sign of the greedy nature of political leaders, who are determined to capture many roles and titles, all with the aim of increasing their popularity and harmony (*Nathanielturner.com* par. 4). As common with most Nigerian intellectuals and leaders, Kongi has absorbed the wrong notion of the superiority of Western values and civilization over African traditional values, and so he replaces the traditional institutions with an absurd version of what he thinks is a modern version of society, without recourse to the effects this would have on the entire society. Kongi seeks to destroy the traditional institutions but also falls back to its legitimacy as he wishes to use this to win the minds of the people, and so he demands that Oba Danlola presents him with the New Yam, thereby presenting him as the protector and spiritual leader of the people.

As common with military regimes, imprisonment and death are the only means through which Kongi maintains control over his newfound State of Isma. As characteristic of Government institutions, State bodies work to project their leader to the status of God head. Smith notes that the Organizing Secretary is completely at home in operating in the code of corruption. At first he appears dutiful and upright, later he is accused by one of the Aweris of collecting bribe; as he gives detainees under his charge comfort, in exchange for money, as well as collects huge bribes from visitors to the president, and makes much financial gain by his organization of the harvest. He speaks thus: "...Just how much do you think I will make for myself from organizing the Harvest anyway. I may as well hand you my entire profits" (Soyinka 29). To further buttress this, as part of the norm, the first Aweri also demands for his own share before he discloses his solution to him.

More so, Nwadiolor, in an article entitled "The Christian Church and the Quest for Cultural Revival in Nigeria", observes that the cultural heritage of the Nigerian peoples is decaying, and that it is doubtful whether much of the good values in the Nigerian cultural heritage can be revitalized. He observes the reasons for this cultural decay as slavery and slave trade, colonialism and imperialism, illiteracy, inferiority complex (7). According to Nwadiolor, just at the time the slave trade was dying and the Nigerian man once more had an opportunity of reconstructing his bearing, Western imperialism came to further shatter the fledging value systems, thereby further distorting the cultural profile of Nigerians. Nwadiolor notes that while leading in the fight against white colonialism, the Nigerian man still identifies himself most intimately with the culture of the Whiteman he is fighting, and this is

evident in the clothing style, eating habits, mediocre, mode of worship, language as well as the educational system of Nigerians (7).

### **Change Management and the Survival of African Traditional Theatre**

Using the case of Nigeria, the need to propagate, promote and preserve arts and culture led to the establishment of various Councils of Arts and Culture in Nigeria. These councils were established with the following objectives: to promote and foster the appreciation, revival and development of the arts and culture of the nation; to plan and coordinate cultural activities and foster the development of literary, visual and the performing arts nationwide; to organize and promote exhibition in visual, performing and literary arts as determined from time to time by the Federal Government; to produce documentary films on the culture of the various ethnic groups for use in Nigeria and for export; to organize and conduct lectures or demonstration workshops to provide instruction in the arts; to cooperate with any other bodies or persons engaged in, or connected with the arts in the state or any part of Nigeria; to publish or sponsor, or cause to be sponsored the publication of any literature, periodicals and newspaper or broadcast materials in relation to the arts and to promote the development of music, traditional dance, drama, opera, cinema, films, photography, folklore, oral tradition, poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, town planning, general arts, woodwork, embroidery, weaving and similar arts (*National Council 3*).

For the realization of these objectives, the state governments have spent a huge amount of money on the management of these outfits. Areas of expenditure include; staffing, staff salaries, cultural projects and productions. From the outset, the Federal Government of Nigeria embarked upon the programme of full sustenance, support and financing of the arts. This resulted in the rapid promotion of the Nigerian Arts. According to Awodiya:

From 1960 to 1990, there was unprecedented proliferation of museums, galleries, arts councils, theatres and arts institutions, the size of their audiences and the level of funding. Many state arts councils displayed their newfound affluence in more elaborate arts festivals, large management staff and new performance facilities with more seats to fill. (19)

This shows that from the onset, the government has been really committed to the course of arts and culture in Nigeria. Audience patronage contributed irrespective of the fact that theatre or arts patronage culture of our people

(Nigeria) was just evolving. In spite of the great attention given to these councils, there have been increased public complaints, protesting the non-performance of these councils. In the last few years, the growth of these arts councils has been slow. Most of them have cut down on most of the programmes for which they were known, while some now live on past glories. On the part of the councils, there have been excuses of poor staffing or leadership, poor funding, and poor patronage for the Arts. The influence of the electronic media provided another strong complaint. The life styles of the youths, who form the potential audience, are changing as they are always presented with foreign cultures via videos, films, television and the social media.

The afore mentioned issues form the challenges which artists and practitioners encounter due to the change in the society as well as the change in the leadership which ultimately affect the promotion and or survival of African traditional or indigenous theatre and performance. The effects of social change, as illustrated in *Kongi's Harvest* is still very prevalent in today's world of arts and culture and leadership. Yet, adapting to such changes and modernism speaks volumes regarding the management of the indigenous arts and culture. Therefore, it is not out of place to emphasize on the fact that cultural heritage is widely recognized as most important in defining the national and ethnic life of a people. As a people who inherited rich cultural legacy from time immemorial, the issue of arts and culture, which of course forms the basis of a people's origin and existence, has remained vital in Nigeria. Hence, every ethnic group in Nigeria has got some aspects of arts and culture to promote and preserve (Basden 23).

The changes that militate against the survival of African traditional theatre have been present since the coming of the colonial masters who never saw anything good in African culture, hence the obnoxious and contemptuous manner with which the colonial masters treated African arts and culture. The Whiteman who never introduced the knowledge of the existence of the Almighty God to the African, on arrival to the African soil behaved as if his Christian religion was superior to the African Traditional religion. Unfortunately, the African accepted and aided him in suppressing the African religion, which is an integral part of the African life. For instance, the Whiteman condemned and abolished African indigenous funeral rites, especially, for the noble and aged which is full of the various elements of drama and theatre, such as music, dance, chants, language spectacle etc. Yet, he feels obliged to observe annually the memorial of his own men and women of nobility whom he refers to as saints, martyrs, priests, religious, virgins,

confessors etc. It is really disheartening that the African accepted such a change which touched on his spiritual life without much ado. However, there is no gainsaying that prior to the coming of the Whiteman, Africans were rich in the knowledge of the existence of the Almighty God whom they already worshipped and had various names for him in their various languages. For instance, the Igbo would call him “Chukwu” which means Almighty God, “Chineke” meaning God the creator, etc., while the Yoruba call him “Olodunmare” meaning Almighty God, “Oba aye” meaning king of the universe, etc. This change due to modernism and leadership trend was also evident in some of the festivals of the indigenous African man. For instance, Nwachukwu recounts how an expatriate priest (Rev. Fr.) of a Roman Catholic Church changed the modalities of the traditional New Yam festival to suit his own religion, which is alien to Africa. According to him, the famous New Yam Festival in Mbaise, Nigeria was known as the Ahianjoku festival. In his words:

The Ahianjoku festival is as old as the history of Igbo land. Right from the origin of the Igbos, it has been one of the highest traditional religious festival (sic) of the land. It is associated with the god of farming or agriculture. ‘Ahiajoku’ the protector of the farm, farm crops and the farmer. He makes crops to germinate and makes the land to be fertile, according to traditional religion. Feast was devoted to Ahianjoku as a period of thanksgiving ceremony, as propitiation for his kind protection and gifts from the farm. (14)

The forgoing is evident that the African man started observing the indigenous arts and culture as soon as he found himself as a creature on planet earth. During the period, the traditional African farmers offered sacrifices to their gods in thanksgiving for the gift of life and goodness, and above all, for granting them a bumper harvest in their career as farmers. This ceremony attracted most of the friends and relatives of the farmers from within and outside Mbaise, in Igbo land. The celebration of the New Yam festival was held in high esteem by the pre-colonial Mbaise man, hence, it involved aggressive planning and publicity, to make sure that everything was made ready for this festival, which lasted for a traditional week of eight days. The initial ceremony usually began with meetings of the elders and the Eze ji titleholders who were in charge of the leadership of the traditional festival. It was at the meeting of these leaders that decisions were made regarding the

date and activities of the festival. The activities included daily display of cultural dances, exhibition of art works, wrestling competition, etc. In the words of Nwachukwu:

This was celebrated during the first yam harvest in August. Every community had an Ahianjoku shrine, a high priest in charge of the deity. Some slaves bought and dedicated to it, both male and female and a piece of land called Ahianjoku forest- 'Okahia Ahianjoku'. The priest and the slaves controlled the forest dedicated to Ahianjoku. The slaves of Ahianjoku were consecrated to the Ahianjoku god and were regarded as 'Osu' untouchables. (14)

This means that the indigenous people were really in charge of the leadership of this new yam traditional festival. However, Nwachukwu goes further to inform us of how the festival became a victim of change due to the coming of the Whiteman and his western religion, otherwise known as Christianity. According to him, it was in the year 1945 when a catholic priest named Rev. Fr. Traick, CSSp who was among the expatriate missionaries to Uturu, Abia State, got worried that his converts to Christianity were still taking part in the celebration of the New Yam festival which his Christian religion regarded as being fetish. So, the priest took his time to study the festival and the attachment of the people to it and concluded that no amount of gospel preaching would stop them from taking part in the festival. After thorough studying of the festival, the priest removed the aspects of it that he discovered to be fetish behaviours and rituals, just to prevent the adherents of his Christian faith from committing sin against the Christian God. So, he introduced a new yam festival devoid of fetishism and fixed August 15, every year as the date for the new yam celebration. It must be noted that this August 15, is the day Catholics the world over, celebrate the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven (15). This was how this traditional festival was changed from its original mode of practice to its current secularized form. However, the festival has also tried to survive the change because it still retains some characteristics of traditional African theatre such as dance, music etc.

African traditional theatre has also been affected by change even in some other traditional performances like chieftaincy coronation. In the traditional setting, especially in Igbo land, a king or traditional ruler is usually crowned at the shrine of the community or at the centre of the market square. This is so because it is believed that the shrine or the market square represents

the entire inhabitants of the community, which includes both their living members and their dead relatives, otherwise known as ancestors. All the rituals that precede or accompany chieftaincy coronation as an indigenous performance are performed at the shrine. But these days, most people claim that as Christians, they cannot receive titles or perform coronation ceremony in front of any shrine or at the centre of the community market square. Imagine a situation whereby parts of the programme for the coronation of a traditional ruler include the following: church service; blessing of the insignia of office by priests of the orthodox churches, presentation of the Holy Bible to the newly crowned traditional ruler, etc.

The aberrations which changing communal values bring to disrupt the African traditional theatre setting are really enormous. During this traditional coronation ceremony, the incantations which worthy elders and leaders of the community make in order to make the ceremony traditionally awesome are now replaced by the modern oath of office which any available legal or para-legal person administers to the crowned king. This really affects even the attitudes of the traditional ruler. Some now misbehave with impunity because of the fact that they are not dedicated to a traditional deity, but rather mere prayers are just said to a Christian God who is acclaimed to be kind, merciful and is never quick to anger. Hence, the so called leaders now live their lives as they like unlike when everything had the traditional setting, with its implications and penalties.

Going further in this discourse, this study also observes the change in leadership which also affects the survival of the traditional African theatre. According to the *Autonomous Communities and Chieftaincy Law*, No 11 of 1981, which has been amended at various times, the role of a traditional ruler, is to assist the government in the maintenance of law and order in their various communities. However, this is secondary to their foremost role or duty as the custodians of culture and tradition. In fact, a traditional ruler is one who can act as a representative of his community both within and outside his town (Nwoga 4).

The position of a traditional ruler may appear very simple and common but it is an exalted and dignified institution because it is not every person that can be considered for such an honourable and traditional post. In fact, to be made a traditional ruler means that one has been duly tried and tested and is found worthy of the traditional stool of his ancestors. For one to be chosen as a traditional ruler, he must be a man of great substance, hence, highly respected or revered. It is no gainsaying that apart from the functions stipulated by the constitutions or acts that established the office of the



traditional rulers, most of them because of their experience in different fields of life endeavours now get involved in other developmental issues and projects just to better the lot of their subjects, or the masses in general. As Nwoga postulates:

The modern ruler can now be found mobilizing, and motivating his subjects in the areas of education and health, agriculture, security and in the provision of those infrastructural facilities which can be undertaken by the communities. The ruler is now the voice that speaks for his community with both the local and the central governments... (5)

All these are welcome developments on the part of African traditional rulers as they make efforts to see that the presence of the state and federal governments are felt in their local communities. But what is rather worrisome is the fact that some of the traditional rulers, in the process of trying to get really involved in governance, now become so partisan to the extent that some of their subjects now see them as political opponents instead of the dignified royal fathers they are meant to be. This is another aspect of change in leadership which has really affected the traditional African theatre. A situation where the traditional ruler who should help the law enforcement agencies to maintain peace and order in the community now turns to a terrorist or a thwart, who supports and promotes crime and other social anomalies, can never promote, propagate or preserve African traditional theatre.

### **Conclusion**

Philosophers make us to understand that change is the only thing constant in life and we do not really doubt it because we all see change in our daily living and dealings. Thus, it is no surprise then that the change mantra in Nigeria has affected every facet of the system as a nation, be it social, economic, religious, political or cultural. Traditional theatre cannot be left out of this change scenario; otherwise, it would not be seen as being part and parcel of the people's existence. However, what really matters is not the change; rather, it is what the people make out of it. In other words, what is the people's approach or reactions towards the change in the various aspects of life endeavours? From the discourse so far, it has been established that the so-called change is affecting Nigerians adversely and the survival of African traditional theatre, irrespective of attempts by the Nigerian government to propagate, promote and preserve the arts that led to the establishment of the

various Councils of Arts and Culture; a lot needs to be done to encourage the survival of African traditional theatre in this postmodern era.

This paper calls on Nigerian leaders to adapt rather than adopt the Western influenced change, so as not to disrupt the social order and cause social instability, as seen in the play *Kongi's Harvest*. This, the paper believes, will encourage the survival of African traditional theatre. A conscious all-inclusive attempt must be made by Nigerians and Africans by extension to ensure that traditional African theatre is protected from extinction irrespective of the ongoing changes in the society, orchestrated by the advent of film and television, as well as the social media.

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# CHANGE IMPERATIVES IN THE STAND-UP COMEDY OF ALI BABA

Edward Egbo Imo  
University of Port Harcourt

## Abstract

*Against the backdrop of the change mantra as propagated by the Muhammadu Buhari led-administration in Nigeria, the paper examines the transformational potentials and impetus in the satirical jokes of Ali Baba. While brandishing the Nigerian stand-up comedy as an emergent and viable theatrical form, the paper establishes Ali Baba as one of the trailblazers of the stand-up comic tradition in Nigeria as well as a unique comic whose jokes take a satirical swipe at the degeneracy in the standard of living in Nigeria as a result of the collapse of the leadership structure. The study adopts the qualitative research approach as it uses some selected jokes of Ali Baba as performed in such notable comedy variety concerts as Opa William's **Nite of a Thousand Laughs** and Ayo Makun's **AY Live** as paradigm for other Nigerian jokes in this satirical genre. The paper notes that like most theatrical experiences, stand-up comedy serves the tripartite functions of education, entertainment and enlightenment. It is for the foregoing that the study advocates the inclusion of stand-up comedy in the secondary and tertiary education curricula not just as a one-off subject or course but as a special field of study. The paper also canvasses the need for Nigerian stand-up comedians to take into cognizance the audience factor when crafting their jokes. Also, the formation of a purpose-driven comedians' guild in Nigeria is long overdue.*

## Introduction

Since the institutionalization of democratic governance in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, there has been one form of linguistic coinage aimed at capturing the leadership vision of each serving administration or the other. While Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's administration emphasized the three Rs agenda of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, the Umaru Yar'Adua-led administration harped on the Seven-Point Agenda with emphasis on education and Youth empowerment. For the government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, it was the Transformation Agenda. Today, the Muhammadu Buhari-led

administration has adopted yet another slogan which it christens 'Change'. Whereas it is not within the scope of this paper to analyse the lexical disparity between the terms "transformation" and "change", emphasis must be made that none of these leadership visions and approaches has brought about the much desired national growth and development.

Seventeen years and more into a supposed full scale democratic governance in Nigeria, the nation is still engulfed in severe dilapidation of the entirety of its social structures. In spite of its huge foreign exchange earnings from the lucrative oil and gas business, the Nigerian country still gropes for an average standard of living among the citizens. Such indices of underdevelopment as poor health care delivery, epileptic power supply, outdated educational infrastructures and policies, youth unemployment, systemic corruption, religious cleavages/tension, tribal/ethnic rivalries, corrupt judiciary, suicide bombing, militancy, kidnapping, political assassination and various manifestations of insecurity among others. What is however permanent, is the introduction of interesting and captivating leadership templates that may or may not be implemented. The leadership slogan in vogue is the change mantra of the Buhari-led government.

Amidst the experiments of leadership strategies amongst Nigerian leaders, the common masses are made specimens whose business would be mainly to fold their arms and savour the biting and crushing effects of these failed experiments. In the face of the masses' resignation to fate, the artist stands out of the crowd to speak for the oppressed masses. Regardless of the form which art is expressed, the motive is usually to occasion social change through education, enlightenment and entertainment. Of all the art forms that make up popular culture in Nigeria, stand-up comedy seems to be the most sensational and vibrant in the portrayal of societal happenings. Taking advantage of poetic license and artistic immunity, Nigerian stand-up comics feel at home to lampoon highly influential political and religious figures in their jokes. There are arrays of instances where such notable Nigerian comics as Ali Baba, I Go Dye, Basket Mouth, AY and Gordons make 'expensive' but humorous jokes on personalities such as Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, the late Umaru Yar'Adua, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, Rev. Chris Okotie and Pastor T.B Joshua among others. Zolten notes that comedy is beautiful to the extent that it gives license to say things you could not get away with otherwise. In order to underscore his argument, he exposes the immunity of Will Rogers, a veteran American stand-up comic, thus:

Will Rogers, one of the first political stand-ups, was an exception during vaudeville era. Rogers would come out in cowboy clothes, doing rope tricks with a lariat as he offered astute and cutting political commentary. He'd joke acerbically about the politicians and policies of the day and get away with it. (2)

It is for the foregoing that the paper takes a critical look at the change imperatives in the satirical jokes of Ali Baba. The focus of the paper is to examine how Ali Baba, through his jokes, lends his voice to the ongoing crusade and clarion call by the Buhari-led administration for the Nigerian citizenry to change from their corrupt ways and embrace functional transparency and accountability in the discharge of their duties.

### **Social Change: A Theoretical Exposé**

The concept 'social change' has quite a handful of definitions. However, the predominant definition is that which refers to the concept as any significant alterations over time in behaviour patterns, cultural values and norms. By "significant alterations" we mean changes that yield profound social consequences. Social change may refer to the notion of social progress or sociocultural evolution, the philosophical idea that society moves forward by dialectical or evolutionary means. Accordingly, it may also refer to social revolution, such as the Socialist revolution presented in Marxism, or to other social movements, such as Women's suffrage or the Civil rights movement. Social change may be driven by cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces.

Defleur defines social change alterations in the pattern of social organization of specific group within a society or even of the society itself. (31) Similarly, Moore sees the term as the significant alteration of social structures (that is, patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, and cultural products and symbols (366) The definitions at our disposal point to the fact that the concept of social change emphasizes changes in the social milieu rather than changes in the physical environment. Through human action, such social structures as social networks and social institutions are brought into prominence for purposes of making life more meaningful. However, past and present studies reveal that such structures are never static as they often change from time to time. The consequences of this

dynamism include the alterations of relationships between individuals and groups. Against this backdrop, Anele asserts that:

In whatever way we define social change, what is important is that restructuring or mutation is seen to have occurred in social relationship between members of a community, group or the society at large and that culture has been influenced by such restructuring or mutation. This could be at the macro or micro, institutionalized values and attitudes, or personal levels, such a mutation implies the modification or replacement of hitherto existing patterns of doing things within any given society, social institution, organization, etc. It means a new thing that is taken over from an old one.  
(12)

For Kimberly, social change is the transformation of culture and social institutions over time. He goes further to identify four basic characteristics of social change, thus: Social change happens all the time, it is sometimes intentional, but oftentimes unplanned, it is controversial and that some changes matter more than others (304).

Within the context of this paper, social change would be examined against the backdrop of the alterations in the totality of the social structures in Nigeria with emphasis on the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural. However, the change agenda propagated by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari is that which is all encompassing as it includes both the transformation of the mind-set of the average Nigerian down to the transformation of all the social structures of the country. In his inaugural speech on May 29, 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari unequivocally assured Nigerians that his administration would be devoid of any form of social stratification. This, he captured in his slogan “I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody” (qtd. in *New Nigeria* 2) In an attempt to bring to the fore his change campaign, President Buhari bemoans the sordid state of the Nigerian nation whereby past leaders have underplayed the ideals and philosophies of her founding fathers and heroes. According to him:

In recent times Nigerian leaders appear to have misread our mission. Our founding fathers, Mr Herbert Macaulay, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa...and their colleagues worked to establish certain standards of governance. They might have differed

in their methods or tactic or details, but they were united in establishing a viable and progressive country. Some of their successors behaved like spoilt children breaking everything and bringing disorder to the house... (2)

It is against the backdrop of the failure of successive governments to build on the efforts of the founding fathers as conceived by Buhari that he initiated the change agenda. As he puts it:

Daunting as the task may be, it is by no means insurmountable. There is now a national consensus that our chosen route to national development is democracy. To achieve our objectives we must consciously work the democratic system. The Federal Executives under my watch will not seek to encroach on the duties and functions of the Legislative and judicial arms of government. The law enforcing authorities will be charged to operate within the constitution. We shall rebuild and reform the public service to become more effective and more serviceable. We shall charge them to apply themselves with integrity to stabilize the system... (2)

The deduction from President Buhari's address above is that his government would transform the social structures in Nigeria which are in a state of decay and collapse. His change agenda is anchored on the cardinal principles of rule of law, transparency, security of lives and properties and aggressive fight against corruption. Whereas the change agenda of the Buhari -led administration is aimed at occasioning social change, the paper expresses some form of pessimism over the actualization of the change mantra given the untold economic hardship, conflicting judicial pronouncements and myriad of insecurity issues borne out of ethnic and religious cleavages one year and more into his administration.

### **The Comic Spirit: A Conceptual Statement**

There exists in contemporary discourse a handful of comic theories by both accomplished and fledgling comic theorists and critics but for purposes of precision, time and space, we would anchor our review on the comic postulations of Arthur Schopenhaur, George Meredith, and Henri Bergson with emphasis on their areas of convergence and divergence. Meredith sees comedy as a cure for "the malady of sameness, our modern malady" (qtd. in



Sypher ix). His thesis is more of an attack on materialism and mechanism that have characterized modern thought. He banishes the world of science and evolution arguing that "...science can tell us little of human life, simply because we have little to learn of apes..." (qtd. in Sypher ix). For him comedy teaches us to look at life exactly as it is, undulled by scientific theories. It banishes monstrous monotonousness as well as teaches us to be responsive, to be honest, to interrogate ourselves and correct our pretentiousness. According to him:

The comic spirit is "born of our united social intelligence", which shows us "our individual countenances" and thus keeps us alive. The comic spirit is the "ultimate civilizer" in a dull, insensitive world. She watches our vanity, our sentimentalism, with a birch rod; she strips us of our affectations. In comedy is the singular scene of charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honourable laughter. (Sypher ix)

For Meredith, one excellent test of the civilization of a country is the degree of flourish of the comic idea and comedy and the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.

It is interesting to note that the relationship between Bergson's essay on comedy and Meredith's is adjudged healthy essentially because both were reacting against the coarse logic, the "machinery" of the nineteenth century, against everything cut and dried. Bergson believes that life is a vital impulse not to be understood by the reason alone. For him, life is instinct, and the real meaning of experience must be sought along the fringe of intuitions surrounding every clear idea. In their respective essays, Bergson and Meredith believe that comedy is a premise to civilization. For Bergson, comedy can make us human and natural in the midst of mechanical societies. In a parallel vein, Meredith implies that comedy can enlighten us and redeem us from our worst stupidity- the original sin of pride, or complacency.

However, long before Bergson published his book titled *Laughter* in 1900, Schopenhauer had explored his discourse on the ludicrous. Whereas Bergson's thesis embodies some characteristics of the incongruity theory, he is careful to state that he does not attempt to be proscriptive in his analysis of comedy, nevertheless, his structure could be considered guilty of being too rigid and mechanical in his description of some comedies as a result of "something mechanical being encrusted on the living" (74, 84). Bergson sets up his problem much in the same way as Schopenhauer did, referring to the

historical problem of comedy and laughter. According to him: “The greatest of thinkers, from Aristotle downwards have tackled this little problem, which has a knack of baffling every effort, of slipping away and escaping only to bob up again, a pert challenge flung at philosophic speculation” (61).

While Bergson’s purpose is similar to Schopenhauer’s, his tone is much more playful and in this passage, he hints at the mechanical rigidity that he believes is the source of humour. His central metaphor seems to be a product of the industrial and mechanical era in which he was writing. His model of laughter and humour is one that is essentially mechanical. He describes it as “...a mechanical inelasticity, just where one would expect to find the wide awake adaptability and the living ‘pliability’ of a human being” (67). Indeed, the rest of his theory can be extrapolated from this basic principle. Bergson elaborates on how his theory applies to the human factor when he states that “the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine” (79). When a person continues to function mechanically by doing the same thing, despite changing conditions, then this, to Bergson, is what makes the situation laughable.

It is also imperative that we establish the fact that this mechanical basis for humour is not confined to the individual, but nature and society, also fall under the definition which Bergson sets forth in this theory of comedy. Although for Bergson, this lack of logical thought or unthinking mechanical behaviour is the source of comedy, comedy itself follows certain logical rules. For the comic spirit has logic of its own, even in its wildest eccentricities. It has a method in its madness (Bergson 62). The recognition of the existence of this set of rules appears to be necessary for us to understand comedy and experience laughter. Bergson is clear to point out that emotion and laughter are mutually exclusive and therefore comedy’s “appeal is to intelligence, pure and pure” (63). Because the appeal of the comic is intellectual in nature, Bergson argues that this puts laughter exclusively in the domain of humans. This is in consonance with Schopenhauer’s observation that “...because of the lack of the faculty of reason, thus of the lack of universal concepts, the animal is incapable of laughter as well as speech” (Representation 2, 98).

The obvious deduction here is that by denying the idea that animals can experience laughter because of their lack of reason, both Bergson and Schopenhauer reinforce the idea that comedy must have a logical or rational framework. Although this logical infrastructure is necessary to understand comedy, Bergson points out that the rules are not always hard and fast. In describing his definition of the comic, he states, “It is suitable only for cases

that are elementary, theoretical and perfect, in which the comic is free from all adulteration” (74). In practice, the definition of the comic is much more ethereal than fits neatly into Bergson’s theory of the comic. He admits the limitations of his theory in describing this ancient problem of comedy. It is imperative to note that some of Bergson’s rules seem to be suspiciously similar to those proposed by Schopenhauer, even though it is unclear whether he would have recognized or admitted the similarities.

For Bergson, incongruity theories are inadequate since they came to be as a result of something that can be interpreted simultaneously in two different ways. He states:

It is natural that certain philosophers should have been specially struck by this mental instability, and that some of them should regard the very essence of the ludicrous as consisting in the collision or coincidence of two judgments that contradict each other. Their definition, however, is far from meeting every case, and even when it does, it defines not the principle of the ludicrous, but only one of its more or less distant consequences (123).

Bergson believes that incongruity theories describe the symptoms of the ludicrous rather than the ludicrous itself. It would be like describing someone with bronchitis as suffering from cough. It is an accurate description of the problem, but is inadequate in describing what is really going on. In discussing absurdity, Bergson states that it does not create the comic rather the comic infuses into its own particular essence. It is not a cause but an effect of a very special kind, which reflects the special nature of its cause. He cites an example which he thinks incongruity theories are inadequate in describing. Why is it that there is something comic in the repetition of a word on the stage? No theory of the ludicrous seems to offer a satisfactory answer to this very simple question. This, indeed, is one of the areas of comedy that Bergson thinks is problematic for incongruity theories.

Amidst divergence in opinions as regards the comic premise, Bergson and Schopenhauer share some striking similarities as far as the ludicrous is concerned. Instead of describing the ludicrous as a conflict between opposing ideas, Bergson avers “The reciprocal interference of two sets of ideas in the same sentence is an inexhaustible source of amusing varieties” (138). Although Bergson continues to describe things in mechanical or scientific terms, he seems to be saying something very similar to what Schopenhauer is saying. Indeed, at times, it seems that he is paraphrasing Schopenhauer.

According to him; “A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time” (123). Bergson’s statement above parallels Schopenhauer’s description of the ludicrous as ‘...the paradoxical, thus, unexpected subsumption of an object under a concept that is in other respects, heterogeneous to it (*Representation* 2, 91). Even some of Bergson’s more central concepts in his theory of laughter are foreshadowed in Schopenhauer’s writings. Schopenhauer makes a statement which is in consonance with Bergson’s theory thus:

The incongruity then between the concept and reality soon shows itself here, and it becomes evident that the former never condescends to the particular case, and that with its generality and rigid definiteness it can never accurately apply to the fine distinctions of difference and innumerable modifications of the actual (*Idea 1*, 78).

One point on which Schopenhauer and Bergson differ significantly is their understanding of the purpose of laughter. Schopenhauer defines laughter in very specific terms:

The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity (*Idea 1*, 76).

For Schopenhauer, laughter is the method through which humans express pleasure at the ludicrous and it is closely related to joy. Laughter, for Schopenhauer, is directed at the ludicrous, the ridiculous and the incongruous. However, his conception of laughter is limited by his conception of the comic as a conflict between the conceived and perceived. Smith questions the capacity of Schopenhauer’s theory to address all areas of comedy. As he puts it: “It is to be questioned whether this explanation accounts for much more than the laughter at jokes; laughter in which the rationalizing process is obvious” (46). He argues that Schopenhauer’s theory does not adequately account for other types of laughter, such as laughter at repetition, which by definition does not have the surprise necessary for the sudden tension of contrasting incongruities (47). The need also arises to note that Bergson’s concept of laughter is not merely a physiological response to a stimulus or a result of conceptual conflict in our minds. His theory of laughter is,

essentially, a social one: “Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness” (187).

Laughter, in Bergson’s conception, is a social corrective always directed at someone or something that is not behaving according to social norms. In this sense, it is a training technique that provides negative stimulus when people do not behave as they ought to. This underscores the import of the theory of incongruity in Bergson’s analogy. Interestingly, while Schopenhauer, Meredith and Bergson might disagree on why something is funny, it seems fairly certain that they would still laugh at it because they understand some of the meaning-making processes involved in creating comedy.

### **Profile Statement of Ali Baba**

Ayunyota Alleluya Akporobomerere popularly known as Ali Baba was born in Warri, Delta State on June 24, 1965 to the royal family of Agbarha Otor, Ughelli North Local Government Area. He had his primary, secondary and university education at Ojo Primary School, Lagos, Command Secondary School, Ibru College and Bendel State University (now Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma) respectively. The data gathered from Ali Baba’s official website reveals that Ali Baba relocated to Lagos in 1990 after acquiring his first degree with the conviction that Lagos is a fertile ground for him to experiment his rib cracking jokes.

Ali Baba started his comedy career way back in his days at Bendel State University in 1988. Then as a student, he discovered his huge sense of humour and took advantage to make a living out of it. At first he earned as little as #100 and #120 per show and by the time he left school, his earning had improved to #150. His relocation to Lagos did not pay off immediately since he needed to study the attitude of Lagos residents to jokes. In the process, he carved out a niche for himself thereby currying the attraction of Charley Boy who engaged his services in his mega *Charley Boy Show*. His successful outing in the show made him a popular face in Lagos and in no time, individuals and corporate bodies began to sign up his services. His major breakthrough into corporate stand-up comedy business was in 1999 when Chief Olabode George invited him to a birthday party organized for the then President Olusegun Obasanjo. His scintillating performance at the event made a good impression on Obasanjo and this paved way for him in the corridors of power. This has also brought him such accolades as President’s Personal

Jester and Aso Rock's favourite comedian. His consistency and pioneering effort in the business of stand-up comedy in Nigeria has also earned him the award of the Grand Comedian of the Federal Republic (GCFR).

### **Performance Dynamics, Form and Content of Ali Baba's Comedy**

Ali Baba's performance structure is organized along the lines of cause and effect. The beginning is often expository in nature as he observes the protocol of recognizing the modest effort of his host and reputable members of the audience. This recognition is an art of its own as he laces it with some kind of caricature aimed at tongue-lashing his friends and hosts. For instance, in one of his outings at *AY Live* concert, in a bid to commend the host for putting up such a robust show, he expressed surprise that such a concerted show can be organized by AY in spite of his timid, primitive and cantankerous dispositions as one of his disciples. He puts it thus:

You can imagine AY. People like AY, Igors are like rope tiny. Na people like AY go run go hold pole for road when truck dey pass so dat breeze no go blow dem throway (mimicks holding a pole) (*AY Live Concert* Vol. 1).

Due to the intellectual nature of his jokes, he throws his audience into a state of amazed wonder as they strive to pick threads of meaning from each joke thus, building a high magnitude of suspense. However, the suspense is broken towards the end of the joke or during the introduction of a fresh joke. Ali Baba is not given to protracted length of time in his delivery of jokes rather he releases them in quick successions to a climactic height where he bids the audience goodbye amidst thunderous ovation. His jokes are linked thematically in a chain of causal relationship and in tandem with the overriding philosophy of the concert in which he performs.

The bulk of Ali Baba's jokes harp on the pandemic of underdevelopment which has engulfed Nigeria as a result of ineffective leadership. His affiliation with Aso Rock notwithstanding, Ali Baba serves as the voice of the common people as he continuously reminds the ruling class of their failures in providing basic amenities for the citizenry. Like George Carlin, his American counterpart, Ali Baba conceives stand-up comedy not just as an entertainment panorama but an avenue to address issues of national concern. For him, stand-up comedy is a serious business that requires a high level of creative energy and strength. He draws raw materials for his jokes largely from the harrowing experience faced by the common man in such a developing country like Nigeria where the leaders are not sensitive to the

plight of the suffering masses. Though in a subtle tonality, his jokes dwell on the leadership question in Nigeria and its attendant effects on the citizenry. He bemoans the average Nigerian's insincerity to politics thus:

Now election is here. Have you noticed that the people that campaign are different from the people that vote? I have noticed that the same crowd that shout for Atiku, shout for Buhari and shout for Yar'Adua (*AY Live Concert Vol. 1*).

He is daring and unbiased in his ridicule of the obnoxious policies and deviant attitudes of most Nigerian politicians regardless of the politicians involved. In one of his earlier jokes, Ali Baba crafted a joke where he lampoons the extravagant lifestyle and the excessive quest for material wealth by Nigerian politicians. In the joke, he paints a scenario where Obasanjo (referred to as Baba in the joke) received a mini budget from the serving Minister of Internal Affairs. In the budget, the minister had slammed a huge sum of ten million naira (₦10,000,000) for the erection of Obasanjo's effigy at the entrance to Aso Villa. At the mere sight of the huge amount, Obasanjo insisted that the money be given to him so he can permanently stand in as the monument since he already looks like one.

The drift of the joke above is that most Nigerian public office holders get excited in squandering public funds on such trivial concerns as mounting effigies of their political godfathers in a bid to curry favour at the expense of providing basic amenities for the suffering masses. In a parallel vein, some of his jokes tongue-lash the common masses for exhibiting varieties of awkward social behaviour all in a bid to sustain their livelihood. He also frowns at the high level of lawlessness and indiscipline amongst working class Nigerians. In one of his jokes, he ridicules the average Nigerian worker's attitude to work as characterized by late coming, thus:

This is the problem with all of you Nigerians. You are here past ten, you are sitting here with your bosses, you can get to work for ten tomorrow. That was how one guy got to work late. The oga was waiting for him two hours... three hours, wey Suleiman... twenty minutes later Suleiman steps in at about 9:45. The oga asks him (*Mimicks in Hausa accent*), where have you been (*Suleiman responds still in Hausa accent*). I was with Mohammed (*The boss responds*). Which Mohammed?.. Go to the notice board and see... Suleiman gets to the notice board and discovers that Mohammed had died four days ago and has been

buried according to Muslim law. From the notice board he sacked himself. He didn't come back (*AY Live* Vol.1)

The joke presented above speaks volumes of the nonchalant attitude of most Nigerians towards their jobs. Using his Warri background as reference, Ali Baba is interested in depicting the rapid growth of moral degeneracy, corruption, tribal sentiment, favouritism, religious cleavage and other anti-social mannerisms in the Nigeria society. Ali Baba's jokes also border on the menace of environmental degradation as evident in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where he hails from. The bulk of his jokes in this regard point to the fact that a degraded environment such as we find in the Niger Delta can only produce lawless, aggressive, violent and morally depraved citizens. This is in consonance with the theory of environmental determinism as captured by Emile Zola in his dramatic style of naturalism. In one of his jokes, he portrays the alarming rate of armed robbery in the Niger Delta thus:

You know how armed robbers dey behave now... before dem dey steal property dey hide but for Warri dem go see you greet you... (*Mimicks Warri robbers*). Bros, na we wey round you up for that junction... (*Beckons on an imaginary robber mate*). Tobore come greet Oga wey you collect him wrist watch (*AY Live Concert* Vol. 1).

Other recurrent subjects in his jokes include such human eccentricities as miserliness, kleptomania, uncontrollable libido, over-suspicion, pilfering, gossip, poor health practice, amnesia, absentmindedness, abnormal dietary attitude, abuse of GSM telephony operation and the intrigues and subterfuges that characterize the average Nigerian marital experience. It suffices to state at this juncture that the sum of Ali Baba's jokes set out to take a satiric swipe at the poor standard of living of the generality of Nigerians occasioned by corruption, greed and nepotism among the ruling class.

### **Change Imperatives in Ali Baba's Jokes**

The change imperatives in the comedy of Ali Baba lie mainly in his sense of ideological commitment in his jokes. Ali Baba's jokes reel out in high satirical tonality. The satire is often directed towards the ruling class regardless of the persona's political standing. His swipe at the political chicanery and megalomania of Nigerian politicians occupy centre stage in his comedy. Ali Baba's satirical comedies came into prominence since the inception of democratic leadership in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 with President Olusegun



Obasanjo as his major comic victim. Ali Baba often puts Obasanjo in a comic situation by portraying him as an ugly person whose ugliness rubs on the nation's economy. In one of his Master of Ceremonies outing during the dinner event organized by Corporate Elites at Eko Hotel, Lagos in 2015, Ali Baba makes a mockery of Obasanjo, thus:

I have learnt that if I was doing business in Nigeria, I don't just need money or study the Nigerian economy or environment or probably where to do my business whether it will be in Lagos, Abuja, Enugu or Port Harcourt, etc. But the major thing is that I have to know the face of Nigerian President at the time I want to do my business. It is because if the president face fine the economy go dey in good shape. And if the president face wor wor (ugly) the economy go still wor wor Just imagine the state of Nigerian economy when Obasanjo be our President. (Corporate Elite Dinner)

Ali Baba's joke above serves huge satirical and critical purposes as it sets out to curry laughter by talking about Obasanjo, one of Nigerian's most influential figures, derisively. The joke also raises a critical revelation of the harsh economic realities which Obasanjo's administration bequeathed Nigerians. However mild Ali Baba's joke above may read, the message that Nigeria experienced economic woes in Obasanjo's administration's, has been aptly captured. In the joke, Ali Baba relies on the comic devices of travesty, caricature and parody to drive home the comic spirit. Sigmund Freud, the Austrian psychoanalyst advocates for the comic of situation whereby we make other people comic by putting them in situations in which a person becomes comic as a result of human dependence on external factors, particularly on social factors, without regard to the personal characteristics of the individual concerned (835). He also identifies mimicry, caricature, parody and travesty as fresh sources of comic pleasure since they are often directed against people and objects which lay claim to authority and respect.

Another striking feature in Ali Baba's comedy is his high sense of dynamism. He is often abreast of trending political and administrative policies in Nigeria. Conscious of the aggressive hunt to recover looted public funds by past political office holders and public servants by the Buhari led administration, Ali Baba crafts a joke that satirizes President Buhari's unrelenting and uncompromising position in the crusade. In 2015, Ali Baba

delivered a joke at the Ogun State Government House during the state's 40th anniversary amidst the rank and file of Nigerian politicians. According to him:

...you know before now, when I perform, especially when Mr President Obasanjo found out how much I got paid for what I perform, he was livid, and when they now ask me to come and perform for the new president, considering that he is collecting money from everybody, he said (*Mimics Buhari*) "How much do you charge?" I said anything you want to give me, Sir. (*Aside*) There is no need to tell him the amount because he will add me to that Dasuki's list (*exclaims in Yoruba*) Olorun maje o! (God forbid) ... And you know that that man has not finished confessing...he is still in the custody of EFCC, make him no go mention my name join.

In this joke, Ali Baba satirizes President Buhari's high-handedness and doggedness in his fight against corruption and resolve to recover monies looted by past Nigerian leaders. The satire in the joke derives partly from the random and aggressive approaches with which the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) under President Buhari's watch, clamped down on Dasuki, the immediate past National Security Adviser (NSA) and other perceived corrupt politicians and public servants especially from the immediate past administration of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Also satirical and consequently, comic, is the reckless abandon with which Dasuki keeps revealing indicting ordeals amongst public office holders and some chieftains of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). In spite of the comic treatment which Ali Baba infuses in the joke, it is a call for caution when dealing with public funds especially in this current administration of President Buhari that is characterized by massive hunt for public fund looters. Also ridiculous is the degrading and cowardly disposition which Ali Baba ascribes to Dasuki by referring to him as "...that man has not finished confessing...". His reference to the immediate past National Security Adviser (Dasuki) as "that man", is a deliberate attempt by Ali Baba to make a caricature of his personality given his being found guilty among the odious bracket of looters of national treasury.

The change imperatives in Ali Baba's comedy also lie in the brutal frankness with which he portrays and makes ridicule of the excesses of influential political figures in Nigeria. In this regards, he serves as the mouth-piece of the suffering and common masses whose sighs and complaints are

hitherto, silent. He is often sceptical of Nigerian political leaders and their inability to live up to their campaign promises. In one of his jokes, he portrays the harsh feelings and realities confronting the Nigerian nation as well as his fears for President Buhari's ability to complete his tenure successfully, thus:

If only Buhari knew the problems of Nigeria, he would not have promised all the things he promised in the election. He said he would bring back the Chibok girls, stop Boko Haram, eradicate poverty, stop corruption and all he should have known that before President Goodluck Jonathan called him on phone immediately he lost his election to him, he should have known that Nigeria's problem is bigger than promises...that was why Goodluck ran away immediately after the election (*Basket Mouth Uncensored*, Vol.11)

The joke above commands high pessimistic undertone since it portrays the Nigerian state in some form of socio-political and socio-economic quagmire such that no one leader can salvage not even President Buhari amidst his lofty campaign promises. The joke also puts some form of question mark on the immediate past administration of Goodluck Jonathan. The joke portrays Goodluck Jonathan as a coward who is eager to relinquish the leadership of the country because he is overwhelmed by biting and excruciating socio-political and socio-economic forces. In this joke, Goodluck Jonathan and President Buhari are put in comic situations by ascribing to them qualities of being lily-livered (Goodluck Jonathan) and ignorant of political leadership (Buhari).

Ali Baba's jokes do not spare human frailties and eccentricities regardless of the personality of the persona. In this regards, he crafts a joke that the double-pronged in his satire of traditional rulers and police in one stretch of joke. The persona in the joke is the personality of the Oba of Lagos. In the joke, he recounts, thus:

We were in a flight once and em...the Oba of Lagos was on the flight too and we went into a serious covalence, in fact we had to divert to Ghana and we were leaving Lagos and as the plane was going like this and like that, I turned to the Oba of Lagos and said "Kabiyesi" (*greetings for a King in Yoruba*) He said (*mimics Oba of Lagos*) "keep quiet, kabiyesi wo? Plane is not landing and you are doing Kabiyesi" I said, ah, kabiyei egbadura (*Oba of Lagos cuts*

*in more harshly this time*) What is your own? Kabiyesi is on the ground not on the air, let's land first, ah!. And em...kabiyeis is someone that em... he is my friend, so most of the time, when he sees me at events, he keeps asking me Ali come and visit me, Ali come and visit me, but the problem for me to visit the kabiyesi is that em...when you go you give him something when he comes to your own house you give him something and to make it worse, the Oba is a retired policeman ...so that one self you don't really need to see him, anywhere he sees you, he collects...(Pan Atlantic University Gala Night)

The joke above mimics man's fears and cowardly dispositions in the face of danger regardless of one's social status. This is evident in the response of the Oba of Lagos to Ali Baba's greetings in the plane during a turbulence. The scenario portrayed in the joke is a manifestation of the Machiavellian position that man is cowardly in the face of danger. Oba of Lagos is put in a comic situation whereby he denies his exalted royal position contending that he is a king only on land and not on air. The joke also takes a satirical swipe at the Nigerian Police Force who are often in the habit of collecting tips from innocent citizens. The joke presupposes that a typical Nigerian police officer is in the habit of exploiting the innocent citizens entrusted in their care.

The jokes presented so far are largely satiric in tonality and content. They ridicule the excesses of the different tiers of leadership in Nigeria. In this sense, Ali Baba serves as an ideal social activist and political watchdog of the Nigerian society. The jokes portray Nigeria as a country where there is incessant inconsistencies and dislocations in the body politic which have in turn, occasioned functional malapropism and socio-economic stagnation. The change imperatives in these jokes are drawn mainly from the satirical treatment which Ali Baba has injected into them since satire, characteristically, lampoons and ridicules in order to bring about social change.

## **Conclusion**

The idea which this paper has put across is that Nigerian stand-up comedy transcends making us to laugh and goes as far as serving as critical commentary on the anomalies and chicanery that characterize the Nigerian political landscape. The study has also brandished Ali Baba as a political satirist whose jokes lampoon and ridicule eccentric dispositions and social

excesses of societal and influential figures in Nigeria. It has also been established in the study that one of the reasons why Ali Baba gets away with it even after making parody of those in power is because of the humorous tonality with which his jokes are delivered.

As a consequence of the above, the need arises for stand-up comedy to be given visibility in the nation's secondary and tertiary educational curricula. This would, in no small measure, help to improve the standard of stand-up comedy in theory and practice. There is also the need for governmental intervention which should come by way of creating the enabling environment for live theatre culture in Nigeria to thrive. This includes addressing thorny issues that engender insecurity in the society. It is common knowledge that theatre practice cannot flourish in an environment or society that there is breach in security operations. It cannot be over emphasized that there is the need for the formation of a formidable guild of stand-up comedians' in Nigeria.

Another peculiar point to note is that the emergence of stand-up comedy as a vibrant means of entertainment in Nigeria has occasioned a major boost for live theatre culture in Nigeria. Since its inception as an emergent popular culture, it has continued to serve one social purpose or the other. However, the most paramount advantage of stand-up comedy in Nigeria is the economic advantage since it is partly responsible for the livelihood of a generous number of youths who would have hitherto, resorted to such criminal past times as kidnapping, armed robbery, bunkering, obtaining by tricks and cyber fraud among others. In terms of its relevance to the change mantra, it becomes imperative to observe that satiric content in the jokes of Ali Baba and his contemporaries create some form of social consciousness among the citizenry by drawing their attention to the excesses in Nigeria's body politic. This underscores Barzun's submission that the inherent danger in arts as a medium for the expression of man's intuitive feelings and experiences goes beyond its potency to dignify and exalt a civilization or political system for, arts could weaken or destroy it. It could also precipitate a revolution or betray a struggle by the way citizens are sensitized and tuned. (qtd. in Adeniran 21).

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# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND TFD PRACTICE IN NIGERIA: THE UNANDU AND KETTI EXPERIENCE

Cynthia Chinenyenwa Nwabueze  
University of Nigeria Nsukka

## **Abstract**

*The purpose of Theatre for Development (TfD) is to communicate effectively to bring about a change occasioned by the awareness on the part of the community of a 'need' and facilitated by theatre workers. For centuries, communication was described as the process through which information (data, message) that could be in a spoken or written form and sent through larynx, telephone or computer (channel) to a computer, robot or human being (receiver) who is expected to decode (understand, transcribe) and encode (give a feedback) which again could be written, spoken, a sign or silence and the whole process begins again. Basically, this form of communication assumes that the sender is literate and knowledgeable and the receiver is illiterate or completely ignorant. Thus, it is termed authoritative in nature and in most cases not ideal for an educative process or a development work. However, the democratic nature of TFD seeks to use the resources within the theatre framework to achieve an aim; which could be behavioural or developmental and to actualize this through active participation by the community in the play making process. This paper analyses two TFD projects carried out in two Communities: Unandu (Igbo- Etiti LGA) and Ketti (Kabusa Ward, AMAC) with a view to measuring the failure or success of the communication process used in data collection.*

## **Introduction**

The popular dictum "Man cannot live in isolation" has made it mandatory that life is communal. Invariably, we share our beliefs, infrastructure, pains even disasters and this sharing has brought man closer to each other. Apparently, communication is the salient tool utilized by man to adapt and familiarize with the unfamiliar environment he finds himself. Prior to what we understand today as modern communication methods that is; information technology, man had effectively devised a method of passing information to one another through visual and/ or symbolic codes. These information processes were necessary to understand the various happenings in his environment and to live peaceably with other humans. Early communication tools include the fire, leaf

branches, sounds for example drums, flutes and many more according to the traditions of the people. In life, there is no human endeavour that is devoid of communication even silence is an act of communicating that the individual wants to be left alone or is in agreement with situation.

Communication is a process where an individual or a group of people with some common tie exchange ideas that are useful to a particular cause using similar codes to encode and decode messages. For a message to be effective, the sender needs to construct his information in the most suitable way the receiver can understand. An example is a numeric input in the computer system where information is converted to binary for the computer to understand and encode (send) its reply. The situation is same with humans thus, problems begin when messages are not well structured in the acceptable mode and the receiver does not understand the message. Therefore, for a communication to be termed effective it must be sent in a manner that it does not get muddled up before getting to the receiver. To ensure this, the sender must guard the communication process. In this light, Mbachaga acknowledges the importance of effective communication when he agrees that “Meaningful communication involves getting information out to a particular audience, listening to their feedback, and responding appropriately” (75). Another characteristic of communication process is multiplicity and the top-down approach of the supposed knowledgeable to the ignorant or from a leader to a follower. Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal have kicked against this approach in their books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Theatre of the Oppressed* respectively. These Latin Americans opposed the use of the communication system which tends to be non-inclusive and propose a system that is more concerned with the process and context of the dissemination of information than message itself. For they believed that the channel through which information is passed is as important as the information itself for if a message is not properly understood, the reply would be a direct opposite of its intention. In Theatre for Development the sender-receiver role is exchanged intermittently as more importance is attached to reawakening the people to their responsibilities to their land, themselves and the governments’ responsibilities towards them. What TFD engages in is purposive communication; to initiate a change or inform using theatrical idioms found in the community for effective communication and participation.

This didactic property of theatre has over the years been employed by developmental studies scholars like Augusto Boal and Paulo Friere using it as a tool for solving societal problems. With successful experiment of ‘theatre for development’ cited in several countries like America, Zambia, Kenya



etcetera, Nigerian theatre practitioners adopted this theatre as a tool to ameliorate the society of her ills, instigating a change of the situation. It is also important to note that we are currently experiencing a downward slope in our economy; this has its resultant effect in every sector and institutions of the society. Although over the years the Nigerian GDP has increased, its effect has not shown on her masses. This brings us to the question, does an increase in GDP account for development? Experience has shown that development starts with individuals not goods or infrastructure. Development as it is known starts with a change of attitude, in time and resource management and this change is what TFD sets out to achieve. For it is believed that a behavioural change could lead to increased productivity and at the latter stages infrastructural development.

In the past, there have been attempts by Nigerian theatre artists to use theatre in their fight to liberate the masses from bad government policies with the plays: *Strike and Hunger* and *Bread and Bullet* Hubert Ogunde ridiculed colonialism with all its 'whims and caprices' creating an awareness in the people of the failure of the government but with little suggestion for saving the situation. Thus, TFD in Nigeria arose after the serving theatre structure could not fit into the development needs of the country. Although a borrowed form of theatre, it offers an opportunity for the community to express their fears, pain, aspirations and successes as a people using their own cultural indices such as: dance, songs/music and drama. Hagher notes "for a long time the Universities in Nigeria made no effort to de-colonize, or in the words of Amilcar Cabral "re-Africanize" their theatre. They based their models on western theatre traditions, and sought to elevate their ethnic cultures to international significance and relevance on the theoretical plane" (15). These westernized theatres help in enforcing an image which is not African and the people cannot relate to. For communication to be termed 'effective' all participants must view the information from the same plane which means that messages must be coded in a way that every participant would understand and translate into action.

The process for information gathering is as important as the information gathered so TFD emphasizes on her methodology and Hagher again lists the five stages of a comprehensive TFD process to include: Goal identification, identification of theatrical idiom, theatrical induction, rehearsal and performance with a follow-up necessary to ascertain the success of the project. Thus, this paper uses two TFD projects to discuss the success or failure of the communication process.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The colonialist introduction of drama in Nigeria was borne out of two purposes: to inculcate western ideas into a people of barbaric culture and to pass on government policies to a half literate colony. The fallout of this is that Nigerian early dramatists were thought to disregard any cultural practice as theatre or at best mould it into the acceptable western forms. However, as Ugwu states, if theatre is “the art of people acting out and giving witness to their experiences, concerns and feelings as argued by Cohen, then to deny traditional African performance its rightful place as theatre, would invariably imply denying both the African people and her culture any experience, concern and feelings” (1). Therefore, for communication to be effective it must be tailored to match the particular context of the “Nigerian experience” and carried out in the Nigerian way if indeed the message is meant for the Nigerian people.

The act of communicating itself is carried out for a purpose and theatre for development as the name implies is aimed at sensitizing people on the need to participate actively in the development of their environment. Therefore, the form of communication must emanate from the particular project at hand and by the people who are involved as facilitators and co-participants as the roles are exchanged during the process.

The essence of effective communication in TFD is captured in the words of Paulo Friere when he proclaims that “effective dialogue must lead to action” and that the quest knowledge/awareness is not sufficient enough for TFD project but knowledge which stimulates action is the crux for this paper analyses. The foundation on which effective communication should bring forth is active participation and its fall out; ownership of the project. Active participation or participatory communication as defined by Nair and White as quoted in Gana is “a two-way process of dialogue between individuals or group, thriving on the principles of information sharing towards reaching common understanding. These two-way process are not like Harold Lasswell’s model for communication but a continuous exchange of roles between the TFD workers and the people as co-workers of a particular project. Corroborating this idea, Dandaura states that:

The familiarity with the medium and content during playmaking makes participation of people possible in developmental efforts and because indigenous knowledge systems are easily handled by the people, they engender discussion and communication among them, and make them retain control over the media; ideas, decisions and solutions arrived at in the process of their own

development. When indigenous knowledge is ignored, the result of a development effort may be woeful. (17)

Thus, it can be derived from the above that when TFD is carried out without an active participation by the people it does not achieve its desired goal. To sensitize and awaken the consciousness of the people of a particular society as regards their immediate problems, TFD utilizes their local idioms, songs, language, and belief system to create a scenario which will be enacted by the people themselves, thus making them ‘spect-actors’ as they enact this reality and at the same time watch it. As espoused by Kidd and Etherton as quoted in Mda “It is only by living and creating with the community that a genuine theatre language evolves although, this new theatre continues to use the same age-old proverbs and dances, these forms are not imposed on the people by outside forces who think that is how African theatre should be. Rather, the people themselves decide to use cultural forms they have at their disposal” (10). Furthermore, participatory communication is very vital in TFD, because with that the society will not be able find the performance appealing to their reality. Therefore, communication media used in TFD performance should be designed in such a way that the community will be able to see their reality unfolding through drama in their full glare, thus spurring them to participate.

The expected fall out of effective communication in TFD is “action” which can be seen as a deliberate attempt by the people to change the status-quo not demonstrations or war but by submitting themselves to the development of their environment. This step is programmed by a continuous follow up by the TFD workers in the community to ensure that the agreement reached by the pair: TFD workers and the people are carried out. The major setback of TFD projects in Nigeria is follow- up; a beautiful project is carried out in an environment and development strategies are mapped out and there is no one to supervise or ensure that they are achieved. However, the process follow-up is financially involving and as most TFD projects are carried out by theatre students with little sponsor by the university, follow-up has been elusive therefore remaining on the paper.

### **Theatre for Development: The Unandu Experience**

University of Nigeria, Nsukka observes TFD as part of the Theatre Arts curriculum. The course is meant to introduce the students to the use of the theatre as a tool for development. It was in this light that the 2015/2016 community theatre program took students and staff to the Unandu: a community in Igbo- Eze local government area of Enugu state in Nigeria. The project lasted for a week and the facilitators camped there for a week. The

problems identified in the community were drug abuse, cultism and poor attitude towards the health centre and school. From information gathered, the Unandu youths were violent and an affront with them which signalled riffle pump actions. There have been recorded cases of disagreements between Unandu and her neighbouring Ichi community and during elections where pump action rifles were displayed by the youths. Although, the major issue found in the community was that of violence and cultism so for security reasons, the TFD facilitators had to act with tact; choosing the less challenging vice which is the insufficient use of the primary health care centre and education.

### **Methodology**

For any TFD project to be successfully executed, the host community must accept the facilitators whole heartedly. This is basically done by visiting the community leaders or the king if they have one. Therefore, at the beginning of the project a courtesy call was paid to the Eze (king) and council members to familiarize with them to garner support for the project. This was the first thing executed by the facilitators.

### **Data Collection**

The homestead approach was used for gathering data on the Unandu community is the homestead approach. According to Hagher, the homestead approach “involves resource personnel staying with villagers as guests; sharing their experiences, eating and dialoguing with them” (32). He explains that “the brief sojourn enables the people accept facilitators as the one who has come to solve their problems and enable resource personnel an opportunity to match theory with practice” (32). The facilitators in the Unandu project were camped at the Primary Health Care Centre in the community for a week and armed security was provided by the youths and vigilante of the community. Unfortunately, the Health Centre is at the extreme of community so, each day the facilitators moved into the villages for interaction and data collection after which they come back for group meetings, documentation and analysis of data.

### **Day 1**

Arrival: The first day marked the arrival of the facilitators and they were heartily received by the youth leaders and community elders.

### **Day 2**

The facilitators divided themselves into groups, thus, going from one village to another collating data. Thus the plenary session commenced, they discussed with the community and they noted the data collected. The data gathered during the need assessment exercise indicated the following problems:

1. Inaccessible roads
2. Poor educations for indigenes
3. Poor health infrastructures
4. Drug abuse
5. Cultism

Moreover, the facilitator's encountered some challenges while interacting with the villagers and during the process of data collation. This was as a result of some certain factors, which all centre on poor communication etiquette and security reasons.

1. Dressing: being a remote community, the facilitators were too flamboyant in their dressing, thus this debarred them from getting adequate information because the villagers looked inferior to the facilitators, they thus deemed it fit not to pay attention to them
2. Accent/Language: some of the facilitators did not take into cognizance the importance of dialect as an apt tool for communication in TFD. Thus this also affected their interaction with the villagers who became disinterested in the process.
3. Women were restricted: Women in the community were restricted from speaking and this posed a great challenge to data collection.
4. Security: the facilitators aware of the security challenges in the community were cautioned not to probe too hard to get information so as not to risk an affront with the people. Therefore, questions were simply ignored and places avoided.

### **Day 3**

Rehearsal began with the given scenario

#### **The Scenario**

After data collection, the facilitators analysed them and selected a four-man team to create a scenario for the project. It consisted of simple plot with three movement or actions:

The first movement captures a woman who picks palm nuts, then her only son saunters in from school earlier than the normal time upon interrogation he reveals that most of the teachers are not in school and the ones available are not even teaching. As he speaks, his pregnant sister starts

crying; because her boyfriend jilts her. Her mother then beckons on her to assist in picking the nut, she refuses saying that her waist is paining her. Her mother suggests that she should go to the village native doctor Uju for check-up, but she refuses and insists that she prefers the primary health centre. Action shifts to the palace of the king and his chiefs, who deliberates on a government proposal which centres on the development of the society. One of the elders suggests that they embezzle the money while others insist that the money must be spent on development projects. The last shows the pregnant girl groaning in pains as people rush her to the health centre but faces the challenges of getting her there in good time. The play stops and questions are asked.

### **Theatre for Development: The Ketti Experience**

The Ketti community is located in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) in Kabusa Ward, a town not far from the metropolis yet the difference in her level of development was gaping. The researcher participated as a student-researcher in a TFD project in the community in 2008 and went back in 2011 as a follow up to the previous project. During the course of the initial TFD project, the following problems were cited: inaccessible road, lack of electricity (no electric poles in sight), poor hygiene, indifference to the primary health care centre, poor accommodation for health workers, communal clash and power tussle. However, the project was narrowed down to health issue so as to attract the attention of the National Primary Health Care and Development Agency.

Basically, the TFD project was to stimulate a desire for proper hygiene and a shift to modern health practices as the people particularly pregnant women and children were dying from patronizing traditional medicines. The project was carried out in six months Nov- May 2012.

### **Methodology**

As noted above, the project was done in two phases within the space of three years. The first phase was handled as a student-researcher and the second phase as a National Youth Corp member. Therefore, because of the gap in years there were two initial visits to both the chairman of the local government (which had changed in 2011) and the King (recognized) and his council chiefs and community leaders. These visits enabled the team to relate with the community, ask questions and take pictures.

## **Data Collection**

There were three approaches used for the collection of data; the homestead approach, the official and the interview. As stated above, as student facilitators in 2008, we were camped at the community primary school for a week as we interacted with the people: helping them at their farms, streams and cleaning the environment. However, for this paper the approach to be mentioned is that which was applied by the facilitators as a build up to the data already collected. Due to lack of accommodation problems, time constraints and the fact that facilitators were workers who volunteered a part of their time to engage in the TFD, the official eye and interview method were considered best. A major factor influencing the decision was that members of the team were health workers in National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA); the parent organization in charge of health in Nigeria. So, information on the health challenges was taken from the official records and from community leaders. However, it was found that information given by the community leaders was either wrong or misleading and the team had to ascertain correct information from their body language.

### **Day 1**

On this day, the community was educated on the matters concerning hygiene, family planning and nutrition by the NPHCDA staff and members were given the opportunity to ask questions which were jotted down to be addressed by the Ward Development Committee (WDC) that would be a fall out from the TFD process.

### **Day 2**

Twenty members were elected from the nine wards of the community and they were formally inaugurated as WDC members to oversee to the care of the community and to act as a mediator between the community and the government. These WDC members were made up of semi-literates and so needed to be trained on how to carry out their functions. Consequently, a two-day WDC Planning Learning and Action (PLA) were organized for them.

### **Day 3**

PLA began with each participant grouped in fours sitting together on a round table. Collectively they were asked to draw a map of the community indicating important buildings and landmarks. After the exercise, members went for a “health walk” to confirm the landmarks highlighted in the map and to effect corrections if need be. During the walk, one could see human excreta

littered and indiscriminate dumping of refuse along the pathway leading to the stream (a significant source of water for the community). This information was useful in helping members couch the scenario play. After the walk, WDC members and TFD members returns to the PHC to couch a scenario that aptly described the situation of the community.

### **Play Scenario**

From the data collected, the facilitators were able to couch a play bordering on the health issues in Ketti. The scenario built was as follows:

A man and his two wives are seen discussing when his son runs in to inform them that a snake has bitten his daughter when as she went to defecate at the back of the house. There is confusion as everybody runs out of the scene to help the girl. Meanwhile, they take her to the PHC and are told to pay a token fee for the hospital card while all other expenses would be taken care of by the hospital. The man refuses and takes his child to the village doctor who assures them that she would be fine after taking his concoction. Then an argument ensues amongst the people on which option that of the traditional medicine or the modern. Along the line, the situation of the PHC is discussed

### **Challenges**

1. Tradition: Women are not allowed to speak about community affairs to strangers especially the male folk. Thus, getting information from them to achieve a balanced report required obtaining permission from their husbands.
2. Language Barrier: None of the development workers could understand the native language (Gbagyi) of the people so a community member was co-opted to act as an interpreter/translator and this made the whole process cumbersome
3. Politics: The internal politics of the people (the tussle for kingship) also played a major role in delaying the whole process as the people did not want to pitch tent with either of them.

### **Achievements**

1. The project was able to bridge the hostility between the health workers and the community members by inaugurating and training a Ward Health Development Committee (WDC) members who pledge to encourage health workers by providing accommodation for them with the



community as the National Primary Health Development Agency sent two Midwives to aid in Maternal and Child Health.

2. During the course of the project, mosquito nets and some hospital equipment were donated to the centre.
3. The community members agreed to pool resources together to help the health centre grow in her medical services.

### **Conclusion**

From the above experiences, it should be noted that for TFD to succeed facilitators must encourage participation in the communication process. The facilitators of the Unandu experience were afraid to associate and interact freely with the community members due to their history of violence thereby hampering the effect of creating their 'reality' together with the facilitators and this is the stage where the conscious awakening in the people is formed. In the Ketti experience, the long gaps in the projects hindered the communication process as facilitators had to work with new faces and data which were either lost or obsolete.

### **Recommendation**

TFD should be structured as a two-semester practical course in the University curriculum. The first semester should be used for data collection process and performance while the second semester should be used as a follow-up of the first as against the practice today where two different projects are used for each semester.

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## Appendices

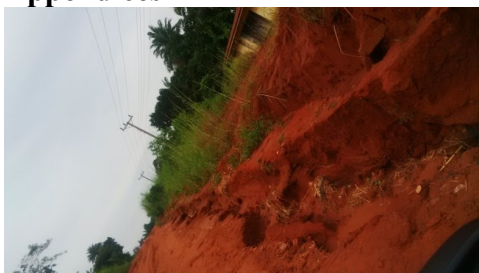


Fig. 1 Bad road leading to Unandu



Fig. 2 Play Performance in Unandu



Fig.3 WDC participants in Map in Ketti

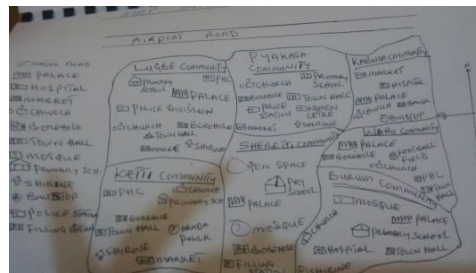


Fig. 4 A Map of the Communities in Kabusa



Fig 5 A Health Walk by Participants in Ketti

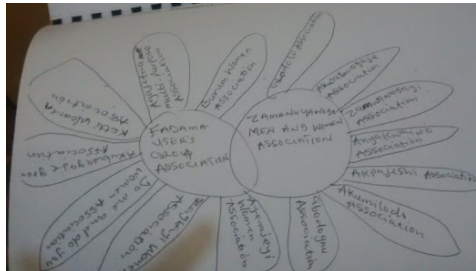


Fig 6: An Organisational Map of Kabusa

# COMMUNICATING EMPATHY FOR CHANGE: A KINESICS ASSESMENT OF OJO BAKARE'S "THE VOYAGE"

**Tosin Kooshima Tume**  
Federal University, Oye-Ekiti

## **Abstract**

*The primary aim of any theatrical endeavour is to effectively communicate. Kinesics is a non-verbal communication concept which deals with the usage of body movements and gestures for message dissemination. Kinaesthetic empathy is a kinesics theory which explores the uncanny ability of making members of audience experience related feelings, and interpret the message being communicated through movements in a performance. "The Voyage", created and directed by Ojo Rasaki Bakare is an improvisational total theatre which documents the socio-political journey of Nigeria as a nation, using the tripartite performative mediums of music, dance and drama for communication. This paper interrogates the various levels of the Nigerian socio-political change identified through the modes of kinesic communication within the play. Through unstructured interviews conducted on randomly selected members of the audience, this paper establishes the diverse levels of kinaesthetic empathy registered through the audience response to the performance. The paper also examines the instructional, emotional and aesthetic values of movements employed in "The Voyage" performance, to prescribe effective change management in Nigerian governance. The study identifies the elements of kinesic communication such as dance, mime, gestures and dramatic movements, as extremely useful in disseminating the message of the play and engineering audience empathy towards the management of the change mantra, as regards the Nigerian political scene. The study recommends more concerted efforts at employing kinesics for effective communication in theatrical performances.*

## **Introduction**

Communication is both a conscious and unconscious activity which is vital to human existence and survival. It involves a process during which information is shared, received, understood and acted upon. It is also an act or art which depends on a response to stimuli, usually aimed at influencing opinions, decisions, and taste of the recipient(s). The concept of communication is derived from the Greek word 'communis' or 'communicare' which literally

connotes 'to make common'. This, perhaps, is why Alexander Gode's definition of communication is that it is "a process that makes common to two or several, what was the monopoly of one or some" (2). Communication as a concept has been in existence since the creation of man. The traditional means of communication which is primal and as old as time, is seemingly indestructible.

The traditional channels of communication are broadly classified into two, namely: the verbal and non-verbal modes. The verbal modes include spoken language, song, storytelling, chant and incantation, and special illusion while Ibagere defines the non-verbal mode of communication as "all such modes which make use of any device other than the spoken word" (1). Ibagere further notes that non-verbal mode consists of, body language, symbology, and dance (2). As a non-verbal communication channel, body language involves gestures and other signs made with any part of the body which are used to disseminate diverse messages. Symbology however, does not make use of any part of the human body in terms of gestures, instead it entails the use of objects which are deliberately placed in certain ways to convey certain meanings. Symbology could also be achieved via costumes, space, make-up, tattoo, extra-mundane communication, and visual signs. Dance on the other hand is the movement of the body to rhythm, making use of space and time in order to communicate.

In every society, communication serves multiple functions such as; information, socialisation, motivation, education, entertainment, cultural promotion, debate, discussion, and integration. As postulated by Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, the three essential properties in communication process are; a speaker, a message, and a listener (qtd. in Ruben 5). It is important to note that a 'speaker' does not necessarily have to 'speak' the message, the 'speaker' is at liberty to communicate through other means, such as the body, or through other non-verbal communication modes. The spoken word is not a necessity in communication, other devices can be used. The most important thing is for the message to be passed across and decoded accordingly. Having established the fact that communication is not restricted to the verbal form alone, the basic elements of communication can be said to be message, source, and receiver. A complete cycle of communication occurs when a message is generated from a source, and transmitted through a medium to a receiver, who in turn interprets the message and gives feedback accordingly. However, the cycle of communication is considered to be completely successful only if the information is received with the intended meanings, or if it is reacted to or acted upon as expected. This insinuates that the cycle of communication is

incomplete if the information shared fails to reach the intended recipient, or if the recipient fails to understand the information.

Research indicates that the preferred communication styles are “visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic” (Cattelan, par. 5). In the visual communication style, message is transmitted by sight and people learn by what they see, while in the auditory style, information is disseminated verbally, and people learn by listening. On the other hand, the kinaesthetic style of communication involves a hands-on experience where people learn through other people’s actions and movements. As a communication style, kinesics is a nonverbal code system which embraces a wide range of bodily language elements. The key submissions from Kinesics theorist, Ray Birdwhistell, are that:

1. All body movements have meaning potential in communicative contexts.
2. Behaviour can be analysed because of patterns and repetitions.
3. Although body action has biological limits, the use of body in motion for interaction is part of the social system.
4. People’s visual bodily actions can influence others.
5. A person’s use of bodily activity will have unique, idiosyncratic aspects while also being part of a larger social system shared with others. (3)

Basically, kinesics is concerned with the way movements communicate emotions and aspirations, and how such communication can influence the receiver of the message.

The aim of this paper therefore, is to study “The Voyage” as performed by the staff and students of the Theatre and Media Arts Department of Federal University Oye-Ekiti, as the departmental production for the 2015/2016 academic session. The paper will analyse the dance, mimetic actions, and dramatic movements which serve as key kinesics communication modes in the production. Using the content and discourse techniques for analysis, the paper also examines the ways in which the identified movements are instrumental in engineering audience empathy to the themes and message of the play. To this effect, this paper applies the qualitative audience research methods, by conducting semi-structured interviews on randomly picked but relatively small number of members of the audience in order to assess their understanding of the theatrical experience and response to the kinaesthetic elements in the performance. The interviews elicit instantaneous verbal responses from the respondents, concerning the meanings and messages they deduced from the mime, dance and other movement components of the performance.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

“The Voyage” written by Ojo Rasaki Bakare, is an improvisational play which documents the socio-political journey of Nigeria as a nation, using the tripartite performing art mediums of music, dance, and drama for message dissemination. The play which aptly highlights the various milestones in the Nigerian political journey has been hailed by theatre critics as either a dance – theatre, total theatre, or dance-drama. There are several conflicting perceptions as to what a dance - drama, dance theatre or a total theatre performance is or should be. Many belong to the school of thought that the three genres differ from one another, while some opine that the three of them are one and same. A close observation however, reveals that the elements of the play in performance, conforms to the set tenets and structure of total theatre, putting to judicious use dialogue, songs, music, chants, dance, mimes, dramatic movements, and other theatrical embellishments. However, the play relies heavily on kinesics modes of communication, and the use of dialogue in the play is reduced to the barest minimum. This paper focuses on the kinesics modes of communication in the play and their effect on the audience.

Since the inception of man, the human body has always been employed as a unique, expressive, and vital channel of communication. For this reason, gestures, dance, and other body movements are considered to be imbued with values and meanings. So also, movements in theatrical endeavours are expressive of the specific feelings and emotions of the creator, and the mode through which kinesics elements engage the audience is known as kinaesthetic empathy. Kinaesthetics is a coinage of the two Greek words ‘kin’ and ‘esthesia’. The word ‘kin’ means ‘to move’ or, ‘to set in motion’, while ‘esthesia’ refers to ‘perception’, ‘sensitivity’, or ‘feeling’. Also, the word ‘empathy’ is an Anglophone version of the Greek word ‘empathia’ which means ‘physical affection’ or ‘passion’. Empathy basically refers to the capacity to share and understand the feelings of another, or the ability to mentally place oneself in the other’s position. Therefore, it is within reason to project that kinaesthetic empathy is the receptiveness of the audience while watching kinesics elements in a performance, or the way viewers respond directly to the art of movements.

Kinaesthetic empathy is the ability of the viewers of a performance to feel psychologically connected to the movements being exhibited by the performer(s). There are several arguments to buttress the fact that “kinaesthesia (sensation of movement and position) is central to audience consciousness or spectator response”, and that “audiences can experience

physical and imaginative effects of movements” in performance (watchingdance.org). John Hartley opines that “the semiotics of movement, especially human movement and gesture, (either) movement both of the body and by locomotion, is not merely functional of but is also coded, meaningful and communicative”. He also states that “walking is highly communicative, bringing posture, speed, directions etc. to bear meaning” (152). Theodor Lipps (1851-1914) who is very articulate in his shift from sympathy to empathy which is captured in the *Einfühlung* theory asserts thus:

There are three areas of knowledge. I know of things, of myself, and of other egos. The sources of these three are: 1) of things: perception, 2) of myself: Inner perception, 3) of others: empathy (*Einfühlung*)... empathy, as the knowledge of other selves, is the result/combination of two tendencies. One is the instinct, or instinctive impulse, of the expression of life. The other is the instinct of imitation... I imitate others' expression which arouses a similar experience in me, resulting in an understanding, which I project back into the other... Imitation of expression plus projection into the other results in to the identification with the other. (qtd. in Burns 3)

Lipps' theory extends art from mere visual illusions to interpersonal understanding. He argues that when observing a body in motion, such as an acrobat, spectators could experience an 'inner mimesis', where they feel as if they were enacting the actions they were observing (qtd. in Burns 4). Kinaesthetic empathy ignites audience consciousness and response to movements in performance. It also makes audience to imagine and even experience physical effects of movement being watched.

Dance which is a stylized form of movement which entertains as well as informs. It has proved to be a vital performing art, and a catalyst for social engineering. While John Hartley asserts that “dance is the aestheticisation of kinetic codes” (152), Ufford-Azorbo stresses that “as a vehicle of interaction, dance employs the use of non-verbal bodily language to communicate” (14). The foregoing postulations make us dissent with Nadel's contention that, “dance is not a substance that can be felt, lifted, or weighed” (1). While dance may be incapable of being lifted or weighed as a matter, dance can be perceived, sensed, and felt, and this in fact, is the very essence of the concept of kinaesthetics. Speaking on the kinaesthetic energy in movements, Ufford-Azorbo states that “movements which are abstracted from everyday use and

transformed into an artistic product such as dance, send felt meanings to the audience who join in the day to day experience of movement. As such, the audience identify with messages sent across through movement in the artistic world” (19).

To corroborate Ufford-Azorbo’s statement, Burt explains the relationship between movements and dance thus:

Movement is therefore reiterated as the life force and essence of dance. The spectator empathises with the kinaesthetic response to movement exhibited by the dancers. This is a physical response, which creates images, ideas or feelings in the mind of the spectator to confirm the enactment of communication. To the modernists, dance is an abstract pure form capable of expressing itself. (44)

Dance is a global language with its own valid vocabulary. However, its manifestations may vary according to the dictates of climes and socio-cultural contexts. Metheny expresses that:

The vocabulary of dance includes the simple every day functional movement. Dance language authenticates emotions, aspirations and goals of a people while reconciling man and his society. It functions in religion, politics, occupation, and the entire sociological framework. So dance is a nonverbal symbolic form of communication, a perceptual form which incorporates all the senses while the movement is being performed. (49)

When prodded about thoughts on viewers’ kinaesthetic response to her dance works in, London-based choreographer Adesola Akinleye who is an artist-scholar, explains thus:

The person watching dance does none of the physical work themselves but in perceiving the performance, they experience the rhythm of it as though it were in their own body. When attention is brought to the line and curves of the physical environment through choreography, the audience starts to experience a building with the same sense of movement that they see in dance. I see choreography working in such a way that the audience becomes aware of their own feeling of the aesthetic of the



body in space. I aim for my work to continue to be alive within the space when the dancing bodies have finished; for the dance to have left a trace. (21)

Akinleye's comments demonstrate that the role of kinaesthetic response to dance spectatorship is key because reactions are activated by the movements in performance. Admittedly, these responses enrich the cultural experience and the quality of lives of the viewers. They serve as mirror systems which assess the capacity of emotional perception in audience, exploring the meanings which the spectators attach to specific movements in a performance. However, audience response to performance could vary due to the different social contexts, lived experiences and education of the viewers.

Kinesics has been identified as one of the psychological approaches to non-verbal and interpersonal communication (Birdwhistell 7). Research efforts in the ways which audience appreciate, perceive and experience movements, have linked dance and other form of stylized movements in performance, with the sciences. In fact, recent studies in neuroscience suggest that when watching a dance performance, the members of audience experience the movements neurotically, as they mentally dance along with the performers. Hagendoorn substantiates this with his claim that "when watching dance, the observer is in a sense virtually dancing along...(and) spectators can internally simulate movement sensations of speed, effort, and changing body configuration" (4). Other notable researchers in cognitive science and neuroscience, such as Barbara Montero (2006, 2012, 2013), Carroll and Seely (2013), Franko (2002) and John Martin's 1939 theory of 'metakinetic transfer', have also established that some audience members report feeling certain kinesthetic responses such as a quickening heart rate and certain tensions along with more mysterious feelings in their muscles and nervous systems while watching dance performances. John Martins is known for his argument in favour of 'metakinetic transfer' through an exploration of the connection between movements and neuroscience. He posits that "Kinaesthetic empathy is the spectator's inner mimicry, metakinesis which is a motor experience which left traces 'paths' closely associated with emotions in the neuromuscular system" (19).

A further study of psychoanalytic therapy in neuroscience reveals that the Sigmund Freud's 'Free Association' technique is used to help patients learn more about what they see, think, and feel. The goal of the technique is "to identify genuine thoughts and feelings about life situations that might be problematic yet not be self-evident". Freud reportedly "used Free Association

to help his patients discover unconscious thoughts or feelings, and they were better able to manage them or *change* problematic behaviours” (emphasis mine, qtd. in Gilles, Para. 1, 2 &3.). The Free Association technique is typically performed in a therapy setting by first having the patient get into a relaxed position, usually in dim light, after which the patient is made to reflect on situations or events. In relating this technique to kinaesthetic empathy in theatre parlance, the audience becomes the patient(s), and the theatre becomes the clinic.

While watching a performance replete with stylized movements, audience empathy is inspired by their perception of the movements of the performer(s). This psychological connection between the audience and performer could lead to the influence of change in the viewers’ attitudes and ideologies. An internal simulation of the mind enables the viewer to go beyond just detachment of mere watching a performance, and this makes the viewer to imagine himself as an active participant in the performance experience. The viewers’ perception of the movement actions in a performance could transport them from the physical to the performance world, thereby putting themselves in the shoes of the performer(s). The concept of kinaesthetic empathy is of paramount importance, because, the end goal of any theatre experience is to connect with the audience and influence a change of attitude and without empathy, this cannot be achieved. Thus, kinaesthetic empathy plays a crucial role in the audience’s reception of dance and movements in theatrical performances.

### **Synopsis of “The Voyage”**

“The Voyage” is an improvisational play created and directed by Ojo Rasaki Bakare. The play dramatizes the dream of a drunkard who rejects his wife’s pleas to come to bed. The drunken man claims that whenever he sleeps on the bare floor, he is guaranteed to have wonderful and sweet dreams. Against his wife’s pleas, he proceeds to sleep on the bare floor, and he indeed dreams. In his dream, an elderly man tells to a group of children, a moonlight tale about a land called Alaoma. The tale leads to an enactment of Alaoma’s continual stagger as a nation after being released from the shackles of the slave masters. The play x-rays the challenges of a failed state; a state situated in the ferry (ship of state), heading for the ‘promised land’, but is bedevilled by the trio monster; corruption, ethnicity, and indiscipline. As the master paddle goes from one leader to another, the ship-of-state gets stuck and troubled by the storms from the deep. At last, a Master Paddler emerges with the mantra of change, to deliver Alaoma from the siege. Initially, he tries to revive the ship

of state all by himself, and he fails. Finally, with the support of patriotic and dedicated Alaoma citizens, the ship-of-state is revived, and the people joyfully proceed on the voyage to the promise land (Production Note, par. 1).

### **Elements of Kinesthetic Communication in “The Voyage”**

As already stated, “The Voyage” production conforms to the structure of total theatre by employing a full dose of all theatrical elements in an eclectic manner. In “The Voyage” performance, several kinaesthetic elements such as mime, dance, and dramatic movements were put to use. On the ship which was constructed using human props, the various change of events and upheavals in the ship of state were communicated mostly via rhythm and movements, while the three lead singers assumed the role of narrators. This segment of the paper will highlight and discuss the points where kinaesthetic elements were deployed in the performance in their order of appearance.

**The Slave Camp:** The slave camp was used to represent the anguish which characterised the advent of the colonial masters. At the slave camp, the Alaoma citizens who had been enslaved by the colonial masters laboured, while the slave masters drove them to work harder by kicking and flogging them with cudgels. This continued until an Alaoma woman could take it no more. She stood up to the Whiteman and all the other Alaoma citizens joined her in the revolution. In the end, the Whiteman gave in to the demands of the Alaoma people, lowered the union jack, and raised the Alaoma flag painted in colours green, white, and green to signify the Nigerian independence.

In this bit, there was no spoken words or dialogue, however, the message of the song was unmistakable.

Song:

Kuyak eyen abiara, kuyak eyen abiara  
Nigeria edin dum eyen Abasi eyen amade

Transliteration:

Do not let Nigeria be destroyed  
Nigeria belongs to us all

To embellish the song, complementary and contrasting mimes and movements were employed to express the colonial masters’ dictatorship and exploitation of Nigerians. While their facial expressions depicted agony, suffering and regret, the body postures of the slaves signified oppression and despair as they succumbed to downwards gravitational pulls. Their dance motifs depicted

labour actions such as; mining, farming, sweeping, washing, and cooking among others. Using different body parts, the dance motifs were fragmented in order to change the dynamics of the labour actions. Most of these movements were of collapsed quality, and were executed on the low level to evoke the images of extreme hardship, despair, and depression. The movements were choreographed through the loose cannon device, alternating the levels while using different placements and facing. The performers however displayed an awareness of other performers within the performance space through a sensitive timing of their actions. The labour actions and the oppression of the slave masters gradually built towards the climax of an inevitable revolution.

**The Pre-colonial Era:** In the course of the play, there was a brief flashback to enact the various ways through which the Alaoma people sourced for their livelihood before the arrival of the colonial masters. This bit featured occupational dances such as fishing, hunting, and, farming. The dances were accompanied by songs.

Song:

Che minye cheminye nalo  
Chemi du kwong diyen dizin ta mini  
Che minye cheminye nalo

Transliteration:

My people let us go to the farm  
We shall plant, harvest, and feed  
My people, off we go to the farm

Song:

Ota me, Ota menemene ta mene

Transliteration:

My friend, rejoice for our net is full of fishes

The occupational dances which culminated into a harvest festival, were executed in circle and mass dance designs to signify communal unity. The townspeople danced in joyful celebration as the Alaoma traditional ruler blessed the farm produce brought as tributes, and prayed for more bountiful in subsequent years. The typical camaraderie which characterises Nigerian cultural festivals was evident in this bit. The dancers were cheered amidst ululations, while some zealous townspeople were seen awkwardly trying to copy the dance movements. After the traditional ruler's solemn speech, a tranquil ambience was created as the people paid homage on their knees in

unison, hitting their palms to the floor and their heads alternatively. Here, the cumulative cannon device for movement creation was employed, as all the performers started and finished the movements at the same time.

**The Elections:** To parody the first Nigerian election, the political contenders in the play were made to compete in a sprinting event. The referee, through dramatic actions and movements, presented for campaign and election, the three contestants representing the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria; Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. Utilising mimetic actions, the referee warned the contestants that whoever is first to touch the Green- White-Green master paddle, automatically becomes the winner and the Master Paddler. The comical but well-choreographed travel movements of the contestants depict the actual running for presidency, during which each contestant tries to outsmart the others. Eventually, the contestant costumed in Northern Nigerian apparels emerged as winner, and the people rejoice. As the play progressed, there was another election dramatizing the electoral process which produced the first democratically elected President after a long tumultuous reign of several military Master Paddlers. In their response to the rousing call to vote, the people adopted various mannerisms which typify the electorate during elections.

Song:

Everybody, yee, e dide edibo  
Stand, stand, stand up and vote oh!

Transliteration:

Everybody come on, let us vote  
Stand, stand, stand up and vote!

The electoral officer employed various popular Nigerian contemporary dance movements such as Azonto, Etighi, and Shakitibobo among others, to lampoon the rigging, multiple voting, ballot box snatching, and other shady actions which typify elections in Nigeria.

**The Civil War Era:** Through the orchestrated use of choreographed movements and variation of dance motifs, the various ethnic groups engaged one another in a fight. The organised chaos symbolises the bitter Nigerian civil war which lasted between 1967 and 1970, during which thousands of Nigerians, especially the Igbo people lost their lives. The movements were created through the simultaneous cannon device, with the performers executing the same motifs at the same time but starting at different points.

**The Ship of State:** There were six dancers permanently on set throughout the play. With their paddles, they symbolize the Nigerian ship of state, and each of them actually represent the six geo-political zones of today's Nigeria. Throughout the performance, their body movements communicate the state of the country thus; agile and lively movements to portray the nation's moments of economic boom, motion to symbolize national growth development, and slow, sluggish movements to demonstrate the deteriorating state of the country. All their movements are executed in unison.

**The Military Personnel:** The stylized movements of the military men each time any of them took over power, speaks of how well or badly the nation fared under their regimes. The military men's choice of reckless movements and the contrasting freeze executed by the Alaoma citizens in unison, suggests a questionable system of government which brought untold hardship to Nigerians.

**The Set Piece Dances:** The set piece dances were performed at specific points in the play to emphasise or comment on the actions of the play, and to celebrate the emergence of each Master Paddler. To celebrate their liberation from the slave masters, the *Akoto* dance of the Egun people was performed. The *Akoto* dance is a significant reminder of the slave trade during the colonial era, and the role which the Badagry town played as the departure point. The other dances such as *Jarawa*, *Egwu Odum*, and *Apepe* are pure ethnic dances which identify the geo-political zone from which each Master Paddler emerged. The choice of ethnic dances of each Master Paddler for celebration further comments on the ethnocentrism which plagues the average Nigerian citizen.

**Solidarity for Change:** At a point in the play, the Alaoma citizens got fed up with the laxity and unproductiveness of their Master Paddler, and they unanimously demanded a change. At that point, all the performers on stage formed a big circle to signify strength, unity, communal solidarity and commitment to a common goal. While dancing with a running movement, they clenched their fists and pumped them in the air in a militant style which is the campaign signature of the current Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. As the people continued to rally round, a character slowly emerged from within the circle. The travel movements of the performers were executed in unison to depict the Nigerian people's clamour for political change and

their pledged readiness to support the new political leader's zero tolerance for corruption.

**Change for All, and by All:** At some point in the course of the play, the ship of State became totally immobile, and the people expressed fear and despair. In their pleas for the ship of State to sail, they sing:

Song:

Se se se se ubele,  
Se ubele, se o se ubele

Transliteration:

Sail, oh please sail, dear ship  
Do sail we plead with you, dear ship

In spite of the people's pleas, the ship of State failed to budge. When all efforts seemed to fail, the people resorted to prayers in their desperation.

Song:

Wa wa wa, Oluwa wa, Oluwa wa, wa o wa wa wa,  
Di di di, Abasi di, Abasi di, di o di di di  
Bia bia bia Chineke bia, Chineke bia,  
bia o bia bia bia Zo zo zo, Allah zo, Allah  
zo, zo oh, zo zo zo Va va va Aondo  
va, Aondo va va o va va va

Transliteration:

Come come come, oh Lord come  
Dear Lord, please, come quickly to our aid

The upward gesticulations of the performers communicated their aspirations and desire for God's intervention in their time of crisis. Unfortunately, the religious leaders in the ship decided to take advantage of the people's desperation to exploit and extort them. In their movements and actions, the actors utilised the nuances and idiosyncrasies typical of fake and insincere leaders of Islam, Christianity, and Traditional Religions. The lead singers who doubled as narrators in the play, then advised the Master Paddler thus:

Song:

In our land, the task is huge, it is not just a man's show  
We all have our roles to play, democracy at its best  
After failing with his initial attempt to tackle the hydra-headed monster of ethnicity, indiscipline, and corruption which consistently besieged the ship of state, the last Master Paddler realized that the task was perhaps too huge for him alone. He finally listened to the advice of the lead singers, to solicit the

support of strong capable men and women from the diverse ethnic groups in order to achieve success in his noble quest. With the help of the chosen representatives from all the zones, the Master Paddler was able to conquer the monsters, after which he revived the ship of State. The people rejoiced for their collective victory, they sang and danced as they continued their journey to the promise land with renewed hope.

### **Changing Faces and the Phases of Change: Kinesthetic Empathy in Response to “The Voyage” Performance**

“The Voyage” is a satirical comment on the various detours, signposts, and roadblocks which sufficiently typify the Nigerian socio-political journey. Documenting the socio-political journey of Nigeria as a nation, the play tactically illustrates the concept of change and change management in the Nigerian political history. Lush in the parodies of the play, are the characteristics of the Nigerian state. Marian Van Tuyl illustrates that “Motion arouses emotion, and emotion also brings forth motion, and the moment we speak of emotion, communication is involved. If you get excited about a dancer, even without knowing it, (s)he is communicating to you” (11). Therefore, this section of the paper discusses the different phases of change identified in the play, and the levels of kinaesthetic empathy registered through the audience response to movements in “The Voyage” performance.

**Change Within the Play:** The play succinctly describes the points of change in the Nigerian socio-political history, and the reaction of Nigerians at every point of change. Creative devices such as flashback and play-within-play were used to capture significant events in the Nigerian history, to which the other actors reacted to accordingly. The fact that the reactions are truly reflective of the Nigerian society heightened the esoteric value of the performance. Ann Daly submits that, “although it has a visual component, (dance) is fundamentally a kinaesthetic art whose appreciation is grounded not just in the eye but in the entire body” (243). The other performers on stage were reactionary to the movements of the dancers by cheering and mimicking the dancers to show how well they enjoyed the performance. For instance, the acrobatic stunts performed in the *Egwu Odum* dance intrigued the other performers so much that some of them jumped and yelled in excitement. Another example is the occupational and harvest dances which elicited a rousing response from the performers and the audience alike. Also at every point of change in political power, the performers would rejoice and celebrate



so much so that the audience could pre-empt their reactions to subsequent change of power, and they joined the performers in mock celebration.

**Change through Audience Recollection:** John Martins' position that "Sensory experience could have the effect of reviving memories of previous experiences over the same neuromuscular paths" bears on audience recollection during "The Voyage" performance. The play through dance, music, songs, dramatic movements and other semiotic mediums, highlighted the various points of political crises and change in political power in the history of Nigeria, which the members of audience, especially the older generation, were able to identify with. In an attempt to demonstrate the Nigerian civil war in the play, the performers broke into three factions chanting war songs in the three major Nigerian indigenous languages; Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.

Song:

A yanka a raba, kowa ya dauka nashi

Transliteration:

We shall butcher and share all

Let everyman pick his share

Song: Nzogbu nzogbu, enyimba enyi

Transliteration:

Let's match the strange elephant to death

Song: Ile won naa nu ni, odede won naa nu ni,

ile abere wo bi ile ekute, ile won naa nu ni

Transliteration:

Check out their horrible-looking abode

Their horrible rat-like abode

These war songs were embellished with vigorous dance movements depicting hostility. It is suggested that "spectators of dance experience kinaesthetic empathy when, even while sitting still, they feel they are participating in the movements they observe, and experience related feelings and ideas" (Daly, para. 1). Therefore, the war chants and dances in this bit, brought for the audience members, nostalgic feelings of the civil war. One of my respondents, Chinedu Iheanacho recounted with melancholy, how his father hurriedly packed himself and his siblings out of Lagos to their village in Umuahia when the civil war broke out in 1967. He confessed that the movements and actions in the play triggered a lot of memories of the civil war for him.

Also, during one of the military takeovers in the play, the townspeople froze in unison to depict fright, while General 'Kill and Go' effected a comic version of the stylized and regimented march past associated with military men. He rendered the following lines with an ominous mien:

Fellow citizens of Alaoma, this is to announce to you that I General 'Kill and Go', FSS, NTA, ANP, EKTU, HIV Esquire, has taken over the leadership of this ship of State from the former Master Paddler due to his inefficiency. So therefore, all airports, seaports, road ports, and even soup pots kpa kpa, are hereby closed down indefinitely. Citizens are advised to go about their normal businesses without any noisemaking as the journey continues. Long live the Republic of Alaoma.

Olori Remi Adejugbe, another of my respondents, recalled that the General 'Kill and Go's' movements and coup broadcast in addition to the varied degrees of the freeze positions of the performers reminded her of how much coup de tats were dreaded in Nigeria. She also narrated how everyone in their neighbourhood danced with joy to celebrate the demise of the particular tyrant military head of State being parodied in the play. This memory, she claimed, was triggered by the actions in the performance. The fervour with which the actors prayed, sang, and danced, pleading for God's intervention, reminded another respondent, Kemi Fagite, of the turbulent experience Nigerians had under the military regimes. She recounted how Nigerians were unified in the common goal of reaching God through various ways, in order to rescue Nigeria and Nigerians from the said military tyrant. According to Bakare (6) the circle floor pattern in dance communicates solidarity and communal unification. Fagite also recollected how the rallying movement round the final Master Paddler reminded her of how Nigerians seemingly voted with fervour for Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections. All these recollections professed by members of audience were triggered by the kinaesthetic elements in the play.

**Change of Mind-set:** As Ufford-Azorbo rightly cautions, in appreciating dance or any other art, one should allow the work to unfold, and not deliberately seek out or impose meanings on the work. She stresses that whatever one feels about an art work is the meaning derived from it, and that the meaning can be aroused kinesthetically and produce some correlative of the original experience (40). We observed that the members of audience

visibly and audibly went through a series of emotions in the course of the performance, ranging from melancholy to nostalgia, intrigue, excitement, spontaneous laughter, despair, anxiety, and hope among many others. The release and expression of these emotions are proof of the fact that even though the members of audience are aware that “The Voyage” was just a make-believe performance, yet they mentally partook of the experience with their entire beings. The events recorded in the play were imaginary actions which took place inside of them, making them part of the ‘ship of State’. Whether or not they are aware of this, every kinaesthetic element used in the play, such as choreographed movements, and dance actions in the play, built up kinaesthetic empathy in the subconscious of members of audience.

The kinesics elements in the play were used as sensory arts to set the mood for each situation in the play, and to evoke kinaesthetic empathy in members of the audience. The mental experience has proved to be capable of influencing them to contribute their individual quota to make Nigeria better, thereby engineering change. Olori Remi Adejugbe confessed that the movements and body language of the performers at each point of election in the play is reminiscent of the manner with which Nigerians create so much fuss about change in political power. She acknowledged that the play made her realise how Nigerians, she inclusive, rejoice at every change in political leadership, and then revert to status quo a few weeks or months after a new government takes over, allowing the usual impatience and discontentment to set in. She resolved to be less critical of the present government, and truly allow the ‘change’ to begin with her. Another respondent, Daniel Wapji, says that the realisation hit him that the monsters depicted in the play are indeed the source of the numerous woes in Nigeria. He said as a result of watching the play, he had decided to become a better citizen and play his own little part in making Nigeria a great nation.

### **Much Ado About ‘Change’: A Conclusion**

The bane of *The Voyage* performance is kinesics communication. All the movements employed in the performance are visual clues to enact the journey of Nigerian nationhood from inception till date. At most points, movements were used for characterization, mood creation, as well as to reveal implications of specific situations. The performance which is replete with kinesics actions attracted varied response from the audience. Kinesics actions in the play took the form of either dance, mime, or dramatic actions, depicting occupation, celebration, solidarity, war, plea, appeal, prayer, and call to action. The kinesics actions evoked varying emotions such as nostalgia,

melancholy, and hope from members of audience. The actions are also instructional in pointing to possible solutions as concerning moving Nigeria forward.

We were able to judge if the members of audience really experienced the intended meanings of the play, through the facial expressions, mood changes, and verbal report from the interviewed members of audience. Several members of the audience were seen to be unconsciously tapping their feet, moving their bodies, and nodding their heads to the rhythm of the music, or just simply grinning. We observed that the audience members were active participants in the performance, actively engaging in and consuming the art forms and cultural contexts, hence, for every action carried out on stage, there was a reaction from the audience. It is important to note that at the point where movements were being used to tell stories on the stage, either as mime, dance, or dramatic actions, no member of the audience was detached from the actions on stage. Some members of audience were so engrossed in the performance with a high level of concentration, trying to uncover and examine details and meaning of the theatrical experience.

### **Recommendation**

We must become concerned about the next thirty, forty years. Think what you can do for your nation, think for your future...think. Others did so much to get us to this stage... Do something to take the next generation forward. For the time has come for us to settle for the change that has come upon us, the change that we have all embraced, and by that change our language, our perception, our respect for law and order must change. No one else will build Nigeria for us, Nigeria will be built by Nigerians. I believe in Nigeria, and I believe in your future (*I Believe in Nigeria*, Chris Oyakhilome).

Change is a gruelling process which requires doggedness and deep commitment. It is not enough to merely make noise about change, if there are no genuine actions to back it up, it will not work. The unfolding events in the performance of “The Voyage” depict that the Nigerian people truly clamour for change, but they are reluctant to condition themselves to undergo the tedious processes of change. This paper fully subscribes to the message of “The Voyage” that a lone tree does not make a forest, and that genuine change can only take place when all hands are on deck for the same goal. As they say,

“to begin the journey of change, one must first of all put on the boots of self-awareness”, therefore, for true change to occur, everyone must do a thorough self-examination, and be prepared to be a part of the change movement.

A popular Chinese adage defines madness as the act of consistently doing things in the same way and expecting change to happen. This paper concurs that in order to effect true and positive change in governance, there is an urgent need for the Nigerian people to change their mind-set. The paper also acknowledges that the onus lies on theatre makers to seek out effective ways of engineering this change. By simulating the audience to witness the actions on stage it is important to give every member of audience something to take home, because it is impossible for them all to experience the same thing. The study recommends the exploration of the relationship between motion, dance and communication, by making more concerted efforts at reaching the subconscious of theatre patrons not only via dialogue, but also through kinaesthetic communication, for as Martha Graham aptly noted, “movement is the one speech that cannot lie” (237).

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## **INTERVIEWS**

- Olori Remi Adejugbe. Personal interview at 5. 58 p.m. on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.
- Chinedu Iheanacho. Personal interview at 6.19 p.m. on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.
- Daniel Wapji. Personal interview at 6. 22 p.m. on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.
- Kemi Fagite. Personal interview at 6.31 p.m. on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.

# TOWARDS ERADICATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN IGARRA COMMUNITY: THE THEATRE OPTION

**Ada Lucy Onaivi**

Alvan Ikoju College of Education

## **Abstract**

*Domestic violence issues have become heightened in the Nigerian society in recent times. These in turn has led to cases of divorce, child abuse, emotional instability in children and in some cases death. it is on this note that this study utilizes drama to explore issues of domestic violence, bringing to limelight its attendant problems. The study uses drama and participatory tools such as the Focused Group Discussions (FGD's) and the Semi Structured Interview (SSI) to derive information on the factors or causes of domestic violence, identifying who the attacker and victim are, the effects of domestic violence on the stability of the home and its members and the way out of this issue. The paper concludes that after discussions held, all stakeholders are part of the reason for violence in their homes and they should all be involved in the process of reducing it to its lowest minimum.*

## **Introduction**

Domestic violence is a widely spread health and human rights violation issue that runs across ethno-cultural affiliations and economic status. Violence especially against women is now widely recognized as a "global phenomenon and one of the major violation of human rights" (Colucci and Heredia 23). The perpetrators of the violence are often well known to their victims and it most times happens within the context of families, therefore resulting in verbal abuse, threats, coercion, harassment, intimidation, manipulation, physical and sexual abuse, criminal damage, rape and homicide.

Domestic violence has caused many negative issues in the lives of many Nigerians, separating families and friends. Based on the survey conducted, there had been incidences of domestic violence in Nigeria in the past, although at a minimal rate but in recent times it has become heightened. So the question is: where did it all go wrong? Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviours by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family or cohabitation. It has many forms, including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting,



shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects) or threats thereof. The second abuse includes: emotional abuse, controlling or domineering, intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse otherwise known as neglect and economic deprivation (Barnet 20). Domestic violence and abuse is not limited to obvious physical violence. It can mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing, harassment and stalking (National network 2011).

The US Office on Violence against Women (OVM) defines domestic violence as a "pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner" (Office on Violence 12). The definition adds that domestic violence "can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender and can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional economic and psychological abuse (WHO Handbook 20). Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Similar to a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with victim's gender as primary motive. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic and psychological abuse" (Office on Violence 2007).

Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Similar to a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with victim's gender as primary. Sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in a private life. The 1993 declaration by the United Nations on the elimination of violence against women noted that this violence could be perpetrated by assailants of gender, family members and even the state itself (WHO Handbook 19). Women are crucial to the growth and development of any nation and the world at large. Women constitute half of the world's cultural and fundamental values of the society and permanent change is often best achieved through them.

### **The Nigerian Situation**

Cases of domestic violence against women have been on the increase in Nigeria. There have been reports of cases of husbands killing and marring

their wives in the media. The statistics presented by This day newspaper (May, 2016) is that about "50% of women have been battered by their husbands". Shockingly, more educated women (65%) are in this terrible situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55%) most endure, believing they have nowhere to go and in any case, believing for good reason, that the law will not protect them. Staggering 97.2% of them are not prepared to report to the Nigeria police (*Thisday* 15). Only four states of the federation have passed laws against the insidious crime. Only recently in Lagos State, "Titilayo Arawola, a 27-year-old mother of one was gruesomely murdered by her husband. Arowola was allegedly axed to death by her husband, Kolade, in their Isolo home in Lagos" (*Thisday* 20). Before that, the scandalous story of wife battering by one Nigerian Ambassador and a traditional ruler who engaged his wife in a public brawl made the rounds thus bringing the issue of spousal abuse one again to the front burner (*The Nation* 10).

Victims of wife battery are reported to suffer from physical and psychological pain (Essen 19). Domestic violence against women constitutes a great problem to the family and the society at large. It occurs at home, in public places like streets, parks, familiar places like homes of friend and relatives, offices involving highly places executives and also in churches and mosques.

### **Theories/Causes of Domestic Violence Against Women**

There are different theories as to the causes of domestic violence. These include psychological theories that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrators, as well as social theories which consider external factors in the perpetrator's environment, such as family structure stress and social learning. As with many phenomena regarding human experience, no single approach appears to cover all cases.

**Psychological:** Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender. personal traits include sudden bursts of anger, poor impulse control and poor self-esteem. Various theories suggest that psychopathology and other personality disorders are factors, and that abuse observed or experience as a child lead some people to be more violent in adulthood (Kalra 19). Dutton and Goiant (95) suggested a psychological profile of men who abuse their wives, arguing that they have borderline personalities that are developed early in life. This simply shows that people who have health, mood swing, violent nature, bipolar disorder are prone to engage in domestic violence

**Social Stress:** Stress may be increased when a person is living in a family situation, with increased pressures. Violence is not always caused by stress, but may be one way that some people respond to stress (Seltzer and Kalmuss 88). Couples in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence due to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects (Jewkes 20). This indicates that economic factors families faced with causes domestic violence. A man who finds it difficult to meet the needs of his family due to economic factors like; termination of his appointment, reduction in salaries, inflation in cost of living, is likely to undergo through a lot of stress which could affect his relationship with his family.

**Social Learning:** If one observes violent behaviour, one is more likely to imitate it. If there are no negative consequences and the victim also accepts the violence with submission, then the behaviour will likely continue. Sometimes, violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a cyclical manner (Sanni 96). This means that the personality of men who engage in issues of domestic violence have been affected over time due to the nature of homes or environment they were born and grew in which from every indication, exposed them to Domestic Violence.

## **Management**

The response to domestic violence is typically a combined effort between law enforcement agencies, counselling services and health care.

- I. **Medical Response:** Medical professionals do not see themselves as being able to play a major role in helping women in regards to domestic violence. Injuries are often just treated and diagnosed without regard for the causes (Sugg and Inu 19). Many doctors prefer not to get involved in people's "private" lives.
- II. **Law Enforcement agencies:** In the replication studies which were more broad and methodologically sound in both size and scope, arrest seemed to help in the short run in certain cases but those arrested experienced double the rate of violence over the course of one year (Sanni 20). Generally, it has been accepted that if the understood victim has visible (and recent) mark of abuse, the suspect is arrested and charged with the appropriate crime.
- III. **Counselling for persons affected:** Since marital violence is a major risk factor for serious injury and even death, and women in violent marriages are at much greater risk of being seriously

injured or killed, counselling intervention is much needed (Odiba 23).

### **Domestic Violence in Igarra and its Effects**

Igarra as the case study is a densely populated area with its citizens and inhabitants sparsely distributed not just in its region but also across the country at large. Igarra citizens are therefore on the average income and domestic violence has become an issue in some homes in the community for some time now. They have been an increase in acknowledgment that a child who is exposed to domestic abuse during his upbringing will suffer in his development and psychological welfare (Dodd 20). Such has been the case in Igarra for some time now. They have been news of broken homes around the community due to battering and other forms of violence, which warranted the need for this study. Six Interview sessions were held with some key persons in the community such as; the Reverend father, three chiefs, two doctors who have treated victims of violence, among others, have all attested to the facts that the estimated number of families in the community that are faced with problems of Domestic Violence either directly or indirectly runs into 60%. Some of the after effects that have been drawn from cases of domestic violence within the community are as follows:

**Physical Effect:** Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization. Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome. Victims who are pregnant during a domestic violence now experience greater risk of miscarriage, preterm labour and injury to or death of the foetus.

**Psychological Effect:** Among victims who are still living with their perpetrators, high amounts of stress, fear and anxiety have been commonly reported. (Response from a police officer in Igarra). Depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for provoking the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. It is reported that both victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship and have a greatly increased risk of suicide.

**Financial Effect:** Once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken

away their autonomy. Due to economic abuse and isolation, the victims usually have very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely for help. This has been shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence and the strongest fact that can discourage them from leaving their perpetrators.

**Long Term Effect:** Major consequences of domestic violence includes psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. Some victims overwhelming lack of resources has led to homelessness and poverty.

### **Theatre for Development Interactive Medium as the Way out for Stability**

Theatre for development has gone beyond the ideology of serving as a research process that tries to derive convictions that the researcher should go into the field to tell the people about their problems and guiding them on how to create a means to the end of such problems. Rather, it has tried to reduce the barrier between the "researcher as a collector of information and the people as a supplier of it" by delving into societal issues ranging from political, cultural, religious, domestic and a host of others (Okwori 149).

It is a powerful tool that uses drama to generate communal understanding around hard to address issues such as domestic violence, using such theatre based ethnography, aimed to identify the key issues such as causes of domestic violence, establishing who the attacker and victim are, its effect on the home and the way forward. Abah describes it as "an Instrument for instigating people centre development in the field outside the academia. An instrument for mobilization and for instigating participation in the development process (XIV). The role of change played by this approach is clearly echoed in the above position. The ability of Theatre for Development to bring a group of people to a point of realization, create a motivation in them towards taking a step of change, to attain total freedom from their ailment". There have been incidences of domestic violence in the Igarra community and to generate information on the antecedent issues drawn from this phenomenon, the study was conducted in stages. In stage one, Focused Group Discussions and Semi Structural Interviews were administered to 60 people on an informal note, comprising of 10men, 40women, 10 youths (5 males and 5 females) and the session was conducted in the absence of the other gender. The aim of this was to get the views of each of the selected

groups on the aims and objectives of the research and to generate information on if any of the participants have been a victim of domestic violence. Some of the questions the participants were asked are as follows:

(a) What makes a happy Igarra family that lives in harmony?

(b) What makes an unhappy Igarra family that lives in disharmony?

While answering these two questions, when the issue of domestic violence was brought up by the participants, they were asked to describe what they meant by these, if it happened in Igarra and to provide examples. Most of the sessions held were Semi Structural only a limited number of questions were predefined by the researcher to prompt discussions for instance,

- What does it look like when there is domestic violence abuse?
- When there is such who is the attacker and who is the victim?
- What are the remote causes of most incidents of domestic violence among families in Igarra?

At the end of the session, participants were invited to provide their contact information if they wished to continue their participation in the study although some were already known by the researcher, who coincidentally is an indigene of Igarra as such, language wasn't a barrier.

**Stage Two:** Reading exercise from the information generated.

Two dramas were created as model to be used as a means towards enlightening the citizenry of Igarra on the effects of domestic violence which are:

- It affects the developmental and psychological welfare of the child.
- Physical injuries ranging from bruises, broken bones, head injuries, laceration, and sometime internal bleeding.
- Psychological effect is another consequence of domestic violence.
- Financial effect.
- Long term effect among others (the effects are fully captured and discussed under issues of domestic violence in Igarra).

It was also deduced from the discussion that the attackers most times in cases of domestic violence are the men while the victims are the women and children. It was based on these facts the drama was created to serve as a model for the intervention but unfortunately, every effort made to carry out rehearsals for the performance proved futile because very few persons were willing to be part of the performance due to certain reasons ranging from time, timidity, lack of payment for their involvement and so on. Due to this, the researcher decided to settle for reading exercise whereby reading

sessions are held, while copies of the drama are distributed and read among participants, after which facilitation are drawn out from the story. Below are the dramas in episodes along with their facilitation.

### **Episode One**

The Adewales have been married for 5 years without a child. This led to the emotional breakdown of the woman. In a bid to keep her husband happy, she made sure to always keep the house tidy and homely. But unfortunately for her two of the husband's siblings that married immediately after they did had already been blessed with the fruit of the womb. So going to visit and seeing their kids, put the husband in a state of depression. As a result of that, his attitude towards his wife changed and he seized every little opportunity to quarrel, insult and beat her up.

There was a day she confronted him about a number which kept calling him persistently with affectionate text messages. Instead of giving her a clear explanation, he resulted to insults, saying it was none of her business after all, his effort of meeting with her this past 3years had yielded no result. In an attempt to pacify him saying, it is God that gives children, he angrily threw the cup of water he was drinking at her, drenching her and further throwing stones and sand at her. She left his presence crying bitterly.

### **Facilitation:**

- (1) Who are Mr. and Mrs. Adewale?
- (2) How long have they been married?
- (3) How will you describe Mr. Adewale's behaviour?
- (4) Who is the attacker and victim during their scruples?
- (5) What is the cause of their rift?
- (6) What do you suggest the couples would have done instead of resorting to violence?

### **Episode Two**

Mr. Johnson is a gentle and soft spoken man but the wife is a direct opposite of who he is. She seized every opportunity to over haul his decisions simply because he had lost his job. It got to the point that even their children started disrespecting him. There was an incident that happened whereby he came back home after a stressful day of job hunting and asked for his food. His wife went into the kitchen and came out with a covered plate placing it on the table in front of him. But to his dismay when he opened it, it was completely empty. When he asked her the

reason for her action, she retorted that there was no food for a lazy man. In anger coupled with his hunger he slapped her. She in turn started fighting him. And the two children joined in, taking sides with their mother.

### **Facilitation:**

1. Was there any case of domestic violence seen in Mr. Johnson's family?
2. Who was the attacker and who was the victim of the incident?
3. Do you think the reason for the quarrel could have been resolved without violence?
4. What is your advice to Mr. Johnson's family?

It is pertinent to note that the participants were interested in the exercise and agreed vehemently that domestic violence should be shunned and harmony emphasized among families in the community. Therefore, based

on their responses, some recommendations were drawn out for families to follow in order to ensure harmony. These are thus listed below.

### **Discussion**

It was derived from the facilitation that a significant number of participants accepted that domestic violence possesses a threat to the stability of homes in Igarra but sometimes incidences of violence that occur are unintended. The perpetrators of this act do not know how to desist from doing it and tend to regret their action after the deed has been done. One of the respondents, a man whose age is rated at 37 years said most times men who beat their wives are under stress either from work, no money to take care of the family, influence from friends or a way of showing dominance over their wives. As the facilitation continued, there were more opinions given as to the likely causes of domestic violence. A woman who puts her age at 41 years said “sometimes we women frustrate our husbands into raising their hands on us either by the way we talk to them or over step our boundary”. Based on this information derived, it can therefore be said that, both couples are most times responsible for incidences of violence in their homes. From further facilitation, recommendations were drawn out which are written below.

### **Recommendations:**

- (1) Comprehensive and extensive premarital counselling should be given to intending couples on how to manage their marital relationship.



- (2) There should be public enlightenment through the mass media on the negative effects of domestic violence against women, especially wife battering.
- (3) Religious leaders too should vigorously teach against marital violence in their places of worship.
- (4) Youths should be encouraged and taught to detest from imitating brutish treatment of wives around them.
- (5) Medical professionals are in position to help abused women, after physical treatment, they should refer them to counsellors and psychotherapists.
- (6) Punishment given to grievously offending husbands should be publicized, so that it can serve as deterrence to others.
- (7) Counselling should be given to offenders in the home.
- (8) Counselling should be given to affected persons of domestic violence to ease their pain and gear them towards avoiding situations that could lead to violence in the home.

### **Conclusion**

Domestic violence is a domestic hazard that should be shunned by all and sundry to ensure stability in homes in Nigeria, especially in Igarra. Based on the research conducted, Tfd has served as a veritable too in not only ascertaining the level of domestic violence in Igarra but also enlightening the community members on the need to shun such an act. In all, the research was rewarding because the participants involved in the interactive sessions did not only see the need to desist from such act, but also went further in turn to tell others about the effects of this act. It was also the first time the Theatre for development approach was experimented in Igarra community and some of its members urged the researcher to return for further continuity.

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### **Oral Interviews**

1. Ozigagun Monday police officer on case of Domestic Violence in Igarra
2. Reverend Father James Ojo, Parish Priest St. John the Apostle Catholic Church Igarra
3. Dr. Amune Patrick, medical practioner, Igarra Community Hospital

# CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: THE THEATRE AND MEDIA PARADIGM

**Nelson Torti Obasi**  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

## **Abstract**

*The bane of most political leaders in the developing nations including Nigeria is lack of political will to render good governance to the people. Instead, most of them have been pre-occupied with corruption, propaganda, tribalism, favouritism, marginalisation, lopsided appointments and recruitments to public offices, and embezzlement among others. It is against this background that the study seeks to x-ray these maladies and recommends that Theatre and the media as two inseparable, indispensable and critical concepts in communicating socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural, and even socio-religious issues in the contemporary society will act as catalysts to stem the tide. The fusion of the duo will propel and engineer the arduous tasks of mirroring, reviewing, analysing, reconstructing the political, economic, social, intellectual, emotional, instinctive, traditional, and moral values in the society. The reason being that, they possess both communicative and didactic qualities that influence people's consciousness and attitudes. Like sociology, theatre and the media are social phenomena that deal with the social problems in the society as well as offering solutions to them. This demonstrates that theatre and the media are agents of social change and watch dogs against human vices and immorality. They are, indeed, media for behavioural change in the society. It is, therefore, against the backdrop of their transformational and behavioural attributes that this study seeks to investigate. The study also revealed that lack of good governance had unequivocally led to injustices, abuse of human rights, widening of the gulf between the leaders and the led, rich and the poor, the metropolises and the peripherals as well as inducing the much taunted hate speeches that is daring the Nigerian nation at present.*

## **Introduction**

According to a popular axiom “the only thing that is constant is change.” However, change can be subjective depending on which side one looks at it. There could be positive and negative changes. While all changes and individuals are unique, decades of research, according to Wikipedia, shows

that there are actions we can take to influence people in their individual transitions (1). Change management provides a structural approach for supporting the individuals in an organisation to move from their current states to their own future states.

To be specific, change management is the discipline that guides how to prepare, equip and support individuals to successfully adopt change in order to drive organisational success and outcomes (Wikipedia: A Free Dictionary 2016). Three levels of change management have been adduced by scholars which include: Individual change management, Organisational/Initiative change management, and Enterprise change management capability. Individual change management deals with the understanding of how people experience change and what they need to change successfully. Organisational/Initiative change management provides people with the steps and actions to take at the project level to support the hundreds or thousands of individuals who are impacted by a project. While Enterprise management capability is an organisational core competency that provides competitive differentiation and the ability to effectively adapt to the ever-changing world. For the purpose of the study, the Individual Change Management has been adopted because of its direct relevance in bringing good governance that brings positive effects to the society. Any change management that is retrogressive rather than progressive is an aberration and is unacceptable.

Prior to and after the long fought independence in Nigeria, the theatre and other media of communication has been at the fore-front of fighting for and ensuring change management for the good of the people. The nationalists in particular and other writers in general during these trial periods of colonialism used all the apparatuses of the media to fight colonialism and imperialism headlong in order to free the Nigerian society from the shackles of colonialism and bring freedom – change management. Even after independence through successive military and civilian regimes up to date, the media has not relented in maintaining such vantage position by propelling and ensuring positive change in the administration of the country; a course of action that will bring political utilitarianism.

Successive governments since independence have promised one change or the other but to no avail. They have always adduced one reason or the other for taking over power from their predecessor such as injustice, corruption, financial impropriety, embezzlement, high-handedness, nepotism, ethnicity, mal-administration, among others. These notwithstanding, the accusers have always become the accused as each successive government has not only repeated the same acts but had tripled them. And for the sake of

personal agenda of these administrations to occupy the office at all cost and by all means, the promised change has never been felt by the masses. Even the present APC government's much taunted campaign slogan "Change" is yet to be fulfilled after almost two years in office. What we receive instead is one denial or the other of what has been promised as well as shifting every action or inaction to the past administration instead of tackling the social, economic, and political problems of the moment. Every well-meaning Nigerians, especially those out of government will testify to the fact that, virtually everything in the country have been "buhari-d" or changed beyond any mathematical equation in the name of change. From the foreign exchange rate, pump price of fuel, transportation, consumer/capital goods to other services have all gone beyond the affordability of ordinary Nigerians today. Under this milieu, the salaried citizens are the worst hit while businesses are having a field day as they sell at any dreamed prices under the worst economic recession ever experienced in the country. In addition, opposition voices and some perceived enemies are daily emasculated, mesmerized, dribbled, cajoled, haunted, harassed, sometimes locked without the due process of law court using the apparatus of the state.

It is based on the foregoing that, this study therefore seeks to investigate the effects of change management in Nigeria through the instrumentality of both the theatre and the media. Theatre and the media are two inseparable, indispensable and vital means of communicating socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural and even socio-religious issues in the contemporary society. The fusion of both the theatre and the media since the evolution of human civilization is unequivocally and from all indication like a marriage without divorce. Their tasks of mirroring, reviewing, analyzing and reconstructing the political, economic, social, intellectual, emotional, instinctive, traditional and moral values in the society is to say the least commonplace. They possess both communicative and didactic qualities as well as being efficacious in influencing people's consciousness and attitudes.

Like sociology, theatre and the media are social phenomena that deal with the multifarious social, economic and political problems and offering solutions to them. This demonstrates the fact that, both mediums are agent of social change and watchdogs against human vices and immorality bedeviling our society today. Change becomes exigent and indispensable when those trusted with the management of our collective will or resources misappropriate them for their selfish and beneficial gains in the name of change.

## **The Concept of Change and Development**

Change drives development and vice versa. In this vein, Okwudiba Nnoli sees development as “a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environment transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large” (36). This shows that the driving force behind every development, nay, change is the human resources. Development is not a piecemeal process but that which calls for a frontal attack and complete transformation of all aspects of life ranging from social, economic, educational, political, and otherwise (Koroma, 17). Development brings change from the rural areas to the national level. To Prince Tony Momoh, former Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture, national development is human and material development through a concerted and collective attempt by all the multifarious fields, education, health, science and technology, religious, politics and government, business community, mass media organisations – all consciously pooling their resources toward one common goal. National development therefore, means the systematic realisation of the full potentialities not only of the individual members within the nation but also of the nation state as a whole.

Development may also be seen as the total or the outcome of efforts made by the people to improve upon their conditions of living. Against this background, development is perceived as being in tandem with growth, advancement, and progress. Writing on *Communication and Development*, Ezekiel S. Asemah explains that, “a society is said to be moving towards development when there is more freedom, more social justice and there are opportunities for the people to participate in taking decisions that affect them” (314). He argues that a climate for development must be created in the environment through education, motivation and mobilisation and when this happens; the people for whom a particular development activity is intended should have the opportunity for discussing all aspects of the issue.

Development enables people to improve the quality of life and beautify their living conditions through positive change, spiritual, material and infrastructural transformation by mobilising their resources on continuous basis. According to Jerry Gana, true development must mean the development of man – the unfolding and realisation of the creative potentials, enabling him to prove his material conditions of living through the use of resources available to him. Development is a process by which man’s personality is enhanced; and it is the moving force behind the socio-economic transformation of any society. Orewere says that, “development is a package

of benefits given to a people by the government” (qtd. in Asemah 315). Above this, development is concerned with the increase in the production of materials, goods and services for the purpose of economic, inequality reduction and eradication of absolute poverty.

Development is also seen as a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and the society interact with their physical, biological, and inter-human environments, transforming them for their own benefits and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process (Nnoli 1981). According to the United Nations Organisation, development implies:

- The realisation of potentials of the human person in harmony with the community seen as the central purpose of development;
- The human person should be regarded as the subject and not the object of the development process;
- The human person must be able to participate fully in shaping his own reality.

Change begets development and it is the people that should wield it through collective and revolutionary actions. To this end, Augusto Boal in realizing the validity of such approach states that, “all truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them. Theatre is a weapon and it is the people who should wield it (122). However, Boal contends that theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is a rehearsal for the revolution.

Theatre speak to the people in their own language and idioms and deals with issues that most affect their life. It is a participatory theatre which everyone that aspires for must actively take part.

The concept of Marxism also comes into play here because of its strong advocate for change in a society hamstrung by oppressive tendencies by the oppressors. Championed by Marx’s closest associate Frederick Engels and supported by the works of Lenin and Trotsky, Marxism deals with social change or revolutionary aesthetics. This is why Karl Marx himself has said, and which Marxists are fond of repeating that, “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, and the point is, however, to change it” (2). Marxism is a philosophy aimed at expunging all traces of exploitative and oppressive tendencies of the government against the governed – to bring positive change. This is the astute stand of both theatre and the media.

## **The Efficacy of Theatre and Mass Media as Agents of Change**

As mass communication and mass transformation mediums, theatre and the media aim primarily at raising the consciences, the consciousness of the people and awakening in them the desire for change, for development and for community action that can bring about an egalitarian society where equal opportunities exist for all the citizenry (Nwamuo 41). Theatre and the media are both apparatuses of communication. Communication is one of the bedrock of development while development brings about change. Without communication there would probably have been no fundamental changes in human endeavours.

The important roles of information and communication, according to Udomisor in directing the affairs of man were first designed, perfected and used by colonialists in their respective domains to direct, condition, assimilate and control the attitudes and behaviours of their subjects to remain loyal, faithful, obedient and sympathetic to the administration (107). On the other hand, the freedom fighters or nationalists during the same period used communication as an effective tool to fight for independence and freedom and eventually wrestled power from the imperial powers.

As agents of change, the media collect, collate, store, process and disseminate news, data, plays, pictures, facts and messages, opinions and comments required in order to understand and react knowledgeably to personal, environment, national, and international conditions or situations that will translate to positive change(s).

Reminiscing on the informational and attitudinal change of the media towards national development and transformation, David S. M. Koroma submits that, “news output from the media including other sources such as the theatre is an attempt at national development; since news dissemination is meant to instil or create awareness among the masses and arouse them to positive action” (27). The implication of this is that, the media by providing information helps in public attitude formation and/or attitudinal change.

Writing on *The Role of Communication in Aid of Development*, Egbon sees development as “a blue-print for change that is modelled for individuals, institutions, national and international progress” (44). Development equates itself with growth, modernisation, change, democracy, productivity, industrialization and a host of other western historical and revolutionary changes which the citizens expect rightly from their government. Egbon adds that communication whether in developed or developing nations is certainly crucial to man’s effort to gain a greater quality of life because it affects his



productivity, his personal expression, social needs as well as his aspiration (52).

The three fundamental tasks of communication by the media are to: perform the role of the watchman; function as a decision-maker; and perform the teacher function. Based on this, Wilbur Schramm argues that, change will not take place smoothly or very efficiently unless people want to change. It is generally the increasing flow of information that furnishes the climate for nation-ness itself. By making one part of the country aware of other parts, their people, arts, customs and politics, by permitting the national leaders to talk to the people, and the people to the leaders and to each other.... A modern communication wisely used, can help wield together isolated communities, desperate sub-cultures, self-centred individuals and groups and separate development into truly national development (49). It is all these diverse interests that bring about positive change in our society. In like manner, Shalwitz writing on the *Impact of Theatre*, posits that:

It educates people about various social issues, and bring light to the various social inequities; it gives people a creative outlet when they would otherwise not have access to one; and it is able to build connections with each other, bridging the gap between people that come from all works of life. (1)

The overwhelming influence of the arts (theatre and the media) in the society as weapons for economic, social, religious and political change cannot be over-emphasized. The arts occupy an enviable position in the society. It has been and is still a catalyst for social change. As artists, Hegel, Marx, Engels, Aristotle, Shakespeare, even locally in Nigeria with people like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Hebert Macaulay, Chinua Achebe, Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, among others have at various times wielded their intellectual influence through the power of the pen to salvage their societies from the shackles of exploitative, despotic, tyrannical and oppressive successive authoritarian regimes. Thus, Lenin advocates and advances that, “literature by itself should not be an enterprise that would bring material benefits to the people. Rather artists should join other progressives in fighting the cause of the masses. That the politically conscious artists should chart the course of revolutionary struggles (53). This implies that literature should not be commoditized but used exclusively to fight societal ills pervading the society such as injustice, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, exploitation,

oppression, kidnapping, oil bunkering, extra-judicial killings, mal-administration, among others.

According to Okoli, “great writers work for progress; a social crusader who has transformed into a pathfinder, a leader, a revolutionary who have aroused men from their apathy and servile sentence, to deliver them from the spell of enslaving traditions, religions, dogmatism, and political dictatorship (72). The writer is a light bearer for the people who pull the revolutionary change that leaves society better, stronger, wiser, and more progressive. Like the Prometheus, Okoli demonstrates that, “the writer is prepared to hand fire to men” (72). Literature has proved to be a great catalyser of unhappy social situations, and a weapon for cultural change culminating in a revolution or change. Literature to Bertolt Brecht “has to be committed; has to be militant and outspoken. To be effective too, literature should employ whatever is useful through modernist or formalist approach.

To achieve social justice and good governance, writers are needed – writers with a sense of obligation or a strong attachment to a course. Chinua Achebe supporting this view submits that, “commitment means attachment to particular social aims and the use of his writing to advance social aims” (72). This, of course, implies a belief that literature or arts can and should be used as force for social change and a writer has a responsibility to do so.

Writers mirror the society and help men and women to think and act in a particular direction. In a bid to conjure up in the mind the militant attributes of the pen and brings into focus the importance of the writer and, indeed, literature in the planting and realization of revolutions, Balzac comparing himself to Napoleon Bonaparte, had claimed that, “he would accomplish with the pen, what Napoleon started with the sword (Literature and Social Change, 73). In the words of Emmanuel Obiechina, “the writer should take the position against the oppression of the people in all forms of brutalities and of unwarrantable violence against the masses. Should be vocal against national hypocrisy, against those who pretend to love the country but are busily stealing the public goods and converting the country’s numerous resources to their private use. Such a writer should also be dedicated to the promotion of a healthy, virile and life-sustaining culture – using his medium to fight decadence, falsification of values, degradation of cultural institutions and the emasculation of peoples’ way of life” (6).

The pen and indeed, the poet have the capability of shaping the destiny of his society. It is in his capacity as a militant against social evils and injustices against tyranny and oppression, against religious fanaticism and political despotism that the writer most often transforms his pen into a flaking

sword of crusade. Expressing the indefatigable nature of the writer and the force behind the pen, Okoli explains that, “the heroic symbol of power and rugged will, the pen, in its ambivalence, is capable of spreading knowledge and enlightenment or sowing discord and panic” (74). He demonstrates that the pen can translate social sensibilities and aspirations and harness them into actions of revolt, liberation or subjugation; reconstruction or destruction. The pen and indeed, literature, is essentially the writer, maker of literature, manipulator of the pen, of words and ideas, of theories and ideologies. One, who gives pleasure, arouses sentiments, evoke dreams or inspire odium and anarchy (74).

### **Conclusion**

It has been revealed through this study that theatre and the media since human civilization has been used as weapons to fight injustices of various dimensions and colorations in the society, especially in the Third World countries to which Nigeria is one of them. Through the media’s indefatigable influences in exploring and reviewing the actions and inactions of those in authority – legally or illegally, Karl Marx’s postulations have become manifested and at best fulfilled in many societies, through revolutionary changes. In these nations, the down-trodden who had been starved and exploited for too long has gained nothing from the general enrichment of the establishment. The much taunted “change” in Nigeria today, for instance, can be adduced rightly or wrongly from the current increases in the cost of living, epileptic power or zero power supply, deteriorating federal roads, retrogressing value of the naira over other foreign currencies, indeterminable foreign exchange, over-pricing of goods and services even in the face of diminishing qualities, among others. Perhaps, this is the change we have been promised, even when the government itself has affirmed that the economy is technically in recession, if not already recessed.

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# NUDITY, MORALITY AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT: A STUDY OF “WOMEN OF HOPE” DANCE PERFORMANCE

**Nicholas Chielotam Akas**

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

## **Abstract**

*Nudity in African performance is perceived by some as something barbaric, taboo and mundane that need not be discussed at all or seen by children. Some African parents believe that colonization has really put an end to any form of nudity, no matter the message or reasons surrounding it. But nudity existed in Africa of pre-colonial era in cultural activities. The research questions in this article are: What is the symbolic essence of nudity in dance? What are the factors that give rise to such nudity in the dance and are there cultural implications of nudity in the dance? When these questions are answered, the audience will understand that indigenous African choreographers do not choreograph in abstraction; rather their environment contributes to their working metaphor. Based on the objective of this paper, the essence of nudity in the dance, “Women of Hope”, is of great potency. This is so because it is a means used by women in the dance to express themselves on how they are being raped, robbed, and brutalized by unknown men in the community. The study discovers that, ironically, the communicative potency of nudity in the dance is for caution and signal for total revenge. From the finding, in Igbo cosmology, women are taken serious whenever they decide to do extra-ordinary things as going nude. The use of nudity in this dance is highly semio-communicative when interpreted beyond its moral potency. In order to understand the communicative potency imbedded in the dance, content analysis would be used as qualitative research methodology towards interpreting and understanding the choreographers’ motivation. In conclusion, nudity in its exposed form should not be ruled out totally as something barbaric; rather people should try to understand the reasons behind such exposure so that understanding the message in the dance as an expressive act can be accomplished.*

## **Introduction**

In African cosmology, nudity based on its sociological undertone is highly symbolic and represents situations and actions at any given time. To Africans, nudity is not all about sexuality; rather each form of nudity is motivated by a

particular action, ideology or environmental situations. For instance, in core rural villages in Africa, children growing up, both boys and girls are allowed to be totally nude while playing, because it is believed in Africa that they are still young, innocent and totally ignorant of any negative emotional feelings or sexual urges. But ironically any child seen covering him/herself at tender age is tagged a spoiled child. On the part of the mothers when they start aging they always expose their bodies especially their breasts. This symbolically portrays how many children they have given birth to. It also portrays at times that they were not wayward before and after they were married and, also, that their breasts are a source of living to all her children, hence none of them should disobey her or regard her as mere old woman. Manning Conrad observed that “nudity in some circles and some societies is completely divorced from sexual overtones. It may have no significant meaning in itself or it may indicate such diverse conditions as poverty, humility and commonly even a state of sacredness and holiness” (24).

The socio-communicative potency of nudity in cultural settings really shows that some environmental actions, mythical belief system or opinions contributed to various levels of nudity: half nudity or full nudity as the case might be. Half nudity can be in various forms for both male and female in our present society. For the girls, only bra on, while for the male totally bare-chested with or without singlet. Some of the environmental factors that might cause such nudity are as follows:

- a. It might be caused by hot weather.
- b. It might also be caused by over familiarity based on brothers and sisters or cousins.
- c. Or in a situation whereby some person or persons are grieving over death of relation, protesting over something or to showcase not being guilty of any accusation (as Yoruba’s do at times).

This paper argues that nudity, in all its ramifications, is far beyond immorality, poor home training and poor fashion trend use. Research has shown from social nudists that, nudity has both health, environmental and physical implications depending on how it is been utilized. So it will be totally bad to place nudity side by side with immorality without knowing the ideal reason or reasons surrounding each form of nudity. For instance, Manning clearly states the positive functions of nudity:

- a. Nudity provides more effective and natural vitamin D and Calcium balance.
- b. Nudity reduces the effect of stress, decreases blood pressure and decreases rising heart rate.

- c. Nudity reduces male infertility, impotence and nodular prostatic enlargement with resultant urinary tract obstruction.

Pauls suggests that “nudity should not only be judged on superficial level whenever it is seen, rather people should learn to ask question, observe and study reasons surrounding such nudity before making myopic generalizations that the person is totally uncultured” (29).

History has it that the nudity of a man as represented by artists in their paintings and carved works portrays man as a higher animal amongst other animals especially apes. The various paintings of nudity of man symbolically represent the innermost being of every man beyond mere clothing. At times, especially amongst artists, the totality of man exposed in nudity reveals his/her trunk shape, emotional reactions and responses to situations or shocks. Henry has observed that “any artist that enjoys expressing himself through nudity of man, simply, alerts man as a being whose self-actualization is inborn and not in the external clothing of make belief” (34).

For some creative works of art, the medium of expression especially when it has to do with nudity has been misinterpreted and called mundane art on the basis of morality. Morality has made some to reject creative art works and going to theatre to watch dance performances which will lead them to hell fire or affect their faith as Christians. It is important to note that this paper is not disputing the fact that some art works are highly obscene before its viewers and buyers. Rather the problem of this paper is to correct the myopic perception placed on nudity as a medium of expression in any art work. Towards the conclusion and recommendation as part of this paper, the reader will understand that the researcher advocates viewers deemphasizing their limited mind-set and valuing the reflective communicative essence imbedded in that medium of expression.

### **Nudity, Morality and Change Management**

Metre Chirag defines change management as ‘the systematic approach and application of knowledge, tools or form towards a better or more efficient process in improving the life of the people’ (5). But based on this paper, the essence of nudity and morality in dance performance is not barbaric or absurd rather what matters and make them acceptable in the society is the communicative undertone imbedded in them. It is the communicative undertone imbedded in change management using nudity and morality as a choreographic tool presents them as a sensitizing mirror seeking for ills in the society to redress especially the once that are gender sensitive. For change management to be useful in any performative art it must be identifiable,

acceptable and adaptable based on Kotter John transformative model of change as cited by Metre which are: a) establishing a sense of urgency; b) creating a vision: c) empowering the people to act on the vision. The aforementioned sociologically justifies the potency of nudity and morality using the selected study “Women of hope” dance performance.

### **Morality: An Overview**

The development of any society, community, organization and human being centres mainly on their moral belief and perception. It is their believed ideology that socially unifies the aforementioned in action, mission and vision statements towards upholding and actualizing any set goal. But non-conformity to a structural and nurtured moral belief system de-emphasizes any set principle. According to Hoffman:

Morality is the welfare and rights of others, especially when they conflict with one’s own interest to make choice between doing good or bad. The person’s ability to emerge successfully from these two emotional struggles makes him/her a moral sensitive being. (qtd. in Lisa 9)

The essence of morality wherever it exists is for it to stand as a guiding force and principle in making our daily choices. Man as a being is believed to be a higher animal among other animals because of his moral ability, sustainability and actualization based on logical and critical reasoning. But in this paper the aim is to observe, interpret and understand the moral justification in some nudist works, especially dance. At this point, nudity in dance based on cultural and moral justification is beyond biblical opinion of sin; rather in this context it is highly communicative and has a piece of information to pass across to the audience. Akas maintains that:

Nudity in creative art be it in dance, costume, poetry and fine art, should not be easily ruled out as an obscene object. Rather what matters or should be appreciated immediately is the subjective meaning imbedded in the art and not the objective perception based on individualised ideology due to engulfing effect of colonization of Africans. (46)

Aside the pains and regrets of colonization that at times de-values our cultural essence, it is very important to state subjectively in this paper that all action, belief and performances in African setting has a moral justification. It is the communicative moral justification in African performances that automatically



explains what gave rise to their emergence and their sociological usefulness whenever they existed. Akas Emenike (in an interview) stated that:

Communities should not be easily commended especially whenever their festivals look absurd or expressionistic in nature when placed side by side with the westernized festivals or performances; rather let the watchword and thematic essence be placed on the moral justification and the essence of its existence. With this, people can understand that any stylised performance be it nudity or otherwise does not exist in a vacuum.

Based on the above, every stylized performance in African setting or in Igbo cosmology has a traceable root. It is the traceability of such performance that justifies its moral implications. Nicholas Akas observes that:

Man as a being does not act out of mere assumption or provocation; rather the development experience he has passed through in life affects his perception or opinion towards certain views and actualisation of things or action. This consciously makes him store those actions in a domain called 'moral judgement' which at times helps him to determine whether to be or not. (24)

The effectiveness of morality in this paper goes beyond mere understanding of holy or sacredness on any works of art rather serve as tool for artistic creative justification.

### **The Sociological Implication of Nudity in Dance Performance as a Choreographic Style**

Dance is unique art form that has several means of communication based on the choreographer's choreographic style. It is choreographic style of any choreographer that positively showcases the information they want to pass across to the viewing audience. In dance scholarship, the use of body movements and its communicative essence has gone far beyond entertainment for it is an expressionistic tool that portrays the innermost intentions of the following: Choreographer (the creator) – the dance (the interpreter) and the audience (the social critics), all these are what every choreographer strives to achieve on stage with the dancer's body and choreographic medium.

Research has it that nudity as a choreographic style is barely used by some of the contemporary choreographers due to its obscenity before the

viewing audiences and their myopic moral justification of always seeing such expressionistic choreographers and dancers as corrupt people who need not to be associated with especially their children. But according to Amaka Nmezi (an indigenous choreographer in Egbeada in Ada community Imo in an interview)

It is the inability of parents to see, appreciate and understand dancers as communicators and not mediocrities irrespective of their form and style of expression that ironically forces such parents to see dance at professional level for their children as waste of time, resources, energy and manpower.

The use of nudity as a choreographic style, in any dance socially wise, is for emphatic purpose depending on the choreographer's metaphoric foresight. Based on this, the existence of nudity in dance performance should be looked at subjectively and not objectively as this paper strongly argues. The sociological essence of nudity as a choreographic style in dance is far beyond the Christian moral justification of sin and hell fire; rather in this paper, subjectively, nudity is used communicatively especially when it has to do with humanity – the society – aspirations/expectations and governance. The choreographer, in order to stress the essence of the aforementioned, will stylize his dancers in nudity form towards achieving the following:

- a. To awaken people's consciousness through the obscene body movements on stage and
- b. To help the viewing audience to know the reason behind the obscene movements and what the choreographer aimed to achieve with it.

Kaeppler maintains that:

In order to understand the use of nudity in dance, the movements must be grammatical, they must be able to view the immediate environment or society at large and present their worries bare before them. The nudity as a style in dance examines the nothingness of man's existences in world in which he lives and struggles to survive. (118)

The effectiveness of nudity as a choreographic style both culturally, professionally and socially presents the innermost feelings of a depressed man in his society. Scholarly wise at this point man no longer hide his feelings; rather he expresses them the way they are and not the way they ought to be. Arieti maintains that "nudity was a natural and normal part of life. People are

not nude when things are moving fine for them, but people's nudity are always noticed when environment and conditions are longer favourable to them" (qtd. in Ankrah 206). The semiotic use of nudity as a choreographic style by some choreographers depicts the following:

1. State of Emergency
2. Man's inhumanity to fellow man
3. Victimization of women
4. To demand for urgent attention on some topical issues
5. As sign of purification against any taboo.

This is what the use of nudity in dance stands for. It is not misleading anybody especially Christians (believers). Wadestone strongly observed that "there is no sin in nudity itself, but if a person uses the nudity for lustful or immoral purposes, he has misused it and this constitutes a sin. But when it is used for teaching morals, the bible does not speak against nudity nor does it teach that the body is shameful "(qtd. in Ankrah 267). Logically, the sociology of nudity in dance interpretatively presents the uncertainty of man's expectations in his daily activities.

### **Nudity versus Morality**

The success of any work of art especially in dance performance and choreography centres mainly on the morals behind its creations. It is the core level of morals in any choreographed dance movements that purposefully guides the choreographer towards setting a goal and work hard towards achieving it through body movement. At this point, the choreographer does not create movements out of mere assumptions; rather it is the de-valued moral belief system of the masses motivates the creative impulse of a choreographer towards creating a dance movement. The objective of every dance movement is to educate and not entirely for entertainment as it is wrongly misinterpreted always by non-dance scholars. But, in order to achieve the desired objective, the choreographer has the creative licence to use any available communicative medium and style in passing the intended message across to the viewing audience. Ifeanyi stated that "dance is a free expressive art and its medium of expression is as free as the art itself" (24).

The essence of moral justification of nudity as a communicative medium or style is based mainly on the ability of the choreographer to portray the following:

- a. To give reason for selecting such a choreographic style as an expressive medium.

- b. To explain the various nudity semiotic movements and take those movements to people that owns it for easy understanding and appreciation.
- c. To make the audience understand that the choreographer mirrors its immediate environment and present them the way they are.

Nudity and morality are highly interwoven in any artistic work especially in dance choreography. Nudity in dance as a style always serves as x-raying, interpreting and projecting the intended thoughts, ideology and observation of the creative artist be it musician, choreographer, fine artist and playwrights. The subjective aim of any choreographer using nudity as a choreographic style is to unmask the hidden truth in man's existence in his immediate environment. For instance, it is the nudity of a man that portrays his inner body structure, showcases how smooth and how rough he/her body structures is and also the places that need adjustments will be adjusted too. The same is applicable in dance creation and performance using nudity as its communicative medium. Here the choreographer uses the dancer's body as an 'operating theatre' where he dissects the governing and governed, present his flaws, broken promises and other various social misconducts. The moral justification of the use of nudity at this point, presents pressing situation the way it is and how it affects the masses and also demand for a possible solution where and when necessary.

Based on morals, the choreographer should always be perceived and appreciated based on the thematic content of his dance movements, its creation and its actualization and not to be christened on the ideology of sin and hell fire. Akas observes that 'The choreographer is a social crusader and his medium of expression should be adored too as a communicator and not as a sinner or moral degrader' (24). Erpolat maintains that, 'Nudity in dance can only be subversive when the naked body is used to question and expose the development of evil on the society through the dancers' body. (206). The semiotic interpretative essence of nudity and morality in dance is for self-acknowledgement and power. Self-acknowledgement helps to ask critical questions when and where necessary, while power gives the viewing audience drive to seek for positive change or look towards observing the change. This work adopts Sarah M.C. Kenncy internalized theory on nudity. This theory centres on man's inner thought towards nudity against the generalized perception of nudity being an obscene action. She said "the positive use of nudity is not a sin; rather its wrong use against its existence is highly questionable and must be sued" (24).

Conquet also believes that “what controls everybody be it artist, normal person and the society at large is the inner self and not outside self” (34). She also reaffirmed that ‘in human existence the inner self is the magic fuel while the outside self helps the fire to burn faster’ (34) Symbolically, the fuel based on the thrust of this paper simply shows what motivates the creative impulse of artists, while the medium of expression serves as an interpreting tools (the fire).

In this paper, the internalized theory as the theoretical framework will help in understanding positive essence of nudity and morality in the dance performance called “Women of Hope”. The core subjective aim of this theoretical framework is to advocate that the medium of expression in any work of art especially through nudity should be viewed wisely, interpretatively and appreciatively beyond immorality, sin and hell fire as the case may be for Christians. Every art work lover and social critics should first of all understand what triggers the inner self of an artist which he/she externalized through the chosen medium. If this can be achieved, one will begin to understand that happenings, situations and observations inspire the creative artist to always put on his thinking cap and work towards proffering possible solution.

### **The Synopsis of “Women of Hope”**

This is a contemporary dance-drama choreographed by Alfred Okoye. It is a command performance requested by one of the new generation churches in Lagos state during their church Women’s Day. The dance through its semiotic movement mirrors the various experiences women pass through because of tradition, societal norms and religious beliefs. The mirroring of women experience x-rayed in the dance portrays how a woman was sentenced to death for cheating on her husband and abandoned her children to her husband to look after them for six hours. Serious and painful women experiences are portrayed through symbolic choreographic movements. The choreographer is able to showcase men beating their wives and calling them all sort of names for going against the societal norms and shouting out what the woman should not do no matter the pressure. Based on the high level of humiliation the women in the dance revolt seriously through their nudity dance style and call for fair hearing. It is the moral justification behind their nudity dance style using the dances body as a medium that makes the dance a communicative tool. According to Alfred Okoye (the choreographer in an interview)

A lot of evil meted out in some public places especially churches, communities and in our society can never be ignored or considered common.

So, that is why I chose nudity as choreographic corrective tool. He also said that he saying the raw truth (using nudity) and also to awaken the women consciousness in seeking for fair hearing and judgement.

### **Analyses of “Women of Hope”**

Before the analysis, it is important to note that the dance itself is a ten-minute dance-drama on stage, highly energetic from the beginning to the end. It is the use of symbolic body movement under three sub-themes that presents the communicative essence of the dance. It is the categorization of the sub-themes through Bretchian style of performance on stage using sign post that presents the various ideologies of each scene and the expected actions of the dancers on stage. The sub-themes of the dance performance are as follows; the victim, the judgement and the revolt.

#### **The Victim**

The dance movement here varies from slow beat to high beat; each of these beats is symbolically important. Before the dance, a solo performer dances onto the stage with two sign-posts. On one sign-post one reads *the hotel* while on the other one reads *the victim*. After the proper positioning of the sign-posts she dances out of the stage. Immediately a woman is seen dancing to a very romantic beat and moving towards the hotel sign-post with her boyfriend. One thing very symbolic about these two lovebirds is the inscription on their both backs. The woman’s own reads: “I’m married, but full of regrets”; while the guy’s own reads: “I’m here to hear you out, you have my shoulder to lean on”. So the slow beats continue which showcases them as two love birds. At a point, the sounds of the drum change to a more fearful sound and on a very high tone, which shows sign of danger. Immediately the sound is heard a man is seen dancing to show sign of anger, disappointment and with a knife on the intention of killing his wife for committing an abomination. But at the back of the man’s costume is boldly written: “Yes, men are guilty of this offence, but it is forbidden for a woman to try such”. The choreographer creatively showcases how the husband beats up the man and sends him out of the hotel room while he (the husband) choreographically drags the wife to the sign-post written “The victim”; there he threatens to send her back to her parents.

#### **2. The Judgement**

This is another symbolic scene in the dance based on the inscriptions at the back of the judges. On the costume of judges is written: “Any offence committed by a woman in marriage should be straight divorce”. The woman is

brought in before judges to give reasons why she is cheating on her husband. Inside the court, other women with their various husbands are present to witness the court scene. One major symbolic action in this court scene is through the choreographer's style of using tempo through drums to portray his actions in the court. For instance, if the victim husband is talking, the whole environment will be calm and quiet through the slow beat of the drums and mimetic movement of the people inside the court room. But if his wife (the victims) wants to talk, the tempo of drums will go high which simply means she is not allowed to talk; rather she is guilty and nothing more. This particular action symbolically repeated itself three times in the dance-drama until the Chief Judge passes his judgement that the man is allowed to re-marry another wife, while on the side of the woman she should leave her ex-husband's house immediately and go back to her parent's house or now enjoy her freedom with her boyfriend. The unfair judgement gave rise to the nudity revolt of the women in the dance.

### **The Revolt**

This is where the choreographer presents his style of nudity revolt with moral justification. In an interview with the Alfred Okoye (the choreographer), he said that the nudity revolt here by the women is a moral lesson for fair hearing which stands on the following:

1. Women are human beings and should be treated fairly.
2. Whenever a woman airs she must be heard out before crucifying her.
3. Our men are always right in their immoral behaviours while women are always scapegoats.
4. Our total nudity on this ground is for moral justice to be done or we will use our breast to lay curse on men.
5. Oh! "Women of Hope" let the obscene nature of our nudity, morally wise fight for our just course.

### **Conclusion**

The core of this paper is to refute the misconception of people about art works, especially when it has to do with nudity. The use of nudity in creative works should and will not be interpreted literally; rather its positivism towards change should serve as the moral yardstick in judging them. "Women of Hope" is used as a medium in mirroring various harmful traditional norms that are inhumane to women and their human rights. The choreographer therefore uses nudity as a choreographic style to expose them, present women's reactions in such situations and proffer the way forward which is peaceful

resolution rather than a gender struggle. Based on this, choreographers and other creative artists become agents of societal transformation and reformation, through their creative ingenuity and unique expressive medium.

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# DANCE AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN MODERN BENIN CULTURAL TROUPE PERFORMANCE

**Josephine Ebiuwa Abbe**  
University of Benin

## **Abstract**

*Cultural dance groups in Nigeria are mostly private businesses and ethnic-bound set to propagate their people's culture. Government-owned cultural outfits also abound in the country. There is the National Arts Theatre which houses the National Troupe of Nigeria while the thirty-six states of the country have their own Council for Arts and Culture meant to sustain, preserve and promote the people's rich cultural heritage through dance, music and other forms of traditional performances. This paper examines the influence of modernity as a social change factor on cultural dance groups in Benin City, Edo State of Nigeria to determine how survival instincts have propelled traditional dance groups to creativity, thereby fostering and sustaining cultural identity and continuity. Two cultural groups are used for comparative analysis; their performances are examined to ascertain new dimensions infused into their works and their audience views on these changes. Literary and non-participant methodologies are applied in gathering data. Interviews are conducted with leaders and members of the two groups. Their performances, observed at social events serve indices for audience acceptance.*

## **Introduction**

The varied forms of dance which abound in our societies are expressions of how people live in each epoch. Some of these dances are constantly performed by cultural dance groups at social occasions outside their original context to meet modern entertainment needs. Preparing these forms in contemporary contexts “naturally imposes a number of constraints on their duration, scope and content, quality and modes of presentation” (Nketia 130). Meeting up with these realities thus requires creativity on the part of the cultural dance groups which sometimes create new forms or improve on existing ones by bringing imagination to fruition.

In line with the above, Edo, in his treatment of culture against the background of civilization, states that every generation changes its culture in

response to times and discoveries (“Concept of Culture” 6). By implication, cultural development is the response of life to changes in the society derived from new perception of things, aimed at making life either more appreciated or comfortable. In a more precise form, cultural development in Alonge’s view is a road map to societal development (qtd. in Babawale 5). Some factors stressed by Edo in another instance such as evolution, innovation/diffusion, and conformity necessitate cultural change and bring about growth, development, and cultural diversification (“Dynamics of Culture” 124-125).

As common with every society, modern Benin society is constantly responding to changes in its social strata which continue to alter taste and perception to life. The complexities arising from intercultural relation of cosmopolitan city continues to engage the minds of the owners of cultural dance groups whose bid to satisfy the yearnings for variety entertainment through imagination, observation and innovation keep afloat the cultural heritage of the people. These they do by bringing new dimensions of creativity into their performances. Thus, in upholding tradition, they leave their footsteps in the tides of times by performing dance and music that cut across cultures bearing in mind that the guest who constitute members of the audience at these events are of mixed cultures. Although the new forms are derivatives of the cultural nuances of the people, these cultural groups are set to erase the notion that African dance performances are monotonous and boring. By this act, they do not only re-invent tradition, they also add value to it thereby promoting the cultural heritage of the Benin people.

The need for this research thus arises from a personal experience of a cultural group’s performance at a social event where the group, despite the presence of various musicians, stole the entire show by their display. Those who had engaged other musicians could not help coming to watch this particular group’s performance. To them (audience), they were seeing such an awesome performance as they never envisaged a cultural dance group will be so captivating in their display. Against this background, this research examines the Edo Cultural Group International and Eki Theatre Troupe both in Benin City, Edo State of Nigeria with a view to determine how they have managed their troupes by bringing innovation into their performances in response to change in taste and perception of the modern Benin society.

### **Cultural Dance Groups in Benin City**

According to Awodiya, each society has its traditional and modern institutions managed by some persons in the community (73). Cultural dance groups as art managers, fall under the above categories as they help to perform, sustain and

develop the people's music and dance at each period in time. Traditionally referred to as *Otu no kui 'kuare*, cultural dance groups in Benin City, Edo State of Nigeria are called several names depending on their owners. Notwithstanding, they are generally referred to as cultural groups or dance troupes which shall be interchangeably used in this paper.

The place of these groups in social gatherings in Benin City cannot be undermined as they continue to bring up new dimensions or improve on existing forms to remain relevant to modern life. They function at most occasions where their services are hired as musicians to provide music and dance for the celebrant and guests. They also entertain the guests by adding color to the event through the cultural display of music and especially dance to supplement the efforts of other musicians when necessary.

Dance troupes in Benin City are over 30 in number consisting of the State Troupe (Edo State Council for Arts and Culture Performing Troupe), Edobayokhae (oldest cultural group), Edo Cultural Group International, Inneh Theatre Troupe, Ediendo Theatre Troupe, Edo Theatre Troupe, Eki Theatre Troupe, and a host of others. Apart from the State Council for Arts and Culture which is government-owned, the rest of them are private-owned business outfits set to earn a living by reviving, preserving and propagating the cultural heritage of the Benin people through indigenous music and dance. This economic drive propels them to infuse variety and changes into their performances to attract constant and regular patronage.

These groups perform in all kinds of ceremonies by government, organizations, and individuals requiring entertainment in dance and music. The occasion they perform nonetheless, their performances can be viewed from two perspectives of when engaged to serve as co-musicians and when they are the sole entertainer. In the first instance they perform more dances serving more as interludes while in the second context their emphasis is more on providing music while spicing it up with spur-of-the-moment movements that cut across cultures for the cosmopolitan audience.

Cultural groups in Benin City travel across local, national, and international levels for cultural exchanges. This exposure coupled with the seemingly competitive atmosphere set by the large number of available groups is some of the factors responsible for the changes taking place in their performances. Each group tries to outshine the other by introducing unique features into their performances to make them continuously attractive.

Dancers in cultural groups are costumed to reflect the *Ugho* dancer. *Ugho* is a major social dance of the Benin people originated by the Oba's (King's) wives. The dressing is thus an identity construct for the traditional

Benin woman. As for instruments used by these groups, they consist of two major sets of drums such as *Emugie* (big drum with three medium sizes) and *Ema-Olokun* (Olokun drums – two small drums), gongs, gourd rattles. These descriptions are necessary at this point to enable us determine the innovation brought into their performances in a bid to manage their troupes to adjust to social realities.



**Plates 1&2: Showing *Ugho* dancers in their complete attire and the traditional musical instruments used by every dance troupe in Benin**  
**Source: The Researcher's personal holdings**

### **Edo Cultural Group International**

Edo Cultural Group International, apart from Edobayokhae, is the oldest serving private cultural dance group in Benin City founded on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1966 by Late Chief S.O. Ogbodu. It was necessitated by an outstanding performance of a young man Agbonifo Enaruna (popularly called Idemudia) and his friend who were contracted by Chief Ogbodu to entertain his guests at an end of year party organized for his club. Their overwhelming performance propelled Chief Ogbodu to form the Edo Cultural Group with Agbonifo Enaruna and his other friends.

The group began with seven members but they are 21-28 in number presently. At its inception, its aim apart from entertaining and promoting the culture of the people was to breed and engage young dancers to carry on the cultural legacy of music and dance. Till date, the group's activities involve the three aspects of the performing arts which are music, dance, and drama presentations attracting a lot of attention by producing cultural music and dance ambassadors for the state. Prominent of these are high priest Osemwengie Ebohon, Agbonifo Enaruna, Abiomo Ogbewi, Jane Ekhaton, and Daniel Uwadiae. Also, several cultural groups have emerged from this group one of which is Inneh Theatre Troupe - one of the most outstanding and expensive cultural groups (presently) in Benin.

Edo Cultural Group International has performed at places like Benin Republic, Ethiopia, Algeria, Australia, England, and Russia for cultural display and exchanges. It has also performed at such national events as FESTAC 77 (Festival of African Arts and Culture held in Nigeria in 1977) and at National Festivals of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) where it represented the state and won gold medals severally. The idea for the formation of the State Troupe is said to have been spurred by this group and some of its members became pioneer staff.

### **Eki Theatre Troupe**

Eki Theatre Troupe, alias *Osamweniyobo* (help comes from God), is one of the numerous indigenous cultural dance and music groups in Benin City, Edo State of Nigeria. Founded in 2011 by Mrs. Martina Ilaide, the troupe currently has about 23 members made up of male and more of females which fall within the ages of 14 to 45/50 years old. Set up as a business outfit to perform the dance and music of the people, the Troupe in its five years of existence is turning into a formidable group by making waves with its unique performance and glamorous outlook. This is not surprising as the founder is a staff of Edo

State Council for Arts and Culture who had worked there for over twenty years. She is obviously infusing her widespread experiences into her private troupe.

Eki Theatre Troupe meets every Wednesday of the week to rehearse. They could also meet on a daily basis when there is an event that requires more rehearsals. They perform at all social occasions such as those listed above. Like most cultural dance groups in Benin City, the Troupe's major dances performed are the *Ugho* and the *Esakpaide* royal dances of the people. This is not to say they are limited only to these dances, they could perform other dances in and outside their culture based on demands.

The Troupe unlike most upcoming cultural dance group is always patronized (engaged). One of the major reasons for this is their attractive and captivating appearance and performances. They are almost sure to get another booking at each occasion they perform from members of the audience. Also, they do not have rigid booking fees but this is not to say they could go below certain amount.

### **Comparative Study of Change Management in Edo Cultural Group International and Eki Theatre Troupe Performances**

From the foregoing, the new and innovative ideas infused in cultural dance group performances in Benin City is an offshoot of factors ranging from social, religious, political, economic and cultural changes and the need to satisfy the new audience. Our focus therefore in looking at how these groups have managed these changes to keep their relevance to the immediate society shall dwell on their dances with reference to movements created, nature of songs and instruments used, costume and make-up worn, props, and the general atmosphere created by their overall performance.

Beginning with the dance, these groups seldom perform the *Ugho* and *Esahpaide* dances at social events anymore except it is specifically demanded for. The nature of the engagements they attend often do not create room for such dances as the occasion is normally very rowdy with people moving all around trying to ensure the guests are satisfied and comfortable. In this wise, these two groups have brought in innovation through solo performances infused with traditional creative movements to charge the atmosphere and entertain guest while they await the celebrant to engage the floor by dancing. Also, backup singers often respond with creative spur-of-the-moment movements often initiated by one of the dancers in addition to earlier rehearsed dance packages.

The spontaneous movements are created and choreographed to meet the exigencies of the occasion especially when members of the audience yearn for more. As the lead singer create movements and patterns on the spot, other dancers respond in such a way that one could hardly notice error and lack of uniformity in their performances. This is not to say there are not moments of lack of uniformity in these performances, but the mistakes are sometimes seen as a matter of style by the enthusiastic audience except it is a very conspicuous one.

In addition to the above, the culture (s) of the client or celebrant engaging the cultural group can as well affect the style of performance by these groups. In marriage ceremony where the bride and bridegroom come from different cultures for instance, these cultural groups will emphasize these in the music and dance they perform. Most times, they sing songs that cut across the major ethnic groups in the country to satisfy the mixed audience.

With regards to innovative movements from the field observation carried out, Eki Theatre Troupe seems to be more dynamic than the Edo Cultural Group International. They are younger and are much more vibrant and captivating in performance. They have a unique performance which is a processional dance. This apart from their style of costume has distinguished them from other groups' performances. It is very colourful in nature, with varied, spontaneous, energetic and captivating movements, intricate or simple patterns depending on the sitting arrangements of guests. The processional dance serves to welcome guests and call their attention to what the group can offer. At the end of this performance, the stage is set for various displays which come in solos and groups.

Another aspect of dance innovation by both groups is a solo creative dance performed by a young female dancer who dresses in a skimpy costume patterned after the method of dressing by the youths. She explores with contemporary movements most of which are erotic in nature. This, apart from spicing up the general performance is targeted at the younger persons mostly in the audience reflecting the language they can easily understand.

As for songs, the groups go beyond the domain of indigenous folk songs to creating praise songs for specific occasions. Some of these praise songs are also created on the spur of the moment in honour of the celebrants or a specific member of the audience. They also sing songs that cut across the major ethnic groups in Nigeria to reach their unique audience. For the sake of being able to reach a larger audience, these cultural groups have added modern instruments to the traditional instruments listed above. First, they make use of sound systems like microphones, speakers, mixer etc. Eki Theatre

Troupe due to the challenges they have encountered with musicians at occasions have infused the use of guitar and, or piano into their performance to enhance their sound.

In addition to the traditional drums, a talking drum (*emele*) has been added to the instruments. The traditional owners of this instrument are the Yoruba ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is a unique instrument that can spur anyone to dance. A combination of these new equipment with traditional instruments coupled with good management, gives the performances by these two groups unexplainable uniqueness.



**Plate. 3&4: Artistes in Eki Theatre Troupe playing *emele* (talking drum) and a guitar. Source: Researcher, field observation, Benin City, 31/1/2016**

Costumes worn by these two groups also come with new dimensions. That of Edo Cultural Group International still maintains the normal style of tying wrapper from the chest down to the ankle. The innovation they have brought into their costume therefore, is in terms of material used and the colour. The usual costume for cultural dance groups in Benin is a red velvet wrapper although other colours could be used. Edo Cultural Groups have extended the variation to include lace, silk and other expensive and more colourful and attractive materials. While their men is consistent with the normal velvet or white wrapper tied from their waist down to their ankles.





**Plate 5&6: Edo Cultural Groups International in their modern attire of lace and velvet materials, beads and creative head wig (*okuku*). Source: Researcher, field observation, Benin City, 26 &28/12/2015.**



**Plate 6&7: Drummers and a lead singer in their different colors of velvet wrappers.**

**Source: Researcher, field observation, Benin City, 26 &28/12/2015.**

Again, Eki Theatre Troupe, in terms of costumes, is much more creative. Apart from the usual wrapper, the troupe has brought a more outstanding innovation into its dressing by making a long breast tub gown with bare shoulders to give the impression of the wrapper. This is more fitting and easier to wear, making obvious the physique of the dancers unlike the wrapper that conceals their body shape. These gowns are made to specific shapes of dancers and necessary precautions are taken to avoid embarrassments which sometimes come with the wrapper impeding movements when not properly tied or falling off the body. As for the men in the group, they either tie the usual wrapper, wear the troupe's t-shirt, or they

are dressed in personal wardrobe as they are normally stationed in a position, playing instruments and singing.

Some years back there was a pronouncement from the King's palace that cultural dance groups should desist from wearing the traditional royal head wig (okuku) in their performances. The reason behind this was that the Oba's (king's) wives and female members of the royal house are the original wearers of this wig that was being commonized by the society. The original head wig is round in shape with four pillars or strings, attached to the front, back and sides of the wig. This is very significant in Benin cosmology to represent the base on which the Benin society rests (Abbe 2014).



**Plate 8: One of the many variations of *Okuku* with four pillars. See plate 1 above also**

**Source: Researcher personal holdings, Benin City, 2/2/2016.**

Cultural groups have devised a way out of this pronouncement as the wearing of this wig completes the royal dressing of the Benin woman. Thus emerged one that carries the impression (shape and idea) of the original one but it is without the four pillars. This variation however, turned out to be very colourful. In this regard, some cultural groups have also experimented with tying head gear which was rejected by the audience and traditional Benin people who felt the change gave a different identity to the people.

The *Okuku* (Traditional wig) worn by Eki Theatre Troupe as observed, has a pillar at the front while that of Edo cultural group have none. These groups also have variations in the beads they wear to decorate their necks, hands, ears and head. These beads are more fanciful in nature. Also, necessity and response to environmental change have made some groups to introduce the use of shoes into their performance unlike the naturally barefooted method. While performers of the Edo Cultural Group still stick handkerchiefs to their wrappers or handle the gourd rattles as hand props when performing,

performers of the Eki Theatre Troupe either use two fanciful hand-fans to display or play with the gourd rattles too.



**Plate 9, 10, 11, &12: Photo section of Eki Theatre Troupe in their costumes, *okuku*, beads, gourd rattles, hand fans, etc. Source: Researcher, field observation, Benin City, 12/12/2015 and 31/1/2016.**

### **Audience Acceptance**

In every business organization, costumers are as important as the products or services rendered, keeping producers in business. The essence of advertisement is to sensitize and draw the attention of the consumers to available services or products and when the consumers are not satisfied with the quality of a product, they do not hesitate to change direction. Hence, the role of the audience in the survival and continuous relevance of the entertainment industry is quite relevant as works of arts are created for appreciation and without audience, theatrical performances are not complete.

As earlier stated, private cultural dance groups in Benin City are set up for economic reasons. Like every other business, the owner of these groups sought ways to improve on their performances so as to attract more patronage. Both cultural groups here discussed are quite aware of the need to sustain

themselves in business hence they are open to suggestions and constructive criticisms that will improve on their art. An interaction with these two groups reveals that they are always on the lookout for things that catch the attention of the audience so as to infuse them into their performances. Eki theatre Troupe in this regard is much more dynamic as far as the innovation falls within the confines of the culture; they infuse it into their performance to add colour to tradition. Part of the motivation for their creativity is the need to have a distinct and unique identity in performance.

One of the major managerial strategies employed by both groups to capture their large audience is to have renditions that cut across ethnic, religious, political, and cultural backgrounds. This gives almost every member in the audience a sense of belonging as their minds are engaged in a pleasurable manner through the avenue created for their involvement and participation. From the interviews conducted on audience members at different occasions (Prof Aibueku, Mrs. Okunbor, Mrs. Eboigbe, Mr. Agbonifo, Mrs. Adagbonyi, benin city, 12<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2015), the responses were very positive. Majority of the respondents were enthused at the new dimensions brought into cultural dance and music forms. To some of them, the innovations are improvements and reassurances of cultural continuity.

As for the conservative audience members (which are minimal), these innovations are agents of cultural erosion meant to truncate original identity. The issue of originality they fail to note is however subject to context as has been captured earlier in Edo (2010:6) statement that “every generation develops its culture”. Every culture is in constant transition to produce new forms and the criticism by minority group on the new approaches does not prevent the innovation that is quite welcomed by majority who keeps engaging these groups. A continuous patronage is therefore a major sign of audience acceptance of these changes and criticisms by the minority group in the view of these dance troupes are as important as the acceptance by the majority as they serve as their checks and balances.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, change management in modern Benin cultural dance performance implicates growth and development, an act of experimentation that results into new forms or an improvement on the existing ones. The reception of innovation by audience members in these two cultural groups' performances is dependent on how appealing these changes are as the audience might not be aware of the processes of coupling a performance but

they know a good, new, and interesting one. Despite the difficulty involved in bringing innovative ideas to fruition, the artist from the perspective of this study, is dogged in bringing his art always to standard and making it relevant to the immediate society by infusing changes that audience can easily identify with thereby adding value to existing forms through innovation that enhances development and subsequent transformation.

Finally, cultural dance groups have always reflected and adjusted to the changes taking place in their environment, resulting into new forms of arts created. They are therefore, agents of cultural propagation and survival that should be encouraged by the society for the sustenance, propagation and continuity of the people's culture. Change in cultural dance groups performances in Benin therefore, is one of the ways of remaining extant and relevant to their society, an organizational and managerial approach to remaining in business.

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# NIGERIAN DRAMATISTS AS CHANGE AGENTS: THE TRAJECTORIES IN THREE NIGERIAN PLAYWRIGHTS

Bernard Eze-Orji

&

Charles Osa Emokpae

Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo

## Abstract

*The Nigerian dramatist from the days of colonial invasion has always led in the vanguard for change. Change is one phenomenon whose constancy is as sure as the morning dew. Drama on the other hand is one veritable art form that has championed change for the socio-cultural, economic and political development and good governance of nations. This study sets out to critically evaluate the trajectories of political change in Nigeria vis-à-vis the works of select Nigerian dramatists. Historical and textual analysis are methods of research employed on the works of the three Nigerian dramatists: Wole Soyinka's **Kongi's Harvest**, Femi Osofisan's **Once Upon Four Robbers** and Emeka Nwabueze's **A Parliament of Vultures**. This paper concludes with the view that against all odds, Nigerian dramatists leveraging on their artistic medium have chronicled political change in anticipation for good governance over the years in Nigeria. This has not abated even in the present democratic dispensation as they have continued to influence change especially serving as voices to the downtrodden in the society, thereby entrenching the functions of drama, which are not only to entertain, educate, enlighten, but also to mobilize the masses against undemocratic policies. The paper concludes that change, whether attitudinal or psychological, must first be politically induced for every other change to fall in place.*

## Introduction

Art is necessary in order that man should be able to recognize and change the world. But art is also necessary by virtue of the magic inherent in it. (Fischer 14)

It is imperative to establish the fact that the arts (through all its forms and in particular drama) especially in Africa are largely socio-functional in focus,

meaning that the notion of “Art for Art's Sake” does not hold in Africa, rather, it is “Art for Life’s Sake”. This explains why topical issues of national importance have been succinctly x-rayed through this unique artistic medium. As such, the dramatist is consciously and unconsciously committed to the welfare of its citizenry who in all cases are the recipients of the change, positive or negative, from the socio-political and economic ends of the government.

Though the level of commitment varies considerably amongst writers in Africa, what we cannot deny is the fact that drama in Africa as it is deployed is largely functional. The functionality of the dramatic art in Africa transcends the notion of entertainment but it largely borders on its use to correct, judge or measure, and restore a generally acceptable social order. This informs Chinua Achebe’s assertion in his paper entitled “Commitment and the African Writer” where he conceives the commitment of an artist, the creative writer in this sense: “when we speak of a writer's commitment we mean attachment to particular social aims and the use of his writing to advance those social aims. This of course, implies a belief that literature can be and should be used as a force for social change, and a writer has a responsibility to do so” (177). Achebe’s assertion is rooted in the Marxist dialectic convention that suggests radical revolution to involve the artist in the process of enlightening the masses and mobilizing them to collectively pull down the stronghold of oppressive structures in the society. It is within this premise that Fischer acknowledges the commitment of art as it is engaged by the artist to mobilize the people. He affirms that, “true as it is that the essential function of art for a class destiny to change the world is not that of *making magic* but of *enlightening* and *stimulating* action” (14). Fischer goes further to describe the level of commitment of the artist to his society. *Art is itself* a social reality – society needs the artist, that supreme sorcerer, and it has a right to demand of him that he should be conscious of his social function (47).

The social function (s) revolves round education, enlightenment, and mobilization of the mass of voiceless and subjugated members of the society. That is why Fischer concludes that; “In a decaying society, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect decay. And unless it wants to break faith with its social function, art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it” (48). The socialist commitment of dramatists and/or artists in Nigeria aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s proposition in, *Writers in Politics* where he notes that:

...literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or



more aspects of intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one of the sides in the battlefield. The side of the people or the side of the social force and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics? (2)

When we examine the artistic vision of some towering figures in the performing arts in Nigeria; Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima, Saint Gbilekaa, and so on, the logical conclusion is that their commitment is people-centred because they summon the courage to rise up in the face of subjugation and suppression; and also serve as watchdogs to government to ensure good governance.

The dramatist has always been an active member of the Nigerian society, as his or her art has always guided, conscientized, stirred, revolted, pointed as well as led the way in the political development and good governance of his/her society. To the Greek celebrated comic poet, Aristophanes, “the dramatist should not only offer pleasure but should, besides that, be a teacher of morality and a political adviser” (Gbilekaa, 54). The dramatist has variously used his art as forms of social commentary and criticism.

To Soyinka, “drama should expose, reflect, and indeed magnify the decadent, rotted under belly of a society that has lost its direction to use drama in reflecting and exposing societal ills” (Orji 23). It becomes the preoccupation of the dramatists and critics alike to note that such an exposition thus becomes the backbone of any work of art towards the political development and good governance of his society. In his inaugural lecture titled “Beyond entertainment: A reflection on drama and theatre, Adedeji opines that:

Beginning from the creation aspect of culture – the literary, the visual and the performing arts which when materialized express the essence of cultures this is the basis of progressive living. There is the philosophical aspect of culture which embraces the realm of ideas, beliefs, concepts and values of a people which come into full view either for reflection or provocation or both... it exists when the theatre is used for social and political action; when it is used as a weapon of change. (qtd. in Enekwe 17)

Practically, usefulness to the society is the purpose of drama and theatre – traditional, modern, post-modern, however defined or conceptualized, in consonance with nature, says Kalu Uka. According to Gbilekaa, beginning from the nineteen seventies, “plays were not written for entertainment only” (qtd. in Enekwe 21). It became functional and people oriented, involving the masses through theatre for development (TFD) to ask questions about themselves and what governance meant and should mean at least for the poor and dejected in society.

In Nigeria, particularly the word politics carries a lot of weight because everyone wants to know why certain developmental opportunities enjoyed by some set of people are yet to be extended to them (him/her), people fight for the sustenance or displacement of a particular regime based on the information they have for or against such government. Olu Obafemi in *Politics and Aesthetics*, draws a symmetrical line between politics and the world of theatre as and notes that “politics and theatre derive from the same source. People, the community playing roles and finding expressions and solutions to life-threatening problems... politicians want to make us believe them, against the fact, while theatre begins essentially in make-believe” (113). Obafemi’s sound comparison between theatre and politics serves as an eye “opener” for us to conclude that the dramatists are in a good position to contribute to the field of politics and governance. Especially since he knows what it takes to re-direct the self-driven nature of the politicians towards commonly driving goals, giving him praise when due and criticizing him when due. So the theatre artist can be described as an evaluator for the behaviour of the politicians. Farah quoted in Obafemi once declared, that the African politician is “a blind man: who moves only in one direction – towards himself” (1). It is against this backdrop this paper wishes to establish the functional roles of the platform of drama and how dramatists use their works to reflect on change; political, economic, socio-cultural in their various societies.

### **Drama and its Thematic Thrust on Societal Change**

Drama and society have close-knitted affinity or in the words of Lindfors, “have a close and inseparable relationship” (27). In every age of dramatic activities, society influences drama and vice versa. This is so because the materials, with which drama is composed, are drawn from the society and subsequently affects people's lives in society. In contemporary Nigerian society, playwrights have always studied their immediate environment in order to use their drama to make political statements. He or She observes the

behavioural patterns, and using this, he develops a play with which these patterns of behaviour will be portrayed or represented. This accounts for the changes in drama forms; the form must change as the society and perception of the world changes. The reason for this position is borne out of the fact that since society is the source of the playwright's inspiration, a change in society should ordinarily meet a corresponding change in drama form, in other words, our world being in constant change, that which imitates it must keep pace with the object of its imitation: mimesis of humanity in drama.

Drama from its inception has served as a mirror through which we look at the world. Like a mirror which reflects the images that appear before it, so does drama reflects the behavioural patterns of the people in the society, making it possible for the people to examine the level of their moral value. It shows the polarity of human nature -- the futility and the necessity, the vulnerability and invincibility of human nature; it also shows man as capable of abject defeat and transcendental greatness, in other words, drama shows human fallibility and instructs how such errors can be overcome. Quoting Vanbrugh in *The Provoked Wife*, Bamidele reveals that, "it is the business of the stage, to copy out the follies of the age, to hold to everyman a faithful glass and show man of what species he is, an ass." (7). Although drama reflects the positive and negative tendency of human nature, this paper is concerned with the negative side since the subject of discussion here, is dramatists and how they have championed change (societal ills) in their works over the years.

That drama has a lot to do with societal ills is a truism that has been confirmed by the realist dramatists since the period of Greek new comedy. Comedy reflects the ills of society by satirizing them. The absurdist drama which basically is comic in nature, try to show the absurdity of human nature. In the words of Edwin Wilson, the absurdist plays; "... are dramatization of the author's inner sense of the absurdity and futility of human existence" (328). When this absurdity is revealed to the audience, they realize the need to assess them individually and when they discover that they are lacking in moral value, will try to mend their ways for the better. Change has therefore, taken place. On this note Baranger enthuses, "the writers of comedy call for sanity, reason and moderation in human behaviour so that the society can function for the wellbeing and happiness of its members" (291). Our position is that no matter the perspective from which one looks at it, drama and its allied activities try to exert a positive influence on the people in the society and where this is done, the ills in that society is

eradicated. A typical example being the plays selected for analysis in the course of this paper.

**Wole Soyinka: *Kongi's Harvest***

Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* as an imitation of its society reveals the die-hard political nature of African leaders and the need for change in Africa's political space. The analysis of this play first published in 1967 will illustrate how drama continues to be timely and topical by serving as a tool with which the society is sanitized. It also offers us an opportunity to assess the extent to which Soyinka's message has continued to influence the lives of African people and ultimately, its society and serve as a bridge upon which other playwrights have stepped to cross and assert their claim to political ideologies for the good of all mankind. The position of this essay against the backdrop of *Kongi's Harvest* is that Soyinka revealed early enough in his writing career what African political leaders are, will be, and will continue to be. In the present, the play has become a reference point hence it was chosen in this paper to lead in the vanguard for plays on political change in Nigeria and in the larger African societies.

The study of the play *Kongi's Harvest* has revealed that of all the possible thematic preoccupations of the play, power tussle ranks tops as the most dominant theme of the play. This conflict of power tussle is among the three camps: Oba Danlola, Kongi and Daodu/Segi coalition. These three groups represent spiritual, political and economic power blocs respectively. However, each faction craves for absolute power. Kongi is not satisfied with just political power; he also wants the spiritual power that will accord him the recognition of Isma people. Oba Danlola is not willing to give up his traditional authority as the ruler while Daodu/Segi pact tries to unseat the others. Daodu is interested in the struggle because he is the heir to Daodu's throne while Segi is interested because her father awaits execution. Neither Oba Danlola nor Kongi feels comfortable with Daodu and Segi coalition. The harvest of a prize-winning yam marks Daodu out as the controller of agricultural life of Isma people while Segi is the controller of the commercial livewire of the people. The amalgam of these two sectors of Isma economy is a matter of great concern to both Kongi and Oba Danlola. Expressing fear for such 'unholy alliance' Oba Danlola discourages Daodu from their relationship in these words:

**Danlola:** ... Tell me, do you know that woman's history? I have myself wandered round some dens of Esu, once, and clambered over sweet hillocks in the dark, and not missed

my way. But Daodu, that woman of yours, she scares the pepper right up the nostrils of your old man here. She has left victims on her path like sugar cane pulp squeezed dry (*Kongi's Harvest*, 51-52).

In his defense of the relationship, Daodu explains that people say what they do not know about Segi. In his words: **Daodu:** Men know nothing of Segi. They only sing songs about her. But Danlola is adamant about that and still argues against the possible influence of Segi over Daodu. Hear him:

**Danlola:** Much better not to know, believe your father. Oh you have chosen to be swallowed whole down the oyster throat of the witch of nightclubs. Segi! son, she'll shave your skull and lubricate it in oil (*Kongi's Harvest*, 52).

Kongi's camp is also dissonant about any association with Segi and disapproves of her. The secretary allays such fear of discontent when he asks rhetorically thus: **Secretary:** But tell me, is she really as dangerous as they say? Some men I know have burns to show for their venture in that direction. The types too you'd think would know their way around (*Kongi's Harvest* 67).

Among the three power factions, the spiritual tends to reign supreme. A close examination has revealed that though Oba Danlola and Kongi's factions were afraid of Daodu/Segi pact, the actual contest is between Oba Danlola and Kongi. Within the Oba's camp, there is unity and harmony. In spite of his detention, his subjects are still loyal to him. In detention camp when the Superintendent wants Sarumi to warn the Oba against desecration of the national anthem, Sarumi simply says: **Sarumi:** We do not know the jackal's call; we do not hear the bonded overseer when the father speaks (*Kongi's Harvest*, 54). Again the supremacy of tradition is held when the Oba pretends he wants to prostrate before the superintendent, but the police officer stops such sacrilege by first throwing himself to the ground in reverence of the pre-eminence of the Oba. In the words of the Superintendent: "Only a foolish child lets a father prostrate to him. I don't ask to become a leper or a lunatic. I have no wish to live on sour berries. He continued when Oba Danlola made more remarks about his continued desire to prostrate" (*Kongi's Harvest* 6). This time the Officer alerts passers-by and:

[**Forestalls him (the Oba) by throwing himself down.**]: I call you all to witness. Kabiyesi, I am only a fowl droppings that stuck to your slippers when you strolled in

the back yard. The child is nothing; it is only the glory of his forebears that the world sees and tolerates in him (*Kongi's Harvest*, 6).

The play is a dramatization of the despotic tendency of African leaders and the misunderstanding that existed, or exists between the traditional rulers in Africa and the supposed despotic nature of African rulers. According to *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama*, the play was written for the festival of Negro Arts at Dakar and was intended to satirize the despotic government of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah. Scholars are of the opinion that the play has a universal theme and appeal: "though the specific political references may be lost on foreign audience, the antics of despots are universal." It will be recalled that the setting of the play is Ghana and being a British colony ran an indirect rule system whereby the British officials ruled Africa with the native chiefs. As a result, the traditional rulers wielded enormous powers over their people that it became difficult to strip them of such powers even after the colonies attained independence. Even this has not abated in present times. Gambia, for example, is embroiled in political conflict resulting in the same sit-tight syndrome from Yahya Jammeh who had to accept defeat and stepped down for Adama Barrow albeit grudgingly after 22 years. Other sit-tight leaders in Africa include; Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Burundi's Pierre Nkurunziza, Paul Biya of Cameroon, Jose Eduardo dos Santos of Angola, Nguema Obiang Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea and so many others. *Kongi's Harvest* therefore, portrays the conflicts that ensued between the traditional rulers and the newly constituted authorities on the assumption of independence. Kongi represents the new leadership, specifically Kwame Nkrumah who became despotic. Kongi, like Nkrumah, is a prophet of a political creed, which he dictates to his advisers from his high mountain retreat. Segi/Daodu coalition represents the new order or rather the rebel group. Like the dissidents we know, their concern is the opposition of the government. Daodu has successfully opposed the state by forming farmers' community against the state's established Farm Cooperatives. His efforts pay off and he produces the prize-winning yam and enough food for Isma population. This success serves as a yardstick for adjudging him an ingenuous administrator. With this character, Soyinka suggests that in spite of the gloomy political situation in Africa, there is a glimmer of hope in that there will rise a man who will combine the good aspects of tradition with modernity for the betterment of Africa and humanity.

However, activities of African leaders over the years have proved it is not yet *uhuru* in this black continent. It is against this background that the generation that followed Wole Soyinka led by Femi Osofisan believed that Soyinka's ideologies put forward in his plays showed man as helpless in the face of daunting challenges. Osofisan in his radical Marxist posture captured the situation thus:

The first generation of writers created our modern literature in English, laid out its architecture, its diction and its language, then they used it to re-establish our past for us, to show us its dignity and its splendour. We of the second generation seized that literature, cleansed it of its cobwebs and ambiguities, and made it more accessible, and more pliable. Then we employed it to fight social injustice, conscientize our people, and compel the military dictatorship to surrender its usurped power, and return us to a free, civilian society. But there is a new war out there, and it is not one for us to throw up our arms and join the exile train. It is a war to ensure that our hard-won democracy is not aborted or truncated once again by greedy, irresponsible politicians (*The City as Muse* 80).

Osofisan's position above captures the thrust of this paper, one that has set out to trace the trajectories of change in the three dramatists under study. *Kongi's Harvest* recently analysed left much to be desired in its bid to confront the social issues of the period. For example, the play suggests that with the knowledge of despotism as practiced by African leaders, a time shall come when they'll change or an opposing force will rise to supplant it for the better. But this position is like a bone (muscle) massager who pities a fractured bone only for it to heal and be deformed in the process. With Osofisan and his contemporaries of the second generation; Biodun Jeyifo, Bode Osanyin, Olu Obafemi, Odia Ofeimun, Esiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze, the stage was set to use their radical Marxist ideologies to lead in the vanguard for more egalitarian society. A drama of purposeful confrontation, and a drama that will look the state squarely in the face and demand good governance. This group, already disheartened by the type of drama of disillusionment of the first generation and they could not wait to challenge their destinies and those of the general public whom they felt deserved better bargains.

### **Femi Osofisan: *Once Upon Four Robbers***

Femi Osofisan is one playwright that has used his works as revolutionary tool to question the traditional passivity and forlorn hope of first generation playwrights; Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark. Olu Obafemi, Osofisan's contemporary captures this mood rather succinctly:

The development of a revolutionary approach to art and theatre manifests itself in the young playwright's commitment to the employment of the revolutionary potential of the theatre to sharpen social awareness, adapt a socialist alternative approach to the obsolescence they find in the body politics of the present recipes for social change. This generation of writers include; Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Kola Omotosho, James Isoha, and so on. They have a conviction that social change could come by playwrights' ability to raise mass awareness to a positive revolutionary alternative to social decadence. (118-119)

Osofisan has with his revolutionary style of theatre continued to question established orders and confront urgent contemporary social problems in Nigeria. He rejects the tragic vision in the works of his predecessors – Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark – which he attributes to the latter's harping upon animist metaphysics. He rejects such a vision, which opts for individual heroism. His ideology is concerned with a mass revolution of people doing things together. Osofisan believes that an artist is faced with a task of pointing out social ills, uncovering the harsh realities of life such as exploitation and oppression, and class differentiation where a particular class invariably enjoys the best things of life (the bourgeois) at the expense of other class (the proletariat and hoi-polloi). He suggests in his works possible means of eliminating these maladies, and therefore, urges writers not to shut their eyes to these problems and realities and stresses commitment to them against all odds. His aesthetic preoccupation is to create art that is close to the popular mode in terms of clarity of language and directness of purpose. He reveals this as:

A story that will be simple in instruction, direct in message, but geared towards positive human value in the context of our society. We should seize the form and structure of Western literature but change the context to meet the needs of our society. (7)



In his brief citation on Osofisan, who was the 2016 winner of the IATC's prestigious Thalia Prize, Don Rubin, Former President, Canadian Centre of the IATC had this to say:

Osofisan is of the generation that followed two theatrical giants and his footprint is almost as large as theirs on the continent of Africa and it is growing in other parts of the world as well. Probably his most well-known play is *Once Upon Four Robbers*, which is already taught in numerous universities around the world and has been widely anthologized. But it is only one of some 50 plays by this major artist and activist. These plays – like his critical writings – are cries for personal freedom and political action and include many adaptations of Greek and Shakespearean originals, tailored for whatever political situation might exist (<http://aict-iatc.org/en/awards/thalia-prize-awarded-to-femi-osofisan/> par. 5)

It is against this background that this paper chooses to analyze *Once Upon Four Robbers*, which is described by Arongbe Afolabi as "a certified indictment of an establishment, a government that could not fulfill one of its major roles of providing gainful employment" (12). The play narrates the escapade of four robbers (Major, Angola, Hassan and Alhaja) who go about maiming, killing and robbing people of their belongings because of the harsh and unfriendly economic situation caused by bad government in power. The same government had set up a firing squad as penalty for armed robbery. In order to evade in their acts, they meet an Alfa (another character) an accomplice of religious fanaticism who promises to give them charm to use in their game on the condition of stealing only from the rich and not their fellow poor. The charm is a song in links and is shared among the four robbers to be reproduced to effect its efficacy. They succeed in their operations, but immediately, Major feels the boss and plans to abscond with their booty, but for the timely intervention of the Soldiers who came after them for arrest. Hassan, Angola and Alhaja flew but Major was not so lucky as he was arrested and conversely charged to be executed on the firing squad. On the day of execution, there is a revelation that Angola is Sergeant's brother, and that everybody has been part of this gross corruptive tendencies; from the Market Women, Soldiers, Policemen, to even the religious fanatics exemplified by Alfa. Osofisan asks: Is it only the armed robbers that are guilty as charged? The play is thrown open to the audience to decide its end.

The concern to recover man's lost humanity in an unjust world has assumed the central theme in Osofisan's drama. Dehumanization though a concrete historical fact is not a product of destiny, it is created by man. The end result of oppression or dehumanization is violence. *Once Upon Four Robbers* therefore, is a radical sociology of crime, an exposition of the struggle of the oppressed masses to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the wealthy class. In highlighting the causes of violence, particularly armed robbery, Osofisan gives it a dialectical treatment. He juxtaposes the arguments of the robbers with those of the hunters -- the oppressor in order to provide insight into socio-economic conditions that drive men into unpremeditated crimes. With this device he expects his audience to judge for themselves in the referendum at the end of the play.

As noted in the play, crime does not start and end with the poor masses but also from the leaders of the state who pay deaf ears to the yearnings and aspirations of the masses. In a thematic and ideological twist, Osofisan believes like Paulo Freire that:

Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons -- not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves. It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent with their power to create the concrete situation which begets the "rejects of life." It is not the tyrannized who initiate despotism, but the tyrants. (qtd. in Gbilekaa 72).

Osofisan's message, as satirical and critical as it is, is double-edged, for while exposing the outrageous crimes of the robbers, he is also more specifically indicting the leaders for being the cause of hardship of the masses thereby inciting them to action. Yet, in spite of the gloomy picture of the oppressed presented in this play, the vision for the future is not a fatalistic one. There is hope for change and betterment. Even at the point of death, Major (one of the characters) sees this hope in the destruction of the unjust capitalist and corruptive system that creates his likes. In his words, Major:

...Serg, today that law is on the side of those who have, and in abundance, who are fed and bulging, who can afford several concubines. ...tomorrow, that law will change, the poor will seize it and twist its neck. The starving will smash

the gates of the supermarkets, the homeless will no longer yield in fear to your bulldozers. And your children, yes, your dainty little children will be here where I stand now, on firing block... (*Once Upon Four Robbers* 84).

It is against this pronouncement that this paper finds it expedient to bring up Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, our next select play for analysis. It is a play that is more revolutionary and confrontational and which accomplishes Major's prophecy in *Once Upon Four Robbers* in his statement above.

### **Emeka Nwabueze: *A Parliament of Vultures***

It seems playwrights are God's gift to humanity, people who dedicate themselves through their works to redirect and conscientize mankind as against the abyss of damnation and perpetual suffering created by Satan (political leaders) in human form. *A Parliament of Vultures* is the playwright's response to the gloom that gathers and has kept gathering in the political firmament of Nigeria. Nwabueze like every other committed dramatist has set out in this play to achieve results, in deploying characters and situations that are revolutionary and confrontational. This is revolution, and there is no revolution without bloodshed or violence. The staging or even reading of *Nwokedi* by Esiaba Irobi will send shivers down one's spine with the way he deploys violence and bloodshed in the play, if only to send warning signals to bad leadership. Osofisan, whose ideological disposition in print is revolutionary, condemns violence in works of art, especially drama. According to him:

I do not believe in violence. Violence: that is not what Marx means; that is not what Mao meant. Violence is not the end, it is only a means, and we must never forget that end. What is the end? The end is to produce a happy prosperous society. A happy satisfying Government in defence of fairness, justice where people are disciplined and have what they need....but people in power do not have compassion, a necessary ingredient of revolution. Once you forget compassion, forget humanity, once you believe in violence as a means to an end rather than the last resort, what we have is a dangerous perversion of justice. And I do not believe that is in favour of humanity; that is very un-African. (22)

Osofisan believes that as an artist one should reflect on the agonies of the time, reflect the hopes of the time and show a possible way out of all the problems, and condemn negative forces, and instruct while entertaining, and entertain while instructing. But for how long can we keep up with this passivity or paper revolutionary ideologies without a bite? For how long can we throw up a referendum to the audience to decide their fate and the fate of the rest of mankind? This may be responsible for the creation of the kind of situations one finds in his play, *A Parliament of Vultures*.

In their synopsis of the play, Nwosu and Onwuasonya capture it in these lines:

*A Parliament of Vultures* is a play wrought around the heart-rending malfeasance of Nigerian Parliamentarians. The play is a poignant political satyr, projecting an incompetent, boisterous and licentious Madam Omeaku as the protagonist. Though illiterate, Madam Omeaku in connivance with her criminal and morally decadent accomplice - Mr. Brown wriggles her way into the highest levels in parliament and relegates the more intelligent and articulate Dr. Parkers and Otobo to mere bench warmers and toothless bulldogs in the affairs of the parliament. (202)

With a divided house of parliament, Speaker Habamero, Rev. Hon. Jossy and the Chief of Protocol align together against the moral and prudent voices of Dr. Parkers and Hon. Otobo and eventually orchestrate their unlawful incarceration all in a bid to ensure that no single opposition remains in the House. The president is also portrayed as grossly incompetent, arrogant and completely detached from the masses. The president's excesses are helped in no small way by the acquiescence of the parliamentarians in playing the game. Nwabueze reveals the high level of corruption, favouritism and ineptitude that are the hallmarks of Nigerian lawmakers till date. The people's collective wealth is appropriated in billions of naira on frivolities and insignificant projects like church invitations and wardrobe allowances. The last straw, however, that breaks the camel's back is the unlawful arrest and detention of the duo of Dr. Parker and Hon Otobo and plans to revoke an already awarded contract because Madam Omeaku supports the obnoxious plan. This stirs the general public to action and the student body revolts as has never happened in the country. In fact, when Chief of Protocol tells members of Parliament about the students' plan of action (revolt), Habamero is quick to ask: "Have students ever brought down any government?" With a

wave of the left hand, they continue on approval of revoked contracts. And before they are able to understand what is going on: “sounds of war songs are heard from a distance. They are harsh and penetrating” Chief of Protocol is dispatched to ascertain what is going on. He comes back frantically and frenetically fidgeting and calls out to the rest of the parliamentarians:

“Hell! Abomination! Hell on earth! Hell has descended on us... *They try to rush out through the door, but it is too late. A group of militant youths rush into the House, singing war songs. They arrest the honourable members and proceed to tie them up with ropes.* (112)

This singular action is revolutionary theatre as demonstrated in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*.

### **Conclusion and Observations**

This paper establishes the trajectories of change and approaches adopted by the different playwrights over the years to bring to limelight the issue of bad leadership in the society. For instance, Soyinka, Nigeria's foremost literary giant had set the ball rolling revealing and conscientizing his African audience about the despotic nature of their leaders in his *Kongi's Harvest*, while Femi Osofisan took the challenge further by indicting the authorities, thereby inciting the masses to decide on what to do with the situation through a plebiscite at the end of his play, *Once Upon Four Robbers*. However, it was Emeka Nwabueze, in his *A Parliament of Vultures*, who really demonstrated what revolutionary theatre is and what can be achieved with it, as the paper revealed in the end of the play.

Dramatic ideology of the African examples has undergone varied changes in form and content, at least from the time of Soyinka's first generation dramatists. Among the second-generation playwrights represented by Femi Osofisan and many others, there is a seething anger and disillusionment with the past, present and even the future. This anger is hinged on the fact that people like Osofisan being aware of the revolutionary fervour of the theatre, do despair largely because such efforts have done little or nothing to positively alter the predicament of the people. It is against this backdrop that Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* took up this challenge and presented a play filled with violence, gloom and despondence as a true reflection of the realities of the Nigerian state and indeed Africa as a whole and what theatre as an art form can achieve if properly channelled.

This position above resonates in Federico Garcia Lorca's theatrical ideology articulated in Asigbo's Inaugural:

... a nation which does not help and does not encourage its theatre is if not dead, dying, just as the theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the genuine colour of its landscape and its spirit, with laughter or with tears, has no right to call itself theatre...(8).

As guardians of the conscience and sacred spirit of the state, dramatists and indeed all writers must not only write to condemn, but must in all honesty lead in the vanguard for a just and egalitarian society with their works. Only within this premise will art, drama and their artists champion change we noticed in Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and many others like that.

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# HAZARD MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN THEATRES: A PARADIGMATIC SHIFT

**Gowon Ama Doki**

&

**Jerry Idah Odeh**

Benue State University

## **Abstract**

*Occupational hazards of fire outbreak, building collapse, injuries, stress and insecurity are eventualities that are grossly inescapable. However, these can be managed and mitigated for the smooth running of any organization. The theatre and its practitioners as performing artists are as well prone to these hazards as they engage in both artistic and technical activities. This paper examines the preparedness and or otherwise of theatre organizations in mitigating these hazards if and when they do occur. Methodologically, the paper deploys interviews and personal observations as tools of data collection where key informants and in-depth respondents are asked relevant questions. Findings reveal that most theatre organizations be they educational, public arts councils or private troupes do not possess requisite facilities to manage these hazards when they do occur. The paper recommends the creation of the office of a hazard manager as well as the training and retraining of staff in this section on rapid responses when hazard do occur.*

## **Introduction**

The continued neglect of a critical component of the theatre by theatre managers is not only worrisome but a risk that practitioners must broach for discussion. While theatre managers dedicate all efforts at ensuring to the organization a surplus or at least balanced budget, little attention is given to the area of hazard management. In their professional wisdom, managers usually insist that “the show must go on”. This popular theatre slogan echoes two premises: first, it presupposes and recognizes the fact that the process of theatre production is susceptible to challenges, critical amongst which is hazards; secondly, in spite of these challenges, final performance is inevitable. A survey snapshot on most theatre houses shows a gap in this direction, yet managers are usually oblivious of the details as can be inferred from the first



premise which presupposes that hazards are inevitable and must be prepared for. According to Oshionebo and Idebi, “theatre management is concerned with the theatre buildings and companies and how artistic events, financial transactions, rentals and box office earnings are interrelated in the running of the theatre” (41-42). Such conceptually parochial definitions permeate most scholarly and practical preoccupation of scholars and managers of the theatre. It is clear from the quotation that a very paramount aspect of management which is the safety of the artist and audience from culpable hazards in the process of theatre making and presentation is neglected. The safety of the artist must be the topmost priority of any theatre organization, for if this is not guaranteed could lead to the disruption of the entire process. While hazards are inevitable, they can be managed, controlled, mitigated and prevented. It is upon this anchorage that the paper proposes a paradigm shift—a move away from the profit making focus of theatre management today to cover hazard management that will pave the way for the provision of systematic, preventive and or managerial approaches and or measures to curb hazards in theatre organizations. Adedokun also toes the same line with Oshionebo and Idebi in his description of the theatre manager’s job thus:

... He is any person who manages a theatre, who coordinates all economic activities, a publicity director, a match maker who brings together the idea, the artist, the place, and the audience. He sets goals, selects plays, books in touring troupes, finds money or raises funds, hire personnel ... supervises and controls theatrical operations from the beginning to the performance. (8)

The practice of theatre management in most theatre organizations centres on general production planning, organization, performance, and production earnings, less attention is paid on the management of hazards in our theatres. Management in utopian terms is the total “utilization of scarce resources in order to achieve pre-determined organizational objectives. These scarce resources comprise people, money, materials machines, information, knowledge, time, etcetera (Oshionebo 95). Szilagyi also maintains that “management is the process of interpreting resources and tasks toward the achievement of stated organizational goals” (7). However, it should be noted that every other resource depends on the people who are the workers of any organization for the success of productions; for they are the ones that make the entire system operational. Therefore, one of the predominant aims of managing any organization should be to first and foremost ensure the safety of

the worker. The worker is the human resource of the organization without whom the organization is left dormant and or un-functional. Rensis Likert emphasizes the importance of the worker in an organization thus:

All activities of any enterprise are initiated and determined by the persons that make up that institution, plants, offices, computers, automated equipment, and all else that a modern firm uses are unproductive except for human effort and direction. Human beings design or order the equipment; they decide where and how to use computers; they modernize or fail to modernize the technology employed; they secure the capital needed and decide on the accounting and fiscal procedures to be used. Every aspect of firm's activities is determined by the competence, motivation, and general effectiveness of its human organization. Of all the tasks of management, managing the human component is the central and most important task, because all else depends upon how well it is done. (qtd. in Oshionebo 97)

Considering the status of the artist in any theatre organization one dares to wonder the level or what measures have been put in place to combat eventualities that they may encounter in the course of dispensing their duties? This is because engaging as a workforce of any theatre organization exposes the artist to a number of risks which include fire outbreak, building collapse, injuries, stress and insecurity among others.

### **Occupational Analytical Frame**

In this segment, an occupational analysis is done to reveal all operations and sub-operations of the theatre artist and the hazards associated with them. Information here presented was generated through interviews with key informants and in-depth respondents as well as personal observations. According to Nyiahule “the world of work is comprised of various areas called occupation. To develop vocational instructions in a particular occupational area, the occupation is analysed into specific job titles. Next the jobs are described and the duties are stated. Then the tasks performed by the worker on a job are listed and validated, usually through a survey” (1). Occupational analysis is also used in times of job recruitment in organizations; this is because it gives clear information of the job requirement, existing loopholes in the labour force and equipment and the number of

persons and equipment needed. This section and or segment of the paper carefully applies Nyiahule’s occupational analytical model, for it is through this analytical frame and or process that the various engagements of the theatre artist may be deciphered and the likely hazards associated with the various tasks phantom for further analysis, comprehension and solution proffered.

**Job Title and Job Description**

<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Job Description</b>
<b>Theatre Artist</b>	A Theatre Artist is someone who carries out theatrical performances to entertain, enlighten, educate and inform audiences. He/she may wear different kinds of costumes typical of the role being played. He/she may work in state’s arts council, national theatre, private troupe, or university/college of education as student or staff or a freelancer. He/she may be designate; however, the nature of his/her job may require going out to perform at occasions and other functions. He/she may also engage in directing, management, administration, costuming, makeup as well as the control of lights and sound equipment.

**Table 1:** Shows the Job Title and Job Description of the Theatre Artist

**Tasks Description**

As earlier noted, job analysis entails listing the various tasks involved in the performance of each duty. The task of a theatre artist falls under three broad categories of artistic, technical and managerial tasks. Below is a graphic tasks description of the theatre artist.

## 1. Artistic Task

<b>Operations</b>	<b>Sub-Operations</b>
<b>Acting</b>	Internalization of pre-written lines, creation and internalization of lines, rendering of lines, movements, shouting, screaming, recording of blockings, private and general rehearsals and performance.
<b>Singing/Music</b>	Internalization of pre-set song verses, creation and internalization of songs, creation and playing of musical instruments, private and general rehearsals and performance.
<b>Teaching</b>	Source for materials, read literatures, make lecture notes, teach students, set test/exams, mark scripts, record scores, and anchor productions.
<b>Dancing</b>	Mastering of pre-set dance steps, creation and mastery of dance steps, playing of drums, private and general rehearsals and performance.
<b>Acrobatics</b>	Gaining mastery of pre-set acrobatics, creation and mastery of acrobatic movements, private and general rehearsals and performance.
<b>Directing/Choreographing</b>	Reading of script, pre-blocking on paper, framing the design concept, supervision of the designer, costumier, and make-up artist's work, blocking and teaching of dance steps.

**Fig. 2:** Shows Artistic Activities of the Theatre Artist

This aspect of the artist's task is rigorous and highly demanding; it consumes energy, time and intellectual resources of the artist. From the preparatory stage which is characterized by recurrent and repetitive actions in form of rehearsals in order to gain mastery of the idea to achieve a near perfect performance to the performance itself and post-performance assessment where strength and weakness, failures and successes of the production are chronicled to boost the quality of subsequent productions, this makes the artistic task very important though very tedious. In teaching, the teacher has to engage in serious reading of literatures to also gain mastery over what he/she is to teach before attending classes and in the course of teaching he/she is likely to demonstrate, repeat, and simplify what he/she teaches in order to elicit the understanding of the students. Acting on the other hand requires memorization of pre-written lines in a play text or creating lines or dialogue in the case of improvisation. Singing, dancing and acrobatics also entail creating one or practising pre-set songs, dance and acrobatic steps or movements for perfection. The task of the artist is fundamentally the transient performance raw material which is presented to an audience, though rehearsed and ready for performance, this raw material is considered and or remains naked without the aesthetics embellishment and or dexterity of the technical tasks that cloth the performance, create and prepare the performing environment for the performance. Below are the technical tasks of the theatre artist.

## 2. Technical Task

<b>Operations</b>	<b>Sub-Operations</b>
<b>Construction</b>	Designing/drawing on paper, meet with the director and other crew, metalwork; wedding of sets/props, woodwork; flats, platforms, rosters, steer case, use of nails, harmer, saw, chisel, etcetera.
<b>Painting</b>	Drawing and painting of cycloramas, painting of sets and props. Use of paints brushes, water. Requires concentration, stability, and thorough evaluation,
<b>Costuming</b>	Reading of script, research into the culture, drawing a costume chart, meet with the director, designing and sawing of costumes.

<b>Make-up</b>	Reading of script, research into the culture, drawing a makeup chart, meet with director and other crew and make performers up.
<b>Sculpturing</b>	Design on paper, moulding with clay or cement. Mould and remould to meet specification. Requires carefulness, stability of hand, and creativity.
<b>Lighting/Sound/sound effects Creation</b>	Reading of script, drawing the lighting plot, chart, light cue sheet, general pre-set sheet, listing of equipment, meet with director, installation of lights and sound equipment, sound check, and lighting the production.

**Fig. 3:** Shows Technical tasks and sub-tasks of the Theatre Artist

The technical tasks of the theatre artist are basically behind the scene activities. It involves preparing the sets and props, costumes and makeup, lighting, as well as backdrops. The enormity of the technical tasks requires both physical and intellectual capacity of the artists; this informs the place of the technical artist's work in the production process which is very paramount. Peter Brook emphasises the importance of set construction in theatre production when he said that "the set is the geometry of the eventual play ... a wrong set makes many scenes impossible to play, and even destroys many possibilities for the actor". He further maintains that this creative impute calls on the designer to think of his designs as being in motion, in action, in relation to what the actor brings to a scene as it unfolds". This frame of mind therefore, subjects the "designer to evolve step by step with the director, going back, changing, scrapping, as a conception of the whole gradually takes form" (qtd. in Parker, Wolf, and Block 1). This makes the technical tasks of the theatre artist a herculean one, for he/she continue to design and redesign to meet the design specifications of the performance, in essence designing ends after the performance has been done, for even during actual performance, adjustments of deigns is likely. However, the entirety of artistic and technical tasks cannot be successful without a viable management orientation. Below therefore is the description of management task.

### 3. Managerial Task

Operations	Sub-Operations
<b>Organizational</b>	He sets goals, selects plays, books in touring troupes, finds money or raises funds, and hires personnel.
<b>Management of Human Resources</b>	Brings together the idea, the artist, the place, and the audience.
<b>Administrative</b>	Supervises and controls theatrical operations from the beginning to the performance.

**Fig. 4:** Shows the Managerial Tasks of the Theatre Artist

Undoubtedly, the managerial tasks of the theatre artist are enormous, the enormity of his/her task exposes him/her to a number of risks and or hazards, which are likely to deter, or disrupt the production process. These hazards are isolated below.

#### **Hazards in Nigerian Theatres**

The above job description reveals the fact that the theatre artist is not a magician neither is he/she an immortal, he/she is therefore susceptible to serious danger and or hazards in the course of executing his/her job. This has necessitated an inventory into this neglected aspect of theatre management in Nigerian theatres. In doing this, it is pertinent to adopt the quadruple process of hazard management which is identification of hazards, assessing the factorial precursors that make for the hazards, deciphering the effects on the worker cum consumer as well as the saleability of the products and finally, suggestion of controlling, mitigating and or preventing measures of the hazards. Below is the tabulation of some occupational hazards collated through oral interviews with theatre practitioners in selected theatre organizations in Nigeria.

Occupational Hazards	Cause of Hazards	Effects on the Artist
<b>Acoustical Problem</b>	Un-controlled loud noise.	Deafness.
<b>Optical Problem</b>	Un-controlled high light beam, close proximity of	Sight deficiency.

	lights to performers, looking directly into light beam.	
<b>Stress</b>	Excessive workload, uncoordinated work priorities, disorganized work procedures, tight deadlines, prolong rehearsals.	Headache, neck and shoulder pain, insomnia, depression, etc.
<b>Physical Injuries</b>	Lack of balance, wrong kinetics in dance and acting, mistake and or wrong usage of construction equipment.	Fractures, dislocations, cuts and bruises.
<b>Collapse of Building</b>	Poor architectural design, use of substandard building materials, lack of maintenance, and use of theatre buildings for purposes other than for theatrical performances.	Impediment of performances, poor patronage due to unkempt environment, and total collapse of theatre organizations.
<b>Electrical hazards</b>	Faulty electrical connections and use of substandard accessories.	Sparks, macro-shock, micro-shock, and fire outbreak.
<b>Insecurity</b>	Unemployment of youths, poor policing and surveillance, late hour closure from theatre houses.	Low patronage of theatre productions, detention, sustenance of injuries as a result of attacks, and death.

**Table 5:** Shows the Occupational Hazard, Cause of Hazard and Concomitant Effects.

### **Managing Hazards in Nigerian Theatres**

The management of hazards in Nigerian theatre must be understood to be a top most priority owing to the fact that the safety of the artist and his/her general well-being determines the resourcefulness of the theatre organization. This segment hereby presents some managerial modalities.



### **The Creation of the Office of a Hazard Manager**

Theatre organizations must create the office of a hazard manager which will be saddled with the responsibility of procuring and maintaining hazard management facilities as well as the training and retraining of staff on rapid responses and preventive measures of hazards. In doing the latter, occupational health approach should be used. Occupational health is “a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive approach that considers an individual’s physical, mental and social well-being, general health and personal development” (*Occupational Health* 13). Occupational health is aimed at:

- i. the protection and promotion of the health of workers by preventing and controlling occupational diseases and accidents by eliminating occupational factors and conditions hazardous to health and safety at work.
- ii. the development and promotion of health and safe work, work environments and work organization;
- iii. the enhancement of the physical, mental and social well-being of workers and support for the development and maintenance of their working capacity, as well as professional and social development at work;
- iv. enabling workers to conduct socially and economically productive lives and to contribute positively to sustainable development. (*Occupational Health* 13)

Once this approach is employed and staff well equipped with the needed knowledge, smooth and hitch free productions and increased earnings will be guaranteed. To this end, the training should be done regularly with the participation of all staff of theatre organizations.

### **Curricula Expansion**

Students in the Ivory Tower and Colleges of Education must be exposed to the rudiments of hazard dictation, assessment, prevention and mitigation. This can be achieved if the gamut of theatre management as a course is expanded to cover this critical aspect. As the foundation and training ground of theatre artists in Nigeria, the knowledge of hazard management will instil in students the ability and skill to prepare against and for hazards if and when they do occur. This knowledge will also be useful to them when employed and in their everyday lives as well.

### **Provision of Managerial Facilities**

One of the managerial facilities that must be procured and used in managing hazards in Nigerian theatres is fire extinguisher. A stand by fire extinguisher in the theatre house is pertinent to curb incidences of fire out brake during preparatory, performance and post-performance stages. As the technical artist makes use of electricity to illuminate and create sound and sound effects for the performance as well as for wedding and woodwork, there is the likelihood of experiencing hic-ups. These problems may arise from faulty connections, the use of substandard cables, incompatibility of the voltage consumed by lighting, sound and contraction equipment with the kind of cable used as a way of cutting down cost and more. If this occurs, this can easily be put out without it escalating beyond measure. Fire extinguishers are affordable and readily available in shops across Nigeria. Theatre practitioners must see to it that this hazard management equipment is always available and operational. They must also see to it that all artists have knowledge of its operation. This will do away with the improvisatory methods like the use of detergent and water, as well other irrational and non-conformist methods of putting out fire outbreak which are characterized by dalliance since there are not readily available in the theatre building and cases of escalations.

Another managerial facility needed in managing hazards is the first aid box. Unfortunately, most of the theatre organizations visited by the researchers either has worn-out and out-dated first aid boxes which are dump by the corner somewhere in the green room or do not have at all. Some of the organizations without first aid box include University of Calabar and Benue State University amongst others. First aid box enables immediate treatment of a patient; it sustains the pertinence especially in times of severe injury before he/she is taken to the hospital. In such instances, the absence of a stand-by and functional first aid box may lead to death of the patient or severity of the injury. Also, in cases of minor injuries, minor headaches, body pains, muscle strain, a well-equipped first aid box can be used in taking care of the injured person. Theatre organizations on providing the first aid box must train their workers in order to gain good knowledge of how to use the first aid box in accordance to best practice.

### **Good Maintenance Culture**

Unfortunately, Nigerian theatre artists have continued to demonstrate deficit infrastructure management culture as well due to concentration on production organization and earnings. The nature of the theatre environment is capable of luring audience to the performance venue and vice-versa. Awodiya reports

“the Main Hall of the National Arts Theatre, according to Osofisan, started leaking six months after FESTC 77” (211). Three reasons are advanced by Awodiya as responsible for the problem, one of which stems from poor building materials. He notes that the materials used for the roofing were inappropriate for tropical areas; secondly, no Nigerian designer was involved in the process and lack of provision of funds by the government (federal, state or local) for maintenance of public facilities and utilities as soon as the basic construction and installation work on them have been completed. This explains why the National Theatre is in the most dilapidated state. For other theatre organizations like educational theatres and State Arts Councils, the problem is attributed to lack of fund to maintain them. With this scenario, what are the government and the theatre organizations doing to solve the problem? Theatre organizations can raise funds via box office productions and the creation of a situation whereby the audience is moved by aesthetic pleasures of a performance to give certain amount of money as token of appreciation. Such performances, if done over time, may generate enough money that can be used by theatre organizations to manage some of these challenges, instead of waiting on government. Therefore, with a well-kept environment, interest and patronage audience will be sustained.

### **Enough Rest and Frequent Medical Check-up**

The job of the artist exposes him/her to health challenges of deafness, sight deficiency, headache, neck and shoulder pain, insomnia, depression, shocks, burns cuts and more. These health challenges are capable of deterring an entire production either at the preparatory, performance or post-performance stages. Cases of the artist that have collapse or died on stage are many across the world, this point to that fact that the theatre artist pays less attention to his physical and mental well-being-his general health. In view of this, theatre artists must prioritize the promotion of sound health as pretext to efficient running of the theatre organization. They must do this with the understanding that though the show must go on, the process of production is delayed or at some point aborted due to the breakdown of an artist or his/her tools of operation.

### **Adequate Security**

Theatre organizations in Nigeria will fail in their task to contribute to societal transformation if the safety of lives of both performers and the audiences are not guaranteed. Also, being one of the fundamental challenges confronting live theatre today, there is every need to put all measures to prevent any form

of behaviour that will endanger the lives of the artist and his/her patrons. In doing this, theatre organization can employ the services of the law enforcement service to foster peace and coherence in the performance venue, they must avoid late closure from rehearsals or performances, in the institutions of higher learning theatre students must be provided accommodation in the school hostel so as not to walk long distance to their place of abode off campus. These measures will go a long way in securing the interest of both the artist and the audience.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has applied the quadruple ameliorative and hazard management paradigm in managing hazards in Nigerian theatres. This demonstration makes clear the job of the artist, his various tasks and the various hazards he may encounter in the course of executing his job. The place of theatre in the society is very critical; this makes the safety of the artist a topmost priority. His physical and economic wellbeing, health and security are very important; however, the apt emphasis on harnessing artistic, technical and other aspects of management activities and the economic gains against the safety of the artist and the audience in the country is grossly worrisome. The situation becomes worse as government fails to provide regulatory laws, supervision and provision of necessary managerial facilities that will set this sector to work effectively and within the ambit of the law which determines the effectiveness of an organization, and invariably contributes to national development. Theatre organizations must make this area very prominent so that the artists will be conscious and ready to either prevent or mitigate these hazardous occurrences, just as they must endeavour to provide all the necessary managerial facilities to enhance the smooth running of the theatre organization. With the reconsideration and redirection from over concentration of theatre organizations on organization and performance earnings to incorporate the artist physical, mental, social and general health wellbeing, the prosperity, success and resourcefulness of theatre organizations in Nigeria are assured.

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