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# FROM EUPHORIA TO SURVIVAL QUEST: A PLAYWRIGHT'S DILEMMA IN AN ECONOMIC RECESSION

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## **Abstract**

*A playwright's nightmare begins from the conception of the idea of a play through the gestation, delivery and nurturing period of writing. From onset, the playwright is aware that the drama genre has fewer readers compared to prose. Notwithstanding, the euphoria he experiences at the birth of his creation can only be compared to a woman that has given birth of a child. It is such that she forgets all the stress of nine months and the sharp pains in the labour room. However, unlike childbirth, the euphoria of the dramatist is short-lived as the reality of the stacked copies of the play in the house constantly reminds him of the dire need for his well-being or survival as a playwright. Using two of Ahmed Yerima's plays, **Pari** and **Akuabata**, this paper examines the effects of the present economic recession in the country on the playwright's quest for survival. Through descriptive and inferential survey methodologies, the paper reveals that the playwright's quest for survival is what gives him the euphoria to weather in storm in the quest for survival in the daunting period of economic recession.*

## **Introduction**

The word, *playwright*, as it known today, was coined by Ben Johnson in his "Epigram 49". Because it had a negative connotation, Johnson refused to be referred to as a playwright. He preferred to be known as a poet. Also known as a dramatist, the playwright is the brain that provides the blue print for the other members of a production. He is a person who writes a play. The word, 'wright', is an archaic English term for a craftsman or builder. The word indicates a person who has created words, themes and other elements into a dramatic form.

Being a creator, the playwright from conceptualisation of the characters, dialogue, theme and setting, to the actual printed script, uses his experiences or that of others to create a work of art which is of educative or entertaining relevance. To achieve this, he uses his imagination to create plausible stories especially fictional ones. The playwright uses his pen to speak his mind about prevalent issues in his society. The issues might be economic, political, social or even religious.

Like other humans, the playwright is highly philosophical. He thinks really hard about life's important questions and analytically tries to proffer solutions. Through the

search for truth, the playwright is able to suggest answers to the questions in the minds of the members of the society. Though what is seen on paper is often an imitation or representation of the playwright's life experiences or the experiences of others, yet, it is often a blend with his creative imagination to present a work of art that has universal relevance. Without involving some level of imitation, it would be difficult for the playwright to adequately project the characters and make them well rounded.

Like all creative endeavours, the art of playwriting involves a lot of suspense and tension on the Playwright. Getting the finished play published, has serious anxiety attached to it that after completion, the euphoria of the playwright knows no bound. His joy is only comparable to a woman's successful delivery of a child which makes her forget all her past sorrows. However, this euphoria is soon replaced by the harsh reality of lack of ready market for plays.

Play writing is an art which like other arts, requires good input of creativity and artistic skills. Nigeria has had a good number of playwrights who draw from her cultural, socio-political and religious background to write plays which in one way or another are commentaries about the country or plays which proffer solutions to the ebbing problems in the society. Ifeanyi Ugwu says:

Nigerian playwrights have engaged in the writing of serious literary theatre of standard quality which deals with the multifaceted portrayal of the Nigerian state. The foremost precursors of literary theatre and their later counterparts had good intentions because they wrote to provide the reader with artistically admirable plays which deal with the historical, political and socio-economic problems of the country. Despite all this, many of the written plays were dismissed by some critics as being substandard, due to what they describe as their numerous short comings (23).

In the past few years preceding the outbreak of the global economic meltdown which seems to have got its toll in Nigeria, there seemed to have been an increase in the number of writers; both qualified and unqualified. Quite a number of the writers saw writing as a new business venture which could put food on their tables. Though some were genuine, yet, the reality of the recession and the ensuing hardship has been very instrumental in sifting the real playwrights from the business-inclined playwrights. This study therefore aims at exploring the effects of the economic recession on playwrights. To achieve this, the study tried to proffer solutions to the short-lived euphoria of the playwrights.

This study examines how the present recession, reduces the joy of the playwright who because he cannot sell his books, is forced to either stop writing or print only a few copies. The paper further considers the processes the playwright undertakes to arrive at the finished play. A knowledge of the process helps one to appreciate why the playwright's euphoria after the completed printing. There is a further examination of the psychological disposition of the playwright as he watches his finished plays stacked in a place in his house. Though there are many playwrights, the paper uses two plays of Ahmed Yerima as

case studies. A paper of this nature provides a residue of knowledge for the encouragement of genuine future playwrights.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory began as collaboration with Dr. Josef Breuer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Neuringer:

Theatre historians credit Freud and his theories for being the prime impetus for the birth of the modern theatre. Although credited with being the "father" of the modern theatre, Freud was somewhat sceptical about its artistic merits and was certainly concerned about its emphasis on the irrational. However reluctant Freud was about modern dramaturgy, his ideas had a profound effect on playwrights, such as, Schnitzler and O'Neill, and through them was instrumental in freeing the theatre from its Victorian moral straitjacket. Freud's ideas also served as the background for other psychoanalysts interested in the theatre, especially Otto Fenichel... (1).

Freud's theory is that people's personalities are developed from childhood. The personality which consists of id, ego and superego controls people's behaviours from childhood till death. Though there are many aspects of Freud's theory, the aspect that concerns playwrights/dramatist is the "Psychoanalytic theory". It is the theory:

of personality organisation and the dynamics of personality development that guides psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology.... Psychoanalytic theory came to full prominence in the last third of the twentieth century as part of the flow of critical discourse regarding psychological treatments after the 1960s, long after Freud's death in his study emphasised the recognition of childhood events that could influence the mental functioning of adults. His examination of the genetic and then the developmental aspects gave the psychoanalytic theory its characteristics (*Wikipedia*).

Though Freud's theory of psychoanalysis has been criticised for its non-consideration of peoples' cultures and environments, yet, it is a known fact that people react "differently to similar situations" (*Wikipedia*). In analysing or watching a play, Freud's theory helps to clarify the meaning of the writing as well as the actions of the characters within the text or performance.

Another theory, which greatly influences playwrights, is the consensus theory. This theory is a fusion of logic and reality. John W. Gassner opines that:

A play lives by its logic and reality. Conceptual confusion is the disease that halts its pace, dulls its edge, and disturbs its balance. As has been noted, the disease is a nervous disorder, growing out of the playwright's

maladjustment to his environment. The technical symptoms, as diagnosed in the case of O'Neill, are the following: the characters are governed by whim or fate, rather than by conscious will (Lawson 146).

Thus, a play exists because there is a reader or audience when it is performed. Richard Abcarian and Marvin Klotz are of the opinion that the theories "focus on the interaction between the work and the reader, holding that, in a sense, a work exists only when it is experienced by the reader" (audience). Currant sums up the import of consensus when he says:

The consensus can only be used as a rough guide. In dealing with the advice on specific sources, the danger is almost the same. The only useful consensus which can be gleaned from this area is the broadest one of reading, thinking, and observing. Any potential playwright who makes an effort to do these things will stand a good chance of uncovering a productive source. To concentrate on, say, reading only a specific form of writing, or observing only certain classes of people would be ludicrous. Although some fields of observation and interest may, in the end, turn out to be the most productive, there is certainly no profit at all to be had in excluding a possible source for what are, in the final analysis, the theorists' prejudices. Thus, the consensus which can most readily be taken, from an aspect of drama which is not particularly well suited to this exercise, is the recognition that there are certain sources well-disposed to being the starting point to a play, but also that all others, in the right circumstances, are perfectly feasible. In the beginning, the playwright should always be open-minded (14-15).

### **Principles of Playwriting**

From conception, through the gestation period to the period of the delivery of the play, much is needed in order to achieve a good play worthy of attention. A play must be well thought out to have a beginning, middle and end. The problems and solutions in the play must be plausible and able to fulfil the functions of education, correction, entertainment, re-construction or re-structuring. The problems should be able to lead to a climax and resolution.

Aristotle's principles of three unities; unity of time, unity of place and unity of action should guide the playwright in situating his story. Because drama is an imitation of life, it is important that people can identify with the setting, situations and timing in the play. Though evolving technology makes it possible to now have insight into the events and situations in other planets, yet, the actions would seem incomplete without human presence/characters.

Characterisation has to do with the inherent traits in a dramatic character. It is the trait that helps the character to be convincing in being the playwright's mouth piece for driving home his vision. It is supposed to be well rounded to be convincing in whatever effect/emotion it is meant to elicit. If it is tragic, the hero should have a convincing flaw



that would cause the audience to empathise with him. If comic, his traits and folly should be able to amuse people. According to Basil Wikina:

Creation of characters is one of the most important factors in playwriting. A writer must create to life as full-blooded individuals with strong emotions and convincing reactions to every situation. He should invent character with background he fully understands. He should know the age, occupation, social status, tribe and other special attributes or peculiarities of his characters (57).

Playwriting is often a translation of a story, a song, a poem or a proverb into an outline which after much time and skill have been infused turns out to be an appreciable form of art which gets perfected after much practice. Thus, choice of language and characterisation are also of serious importance in writing a play. Language may be simple, complex, poetic or ordinary. The language a character uses helps in explaining his personality, define his role and situate his type in the society.

Simple or complex plot is another principle which the playwright must be abreast with in his writing. Whatever choice, the plot should be well knitted that the absence of a part of the story would affect the whole play. Moreover, the story should be believable and filled with suspense sufficient to grip the audience or readers to see the resolution of the climax of the story.

The theme of the play could be either central or sub theme. Being the playwright's message to the society, the central idea should be well articulated that it leaves no doubt about its ability to communicate the right message. Since content forces the playwright to think deeper, re-arrange his thoughts and put his creative imagination to effective use, he uses the aesthetic principle or elements common to the play to constitute the techniques or forms. Since theatre is the imitation of life and not life itself, the playwright should be able to present live situations in a way that it would captivate audience's attention to see the solution proffered in the play.

### **Nigerian Playwrights**

Nigeria has produced several generations of playwrights. There are first, second and third generations and an additional new breed or new generation playwrights. Alex Asigbo is of the view that the proponents of the different generations are based on ideological commitment and period of writing. For Soyinka's group (the first generation), it is cultural affirmation. To Julius-Adeoye, these first generation playwrights were concerned with "nationalistic ideals, cultural re-affirmation and historical re-engineering in their dramas" (2). Apart from the Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, the first generation playwrights include James Ene Henshaw, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola.

For the second generation Nigerian playwrights, the ills of colonisation and post-colonial experiences took the front-burner. They were more radical and revolutionary in their writings.

They liked the Marxist`s dramatists craving for a just socio-political order in the Nigerian system by reflecting leadership crisis, military misadventure, national unity, political and ethnic rivalry, and state oppression of the people that plague the nation`s socio-culture and politics. Other issues that pervade their works include corruption and poverty, inadequate health care, environmental problems, and other socio-economic issues (Julius-Adeoye 3).

This group has Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Esiaba Irobi, Tunde Fatunde, Emeka Nwabueze, Tess Onwueme, Sam Ukala, Wale Ogunyemi and others.

For the third generation, or the Ahmed Yerima`s group, experiences from their childhood are prominent in their works. This third generation playwrights include Iyorwuese Hagher, Sam Ukala, Ahmed Yerima, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Julie Okoh, Barclays Ayakoroma, Stella Oyedepo, Ben Tomoloju, Foluke Ogunleye and ABC Duruaku, among others. As Ademola Dasylyva opines:

The ideology of the Nigerian third generation dramatists is an expression of individual survivalism, placing emphasis on the survival of an individual in a chaotic society as opposed to socialism which was characterised in the works of the earlier playwrights. Ones` survival is self-dependent and not reliant on any governmental intervention (157).

However, Asigbo classifies himself, among other playwrights like Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Rasaki Ojo Bakare, Victor Dugga, Tor Iorapuu, Emmanuel Dandaura, Greg Mbajiorgu, John Iwuh, Bunmi Julius-Adeoye, Toyin Abiodun, Chukwuma Anyanwu and Solomon Iguanre, as belonging to another generation, which he categorises as, “the new voices” (Asigbo 29). These new voices have been described as:

trouble makers, that will not allow these megalomaniacs to spend their ill-gotten wealth in peace but must criticise and prick their conscience? ... rabble-rousers, these restless souls that have continued to attack and vilify the status quo? (Asigbo 29).

To Asigbo, he cannot imagine himself being classified alongside his teachers, based on the fact that the earlier generation of playwrights either taught him or he read their plays; and so, he and his contemporaries could not be deemed to belong to those generations with them. However, the restlessness and challenge of the existing status quo found in the works of the so-called ‘new voices’ could also be seen in the works of earlier playwrights, especially the second and third generations.

### **The Playwright and the Economic Recession**

The period of economic recession is one of the most difficult periods in a nation. It is a period of lack, general economic decline and is typically accompanied by a drop in the stock market, increase in unemployment and a decline in the housing market. Recession

entails insufficiency and total shortage of money to solve the needs of the members of the society where it is found. In a period of recession, families are often disintegrated because of lack. Some members of the family lack means of sustenance. Though a little less severe than depression, the government in power is usually blamed for the recession; or they pass the buck to the previous one, as experienced in Nigeria.

Nigeria was plunged into recession by the fall in oil prices. Because the country is dependent on oil as its main source of revenue, the fall in global oil prices, therefore affected every strata of the economy. The naira was devalued thereby causing investors to withdraw. Another factor which contributed to the recession is the stringent measures, which the Nigerian government put in place. As a result of this, most wealthy men preferred to stash their money or buy properties abroad. Furthermore, the shortage of foreign currency affected every strata of the society. Like rain, the art of playwriting has also felt the negative effect, as there has been a knell on publishing.

### **The Effects of Economic Recession on Playwrights**

Because recession slumps the stock market, goods and services are difficult to sell, consumer power is reduced. As business earnings depreciate, there is a reduction in production. This means an increase in unemployment and scarcity of money in circulation. The basic needs of man are food, clothing and shelter. In a period of recession, satisfying the basic needs is the priority of people. The rat race for survival makes people to prioritise their need into scales of preferences. Reading plays somehow becomes secondary. In the first instance, the format or layout of plays makes it disadvantageous to some people as they find it difficult to understand the dialogues. More so, Myles-Munroe once said, "If you want to hide a treasure from a black man then put it in the pages of a book" (Masarira, *Online*). It is also believed that blacks do not write as much as the whites. This is supported by the statement that, "there is anecdotal evidence that African scholars do not write and publish as much as their... (Masarira, *Online*).

Where there are few writers, the competitive spirit to challenge the playwrights would be lacking. There would be limited materials for consultation. Also, the lack of reading culture among the Nigerian populace is a major problem which discourages burgeoning playwrights. This is because the fear of prospective buyers of the published plays is enough to discourage many would have been playwrights. Additionally, the art and science of playwriting requires research and hypotheses which needs to be tested before implementation. Therefore, if mini ethnography is needed it becomes difficult during recession due to lack of money. To get the register of the area of research, travelling is required and travelling needs money. Playwriting consumes a lot of cerebral energy because the brain thrives on glucose. The time that would have been used for creative enterprise would then be channelled into thinking about the next meal.

### **Biography of Ahmed Yerima**

A playwright, dramatist, scholar, cultural administrator and educationist, Ahmed Parker Yerima was born on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1957 in Lagos to Alhaji Musa T. Yerima, a police officer, and Hajiya Saidatu Yerima. He was Artistic Director of the National Troupe of Nigeria as well as General Manager of the National Theatre, Iganmu-Lagos; and one-time Artistic

Director of the Abuja Carnival. Celebrated winner of the Nigerian LNG Prize for Literature (2006), as well as the ANA/NDDC J.P. Clark's Drama Prize (2006), with his play, *Hard Ground*, Yerima studied at Baptist Academy, Lagos; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; and the Royal Holloway College, University of London, where he got his doctorate degree.

Currently a professor at the Department of Theatre Arts, Redeemers' University, Ede, Osun State, Ahmed Yerima researches on performance, culture, textual analysis and criticism. His hailing from a predominantly Moslem community as well as his attendance of a Missionary School have given him the advantage of understanding the multi-religious nature of his society. Being well versed in Igbo, Bini, Hausa, Yoruba and his Auchi dialect, he is a true Nigerian, well-equipped to write on the socio-political, cultural and historical issues of many parts of Nigeria. According to Gabriella Osamor and Nseobong Okon-Ekong, Yerima is "a truly detribalised Nigerian who sees himself as a cultural officer first and one who does not remember who his people are because to his mind; he belongs to all cultures and people".

As noted earlier, Ahmed Yerima has been classified as belonging to the third generation of Nigerian playwrights because of his pre-occupation with socio-political issues in his works. He is so prolific that listing the oeuvre of his works is arduous. However, some of his over sixty published plays include: *Heart of Stone*, *Abobaku*, *Iyase*, *Little Drops*, *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, *The Bishop and the Soul*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Statement from Prison* and *The Last Grain of Wheat*. Others are *The Silent Gods*, *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*, *Attahiru*, *The Sisters*, *Idemili*, *Yemoja*, *The Lottery Ticket*, *Kaffir's Last Game*, *Ameh Oboni the Great*, *Otaelo* and *Hard Ground*, just to mention a few. He is also the author of two critical works on playwriting: *Basic Techniques in Playwriting* and *Discourse on Tragedy*. With so many plays and critical works to his credit, it could be said that Ahmed Yerima is the most prolific playwright, not only among his generation but among the whole generations of playwrights in Nigeria, if not Africa.

### **Ahmed Yerima as a Socio-Political Commentator**

Man is a social being; and it is a fact that cannot be debated. Man exists, lives and operates in a society. Because human relation is an integral aspect of human existence, a playwright's impact is greatly felt when his works reflect the socio-political realities of his society. In reaction, the nation is supposed to encourage and appreciate the works of the playwright by taking heed to the issues in the play. To confirm this, Frederic Lorca says:

... 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 amusement hall, or a place for doing that dreadful thing known as "killing time" (cited in Asigbo 7-8).

Many of Yerima's plays centre on socio-political issues. Examples are: *Abobaku*, *Iyase*, *Little Drops*, *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, *Pari*, *The Mirror Cracks*, *An Inspector Calls*,

*Statement from Prison, The Last Grain of Wheat, Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees, Attahiru and Hard Ground*, among others. Socio-political issues are the societal problems which have political undertones that affect members of the society one way or another.

In *Pari*, Yerima handles the story of the Chibok girls who he gave the major names of Shekau and any of the girls as Ibrahim and Hyelapari. Pari along with some other girls are kidnapped and forcibly married to the Boko Haram Islamic extremists. After two years of fruitless search and no hope of Pari's return, her mother converts to Islam hoping that her acceptance of the Islamist's god would make her daughter to be released. When Pari eventually returns, she returns with her son. Ibrahim's search for his family brings him to Pari's family house where he is eventually arrested. But before being taken away to Darak (barrack), Pari, who had been dumb, requests to be allowed to follow him. She says:

**Pari:** I want him to take me and my son along. I don't want him to go alone. Who will take care of him? ... I believe him ... Two years. For two years, I lived my life with him ... dodging bullets and bombs. He taught me how to clean his AK 47 gun, how to cry and how to muffle tears and pains with honour... (*Pari* 68).

From these words, Yerima comments that what began as a socio-political problem has got solution in individual choices. Ama's verdict of Ibrahim is:

**Ama:** I say no! He is a human thief. He stole my only child ... took my daughter's virtue ... and killed Vero's husband. He must die by the knife he has brandished so well (*Pari* 57).

In the first instance, getting Pari re-integrated became impossibility. Ama says:

**Ama:** You see what they brought back to us? The living carcass of our once dear sweet innocent daughter. Several times, she screamed in her sleep today. Even the sleeping drugs do not have any effect on her anymore.... We may need to add traditional medicine to her treatment (*Pari* 42).

By investigating the story of the Chibok girl, Yerima confirms what he said in a telephone interview with the researcher that, it is the Nigerian society which inspires his writing.

Evidence of socio-political theme is also seen in Yerima's *Akuabata*, where the sociological problem of women's relegated background role is explored. There is also a clash of public duty as a King and as a lover. In the play, Olanma (*Akuabata*: wealth has come) is supposed to be married to a deity (Iyieke). But she marries Isiugwu, a stranger with a different culture. Instead of being the financial pillar of the home, Isiugwu does the household chores, while Olanma goes to farm and provides for the home. Rather than be the rightful Eze ogo of Ohafia, Isiugwu asks:

**Isiugwu:** And Olanma? What do I tell her? Do I go to her and say: “Thank you for bee (*sic*) being my wife for thirty years. I have had enough of you. Thank you for the food, and tender care. Thank you for our only child. I am off to my village to become king. I have just been told that kings don’t marry commoners. And even then, you are now too old to fit in. Kings only marry princesses” (*Akuabata* 19).

This blending of politics with culture of a people confirms Yerima’s words that, he allows the influence of other writers. This is because drawing from culture is peculiar to the first generation of playwrights. Yerima says:

I got introduced to Soyinka’s works. In school I liked *Madmen and Specialists*. I liked Chekhov, I liked Ibsen, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco (especially Ionesco’s *The Chairs*, I loved that play). I wrote my plays around those plays at that time. In the early plays, I took a little bit of Soyinka’s anger and a little bit of my influence from those other playwrights, until I met Brecht. In my postgraduate, I settled down to write other plays because I felt there was no need to be that angry ... *Hard Ground* is perhaps my famous play. The need to write *Hard Ground* is based on my background, my relationship with Soyinka. The playwright must be relevant to his society and must be proactive, must think for the society and at times also to pre-empt the society.... Wole Soyinka told me I must be relevant. I cannot sit down and create art for art sake. I cannot be writing about irrelevances – marital issues and such (not that they are irrelevant) – but when there are issues of life and death involved. When immediate issues, generational issues of the society, or when issues of the future of the existence of my country are involved, I cannot remain passive. An individual within the society but also as a playwright, I need to say something; I need to state how I feel (*Online*).

The above influence is a reminder of the Freud’s psychoanalysis theory. Soyinka taught Yerima never to write about irrelevancies when there are better socio-political issues that can affect the decorum in the society. Yerima’s plays are divided into historical realism plays, religious realism plays and socio-political realism plays. Whatever theme he chooses to explore, he pays serious attention to proffering solutions to the immediate societal problems.

### **From a Playwright’s Euphoria to Survival Quest**

Playwriting is both an art and science which uses human acts and emotions to experiment the effects on a larger society. Playwriting in Nigeria is like seed sprouting on a ‘hard ground’. Apart from lack of market for the finished play text, there is no ready fund to assess to help in the publication. Thus, the playwright has the onerous task of incubating the idea, having it gestated, getting it written and then sourcing the fund for its publication.

After all the stress, the euphoria of the playwright at the completion of the published work is better left to the imagination. With the onset of recession, the playwrights' quest for survival becomes even more. This is because people need to settle their more pressing needs before talking about books. Also, even in the bookstalls, the presences of older renowned playwrights intimidate the new authors and make their books unnoticed.

### **Conclusion**

The writing of a play is an art and science which brings to fore the embodiment of a researched process. Being an art, playwriting requires a deliberate use of aesthetics. As science, playwriting involves a careful study of a particular topic, culture or a people. By making a systematic observation of the issue or people in a particular environment, the playwright then adds aesthetics to bring out a play that has societal relevance. Christiana Oboshi confirms this idea when he reiterates that:

the playwrights are involved in making dramatic statements about burning issues such as ineffective leadership, bribery.... This places the playwright in the role of a watchdog of the society (213).

Based on the above role, the playwright is also a socio-political commentator who is able to rescue his nation from the pains and effects of recession. It is true that:

during the recession, economic hardship knows no limits and boundaries, it affects livelihood of everybody in one-way or the other- and this naturally gives impetus to survival instincts as people work harder and more effective to tackle the new economic realities (Agbugah *Online*).

The adage, "the pen is mightier than the sword" seems to be most appropriate at times like this. Though there had been instances where writers like Dele Giwa and Ken Saro-Wiwa even paid with their lives; and Wole Soyinka was imprisoned; yet, the deaths and imprisonment have not ended the vision of playwrights. If anything, the buried truths resurrected and have produced the harvests of recession now plaguing the country. Playwrights are guardians of a 'sacred mandate', whose duties are not just to draw from the culture and condemn the evils, but they must point the way forward and proffer solutions in their writings. Asigbo supports this position when he says:

the artist is not a frivolous character or jester as he is most often seen by an ignorant public. He serves as the memory of men and watchdog of communal ethos and in fact remains bulwark and last bastion of defence against tyrants and deviants who often seduce the world with illusions of grandeur (Asigbo 11).

Being one of the renowned Nigeria playwrights, Yerima has through his works established the fact that a playwright is committed to the happenings around him and so has the right to express his individuality. Though the playwright's vision should go beyond

art for art sake, yet his euphoria at seeing his completed work should give him the satisfaction that is beyond monetary equivalence. By combining rules, knowledge and mastery which is the basis of consensus theory, the playwright should bring out a good play capable of proffering solutions to the pressing societal problems. However, in applying this theory, Gallaway, Rowe and Seldon believe that:

ultimate respect for the playwright's own inspiration.... It is agreed that this creative impulse may be channelled, but great care must be taken that it is not stifled or adulterated. Seldon is a virtual echo of these two writers. He wants the playwright to use his theory to clarify thinking but never to fundamentally change the "basic discovery" which must come from inspiration.... Because they wrote on the basis of instinct, rather than from exact knowledge. Instinct may lead a man once, or several times, to create a masterpiece, but as sheer instinct it may lead him just as often to create a failure (cited in Currant 8, 9).

### **Recommendations for Playwrights**

In the light of the foregoing, this paper recommends as follows:

- a) Like other business ventures, it would be advisable for playwrights to reduce the cost of production by printing the quantity they know would be easily marketed. This is because of publishing that may not be sold for years only ties down the money that could have been circulation.
- b) "Since downsizing is inevitable during a recession" (Agbugah *Online*), the playwright would be doing himself a great favour by learning the rudimentary things about publishing. If the playwright can undertake the simple things like typesetting, dummyming and others, he would have saved some money which would help reduce the cost of production.
- c) Because of the inflation, many people opt for low quality printing. For a generation which loves quality products, this becomes a hindrance to the purchase let alone reading. With no interest on the quality of the book, the confidence of the customers is lost and may never be regained.
- d) The need to review the marketing strategy of the plays cannot be over-emphasized. The whole world is one global village of which social media is the link. Many people prefer soft copies of reading materials than to carry hard copies no matter how light. Rather than waste money on producing hard copies of plays, playwrights should link up with online marketers or domain owners for the uploading of their plays of which they would be paid after the sales. In fact, internet sales are so well organised that the sales cannot be challenged. Moreover, it provides avenue for better global recognition since the social media can reach where the playwright may never have thought of reaching.



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# TOWARDS AN IDEOLOGY OF THE POST-OSOFISAN GENERATION PLAYWRIGHTS: INDIVIDUALISM AND SURVIVALISM CONSIDERED

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## **Abstract**

*The process of change and further change is heightened in the final years of each decade and/or century. At this period, literature can come in clear movements, tendencies or trends and ideologies while variety and pluralism, multiplicity of experience, and a wide breath of voices are some of the dominant characteristics of new writing, many of which challenge or even extend the themes of previous writing. Thus, we can argue that the “new” takes the “old” up in the process of emerging and entrenching its own dominant voice. The Nigerian literary drama which came out of the dying years of the 1980s therefore, had in common, a revival of forms of the past, while simultaneously experimenting with the often media-based forms of the future. These dramatic pieces are less open than ever, to the clear distinctions between the ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ or the ‘experimental/avant gardist’ and the ‘conventional’ as exemplified in the two generations which came before. The strong, new generation which emerged in the Universities of Ibadan, Ife (now OAU), Benin, Calabar, Jos, Nsukka, Zaria, Port-Harcourt, Ilorin and Maiduguri, came with the purpose of reviving the consciousness of theatre-loving Nigerians to their own art, in the face of the onslaught of the motion pictures. As the **younger** or the ‘third’, ‘fourth’ or ‘fifth’ generation writers I have code-named the post-Osofisan generation, these cultural interpreters have had their dramatic sensibility and thematic thrust shaped and sharpened by the socio-political and aesthetic realities of their immediate environment, in spite of the fact that they have been accused of having no ideology. Hence, their vision was to use the platform of the defunct but **recently-revived** Nigerian Universities Theatre Arts Festival (NUTAF), which threw up a new crop of playwrights and other practitioners. This paper argues that the ideology of the generation is nothing but Individualism and Survivalism, stemming from post-modern sensibilities and concludes that these playwrights now speak in their own tongue, of their angst through the labyrinthine paths of **becoming**.*

## **Introduction**

The term, post-Osofisan generation, used by this writer for the first time in 1999, actually could have originated with him. Although, it is now generally applied to the body of works today that are from recent Nigerian dramatists of the NUTAF 1988 virgin scripts initiative. This phenomenal exploits remain the signpost for the emergence of the ‘new’ generation of Nigerian playwrights, who had been expected to live up to expectations (Ademiju-Bepo,

“Recent Nigerian Dramatists...” 63). It was in connection with, and within the ambits of these revolutionary experiments which were evidently driven by robust creativity, and the promise of a bright future for dramatic literary tradition in the country that the environment is made conducive and clement for their creative impulse.

It is no longer disputable that a new generation has emerged after the second generation of literary dramatists in English. All this had come to pass through the Nigerian Universities Theatre Arts Festival (NUTAF), a platform instituted in 1981 by some members of the ‘next’ generation after the Femi Osofisan-led political theatre exponents of a positive revolutionary alternative (Obafemi 168). The social vision of this category of writers, we want to argue, is more or less similar to that of the pioneer generation of Soyinka and Clark, in its individualism, in the description of J.C. de Graft (17). In the wake of this is the rise of the dialectics on their ideological persuasion and commitment.

Recent revelations of a body of work which has come to be known as post-Osofisan so far has kept cynics and sceptics drooling on the sheer artistic commitment to the purpose of reviving the consciousness of theatre-loving Nigerians to their own art, in the face of the onslaught of the motion pictures. Several scholars including Olu Obafemi have previously described them as the *younger* or the ‘third’, ‘fourth’ or ‘fifth’ generation dramatists. But I have precisely code-named them *the post-Osofisan generation*, being cultural interpreters who have had their dramatic sensibilities and thematic thrusts shaped and sharpened by the socio-political and aesthetic realities of their immediate environment.

The above is in spite of the fact that they have been accused of having no ideology. But then, it could be argued that, the predominant ideology in their plays – for which members of this generation have been accused, is that of dressing old themes in new robes. As a playwright of the post-Osofisan generation, Chukwuma Okoye avers that,

...the issue of dressing old themes can be found everywhere. Even in the Osofisan generation, we still have writers who have not actually been successful because they just get a few things and then go out. Let me say that ideology has nothing to do with themes. Some of them are so ideological, so concretely ideological and have produced works in that ideology but works of little value. I am sure that you must know one or two of them, and if it is a question of ideology, theirs is even more profound than those of their contemporaries, but have not been able to produce works of equal value. So, you don’t accuse the present generation of writers of that. It’s something that’s natural. In a generation of writers, you have the good and the bad. Bad writers would just dress old themes and do whatever they like. But you know, nothing is new. The inspiration is not anything new. What is new is what you make of it, how you go about it and what you have produced in the end. Some people get that inspiration and are unable to withdraw from that inspiration and are thus, unable to give the work of art its own life. This is an abstract statement, though (2003).

### **The Ideological Conundrum and Thematic Preoccupation**

The 'unconscious' ideological commitment of the post-Osofisan generation is a clear departure from the conscious commitment of the dramatists before them, mostly represented by writers such as Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Tunde Fatunde, and Tess Onwueme (Obafemi 168). It can thus be argued that writers of this generation were not conscious of their ideological vision to confront the contemporary social problems which have held them in bondage. Their artistic strength lies in the variety of approaches employed in the thematic preoccupation, interpretation and use of the medium of theatre, and subsequently, the screen to pursue their calling. For instance, that Soyinka has written on the theme of dictatorship did not preclude the new generation from writing on the same dictatorship. It is not enough to suggest that the playwright will be taking an old theme and dressing it, rather it sounds nonsensical. The argument may be taken if this author has taken an old theme and he is not able to make anything out of it. Even at that, it is not peculiar to the present generation, it happens everywhere, as far back as one can remember.

Now, to the subject of thematic preoccupation. Many of these writers no doubt had their initial exposure to the works of most of our writers, like J.P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, and then later, Femi Osofisan. Okoye, for instance, had been captured or fascinated by the art itself and admitted to this writer in an interview that as a person, he had not felt that his individual problem or interest had been attended to:

Now, I use individual or personal as against general, which is human. Those works have, of course, addressed human problems and that is why they are great works. But somehow, the personal problems, as far as I'm concerned, have not been profoundly addressed. Some of these are my personal interest or worries, like transport, fuel scarcity, and such like that... (Personal Interview).

While not sounding blasphemous, he also admitted that he was not disturbed about the problem of dictatorship in Nigeria, for instance. According to him,

It's something I'm scared of saying, but in this context, I do not want to compare. But I do not think that the situation today, because we are under a democracy, is different from our situation about ten years ago. I, in fact, think it is worse. So, I do not think it is a problem of ideology but human (Personal Interview).

However, it could be said that it is the way specific problems are treated and then given an entirely human perspective that makes or mars great themes. It could be quite instructive to look at the works of J.M. Synge. Where one may, as a Nigerian, discover that thematically, these works do not apply to you, but because they have a human context, apart from possibly individual or racial implications, you find them appealing. For me, I find most of those works appealing for their human texture. And this is not a negative criticism. Naturally, my interest became focused on things that are happening around me,

things that I see, and things that worry me. Not going after elevated things, high-sounding themes.

For Okoye, the themes of his plays are essentially contemporary; even in his first play, *We the Beast*. In this play, Okoye examines the beastly aspect of human nature and felt that the greatest exposition of that is a war situation. Insurgency has become the order of the day: people are being slaughtered daily; and it does seem as if the bombs and guns are no longer fashionable. We are now using all kinds of machetes and crude equipment like IEDs to slaughter ourselves, especially in Africa.

I thought the problem was an African problem, but that is something I have felt personally, though, most people in Nigeria did not really experience the civil war to that degree; probably some people never heard a bomb explode all through the war. For some people, it was an everyday occurrence; some people cannot identify somebody that they knew, that died during the war, some can. Some people did not experience starvation, which incidentally was devised as a weapon of war, some people did. Some people did not die from physical warfare as it were, they died of starvation, disease, malnutrition, etcetera, etcetera, which is even more dehumanising to perceive. So, it was for me, something that I could identify with. There is also the theme of insanity; now who is insane? That is why I decided that the person who is actually sane is the person that is insane. The society; it was the society fighting a war and it was justified by those words: keeping one thing one; keeping this one, one; fighting for your nation, and whatever (Personal Interview).

### **Break-away or Adventure: Influence, Form and Style Perspective**

Has it actually been impossible to break away from the influence of the older generation; or the new generation is actually afraid to? I think it all has to do with the degree of comfort. The emergent generation was becoming too comfortable with the *status quo*; and if this was the case, none can become adventurous. Besides, the older generation no longer needs the kind of encouragement being given by the younger in the production of their works. I would rather put my own money in the new generation of Nigerian writers. Left to most of us, we would prefer to publish under normal circumstances, and produce plays, our own plays.

It is interesting to note, talking about contemporary playwriting, that one can say so much about form and style, structure and technique of the post-Osofisan generation today. It may equally be argued, some ten years or so ago that the reference to this generation was an absolutely elusive or difficult thing to capture by way of definition, or by way of form, style, structure, and so on. From my point of view, I did not even concretely see the existence of that generic class of playwrights like the modern or post-Osofisan era or something like that, until I began my research leading to my doctorate degree. That was when I started to make such distinction. Consequently, I can speak of these playwrights, thematically or stylistically today because the problem of not having enough playwrights or rather published playwrights of this generation, to read or interpret

due to several and other related problems that go with publishing in Nigeria is fast disappearing.

However, there are a lot of influences, which are both internal and external, for most of these writers have been responsible for this. I believe the circumstance, environment, or reality, both physical and psychological, and then in the physical, the most prominent is economic, which I believe, is rigorous, or in a minor term, uncomfortable, for contemporary writers, in Nigeria. I will not say for everybody; but for writers, it is absolutely peculiar. When we compare the manner in which their predecessors were prolific, it tends to imply either paucity of writers or a paucity of seriousness, or whatever. This category of playwrights is more prolific than their predecessors, in a sense, because of their survival instinct.

The perspective of their remaining largely unsung has contributed to their creative response to the movement of the social pendulum as a predictive analysis of the social system and contemporary reality. In spite of the lack of critical attention on and production of their output on the one hand, and the dearth of publishing opportunities some decade and a half ago, on the other, these cultural interpreters have continued to write and create within the ambience of social phenomena which literature invariably is. Their social vision is to expand the frontiers of drama and theatre in Nigeria. This they have done by taking up the gauntlet not to be docile and had gone into the home video terrain, beside the self-publication option, not minding the economic stress or distress.

NUTAF as their platform of expression and ultimately, emergence, through the virgin script initiative, ensured their style and perspective were sharpened and shaped by the often classroom theory-based, but *amateurish* viva voce after each production back in school. This emboldened their exploits until the emergence of a body of work which deals with the contradictions of their social existence at a highly concentrated, more intense level than their forerunners in the dramatic venture. Away from the cultural renaissance of Negritude; the post-independence disillusionment; the political and ideological commitment of the post-civil war; they embraced the twin-perspective of spiritual experimentation and re-definition of ideology and the spiritual and ideological alternatives. This dual personality of their consciousness dictated by the individual talents and the mushrooming tendency of the playwrights to survive through the examination of the spirit of their society in its different epochs gave birth to the postulation of *Individualism* and *Survivalism*, as the ideology of their generation.

### **The Post-Osofisan Playwrights: Between Lack of Ideology and Non-Publication**

Even though the accusation was rife once upon a time that these playwrights lack(ed) ideological slant, I think, I would say, that basically, the accusation was unfair, as well as untrue. May be we should first answer the question, does ideology make a better writer? What's the relationship between ideology and creative writing? If a writer produces a work that seems to tow a particular ideology, and tomorrow, he produces another work that seems to tow a different ideology, and again another one that is in an entirely different ideological disposition, would that then mean that, it is impossible for those works to be great works, because they are not ideologically consistent? I do not think there is any kind of relationship between ideology and creativity. Some of our predecessors had particular



ideologies, which to say the least, are in contrast to their present ideologies. Some were Marxists when the going was rough, now obviously even, if they do not want to admit it, most of them are capitalists, in terms of ideology. But how does that relate to their works? Are we going to say that the work Mr. 'A' produced as a capitalist is better than the work 'he' produced as a Marxist?

In Okoye's contention, that kind of comparison is not worthwhile.

...For me, a work of art is usually perceived as sufficient. When you perceive a work of art, its appeal to you should be total. Going out to find out what the ideology of the writer is or was, is an aberration; that is not the way works of art are considered. When you then say that a particular generation does not have any definite ideology, I mean, not having an ideology, for me is actually an ideology! If I do not believe in anything, by way of ideology, it should not hamper my creative energy. I do not think there is such a relationship between ideology and creative writing. Secondly, even if there is, I do not believe that there is a paucity of ideologies in contemporary Nigerian writers. So, I do not subscribe to that accusation that they lack ideology. I think it is all a matter of the period. If we look at our contemporary society, when almost every kind of ideology is being put to question, you will find out that what we have is not a lack of ideology but probably a plethora of ideologies ((Personal Interview).

For instance, you can now see somebody who will tell you that he is a Christian, as well as a Muslim and he is also a traditionalist, a *tradochislamist* (just like this writer's intellectual quest and claim). There are others who speak like that, and they will tell you that what they are doing is processing the three religions and their ambition is actually to arrive at something. For such a person, his would be some kind of a new ideology, which means that it has not been in existence. I believe it is a part of the environment, several ideologies clashing and aiming to create a new ideology. Maybe with the period gone, critics would begin to find an ideology, when you can now look with the advantage of hindsight, you get all their works together, and then you can begin the search for their ideology. We, members of this generation, are still writing, so what kind of ideology are we expecting at this very point, this very early stage of our becoming published? Now the works are here, the search should begin for the ideology. Unless, of course, these so-called critics are looking at the persons, the human beings rather than the works. But that is a wrong attitude, what they should aim for is to find out why the work of this man or that woman lacks an ideological position.

With the emergence of a body of writing, we may now be having a body of literature, these writings, that the critics can read. They are able to identify several titles published by this generation of playwrights and will discover that these people have talent; they have an ideology and the energy to sit down and write. And they have written a lot; in spite of the environment in which they write, and the reasonable degree of (dis)comfort. In fact, I believe that even with these extenuating circumstances, these writers would soon emerge, if they have not done so already. There will be some kind of a renaissance which

I believe will come, may be in the next five to ten years. I mean, this situation cannot continue to exist. I know, from within, and from the fact that I am also in contact with some of these writers, I know that we write even under the most inhuman circumstances.

Several of them have manuscripts; to evaluate the quality of these manuscripts, that is something else. I know that they are writing even in this absolutely inhibitive environment. So, I believe when there is an economic change, or someone begins to show interest in our work, we are going to have the kind of output that, I believe, is even greater than our predecessors have recorded. And I tend to get the hope that I do not think that kind of situation would arise, or is going to be influenced by some kind of action taken by people in Nigeria, not even by our predecessors. Some of them who have made a lot of money, went into publication, somehow, half-heartedly and are not even interested in publishing new writers, they are more interested in publishing the established writers. Maybe they are not to blame because they are after money. That also speaks about ideology, what is the ideology of the publishers? Their ideology is simply money. I believe such an interest will come from outside Nigeria. Even the few writers who write from Nigeria, you will see that the encouragement that they get is from outside (Okoye, Personal Interview).

### **Towards an Ideology: Popular Themes versus Popularity**

Is it not time to look for the critical minds to look at new works and styles from these playwrights of the post-Osofisan order? The ready answer is 'YES'. Going by the popularity of the themes that have been treated by these playwrights, the time is now ripe for critics from amongst their generation to shift the critical torch on their creativity in order to ascertain the validity of my claim in this postulation. The Osofisan and the post-Osofisan generations have one thing in common: both generations agreed that the appeal in their drama is that, whilst being in different 'realms' in numerous concerns, they are free to push in the direction of its individual beliefs. In the works of the ideologically committed dramatists, as we have the self-conscious materialists, so do we have the spiritual nationalists (Obafemi 168-169). Obafemi contends further:

This variation in conviction naturally affects the playwright's approach to his art .... their individual efforts to employ both the traditional theatre heritage and modern stage techniques to deal with immediately relevant social problems as well as make emphatic political statements (169).

Perhaps more than any other generation, the post-Soyinka dramatists neither wasted time nor left anyone in doubt as to their intention to employ the theatre to effect social change. They were more interested in using drama as an instrument of social change, away from the Soyinka generation which believed in aesthetics and entertainment (Obafemi 169). The post-Osofisan generation, however, has been able to combine the

preceding two perspectives with their own spiritual search for a way to change the *status quo*. Brecht and his theatrical aesthetics was a fascination to them as he was to Soyinka, Osofisan, Omotosho and Sowande. I therefore agree with Fiebach's invitation to African playwrights to utilise not only the 'metaphoric and poetic structure' of traditional African theatre, which is similar to what Brecht extols in his 'epic theatre' (qtd. in Obafemi 170), as I have upheld elsewhere, juxtaposing the African storytelling theatre with the Brechtian Epic theatre. The thematic pre-occupation of these playwrights has opened up new vistas of engagement for them to explore and examine the circumstances of their social existence through their plays. Though weaned on Marxism, these playwrights confronted contemporary realities with the torch of spiritual rebirth and transformation. Such themes as corruption, leadership crises, military dictatorship and misadventure, national unity, political rivalry, oppression of the masses by the State, economic deprivation, human rights abuses and the scourge of campus cults, among others, have featured in their plays.

Examples of such plays are Tunde Ajayi's *Streaks of Blood* (1989 University of Ibadan's entry to NUTAF in Jos); *Rhythm of the Wind* and *No More the Taming Hawks* both by this writer, which were entries of the University of Ibadan at NUTAF 1990 (Nsukka) and 1996 (Ile-Ife), respectively; Alex Asigbo's *War of the Tin Gods* and *The Reign of Pascal Amusu*; Bakare Ojo Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan* and *This Land Must Sacrifice*; Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*, *Froned Circle* and *Cemetery Road*; and Tracie Chima Utoh's *Who Owns This Coffin* and *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, among many others. These plays bring to the fore, the contemporaneity of their attitudes in approaching the re-awakening of the society through moral re-armament and interrogation of the ideological aesthetics of the previous generations on which scholars like Barclays Ayakoroma, Alex Asigbo and Ameh Akoh have written copiously, in their attempts to arrive at the ideology that drives the post-Osofisan generation playwrights. While not denouncing the traditional resources of the theatre such as ritual, they have given these elements new, revolutionary significance, well-appropriated to conform with their own zeal about the harmony of the society in which they live and which has given life to their art. For instance, the campus secret cult forms the theme of Ademiju-Bepo's *Farewell to a Virus of Anomie*, "Fruits in the Wind" and others. The variety of dramaturgy in their drama notwithstanding, their stories provide a remarkable narrative with the freshness in style, technique and temperament. They became the voice and mirror of our prevailing anguish and angst, and

...they go further still, in the manner of the radical tradition, than the mere presentation of our contemporary society, to suggesting solutions, to pointing out where an outlet exists from our present enclosing cells. Catharsis is obviously out of fashion here; the call is for a violent upturning of the existing order (Osofisan 46).

The search for a definition of the scope of both artist and the people in Nigerian drama of the new age, and the quest for a marriage of aesthetic ideology of the old and new according to Ameh Akoh, bring us to the question of the ideology of this much talked-about generation (264-272). The proposed ideology being *individualism* sustained on

*survivalism*, has been argued for and against. While some critics like Okoye, for instance, will not want to disagree with that, he enthused:

I believe it is, and the situation is responsible for that. Let us extend our analysis of the environment to the Staff Club, for instance... Even if I belong, I remember that I hardly even go there... because I do not expect to see my contemporaries sitting down to discuss their problem in the environment, etcetera, etcetera. But when you go to the Staff Club, you see our predecessors, sitting down comfortably over whatever it is that they drink, to discuss and thereby inevitably propound ideologies, so to say. What I'm actually trying to say is that, these people had a lot of opportunities to come together and talk and discuss, because friends know each other. I believe there is no dramatist of that generation that does not know his colleague closely or that has not met his colleague in numerous social and artistic occasions. But when you bring that to the contemporary writers, you find out this boy has no time to go there and sit and talk about ideology and stuff like that. There's no time for camaraderie, this man has to survive. So, when you see that kind of a fraternity, it's nothing but the environment, because they go to meet (Personal Interview).

Asigbo's contention readily aligns with this writer's position, when he describes this generation of playwrights as one

that never went to school on government scholarships; the generation that has had to fight for every little right that accrues to it; the generation that must now ask all those that went to school in the 40s, 50s, 60s and perhaps early 70s what they have done with our common wealth which was entrusted into their care? (28).

He goes ahead to say these playwrights, these restless souls have continued to challenge and vilify the *status quo*, criticise and prick the conscience of the generations before their own in their plays. Akoh is convinced that these playwrights in their search for aesthetic ideology attempt to reach new goals or build on or re/deconstruct old dramatic canons within ideo-aesthetic boundaries in both language and theme (264-272). Asigbo again submits that:

It is this search for a new aesthetics, a new ideology and a new approach to issues different from the dogmatism that characterised the previous generations before the third that has preoccupied my generation to the point of an obsession (30).

It could readily be argued that there used to be some journals, intellectual get-togethers or meeting points in the past that helped to make the older generation. Today, hardly do we see such any longer. Are we to blame or they are to blame? As far as I am

concerned, I know what the environment is and I know that I, for example, I am blameless. I am not responsible. I have had an idea for a journal for some time now. The present generation is not to blame at all. As a matter of fact, some of them have tried to put one or two journals together but it has proven impossible to continue because of the financial implication and the lack of patronage. If you were unemployed, and then you begin to think of publishing a journal, no employer will want to touch you. In fact, they will say that this man is insane. It is not that I cannot publish a journal, but if I have to die, ignore my family, ignore myself, and choose to publish a journal and not make money out of that journal, then that's suicide, isn't it? This brings to the fore the question of survival. For Solomon Iguanre,

I would not say there is a specific ideology... we can equally say that the present crop of writers have an ideology. But if the plays are published, you have a much wider audience that could subject the works to thorough literary criticism. That is when you can say, this or that is the ideology of the new writers (364).

Going further, he contends that may be when our own generation also go into publishing, then we could have young publishers taking up the works of their contemporaries. Then there could rise a new era (366). Rasaki Ojo Bakare believes:

We have been greatly hindered for reasons that are naturally human, social, and economical. Talking of basic instincts, every human being is naturally endowed for survival.... Whereas a Jeyifo will tear apart an Ogunbiyi work and then, he will invite them for beer in the evening. They tolerated criticism and the critics of their age were able to say the truth.... How many members of our generation are interested in criticism? The responsibility of individuals too, sycophancy and corruption have taken over. Because you want to survive, you may not want to say the truth ... because people are poor, all they want to do is survive. We are afraid of tearing ourselves apart to build. These are the factors that have conspired against our critical attention (374-6).

Charles Novia also posits:

Factors were right for the older generations when they sort of embraced Marxism or what have you and neglected same in their works. Today, the depression in our economy must be responsible for the two *isms* which you mentioned. Yes, I think we are too individualistic with our creativity. Talking about survival, more people are going into experimental theatre on stage, like monologues and one-man theatre (411).

Presently, true to Novia's contention, the genre of stand-up comedy has gained so much attention and acceptance by the society.

If not for the emergence of the home video industry, which is an absolutely positive development in Nigeria, we may not be talking about the present generation today. We may be talking about the seriousness of art, in which case we are talking about high art, and the fact that theatre is unique, we use such profound words to glorify the theatre, the performance; we speak of the live audience, of contact, interaction between this and that. Okoye enthused:

I have written several scripts for the home video but I have only succeeded in selling one and it's because I am presently in the university that I can afford to be hesitant. If I were not, I would pursue that industry until I become a part of it. That would guarantee my livelihood, my survival. If one looks at these writers, they are contemporary writers; they belong to the post-Osofisan generation. I do not think that Osofisan would write for the home video, at least not yet, and I do not think that Soyinka would do same for the home video (354-6).

The media outlet has undergone a process of evolution and is relatively no longer new. But as long as the interest of practitioners is economic, this situation will continue like this. That is one point in favour of the ideology of survivalism. But I know that even, with that, the situation is still going to improve. I believe that it is good that writers in this generation are writing; at least without the home video industry, they will not be writing. Even if the guy is a mechanic, and then this thing comes up, and he discovers that he can actually tell a story that is going to be acceptable, that is very good. We have produced one more writer and then it might turn out too that some of these writers who are getting recognition in the home video industry might later discover that they actually have what it takes to write for the live theatre and the movement would be an absolutely welcome development and I know that it is possible.

When you actually ask some of the Theatre Arts graduates in the home video industry, they keep telling you that they would have preferred acting, producing or at least, being a part of the collaborative team in the theatre, but they have to survive, and survival is natural. I believe that, if it turns out that these people now become rich and have enough money, they would, I am sure, be able to produce plays or encourage dramatists from the theatre. So, I do not see any problem with the growth of the home video industry in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

For some members of the post-Osofisan generation, their emergence had been conditioned by the factors highlighted above. However, they seem to have risen above some of the identified challenges as at the time of their emergence. Adepetu opined that,

Art for the individual must have growth. We cannot look at a particular set of people forever. As students, the older generation gave us the foundation.

Now, you must be willing to tap from and build on that foundation. As far as creative writing is concerned, they did understand the power to help each other, but with our generation, it is a different story entirely.... Yes, everyone is living for survival. Perhaps that can represent the ideology of our age, but I will quickly add that it was forced on us by the present predicament of our situation. Although one must acknowledge and bemoan the fact that we were never empowered by the older compatriots, but.... You must be strong in your survival before you can be creative.... It is this ideology that is forcing our generation to branch out into all media (415-6).

From every indication, these playwrights of the new order now speak in their own voice, as exemplified by the works of the members mentioned here and many more which space could not permit. The technology of the home video has greatly assisted them out of the dark alleys, as Adepetu prophetically foretold, influencing their outlook, on life and by extension, their artistic form. Their angst can be seen from the interviews this writer had with some of them and the thematic foci of their plays which are now coming together as a body of literary corpus in search of critics to facilitate their ultimate becoming through the labyrinthine paths like Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Actor* to make a generational statement.

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# **THEATRE ACTIVISM AND LEADERSHIP TUSSELS: PLAYWRIGHTS AS CATALYSTS FOR RESTRUCTURING NIGERIA'S ECONOMY**

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## **Abstract**

*The social and politico-economic growth of a nation is largely dependent on the credibility of her leadership. No organisation, group or association has ever achieved economic, social and cultural growth without being engineered by person(s) who form a permanent leadership caucus. In the world at large, judging from the antediluvian era up till now, there had not been a period of leadership perfection. In Nigeria, the centrifugal force of indecisiveness and perverted judgement has taken over as a modus of leading the masses against the original setting of the constitution. Therefore, this study aims to add voice to the existing voices advocating for adequate restructuring of Nigerian federal leadership in order to ameliorate her economic instability that led the nation into economic recession. The researchers zero in the study on Alex Asigbo's **The Reign of Pascal Amusu** and Emeka Nwabueze's **A Parliament of Vulture** which serve as literary templates in divulging and disparaging the bad actors of governance in the society. This is to ensure equal opportunity to all Nigerians to contribute effectively in national development and economic stability, as well as restoring peaceful coexistence amongst its citizens in different parts of the country. Case study and content analysis research approaches of the qualitative research method are adopted for the realisation of the research objectives.*

## **Introduction**

The clamour for the restructuring of Nigeria's political, economic and social system has garnered much momentum. Prevalently, many political leaders, religious leaders and political activists from all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria have aired their diverse views on this issue. However, the issue of restructuring may not be engineered by the masses without finding dissatisfaction on the existing structure. The act of restructuring when appropriately done, paves way for the alteration and reorganisation of the existing constitution for a preferable and more beneficial one, be it in politics, economic, social and

religious affairs. In the course of this study, the researchers copiously looked into the deficiencies that have characterized the leadership system in Nigeria and the reactions of the masses for restructuring as captured by the literary piece of the two playwrights under study.

Since 1960 when Nigeria got her independence, the nation has been bedevilled by leadership tussles; high level of corruption orchestrated by either the act of converting public property for self-aggrandizement or other reasons best known by the doers. This act has contributed immensely to sucking the nation of its strength and has caused perpetual decline in her economic development. Records have clearly shown that the First Republic of Nigeria is characterised by widespread corruption under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the then President and Prime Minister respectively.

In the light of this, the name Nigeria, leadership and corruption have been viewed by many counterpart countries as sobriquets to Nigerian Government. According to Malam Nuhu Ribadu, in corroborating to the above fact posits that:

The country is endowed with abundant natural resources and brilliant human capital. Yet, the paradox there is widespread poverty due to misused resources and untapped potentials. It is therefore true that wherever Nigeria is mentioned, what comes to mind is Boko Haram, oil theft, kidnapping and corruption (8).

The leadership tussles in Nigeria have led many lives to the world of the dead, to mention but a few, on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1966, the first coup d'état took the lives of the First Nigerian Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Premiers of the West and Northern governments, the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, Brigadier Maimalari, Colonel Arthur Unegbe and many others. Since this gruesome incident happened due to the thirst for leadership and power, Nigerian political space is no longer a level playing ground where each tribe contributes equally to the economic development of the country. There had been reactions and counter-reactions, many people had the impression that the coup was tribal in nature in view of the way casualties were recorded. In the writings of scholars today, it is unfit to read Nigerian leadership appraisal without the mentioning of corruption as her main threatening hallmark that deter all round development. This is manifest in the submission of Joe T. Ande when he avers that:

The present democratic dispensation in our great country Nigeria is no doubt characterised by corrupt tendencies manifested in many spheres especially in leadership and followership. This cankerworm has eaten deep into the annual of the entire nation and has unfortunately become the order of the day. Its attributes of bribery, advanced fee fraud popularly known as 419, election manipulation (rigging, kidnapping and insecurity to mention but a few have now been deeply entrenched in the polity (168).

Despite these challenges that threaten development which include political instability, economic recession, social stratification, thuggery, kidnapping, schismatic agitations, genocide attempts and so on, which is orchestrated by leadership ineptitude, the theatre artist as an interventionist and mouth piece of the people has stood firm to correct and avert the cataclysm and regrettable ruin that the country is vulnerable to. It is axiomatic that the theatre serves as a mirror that reflects its society but it is also very pathetic that the societal reflections it brings to the optical view of the masses are not things of public botheration rather the masses see these reflections as ensemble arts for mere entertainment galore.

This paper seeks to invigorate the minds of scholars, politicians, religious leaders and masses from all works of life to the meticulous study of the Nigerian situation as exposed in dramatic texts of Emeka Nwabueze in his *A Parliament of Vultures* and Alex Asigbo's *The Reign of Pascal Amusu*. The theoretical foundation of the study is anchored on the dialectical materialism which argues that change in the society does not just happen but it is modelled on the social and economic reality in the society. Discussing "Nature connected and determined", Joseph Stalin argues that:

The dialectical method therefore holds that no phenomenon in nature can be understood if taken by itself, isolated from surrounding phenomena, inasmuch as any phenomenon in any realm of nature may become meaningless to us if it is not considered in connection with the surrounding conditions, but divorced from them; and that, vice versa, any phenomenon can be understood and explained if considered in its inseparable connection with surrounding phenomena, as one conditioned by surrounding phenomena (4).

From the above assertion, the researchers uphold that the Nigerian economic recession did not just happen but it is caused by a weak economic structure chaired by the bad actors of governance that have ruled the nation over the years.

### **Theatre Activism and Leadership Tussles in Nigeria**

As every writer is a writer in politics as postulated by Ngugi wa Thiongo, one could say that most theatrical arts are arts in politics. To be political, there must be influence and such influence is achieved through conscientisation, healthy conviction, criticisms and propaganda. Activism therefore, is an action that is red in tooth and claw due to its nature and demand which appears to be a threat to the government of a country. To be a theatre activist entails voluntary act of advocating and speaking for the voiceless, the oppressed, and the handicapped that are left as destitute begging for financial salvation. Activism does not exist in a vacuum, it always fight unfriendly happenings in the society, which the government is in most cases the recipient. Consequently, the target enemy of a theatre activist is not the leaders but their ill policies that bedevil and tyrannise the masses, it could be expressed in writing or in action. When expressed literally, it is manifest in the dramatic works of many revolutionary writers like Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*, *Hangmen also Die*, *Cemetery Road*, and *Colour of a rusting Gold* among others. Femi Osofisan's

*Morountodum, No more the Wasted Breed, Red is the Freedom Road* and so on. Emeka Nwabueze's *Dragon's Funeral, Spokesman for the Oracle, Fate of a Maiden, Echoes of Madness, A Parliament of Vultures* and *When the Arrow Rebounds*.

These and many more academic gurus have done well to expound Nigerian Leadership ills with no applause. This spurred Chiduo Obadiogwu to posit that, "popular theatre is a very powerful tool, which sometimes may be misconstrued by people in power, perceiving it to be an opposition to mainstream politics" (91). This is also in line with what happens in an action-packed theatre mass conscientisation exercise. Obadiogwu summarises an experience on this when he narrates a Kenyan ideal thus:

In the production of *I will Marry when I want*, and several rehearsals of *Mother Sing for Me*, the feeling that peasants can understand the truth of a situation and actually communicate what they are thinking was what becomes the biggest threat to the status quo. The Kenyan government in 1982 sensing the power of theatre in raising awareness of the masses demolished Kamirithu Community Education and Cultural Centre and at the same time banned any theatrical activity in the area. Most of the organisers were exiled. The plays questioned the validity of their independence. Independence, instead of giving them freedom has brought them new problems (91).

Theatre has being a workable tool in fighting leadership menace and keeping the government on check and balance towards achieving successes, and eradication of oppression and poverty amongst the masses. In numerous parts of Africa like South Africa, Literary theatre activists like Athol Fugard in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and Lewis Nkosi in *Rhythm of Violence*, have also fought through their writings to ensure that justice will not be reserved for the ruling class alone, but also for those who form the core productive asset to the nation (proletariats). These literary and action-packed reactions precursor national development, which Chigozie Uzoh explains to be, "the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people by providing such things as good education, basic infrastructure and so forth" (181). He further reiterates that in discussing national development, one need to look at economic and political developments, socio-cultural integration and how these contribute to human development. That is one of the sole aims for the practice of theatre activism which cannot be tempered with. In corroboration, Chijindu Mgbemere asserts that:

The artist as social rebel tends always to see the society from the leftist perspective. However, the artist as a seer can use theatre and media to strengthen government policies by conscientising its citizens.... The work of the artist should always gear towards creating a better society where equity, democracy and good governance is emphasised (426).

To achieve the above claim in Nigerian political set up, the masses like a bunch of broom should jointly put heads together to checkmate the government structure that

instigate the leadership tussles experience currently in different corners of the country. Hence, the truth stands out conspicuously, and transparency, by constitutionally enabling the masses to know the true nature of how their resources are managed. By so doing, the reality of democracy becoming the government of the people by the people and for the people becomes true. Supportively, Ayakoroma opines that:

Transparency and accountability on the part of the leaders are antidotes to the cankerworms of corruption. Our leaders are not answerable to the electorate probably because they believe that whether they are voted for or not, they will still find themselves in power through the back door. Where they are appointed into office, they feel they owe the masses no obligation .... Once leaders are accountable to their followers at every point in time, then excesses could be checked (4).

It is pathetic to see that the ignorance portrayed by most of our leaders has presently given rise to many faction groups who fight the government of the day to ensure that attention is given to them. Some of these faction groups seek to be an autonomous nation with total sovereignty like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); the Arewa People Congress (APC). The latter resurrected as a counter group against the Indigenous People of Biafra secessionist group. The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) group have continued to launch attacks on oil installations in the Niger-Delta area and so on. In fact, Uzoh further made a good exposition on this when he posits thus:

Analysts say the dissatisfaction with the structure, operation and power configuration under Nigeria's federalism is responsible for the unprecedented emergence of these groups. The increase in crime rate and the helplessness of law enforcement agencies towards curbing crime have been cited by their founders and admirers as reasons for creation of these groups (210-211).

Going by the above developmental exposition, the leadership tussles and promise for change have over the years, instigated calmness and reliability in the policy of the government. Therefore, the theatre as a mirror of its society shall continue through actions and its literature to advocate for the attainment of the desired change that the masses clamour for.

### **Toward Nigeria's Leadership/Social and Economic Reform**

Nigeria, as a country full of dynamism, has over the years witnessed numerous upheavals which have hampered its economic development. As a nation full of dynamism in this context, explores its manifest potentials, both human and natural resources which have been unharnessed. In this light, it could be said that her developmental plan is *epilepticised* by gross misconducts of those who the masses have entrusted the responsibility of her management.

To achieve a virile leadership stance in a non-reformed society as Nigeria, one need to be conscious of the major key determinants which serve as ‘light hoped’ for at the end of the tunnel. They include positive mindedness, fear for posterity, and so on. These, precursor’s the reality of a desired reformation, restructuring, revamping and resuscitation of a healthy new Nigeria capable of competing to the world class standard. Mgbemere further avers:

Nigeria is still grappling with basic developmental indices. Crime and unemployment have remained endemic experiences of the country’s past and subsisting history. While many hold corruption and its allied vices responsible for this state of affairs, others see lack of technological advancement as the arrow-head. The concern here is that the more these issues are discussed, the worse things seem to get. This stands to reason therefore that there is an obvious deviation *abinitio* that missing link is in the development of the psyche of the human agents, who are the necessary vectors of development and nation building (423).

In agreement to the above assertion, the human resources needed for the development of the nation is totally in doubt due to the psychological deficiencies in thinking positively. This is the platform in which the leadership class of the Nigerian society falls. It is a case where the aspiring leadership agents pre-conceive to wield power in order to exonerate themselves from the clique of poverty-stricken masses before assuming office. This justifies why the Nigeria society, even at the age of fifty seven (57), still crawls like a baby. The resources that should be used to enhance the development of rural areas are shared among the ruling class, leaving nothing behind to ensure quality assurance. These are some of the reasons why news of death tolls is heard from time to time when public roads are just macadamised and abandoned due to insufficient fund. Some of the government owned primary and secondary school pupils study under dilapidated buildings. Electricity generation which is another major determinant that aid development is left to ruin, diversification of wealth sources has become a herculean task. One may argue that the focus of Nigerian leaders is streamlined to nothing but the crude oil which is also managed with a monumental deception without transparency and accountability. To uphold reformation, one must take cognizance of the words of Nuhu Ribadu when he posits thus:

It is therefore right to say that what the country needs is honest and modern leadership that would be a rallying point for citizens, one that can tame the consuming tides of corruption and evolve creative solutions to our myriad of problems. It is my belief that firm and sincere leadership is the precursor for industrious and patriotic followership (16).

To ensure honest and truthfulness in today’s leadership, it is also pertinent to have a brief review of the examples already set by the fore-fathers of Nigerian politics. The review will aid the present leaders and followers to have a glimpse of where it all started,

the present situation and a pointer to the way forward. This review is summarised in the words of U. I. Ofor, when she submits that:

The two major principles are truth and confidence in the pre-colonial days, those who want their conflicts resolved must have confidence in the tribunal that would resolve the dispute. It includes elders, secret cult; priests and priestesses. The decisions of the tribunal are binding unto the disputants. Also both disputants must be truthful. The mediator, arbitrator and judge must be truthful because of the presence of ancestral forces (178).

From the above sayings, there is no gainsaying to conclude that the political system has not been besmirched. The criteria for vindicating unerring citizen has not been perverted due to their truthful believe system, orchestrated by trust and dependency on the punishment that follows suit to offenders by ancestral forces, that could quickly remind one of the disparity that exists between then and now. These palpable differences can as well expose modern citizens to the knowledge of the causal harm the western influence on Africa have done in Nigerian leadership system. This traditional African leadership modus operandi, if followed sincerely is an example that could instigate credibility and serve as a sanitiser to the debilitating system of government experienced in Nigeria today.

### **Synopses of *The Reign of Pascal Amusu* and *A Parliament of Vultures***

The *The Reign of Pascal Amusu* opens with the revelation of Sasha's megalomaniac utterances in Naijaland as a military head of state. As a General, he parades himself as having the power to do whatever he likes even to the extent of squandering public fund just for self pleasure. Though (Sasha) was appointed to lead due to election crises in the land, he drives Sowole and his gang into exile for demanding that he hands over power to Shiwo. Having jailed Amusu, Shiwo and Dayo, Shasha threatens to teach them lessons they will never forget through punishment. The anger escalates when he remembers how he (Sasha) served Pascal Amusu diligently for many years when Amusu ruled Naijaland. This action is interrupted by the call of her Indian Queen.

In the second happening, the chief security officer begins to reveal the ineptitudes of his Masters through a monologue. As a Major, he exposes the level of scheming and "godfatheristic" forces that bedevils the political system, despite the protests from Prof. Sowole and his gang, the end points to their detention as presently suffered by their ilk. At this point, El-Ghandi envisages his General's presence and bows out as Sasha emerges with his threatening words of crushing whoever that opposes him. He bites a chunk of Apple intermittently as he speak, at a point, a fit of cough seizes him as he sinks to the floor foaming at the mouth and there and then he gave up. Salam, who is promised by Masi to be the next leader of Naijaland immediately, begins to question Masi about the fulfilment of the promises irrespective of the activism tension mounted by Prof. Sowole and his group, Masi, tutors him and reassures Salam of his victory despite any human opposing actions that may arise.

In happening three, Pascal Amusu appears as the new president of Naija land having ruled for years earlier before the reign of Sasha who jailed him before his (Sasha) death. Presently, who shall question his authorities? One of his major agenda includes recovering of looted monies from past government administrators. Pascal Amusu in this scene also vows not to hand over power back to Masi who alleges to have back the leadership seat at the expiration of Pascal's tenure. Through the recommendation of Sony Aninta, Bureau for Financial Crimes Investigation is organised and chaired by Mallam Rilwanu Lulu. President Pascal Amusu is characterised by embarking on tours to various foreign countries and to bring to book any individual alleged to be in possession of too much money. As the story unfolds, we see Pascal Amusu, Salam, and Masi who claim to be the leadership ring of Naijaland having problems amongst themselves on whose turn is it to rule and who should step down for the other. Amusu insists that the new reform agenda of bringing to book corrupt leaders must be upheld. From one electioneering period to another, we see high political stratagems employed to ensure election victory by same people who besmirch terribly, the Naijaland political system.

*A Parliament of Vultures* opens in a living room of a middle class family of Mr. and Mrs. Omeaku who leave in an African Metropolitan city. Mrs. Omeaku who is popularly known as "Madam" just succeeded in winning an election into the Parliament of her nation. Following this development, Mrs. Omeaku makes boast of herself because of her political position even when her husband – Mr. Omeaku caught her (Madam) and Mr. Brown in a compromising position in Mr. Omeaku's living room. As a member of the parliament, Mrs. Omeaku makes mountainous plans of changing her entire life to suit into her present status. In this scene, Brown, a political colleague of Madam exposes his intention of using Dr. Parker who has spent fifteen years in the United States to store their money in Foreign Banks. Again, Rev. Jossy, a character who claims to be a religious leader is deceptively addressed by the title to make the voters have a level of trust in them and vote in support. In situation two, Habamero Nathaniel, the parliament president is seen with his caucus members guzzling some bottles of imported whisky in the entertainment centre of his official residence, Madam, Reverend Jossy, and other parliamentarians are present, billions are approved for wardrobe and inconvenience allowances without proper scrutiny of the approved funds. As this happens, encomiums are poured on the president for his kind gesture. To cover these superfluous expenses in the eyes of the masses, a press conference is organized where the journalists will be entertained and bribed with brown envelopes to enable them keep mute. Mr. Otobo and Dr. Parkers are parliament members who stand for transparency, credibility and accountability. Parliament meetings are done in their absence because of their stance for justice. Instead of meetings to be held in its official venue, the president, Habamero agrees with his supporters and changes the venue, thereby making some parliament decisions in absence of Parker and Otobo. During the election, it is discovered that the masses sold their votes due to immediate pecuniary peanuts given to them by aspirants who have little or no formal education and good intension for the welfare of the people.

During Parliament Meetings, Protocols are broken, minutes are not read, decisions are made by some caucus members before deliberations in general parliament meetings, Parkers and Otobo who are the only two schooled members object to some parliament



abnormalities but Habamero, the Parliament President, having known his synergy with other members will always shut up Parkers and Otobo. The play ends with the invasion of angry youths during a parliament meeting, having learnt about how their rulers feed fat on their wealth; the youths become the present order. The presidential mansion is set on fire and songs of war, freedom and liberation is heard.

### **Critical Evaluation of Leadership Tussles in *The Reign of Pascal Amusu***

The thirst for leadership position in Nigeria and the world at large has become a re-occurring factor. In extension, the promise for change by leadership aspirants has become a cliché due to the futility that has characterised and enveloped the change mantra. In every electioneering season, lives are maimed, many are left homeless, blood is shed, and kidnapping cases arise, and so on. These vices make it believable that politics is a dirty game. Hence, the press is under the total control of the government as manifest in media authoritarian theory, the playwright therefore takes it upon himself to espouse these ills that have bedevilled the Nigerian society, as a mouthpiece of the citizens. For the masses to become more conscious of their milieu and seek for a lasting solution, Asigbo, has achieved this by creating characters in *The Reign of Pascal Amusu* for proper representation and exposure of the positive (if any) and negative effects of leadership tussles and its accomplices such as god-fatherism and nepotism in Nigerian political terrain.

In the play, political obsessions that have become the hallmark of Nigerian Leaders to a great height have been proven to be the bane of development due to the inquisitiveness of the ruling class to satisfy self in expense of their core duty which Nnaemeka Agbaenyi summarises as, “three basic function, namely: governance, security and production in the society” (99). This total negligence of duty manifested in Sasha’s character as buttressed in the following dialogue.

**Sasha:** ... kai! Walahi, life is good... especially when you’ve the ruler of a country like Naijaland. Let’s look at it fa. I have paid my dues. I served Masi: the Maradona faithfully but he wanted to dribble me... Shegababanza. Anyway, I’m the ruler now and any day I catch that rabble-rousing Professor Sowole I make him funk his mother. If I catch any of his followers, I put brooms up his prick... I mean, judge for yourself... I mean, duty is duty, I drove Sowole and his gang into exile, Walahi, they don’t have right to demand that I hand over to Shiwo. Did I do the selection? .... Why is it under my rulership that he should seek the throne? To Shiwo my friend, if you’re looking for something you go to where you lost it. (*Slaps him through the bars*) (1-3).

From the above dialogue, the democratic freedom of citizens who tend to voice out their views on government misdemeanours is surmounted. Though, in this context, it is a reprisal to injustices levelled against the present leader by his master, he succeeded. In whatever light one sees it, the overriding idea continues to be the enouncement that accompanies political position which the occupants have bastardised for self-

aggrandisement. It is in this premise that the general believer that power intoxicates becomes a truism. Amusu, the detained past leader who Sasha served during his tenure presently resurfaces to demand for the dethronement of Sasha. The leadership tussle among these fellows is further espoused in the play:

**Sasha:** ... And as for you Pascal Amusu, I weep for you. You who ruled this land many years ago and we served you diligently. You turned your farm house into a meeting venue for the plotting of my downfall. Walahi, not even all the religious leaders of the world can save you. (*Unknown Soldier floats in as voice calls from room*) (4).

The dialogue above gives us a glimpse of the past happening in Naijaland. In Nigerian society today, the polity to a regrettable height has been hijacked by few oligarchic cliques who vie or occupy public positions just to enrich themselves. When victory is achieved, the constitutional power bestowed on the winner of an election is turned into a tool for reprisals instead of fighting corruption and other ills that have become cankerworms to the society.

After the death of Sasha, the leadership tussles found in the polity of Naijaland takes up a more sophisticated dimension which is also a clear enactment of what is seen today in Nigerian political system where a particular individual has a great influence of who succeeds the incumbent political leader and how long the tenure will last. The following conversation places the above remarks in the right perspective:

**Masi:** Yes, it has been decided you have six months in the first instance with possible extension for another six months within that period, you've to organise a credible transition to a popular government.

**Salam:** That will be hard sir ... with Prof. Sowole and his band of activists traversing the whole world and saying unprintable things about this government.

**Masi:** That shouldn't be a problem. You see, behind all that mask of activism is a man who loves and courts attention with a Promethean zeal. You will arrange to meet with him in London. Let him feel that his opinion matters and that you're doing everything to heal the land. Assure him that things will return to normal.

**Salam:** What about Shiwo? He will stake his claims and Sowole will support him.

**Masi:** Forget about Shiwo! He will go the way of Sasha (9).

The above conversation between these two characters exposes the game of god-fatherism which has being a topical and heart throbbing issue in Nigerian polity. That has subjected opposition of the ruling party to experience perpetual failure in elections.

Purportedly, in the present Nigerian political situation, during the last presidential election conducted in 2015, there was a change, the political terrain of the country, the APC took over from PDP, and promised the masses the seven (7) point agenda and glorified the change mantra. Nevertheless, the populace is yet to experience this promised change. The unfulfilled promises leave the masses with the conclusion that the leadership of the present political party is nothing but the aggrieved members of the past ruling party in disguise, Same rats in different holes (one may say) just for the sake of gaining the votes of the populace, change of nomenclature and slogan were imported respectively. Another pathetic issue exposed in the dialogue between Salam and Masi is the tenure elongation decision made by just a single man for a whole country. What else is the true definition of bad governance? In a related context, O. P. Wariboko explains the resultant effect of bad governance by positing that:

Nigerians have been victims of bad governance. This has precipitated the alarming high rate of crime, militancy and terrorism. Individuals and groups have picked up arms to pursue their courses violently: Truly, the frustration aggression theory is playing out in Nigeria. Citizens are frustrated as a result of poor or bad governance and they react with aggression to meet their needs or force the government to attend to their need... (103).

From the above sayings, there is no gainsaying that the problem Nigeria faces today is orchestrated by Nigerian past leaders who still exercise influences on the present political dispensation as seen in the character of Masi who has transformed the Naijaland society into a private business or property. Secondly, because the recent and possibly future leaders may have same political ideology that politics is the easiest way to break off from abject poverty and appropriate public owned property into private one. It becomes a herculean task to decipher a party or person who has the interest of the masses at heart. Be that as it may, it is a celebrated discovery that the Nigerian society, having known where it pinches her, will one day, break the shackles of the few privileged leadership trend that is prevalently invoke and structure an egalitarian Nigeria full of opportunities for all.

Furthermore, the play at study brings to the forefront how political appointments are made in expense of the alleged ballot voting that is done publicly. Godfathers now stay at home and make selection of who will occupy political positions even before the election is conducted. This is could be seen in the dialogue of Pascal Amusu and his servant Odibo:

**Amusu:** We've gone a long way boy, and I take you as my son. I see tough day ahead boy. I fear my boy that things may get out of control.

**Odibo:** We'll survive sir . . . we always do.

**Amusu:** I hope so boy. Anyway, you may now go back to your people and begin your preparations towards becoming their Governor (45, 43).

Consequently, from the above dialogue, it is seen that Pascal Amusu pumped in huge sum of money to ensure victory for Odibo in his home state, though all proved abortive when the tribunal nullified his election, but in this light, the playwright did not mince words in showing the world what happens behind the scene of Nigeria's political system. Therefore, with this dramatic politico-criticism at hand, the masses will be able to seat back, brainstorm and come up with effective modalities to better the situation of the Nigerian society.

### **An Evaluation of Economic Extravagance in *A Parliament of Vultures***

At the mention of the term corruption, many seem not to have a clear understanding of it. But it is like a virus, spreading to every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society and the world at large. According to 2016 Transparency International (TI) reports, "For the fourth consecutive year, Nigeria has failed to rise in Transparency International's Corruption Perception ranking" ([www.punchng.com](http://www.punchng.com)). In further disclosure, Transparency International reports that Nigeria ranked 136 out of 176 corrupt countries in the world in the year 2016. Aspects of these corrupt practices are exposed in the play under study. The rate at which public fund is appropriated into individual fund is also captured. This is manifest in the dialogue that ensued among the characters thus:

**Habamero:** This is only to kick start the day we shall move from here to the Hilton. My special assistant has already made reservations for us...

**Brown and Jossy:** Up speaker

**Madam:** Wait! Are we not entitled to inconvenience allowance? I mean, for eating out or sleeping out. What are parliamentarians for?

**Brown:** You know, she's very correct. Madam Hoha!

**Madam:** I'm fine.

**Jossy:** I support the proposition in toto.

**Habamero:** By the powers invested on me as Speaker of the House, and Chairman of this Assembly, I approve the sum of two million naira for each member as inconvenience allowance.

**All:** Great Speaker.

**Habamero:** We shall cover it officially by calling for an emergency meeting of the Political Affairs Committee at the Hilton (26-27).

The playwright being a political activist, in his quest to better the society through his dramatic arts has done well in showing the masses, just like a mirror, the unpardonable sins that are committed by most political office holders. O. C. Israel posits: "Many destinies had been terminated; many prestigious positions forfeited and many lives lost, as a result of abdicating responsibility and abusive use of position" (66). The aftermath of the abusive use of power by the leaders is a big threat to teeming Nigerian youths, to the economic growth of the nation, to the security of lives and property of the citizens and so on. Habamero, a character in the play under study is a good representation of some Nigeria's leaders who have deluded themselves into believing that the people who voted them into

office are stark illiterates who are easily bought over with bags of salt, clothes, umbrellas and some wands of naira notes. This same derision that exists between the rulers and the ruled has given rise to economic recession, unemployment, robbery, kidnapping and many other social vices. When the stipends that ought to be in circulation is amassed by those in power, the masses are hard-pressed to suffer untold hardship. Furthermore, the following dialogue of Habamero, Brown and Madam exposes and re-emphasises their nonchalant behaviour towards the welfare of the common men.

**Madam:** They can't do anything. They can only talk, the best way to deal with a man who talks much without any action is to ignore him.

**Brown:** By the way, what does the public know? Who tells the public what it hears?

**Habamero:** We shall organise a party for pressmen. Call it press conferences if you like, and follow it up with refreshments and appropriate brown envelopes. That will be at the Hilton. Tell them they can sleep over night if they like. After all, we can book the whole rooms in the Hilton in case of eventuality. Nkechi can come with her young friends and chat up the journalists then everything will be reported as we deem fit (28-29).

The conversation among these government top leaders in the play understudy cannot in any way be found wanting in the Nigeria's polity as they devise strategies on how to deceptively cover their corrupt practices. Relatively, the play further unfolds more corrupt practices in the dialogue of Madam and other parliamentarians:

**Madam:** Wait. I have something to add, you know that my daughter, Nky baby, has been doing a painstaking job for us. And she has no car.

**Brown:** She can charter a taxi and keep it for a whole day.

**Madam:** That is not enough. She needs her own car...

**Habamero:** (*Who has been busy writing*) Ok. It is settled. Nky baby.

**Nkechi:** Sir.

**Habamero:** Take these papers. Give it to the Director of the establishment whose name is on it. He will give you a brand new Honda Accord for your use. Approved?

**All:** Approved (30-31).

The act of purchasing a Honda Accord for Nkechi in the above dialogue and given her the privilege to do painstaking job is as a result of her mother's intellectual ineptitude. Instead of following the right protocol in selecting the Secretarial Personnel, "Madam" presses on, to ensure that her daughter is appointed to do the work on her behalf. This exposition is indeed pathetic and ear tingling to hear that a parliamentarian is occupying a public office without the prerequisite knowledge and the intellectual capability to do the work entrusted into his/her hand. It is a gross affront to the society that he/she claims to represent. These are some of the major contributors of the depreciations in economy that

the Nigerian society experiences from time to time. It is on this foregoing that, Nyigide quoting Acholonu, opines thus:

Our collective predicament is both caused and compounded by our societal ills, as many Nigerian leaders seem to be careless about the welfare of the ruled majority. The many developmental problems facing Nigeria today include the fact of a disintegrated bourgeoisie or middle class, the near-collapse of our Socio-Cultural and Political System and Structures, seriously weakened by the roles of many of our incompetent, dishonest, corrupt, selfish and unpatriotic leaders (142).

All through the play, the issue of misappropriation of fund is a re-occurring factor. In situation four (4), for Madam, Habamero and other top dignitaries to attend a thanksgiving service, a whopping sum of ten million naira is approved even when Otobo opposes and sees it as a “Circus Show”. Such fund is approved just for the upkeep, purchasing of cloths and invitation of musical band players that will accompany them to the ceremony. From the words of Habamero, one can see that the money is shared among the leaders after Otobo’s objection of approving such fund. Habamero explains the actual reason for approving such huge sum.

**Habamero:** You have seen, Honourable Otobo, that ten million naira will not be adequate to take care of this business. The bulk of the money will be disbursed through the payment of inconvenience allowances to members for attending the thanksgiving service. Extra expense will be accrued through the making of appropriate dresses for members and hiring the music group. I therefore approve the sum of two million naira for this purpose. Approved?

**All:** (*Except Parker and Otobo.*) Approved! (72).

Amidst the happenings in the two plays, the playwrights challenge the masses that are oppressed and humiliated, to wake up and fight for their rights. The above wakeup call could be seen as the core doctrine of Karl Marx. Also in the plays, the masses are seen taking radical and revolutionary action, waging war against the corrupt leaders, as such, buildings are set on fire. All these actions are clarion calls for change, in order to make Nigerian society better and fast track its development. The two plays analysed above have shown that stability in government is desired in the country and hence calls for restructuring of the leadership system. Power should be designated to different states of the federation, such as: (i) power to select their own police force that would take no bribe from the masses; (ii) power to make policies that would benefit their own people, and most importantly; and (iii) power for resource control and economic drive for the sustainability and development of the individual states of the federation.

## **Conclusion/Recommendation**

The economic, political and cultural system of the Nigerian society, having been bedevilled by corrupt practices among public office holders still have residual potentials to restore her dignity. The playwrights being aware of this premise have taken it upon themselves to create this consciousness in the minds of the citizens. Bearing in mind the government's anti-responses to the suffering of the masses, the playwrights through their creations of artistic endeavours suggest or fashion out ways to provide succour to the masses, ensure adequate security, equitable distribution of resources, fight against corruption, which encapsulates siphoning of public fund and making private, public investments and so on. This drive has today taken a radical dimension in ensuring that the orchestrators of these ill happenings which have kept the Nigerian society in her sorry and recessive state must be exposed. From one electioneering period to another, promises are made to the masses without fulfilling them. Subsequently, some of the masses are lured with pecuniary enticements to be used as thugs and assassins during and after elections. Also, the masses suffer perpetual shame and humiliations as these top leaders use them as scapegoats just to achieve their selfish interest.

Therefore, to end this impending political, economic and leadership cataclysm threatening to exterminate the entire Nigerian, this paper advocates that both the rulers and the ruled should put hands on deck towards achieving a restructured political and economically revolutionised nation that will pave way for total eradication of recessions that Nigeria experiences prevalently in all her facets. The paper also preaches against the recycling of past corrupt leaders and advocates the emancipation of virile Nigerian youths into the leadership caucus, so as to engender the desired change that the masses clamour for especially in this recessed economy.

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# YOUTHS AND NEGATIVE STEPS IN A DEPRESSED ECONOMY: X-RAYING TONI DURUAKU'S *A MIRAGE FOR A DREAM*

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## **Abstract**

*The trending word in Nigeria today is “recession”. This national condition affects the educational, political, religio-cultural, and social institutions. Global recessions have occurred since World War II; in 1975, 1982, 1991 and 2009. During these recession periods, many Asian countries did not suffer greatly because they had robust economies and gained from the falling prices in goods and services; while the most affected were countries with chronic financial liquidity issues and commodity imports dependency. However, the collapse of the Nigerian economy, both the real GDP and the nominal GDP, is somewhat engaging, because diverse survival strategies have been adopted by the masses. The fact is that, though a majority of Nigerian youths believes in ‘migrating to Europe, a handful of the youths engage themselves in one menial job or the other. The system presents us with humorous, disturbing and illuminating characters; hence, creative artists would have to “think out of the box”, by pointing ways forward even under difficult situations. This paper examines Toni Duruaku’s *A Mirage for a Dream*, a play that problematises emigration from Africa. The method of research is content analysis the play text, aided by library research and observation. Furthermore, Lee MaGaan’s persuasion theory is adopted for the conceptual framework. The paper concludes that a greater number of youths fail in their quest for survival because of unhealthy competition, assumptions and other people’s perceptions. The finding is that crime has become a recurring decimal in the conquest against economic depression. The researcher recommends that survival in a depressed economy requires a robust and deliberate re-orientation of the youths.*

## **Introduction**

The youth occupy a prominent place in the Nigerian society. They are the leaders of tomorrow; and they outnumber the middle-aged and the aged. If their energies and ideas are allowed to spring up, they remain society’s greatest potentials. In spite of being the foundation of a society, the youth “through socialisation ... learn gradually the rules and regulations of what is expected of them” (Akpa 237). Thus, if their labour power, creative talents, dreams and aspirations are well harnessed, they will define the pace of development, sustainable peace and security architecture of any nation. Since peace is a

precursor of development, the youths can contribute meaningfully to the sustenance of peaceful coexistence of their nation if they are gainfully employed. Their inclusive participation in the nation's economy and polity is bound to boost socio-political and economic development for the country to attain higher heights. This underpins the view that, any nation that neglects the dreams and aspirations of her youth is bound to reap chaos and a depleted economy.

But the indices of human development in Nigeria show that there has been a neglect towards children, adult literacy, girl-child education/training, infant and maternal mortality. However, the erosion of family values in Nigeria constitutes some of the delinquent behaviours found among the youths. Whereas the youth are not empowered, the tendency to resort to crime is rife. A greater number of youths that struggled through self-sponsorship in school are not gainfully employed. There is no functioning scheme for loan or support for small scale entrepreneurship to empower the youth. Again, where these schemes exist, the processes are over-demanding. However, Charles Ofoche stresses that:

The problems and weaknesses arise from a history of flawed elections, the dominance of the ruling party, and scant evidence of political accountability. These have undermined the legitimacy of democratic rule. For democracy to thrive it requires strong institutions such as the legislature, courts, police, armed forces and civil service for good governance; but unfortunately many of these institutions are weak due to poor leadership and corruption; and have fostered problems of governance. The weak political structures in Nigeria have also had a negative impact on the economy (Ofoche 7).

Nigeria's industrial base and financial institutions are weak. Recent statistics reveal that Nigeria's economy falls short of the government's expectation to hit more than the yearly 7 percent growth rate but has failed to optimise a 15 percent growth rate. This is consequent upon the consumptive nature and imports dependency. Before the advent of urbanisation and globalization, "life was governed by well-known morals and ethics that had been passed down through the generations. Deviancy was punished, conformity praised and difference discouraged" (Gyuse 5). The argument therefore is that the erosion of values has led to the breeding of uncultured children that are lazy and are easily co-opted into crime for its material benefits. The outcome is a harvest of misguided youths roaming the streets with guns ready to maim and kill at the slightest provocation. The privilege for their action was granted to them by the weak institutions of government and Nigeria's dysfunctional political culture; hence, economic recession was therefore imminent in Nigeria:

about 80% of the country's income comes from oil and a meagre 15% from other sources. Before the discovery of oil, Nigeria was an agrarian economy which promoted free enterprise. The regions retained half of their locally derived revenues, which were based on exports (Ofoche 8).

Nigeria's economy is yet to recover from the "Dutch Disease" since the economy is dependent on the performance of the oil sector". The Dutch Disease pushes out local manufacturing and negatively affects the social contract, because the government no longer relies on local revenues, such as taxes, but on foreign revenue" (Ofoche 8). The country's overly reliance on oil and the failure of the power corporations to meet local demand thereby manufacturers are left with no choice but to depend heavily on power generating sets for power has adverse effect on cost of production. Therefore, a nation that turns blind eye to corruption will definitely enjoy a bad economy.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Backings**

For theoretical backings, Toni Duruaku's *A Mirage for a Dream* may have unconsciously applied Lee McGaan's persuasion theory in its tone of dialogue. The persuasion theory is "a process by which people use messages to influence others. While persuasion typically uses information, the emphasis in a persuasive message is on influencing the receiver (rather than merely providing information and letting the receiver make up his/her own mind). Persuasion attempts to change minds or get people to act" (McGaan 1). Hence, in the line of dialogue between Charlie and Chimdi, several persuasive terms were used such as belief, which establishes a fact, as exemplified in Charlie's dialogue; "good life indeed! Taxi driving can't give you the good life. And with your wife expecting, you need something really solid" (Duruaku 29). This illustrates McGaan's persuasive term of *belief*, which "refers to what people think is true or false, that is, the facts" (1). Again, the persuasive term of *value*, which "refers to what we think is good or bad, right or wrong" (1), is evidenced in Berna's point of view:

**Berna:** What you want to do is dangerous. Through the desert to God-knows-where; then cross the sea. Have you forgotten you can't swim, even in a pond, not to talk of the ocean... (Duruaku 48).

Other persuasive terms, such as, *motive*, *attitude* and *behaviour*, are exhaustively appropriated in *A Mirage for a Dream*. Hence, the play underscores the social psychology of the youth and their misguided steps. Therefore, some negative steps taken by the characters in the play are reflections of their socio-political environment.

Also, the concept of poverty is a factor in Nigeria's depleting economy. This is because from the family level, parents lose control of their children, and when such children become breadwinners, they unleash mayhem on the society. What would you expect from a child that started fending for himself at age eight or 12; through odd and unethical means such as armed robbery, drug trafficking, prostitution, political thuggery and rape? Akpa emphasises that:

Poverty has "incapacitated parents in the exercise of their roles in the family. This is because, most parents are unable to feed, educate and clothe their children, thus allowing them to fend for themselves at a tender age. In most families, such children are breadwinners and the parents cannot control them again (242).

The absence of basic amenities contributes to poverty. Again, in *A Mirage for a Dream*, Toni Duruaku highlights poverty as a basic factor through the dialogue between Mike and Chimdi. The action code reveals the capitalists and the bourgeois. The play therefore is polarised between the 'Haves' and the 'Have-not' in the following lines:

**Mike:** Really! Yes, I left in the first term of primary five when my dad was transferred and we moved to Aba. You know, he was in the Federal Civil Service. Later, we came back here.

**Chimdi:** When my papa die, senior wives gang up, seize everything my mama get, chase am commot. Them children big pass me. No money dey for me again. So, every weekend I begin follow my mother him brother wey be bus conductor (Duruaku 12).

Language has not only defined the characters, but Chimdi's lines are laced with imageries of poverty, polygamy, family instability and maltreatment as reasons for his misguided steps. What affects Chimdi affects millions of Nigerian youths due to weak government institutions and lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of quality education and inadequate training programmes. These are contributory factors to youth restiveness and emigration from Africa. Thus, the youths react indiscriminately, whereby these and many more are not attended to, the Nigerian youth will continue to express his/her dissatisfaction through different channels of crime.

The economic recession and its orchestrated hard times have adverse effects on the young people's life chances, thereby opening the floodgates of crime and insecurity. The youth represents the driving force for national development. A nation that is striving towards sustainable development must make sure that crime is reduced to the barest minimum. Ideally, if the youths are gainfully employed, the economic and socio-political life of the nation would be sustainable. But whereby the youths are unemployed, their energies will be misdirected. This has a serious implication because youths are volatile and as such by the power of peer pressure, misdirected energies are channelled towards crimes and the breakdown of the social order. Also, the recession period has heightened the dangers of unemployment, incessant armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, youth restiveness and delinquent behaviour have created a social problem that is threatening the stability of the society.

Psychological and economically, a depressed economy devastate both the old and young life. Youths all over the world are a vital and promising segment of the society. Focused, disciplined, and law-abiding youths create bright future for their nation. All the same, Violent, indulgent and lawless youths are of great threat to the nation's peace and security. For instance, from the angle of the Nigerian political culture, with its feathers of ethnicity and tribalism fanning, the country is enveloped into a bombshell called corruption. In every facet of the Nigerian life and economy, you will see the embers of corruption fanning. Adebayo expresses his disgust when he says that:

The fundamental reason why corruption is prevalent is that the generality of Nigerians worship material success, no matter by what means the success is achieved. This goes to the roots of our sense of values. A Nigerian socialite was once jailed in Britain on charges of very serious crimes. On returning home after his jail term, he called an all-night party at his residence, and the place was packed full of the top socialites in Lagos. In a civilised society where the sense of values is not misplaced, such an ex-convict would hardly dare show his face in the public, let alone call a party. And if he did, no decent person would turn up as a guest (24).

The above is a replica of what former governor of Delta State, Chief James Ibori did on his return to the country. It has become notorious with Nigerians to welcome 'Our Thieves'. Why then should the society expect the opposite from the youths? Lee McGaan's theory is apt here because the action code from Nigerian leaders/politicians is persuasive enough to indoctrinate the youths into a corruptive culture. Whereas the hospitals, roads, water and light are in a critical state, public functionaries are busy abusing their offices by ways of fraud, bribery, straight forward theft and hegemony. Therefore, violence erupting from the youths in the guise of kidnapping, rape, restiveness, and armed robbery are to some extent reactionary. Again, when the environment is saturated with the get-rich-quick syndrome, corrupt practices and materialism, what else can one expect from the youths? Surely, environmental factors will set in because standards copied from the society/parents are bound to influence the children/youths. This scourge has for a while been around. What is the future of the Nigerian youth? Is the government adamant as their destinies are being raped day-in, day-out? Perhaps, the right question should be; is it part of the Nigerian culture for the youths to be restive or what is truly responsible for their expression of dissatisfaction via violence? Is the Nigerian government adamant to their complaints over the years? Are the youths reacting to the rots in politics – the decline of African values- the materialistic expectations of them by the society/parents and the inability of the government to meet up with their responsibilities?

#### **About *A Mirage for a Dream***

Toni Duruaku explores the predicament of the Nigerian youths, their inordinate desires and misguided steps in a depressed economy. *A Mirage for a Dream* is a 2016 statement on materialism, greed and the prevailing challenge of emigration from Africa. The playwright weaves together the drop-out-of-school, the get-rich-quick and the 'jetting' out of Nigeria syndrome into a social drama that is meant to educate as well as entertain. The parable of Chimdi Nwachukwu, a primary five school drop-out and motor park tout, with Mike Abimbola, an old classmate sets the stage for an expose on the cause and effect of delinquency, youth restiveness, greed, materialism and insatiability. While the play interrogates the dependence on government for employment and basic amenities, it maintains that education is the key for sustainable development. The storyline starts with the protagonist, Chimdi Nwachukwu, whose educational training truncates at primary five. By association with his uncle, Chimdi becomes a motor park tout and in a chance-meeting at the park, reunites with his classmate, Mike Abimbola, a renowned politician. By Mike's

benevolence, Chimdi acquires a taxi and completes his education through the adult-education programme. But, Chimdi's association with Charlie and Ginger lures him into traveling to Europe for greener pasture. The play frowns at vital organ harvesting and exposes the dangers of racketeering as exemplified in Chimdi's dangerous journey through the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea – the lure of Europe – during which he meets his tragic end.

### **X-raying** *A Mirage for a Dream*

The play starts with a PRESET and ends in a POST-SET. It has Transitions A-H, and Nine Episodes. The playwright appropriates the total theatre elements laced with a masquerade dance, songs and ritualised dance. The characters engage in a conflict of survival, hence the Motor Park scene exposes the squalor and despair of the motor park touts, while Episode six unveils the harm and damage youths bring on themselves in their quest for survival and greed for material things. The play delineates the world of the 'Haves' and the 'Have-nots' as well as the emerging world that is replete with greed, crime, violence and unethical standards. Charlie's sudden wealth and riches mesmerises Chimdi. Hence, Charlie relates his business conquest to Chimdi saying: "But I have the toothpick business. And I will soon go into importation of canned tomato" (*A Mirage* 42). McGaan's theory of persuasion triggers Chimdi's interest. Charlie graphically explains his travel route to Chimdi:

**Charlie:** ...I went through Morocco, then I was smuggled across the Mediterranean at Gibraltar on a boat for 15 kilometres that felt like 100. Terrible risk, but I made it. Holed up in Malaga for two months, then got a job in the vineyard of Andalucia, I worked in a wine factory for one year. Slave labour, but good Euros. Then I went to Palermo Italy when something more profitable came up, I was there for six terrible months then bolted when the Carabinieri came after some of us. I lived dangerously in Italy, but I made my money (*A Mirage* 43).

The phrase 'I lived dangerously in Italy, but I made my money' is juiced and therefore persuasive. It corroborates with Lee McGaan's introduction to *Persuasion*, Maral Caverner explains that,

Not only does she discuss and define the terms belief, attitude, and value, but she also discusses and defines motive and behaviour in relation to persuasion theory ... which suggests that people think and behave in ways based on reasons and are relatively predictable (para. 4).

Charlie's motive here is to lure Chimdi into their business syndicate. The play's preoccupation is on the psychological leanings of the period. The playwright's idiom is existential. It captures the day to day existence of a greater number of Nigerian youths. For

instance, the Park Scene is not merely a metaphor for ‘the journey of life’ but a deliberate picture of a segment of the society and their psyche as exemplified in the following:

- Man:** I thought you said that you are full and ready to leave. One chance you said. Means one vacant seat.
- Chimdi:** Oga, na one chance after you. Siddon that front seat before person take am. We dey move in five minutes. No shaking. (*Leaves yelling.*) Aba! Aba!! One chances.
- Man:** (*Sighs.*) These people! (*Opens the door and sits.*)
- John:** (*Calls*) Lagos! Lagos! One chances! (*A Mirage 7*)
- Man II/Mike:** Touts like you get on the bus as if they are passengers, to give the impression that the bus is getting filled up, and ready to depart. As genuine passengers get on, the fake ones get down and drift away. That way, the bus appears perpetually short of one or two persons, till it actually fills up (*A Mirage 11*).
- Chimdi:** ... You be Mike? Mike Abimbola?
- Man/Mike:** Yes! Have we met before?
- Chimdi:** Chai! Mike! Na Chimdi, your classmate for primary school.  
Chimdi  
Nwachukwu! (*A Mirage 9*)
- Mike:** How did you end up here?
- Chimdi:** I stopped school at primary five
- Mike:** Why? Your father was rich, and you were smart.
- Chimdi:** Yes. But my father marry many wives. My mother na the youngest and I be her only child. For school I dey spend good money... yes o! My papa die as your parents transfer go Aba
- Mike:** Really! Yes, I left in the first term of primary five.... But you are now a tout. That’s going backwards. Surely, a driver’s mate is a fair job (*A Mirage 12*).
- Chimdi:** That na another story. Anyway, na here I dey. No certificate, no job, no training. No money. Nothing! But I manage marry one fine girl so (*A Mirage 13*).

Obviously, the psychological and environmental factor that affects Chimdi can be traced to what Paulina Akpa describes as family socialisation when she says that,

in the family, through socialisation, children learn gradually the rules and regulations of what is expected of them. They are taught through everyday situation to be responsible members of the family as well as the general society (237)

This also concurs with Babs Fafunwa’s position that, “character training is the cornerstone of African traditional education” (Cited in Akpa 237). Chimdi’s polygamous background; the psychology of his mother thrown out and the fact that he started fendng for himself

from primary five shows that he lacks ethical socialisation. This familiar treatment of happenings in the society reveals recognisable characters in both slums and citified locations within the reach of government. Albeit, critical attention has not been tabled to strategise on how these youths can be rescued and empowered. Although, they are struggling to survive, the playwright typifies in Chimdi the fate of many Nigerian youths whose family background and socialisation have crippled their future and by extension the society.

Unfolding the characters' socio-economic status, the audience becomes familiar with Chimdi's semi-literate background and the positive effect of Chimdi's chance meeting with Mike. The role and importance of education and its inherent powers are here re-emphasised. The class difference between Mike and Chimdi is highlighted through language, costume and demeanour. Aroused by the encounter with Mike, Chimdi begins to appreciate that education refines a man. His dissatisfaction with his touting-job is taken out on Berna:

**Berna:** Last night you were tossing around in your sleep like a fish out of water ... speak to me.... Did you lose your job?

**Chimdi:** What job? Is that a job? It's a job alright. But, there is something wrong with it... I mean, the way I do it. No dignity.

**Berna:** Well, someone has t do it. It's better than stealing.

**Chimdi:** That's the point. The way we do it. That's why anytime the police is searching for a criminal, they come to the motor park *fiamm!* The home of thieves (Duruaku 16).

The scene hints on the crude and careless ways the-not-so-literate conduct their businesses as well as conduct themselves. It points towards job hazards, crude practices and backwardness. Bitter about the situation, Chimdi worries about dignity and job satisfaction as he informs that, "...Rowdiness, filth and rudeness can't be the mark of any profession. But they mark out the *Ocho passenger*. No respectability; very bad conduct" (Duruaku 17). Inadvertently, these are one of the many reasons youths consider certain jobs in Nigeria as degrading while they travel out to Europe and do worse jobs; reasons being that such jobs are situated in organised and clean environments with more remuneration.

The rising action builds up as Mike sponsors Chimdi through the adult education programme and engages him with taxi driving. Through Mike's benevolence, Chimdi's life gets better, his responsibilities are met and his pregnant wife is optimistic until Charlie's success engrosses Chimdi. Greed is another factor that misguides the youths, and as it has become incumbent on Nigerians to worship material success, Charlie captures Chimdi's interest. But Berna warns that:

**Berna:** What you want to do is dangerous. Through the desert to God-knows-where; then cross the sea. Have you forgotten you can't swim, even in a pond, not to talk of the ocean...



**Chimdi:** Not Ocean. Sea! ...Mediterranean Sea. Only twenty-three kilometres at the crossing point. And we will be in a sip. We're not swimming across.

**Berna:** Oh! I now know why Charlie gave you that map.... Still.... What happens if you fail. The money you are borrowing, your savings, plus your miserable share of the family land you've sold? You will come back to nothing if you fail (Duruaku 48).

It is obvious that the socio-political and economic climates of Nigeria is frightening and very disheartening, but the playwright's message hinges on the danger of running away from known problems to unknown horizons.

### **Impact Factor**

The playwright's message will no doubt engage the mind of the reader with the interrogation of vital organ exportation as well as the hideous crimes. However, the play's thesis on the relevance of education and self-employment are areas that government, philanthropists and Non-governmental organisations need to emphasise. Since drama points the way forward, Duruaku has outlined not only the environmental factors that influence the youths, but reasons for their dissatisfaction. Technically, the playwright emphasised self-help rather than the masses waiting for the government to come to their aid on employment, education, and housing. The example of Mike Abimbola's encouragements for Chimdi Nwachukwu to complete his education are laudable. Below are excerpts:

**Mike:** The problem is your lack of education. No training in any trade either. *Ocho passenger*. That's not a job, is it? After I saw you at the motor park that day, I couldn't eat when I got home. I said: how can Chimdi, the brilliant Chimdi, who used to even help me with my home-work become a nobody? I nearly wept. You could have learned a trade or finished primary six, at least (Duruaku 26).

**Chimdi:** I dey regret everything. I thin say when I marry wife wey go school well well, e go help. But that one no dey enough. Okay, see now. I come your office come disgrace myself. Your people come dey laugh me as I no fit write (Duruaku 26)

**Mike:** Indeed, it's somewhat absurd not to be able to write in this present age. You can still do something about it though. Extramural classes, for instance. Private lessons. You will always be better at anything you do if you have basic education. Ambition without education is like an adventure without a map (Duruaku 26).

**Chimdi:** True

**Mike:** Get some education and I will buy you a taxi to drive for me. (*Pause*.) In fact, I will let you have it as dash at some point; my gift to an old friend. But you must become literate first. In a year

or two, you will get your certificate, but more importantly, you'll be literate. I'll pay the fees (Duruaku 27).

It is obvious that Mike is aware of the effect of Chimdi's dysfunctional family on him, but he sees un-tapped greatness in Chimdi which could be encouraged. Mike's example is another angle the playwright is developing in the mind of the reader/audience. The playwright's appropriation of migration as a contemporary socio-economic problem reveals the obvious; a consumer nation that imports what it produces and something as minute as toothpick. The familiar treatment of the above relates to the audience the economic and political situation in Nigeria; the squalor and abject poverty which have thrown the youth into unending search for 'green pastures' outside the African soil. The shocking reality is that out of every ten Nigerian youths, the ambition of eight is to travel overseas. Chimdi is no exception, hence he inquires:

**Chimdi:** So how did you go?

**Chimdi:** What business were you doing in Italy?

**Charlie:** Never mind. I don't want to remember that one. With 150,000 Euros in my back pocket, I vamoosed to Nigeria. convert the sweet Euros to Naira...

**Chimdi:** I've always been good with math... Over 45, million Naira... (*Slowly, but firmly.*) I have to go to Europe... (*A Mirage... 44*).

The playwright appropriates dialectically the treatment of the social conditions that produced the greed in the character of Chimdi. The hazard of traveling to Europe is juxtaposed with Berna's caution: "what happens if you fail. The money you are borrowing, your savings, plus your miserable share of the family land you've sold? You will come back to nothing if you fail" (*A Mirage 48*). Interwoven with songs and dance, the argument allows the reader/audience digests the hard facts presented. In Transition D, the salient issue of organ harvesters is appropriated. The playwright focuses on this menace and cautions the youth through a vivid and graphic illustration of the harvesting of Chimdi's vital organs. It is surreal, empathic and painful. Chimdi's associates panics:

**Ginger:** They tracked back from Waddan. Midway at Zawilah, the hospital admitted that two bodies had been found on a road track a few kilometres away. One of them was...Chimdi...

**Mike:** Exhaustion or what?

**Obinali:** Worse...His kidneys were missing!

**Charlie/Mike:** What's that?

**Obinali:** There's a huge demand for certain human parts in Asia, they can't get enough donors or accident victims with undamaged organs, so they force the matter. Their agents ambush vulnerable desert crossers and rip off their organs, especially the kidneys. It's a syndicated business.

**Charlie:** Terrible! I shouldn't have encouraged him to make this journey.

**Ginger:** He was determined to get to Europe... (*A Mirage...* 67).

*A Mirage for a Dream* demonstrates how youths carelessly endanger their lives in pursuit of material gains. Abysmally, most Nigerian youths have remained unperturbed about the socio-political and economic issues on-going in this country. They are oblivious of the fact that the consequences of today's corruptive leadership will rupture their tomorrow. Hence, the youths are preoccupied with frivolities, materialism and the quest for greener pastures in Europe. This I-don't-care-attitude is a sad development and does not augur well for Nigeria and sustainable development. It must be noted that without any form of scheme or support from the government, the struggling youth becomes a weapon in the hands of misguided politicians, which, accounts for an upsurge in crime and youth restiveness. Though Nigeria is in a recession now, but monies (loots) recovered from misguided politicians (Names withheld), can be channelled into engaging the youths meaningfully.

Therefore, the onus lies on the youths to equip and empower themselves by acquiring sound and functional education, because an informed youth is self-made. Their attention on frivolities, games and money-making can be redirected by engaging the youths in meaningful schemes and projects that will benefit the nation as well as empower them. The need to redirect the youth is uptime. Examples are that; if youths are involved in critical public issues such as the national conference, budget committees/budget planning, constitution amendment committees, and so on, their opinion will not only count, but their involvement becomes experiential and a patriotic commitment.

## **Conclusion**

Ideally, it will benefit Nigerians if a viable and robust grass root re-orientation is launched through the family, the custodians of culture and churches to begin to re-focus the children/youths with the right values and expectations. Most especially, in this era where the emphasis is on certificates and most parents want their children to become "office staff", an orientation in the lines of self-employment will be applauded. Hence, Toni Duruaku's *A Mirage for a Dream* is timely, as it x-rays survival options, precisely education and self-employment specific. Nigerian youths to a large extent constitute a huge part of the nation's population. It is on this premise that policy makers and governments are advised to consider youths as the beacon of light and trustees of tomorrow. Unfortunately, many resources are yearly expended on projects that have in no way directly benefited the youths. Thus, Nigerian youths suffer from lack of direction as a result of non-provision of functional and inclusive policies that will enhance the wellbeing of the Nigerian youths. Consequent upon this neglect and the nation's economic stagnation, unemployment and now recession, the interest of the youths is somewhat diverted to materialistic impulse. The fun-seeking gallivanting youths are deliberately exposed to crime, inordinate desires and get-rich-quick syndrome at the expense of commitment towards sustainable development. These trustees of tomorrow are therefore ill-prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

Although, government has approved some programmes for youth development and, there also exist a ministry for youth development, but, paucity of funds and lack of

proper implementation has stalled such projects. Be that as it may, adequate attention has not been given to youth empowerment and development in Nigeria. On the misguided interest of the youths, Akido Agenro points out that,

most Nigerian young men's preoccupation with soccer and their excitement with the fabulous earnings of major players in the teams competing in Europe to the neglect, if not outright disdain for events that occur at the home front (1).

In this era of recession, the expectation is that the federal government would address the interest of the masses as a priority and invest in the youths by empowering them with projects that will create wealth for self-reliance of the individual and the nation. Though, where basic amenities are the exclusive preserve of the rich, the masses become incapacitated. Again, a faulty curriculum, non-conducive learning environment, and inadequate funding of the educational sector contribute to eroding values and misinformation amongst the youths. Also, the absence of these creates room for misguided minds to misdirect the youths and lure them into one crime or the other.

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# **DRAMA AND THE NIGERIAN ECONOMIC RECESSION QUESTION: A CASE STUDY OF FELICIA ONYEWADUME'S *ECHOES OF HARD TIMES***

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## **Abstract**

*It is no news that Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa and the largest producer of oil amongst African countries, is currently experiencing economic recession. While the reason for this phenomenon may be global and may be attributed to such factors as: high inflation caused by a rise in the prices of goods and service, a fall in the price and demand for oil, poor economic planning, high interest rate and many others. The purpose of this essay is not to cast blames on anyone or glorify the already identified causes of the recession in Nigeria, but to advance a solution to this problem. Admittedly, drama has served a veritable tool for social reconstruction and redirection. By this, drama does not only entertain, but in doing this it also informs and educates society for good. Drama, thus, has proven a potent tool to solve the problems of man as he interacts with the social forces around him. The foregoing is the aim of this study as this research demonstrates how Nigerians can deal with as well as surmount the current challenges they face in this period of recession, using Felicia Onyewadume's ***Echoes of Hard Times*** as its case study. The study employs the case study and content analysis research approaches of the qualitative research method to realise set objectives. It observed that studies bordering on the role of drama in dealing with economic recession are limited, and therefore calls for more studies to be carried out in this area.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and the largest producer of crude oil in Africa. As observed by Michael, Nigeria produces 1.782 million barrels of oil per day, as against Angola's 1.688 million barrels of oil per day (www.africanews.com). As a country whose main stay is crude oil, which she exports, Nigerians should be benefitting from the rewards of her crude oil exports, but the reverse is the case as a large number of the Nigerian population live in poverty, hunger and starvation. This situation was further worsened by the global economic meltdown that further launched the country into financial crisis. In a yet unstable democracy, ravaged by the woes of political fights and instability from oppositions in successive governments, Nigeria did not learn from other countries like U.S.A, Britain, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and many others that put measures in place

to cushion the effects of recession whenever it is envisaged. Unfortunately, Nigeria is yet to recover from the scourging effects of the economic plague called recession.

Drama has served a veritable tool for social reconstruction and redirection, by this, drama does not only entertain, informs but also educates the society for good. Drama, thus, has proven a potent tool to solve the problems of man, as he interacts with the social forces around him. A lot of reasons have been advanced for the present economic recession that hit not only Nigeria, but other countries of the world. The purpose of this essay is not to cast blames on anyone or glorify the already identified possible causes of Nigeria's present economic woes, but to advance a solution to how Nigerians can deal with the present economic situation of the country using Felicia Onyewadume's *Echoes of Hard Times* as the primary text for analysis.

### **The Dramatist and the Society**

A dramatist is a person who crafts or writes plays. Another name for the dramatist is a playwright. The dramatist does not just write because he wants to express an idea, all too often plays are meant for the society. Plays reflect the tastes, attitudes, lives, anomalies, needs and aspirations of the society, and are written with the aim of informing, entertaining and educating the masses. Drama has been described as a mirror that reflects back society to itself. As such, the dramatist is a watchdog meant to observe, document, and warn society against inimical attitudes and behaviours that can stampede and impede its growth and development. For Bertolt Brecht, plays should engineer the people towards social change. Thus, drama should reflect the dominant worldview and lifestyle of the age in which the drama is situated, and provide tangible solutions to the societal problems of its time.

Over the years, drama has been used by playwrights to make constructive statements on the events in the society, so as to effect positive changes in man and the society. According to Emmanuel Ebo, the dramatist has been described as "the gadfly which God has attached to the state and all day long in places...am feasting upon you, arousing, persuading and reproaching you" (108). The dramatist therefore acts as a watchdog of society as he uses drama as a tool to effect changes in his environment. For Cyprian Obadiogwu, the dramatist aims to show his own stand in his society (112). The dramatist cannot only effect changes in the society by recreating these changes through play texts; he can also serve as a visionary who can predict the future by utilising recent experiences as perspectives on both the present and future (Dandaura 179). Hope Eghagha, commenting on the role of the dramatist in Nigeria, submits that:

Because popular theatre (drama) has the capacity to reach all strata of society using a simple language, a simple method, its outreach could be the tonic the nation needs for the change in values which both the leaders and followers of the country are currently clamouring for (210).

As such, a dramatist is able to achieve his intended aim through his play because he is a member of the society so naturally that his artistic sensibilities are shaped and sharpened by the socio-economic contradictions and political happenings of his time (Dandaura 179).

### **Economic Recession: A Conceptual Definition**

Economic recession simply means a general slowdown in the economic activity of a country. Economic recession is a downturn in the economy or a situation where a nation's economy seems to be standing on its head. According to Tinuke Fapohunda, it is a period of economic slowdown featuring low output, illiquidity and unemployment. It is characterised by its length, abnormal increases in unemployment, falls in the availability of credit, shrinking output and investment, numerous bankruptcies, reduced amounts of trade and commerce, as well as highly volatile relative currency value fluctuations, mostly devaluations, financial crises and bank failure (8). For Farayibi Oladapo, economic recession is often characterised by symptoms such as rising prices of goods and services, inability of government to meet its financial obligations, exchange rate fluctuations, and poor performance of other macroeconomic variables which defines the state of the economy per time. Economic recession is a recurrent issue because of the cyclical nature of the global economy. That is why most countries, especially the developed ones, often diversify the structural base of their economy to withstand any external shock (4).

Furthermore, Chukwu observes that, the National Bureau of Economic Research defines an economic recession as, "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production and whole sale – retail sale" (43). In the same vein, Kale, Maigari and Haruna view it as a negative real GDP growth rate for two consecutive quarters (say first and second quarter). Judging by the above definition, Nigeria is experiencing economic recession currently, since her first and second quarter growth in 2016 are – 1.7 percent and – 2.06 percent (54).

### **The Nigerian Situation**

According to Jubril and Olayinka, going by the report of the National Bureau of Statistics, economic recession is upon Nigeria. The double quarters of negative growth, high levels of inflation, worsening purchasing power of the naira and the increasing levels of unemployment are all strong indicators that all is not well (302). Oladapo also adds that Nigeria's current economic situation emerged like a thunderbolt at the instance of the negative growth rates recently released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). This admission was just an official declaration of the situation the Nigerian masses have been battling with for quite some time. The antecedents in the country provided justification for this economic woe. Also, the present situation substantiates the effect of an absence of a clear policy direction of the government (4).

A number of factors have been attributed to have caused the economic recession in Nigeria. According to Kale, Maigari and Haruna, these are poor economic planning, high inflation rate, high interest rate, high taxation, policy conflict, overdependence of the nation on petroleum, resource mismanagement (not just petroleum, but natural gas as well), activities of Niger Delta militants, high rate of importation, the debt game (on all levels), the changing dynamics of over population, outright corporate greed, the national relocation of employment and the changing of means of labour, growing gap between the elite and



the impoverished, and other causes like ethno-religious crises, political instability, fraud, leadership crises, disease burden, budget priority and implementation, and so on (55-56).

More so, Oyesiku observes that economic recession does not just occur, certain factors trigger recession which include; inflation, loss of consumer confidence, excess supply over demand, excess demand over supply, and global economic crisis. The present economic recession has severe negative and also some positive impacts on aggregate economic activities in Nigeria. It causes extreme poverty and suffering of the masses, children's right to quality education is denied, affordable inclusive healthcare are deprived, there is adverse demand and supply shocks. It has contractionary effects on aggregate demand and supply resulting to volatile shocks in economic activities. There is scarcity of foreign exchange, few money, reduced income, decreased finances available to households and businesses. There is also weak purchasing power, reduced consumer spending and decrease in sales of goods and services. The purchase of goods and services by individuals, households and firms has drastically reduced as a result of the economic recession. Business activities are now at the low ebb, there are jobs losses and increase in unemployment rate. The reduced employment is due to decreased sales of goods and services by business owners, companies, street vendors, farmers, shop owners, retailers and wholesalers. The aggregate spending power has sharply declined (qtd. in Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku 2).

Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku assert that, following the loss of jobs is the loss of income; the cost of living has gone astronomically too high for the core poor and the middle class. There is sharp decline in savings and investment; decline in the stock market activities, as some investors have pulled out their funds from the stock market due to high risks and uncertainties. There is also increase in the crime rates as life gets harder for a greater number of the population(the poor), living conditions are getting worse, crime rates have escalated; increase in robberies, petty stealing, street hawking, kidnapping, child trafficking, fraudulent schemes and other financial crimes. The aggregate poverty incidence continues to increase. There is budget deficit in government spending. The national and state budgets are experiencing spending difficulties due to shortfalls in government revenues. The governments are borrowing as an option to cover for the fall in revenues. This has geometrically increased the debt burden of the Federal and State Governments. There is high rate of inflation attributable to hike in pump price of petroleum, low domestic production capacity, dependence on imports, a weak naira, scarcity of foreign exchange and high cost of doing business in Nigeria, high interest rates, poor electricity supply, lack of portable water, high cost of transportation and poor state of aggregate infrastructure. Statistical overview of growth rates in major sectors of the Nigerian economy show that they are either slow or negative sectoral growth rates. All the macroeconomic fundamentals (variables) such as exports, balance of payment, inflation, unemployment, and exchange rate are not moving in the favourable direction. Nigeria is still a generator-driven, monoculture economy with epileptic power supply. There is jobless growth as well as major negative social indices. The basic needs of life have eluded almost 85 percent of Nigerians. Human capital indicators or social indices are fast declining, worse still, as oil revenue continues falling. The economy is deteriorating in human development indices, the quality of education and healthcare has collapsed, with

abject poverty, acute hunger and starvation prevailing amongst the poorest poor (Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku 3).

The positive impact of the economic recession in Nigeria is that it is giving an edge to small scale businesses such as small scale cropping, gardening, fishery and animal farms. Low cost transportation business such as the Keke-Napep and commercial taxi are making it as it has become too expensive (in fact a luxury) to move about with car given the hike in fuel price and the level of illiquidity. Average people prefer to pack their cars, except where very necessary, and patronise cheaper means of transportation. It has become more economical to use Keke-Napep. Sales of food items and operating a low cost canteen, low cost health care are business opportunities favoured by the economic recession. There are also individual, household and business austerity measures. Economic agents involved in a lifestyle that leads to wastage of money are making changes. For instance, unnecessary and irrelevant travels, avoidable shopping and flamboyant entertainment and food wastages are minimised. The rich are also complaining. These are making the average Nigerian lifestyle economical and sustainable too. There is budget deficit and budget cuts for individuals, households and businesses. Purchase of expensive phones, new cars, household gadgets and appliances when old ones are still in good condition are discouraged. People are fast imbibing maintenance culture. Those with long appetite for imported foods and services are beginning to realise that it is not economical, or too expensive and unsustainable. In fact many have switched to buy “Made in Nigeria” and have realised that they gain more by doing so. This is good for local manufacturing and employment. Even for the rich, areas of priority spending have become housing, food, affordable education, healthcare, transportation and clothing. Economic agents are into part-time job, business and small scale farming for household consumption which is a positive injection to the economy. Medical tourism to India, United States of America, and shopping spree in Dubai, France, Italy, South Africa and wholesale imports from China and other countries are fast declining (Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku 3).

The above submissions reveal that the recession in Nigeria has also impacted on Nigerians positively by instilling a sense of discipline, rationality and frugality in their spending lifestyle. As such, Nigerians have cut down all unnecessary propensities to consume.

### **Synopsis of *Echoes of Hard Times***

The play, *Echoes of Hard Times* is set in Lagos, Nigeria. It revolves around the family of Jide Ojo, a company clerk and his wife, Bisi Ojo, a food vendor. The family is poor, and they have a son, Tunde and three daughters, Adeola (the eldest), Wumi (second daughter) and Bola (the youngest daughter). The main action begins when Jide tells his wife that Chief Ladipo; a rich business man has indicated his interest to marry their daughter Adeola. He also tells her that his company summoned its staff that had put in fifteen years and above, and told them that the company is running into debts, as such, it has become necessary to lay off some of its workers, but if they are willing to accept half of their salaries till the economy improves, they will be retained. Bisi reacts and tells Jide that their daughter will not marry Chief Ladipo or his riches. She says he hates his daughter for him to think of such an idea. She tells him that Chief Ladipo already has three wives, and that

her daughter will not marry anybody until she finishes school. Jide tells her that he cannot steal to keep his children in school, and that people use what they have to get what they want. The situation escalates to a quarrel and their neighbours intervene to separate the duo from fighting.

The action progresses as Jide tries to convince his daughter to accept the marriage proposal of Chief Ladipo, but she refuses and begins to cry. Bisi comes in and tells Jide that she dropped out of school to marry him, but she won't allow the same thing happen to her daughters. She then summons her children and tells them to put in extra hard work in their studies, and possibly get scholarship awards. She tells Adeola and Wumi to assist her in the market after their school, and says she will ask the two girls assisting her to leave so that she can save some money. Bola would stay at home to prepare food for her father, while Tunde would help his uncle in his car-wash business after school, so that he can get pocket money whenever he asks his uncle.

Jide visits his friend Peter Akeju, who has been retrenched from work for about six months. Peter tells Jide that the economic crunch has made him a prisoner in his own house. He adds that his wife, Mrs. Joe Akeju, who is a contractor, is now the man of his house, and even refuses him sex. He tells Jide that even his mistress, Nina, whom he told about his unemployment, told him to go back to his wife, and never return until he gets another job.

The next day Jide returns home hungry from work and asks Bola to bring his food. He is surprised when he discovers that his wife put just a piece of meat in the food. He complains about this, but later eats the food. Chief Ladipo visits him and enquires from Jide if he has spoken to Adeola about his marriage intention. Jide tells him not to worry that everything will be fine. Chief Ladipo tells him that he would be back by Monday to finalise their discussion. He hands Jide an envelope of five thousand naira, which he calls kola, then he leaves. Jide opens the envelope, counts the sum and says it would be for the purchase of Tunde's JAMB form, he then prays that God should make his wife and daughter see the reason why he is taking that decision, or provide him with a better alternative so that his son can complete his university education.

The action progresses as Joke, Jide's younger sister, visits him and tells him that her husband, Femi now has a shop where he does his cobbling business. This he uses to augment the money from his government job. He has two apprentices working with him full-time, and their son joins them whenever he returns from school. Jide is fascinated by the idea. She hands him a letter which his father from the village sent him, then she leaves. Jide opens the letter and reads the contents. He then says his father is not serious, and must be joking. He visits Peter and tells him that his father wants him to marry another wife so that he can have more boys. He says he would reply his father with a strongly worded letter; telling him to forget about the idea. Peter tells him to calm down and take it easy. Peter then says he heard that Chief Ladipo has the intention of marrying Jide's daughter. Jide confirms that this is true. Peter tells Jide that he has no problem; that he should marry his daughter off and get another wife. Jide reacts that Peter can't be serious, and that if he has to give his daughter to Chief Ladipo, it must be to see Tunde through his university. Peter asks if Adeola likes the idea, Jide says she doesn't. Peter tells him that she may be right. Jide replies Peter, and tells him that it is not a matter of right or wrong, she just has to marry

Chief Ladipo so that her brother can finish school. Peter then suggests that Jide asks Chief Ladipo to sponsor Tunde through his university and wait one extra year for Adeola to complete her secondary education before marrying her, so that she can at least have a certificate and be employable.

Jide asks Peter about an interview he attended, and Peter says it was fine, but he isn't putting all his hopes there. He tells Jide that he is pursuing a loan from a bank to start off something before the year runs out, and that he does not think he can work for anybody anymore. Jide tells Peter of his sister's husband, Femi, who does cobbling business alongside his government job. Peter then tells Jide that he could do same since he is a barber. Jide says he would need money to get a shop and buy some tools. Peter tells him that he would lend him some money when he secures the bank loan, which Jide would pay back gradually. Jide thanks Peter for the idea and says he would discuss it with his wife.

The next scene shows Jide discussing with his wife about the idea Peter suggested. She likes it. Jide tells her that the challenge he has is the money to rent a shop and to buy some tools. Bisi tells him that she has some money in her safe, which she was saving for Tunde's university fees. She asks Jide how much he needs, he says between five hundred and one thousand naira. She then tells him that she has two thousand five hundred naira. Jide is happy and embraces her fondly. Bisi tells Tunde that she is doing all she can to make the best out of their marriage because she loves him. Then she tells him not to force their daughter to marry Chief Ladipo, and that Adeola needs education just as Tunde does. Jide tells her of Peter's suggestion that they tell Chief Ladipo to sponsor Tunde's university education and wait for a year till Adeola completes her secondary education before marrying her. Jide tells Bisi that he has not told Chief Ladipo yet, and hopes to do so when he comes on Monday. He tells her that Chief Ladipo gave him the sum of five thousand naira as kola, which he gave to Tunde for his JAMB form. Bisi reacts as she says he would not have collected the money if he told her. She tells Jide that they would keep Chief Ladipo's five thousand naira for him when he comes on Monday. Jide then tells Bisi that they should start looking for a shop nearby and tell their children to invite their friends to come have their hair cut next week, when he must have bought the things he needs.

Tunde tells Jide that he wants their television repaired because he and four other science students were selected for a scholarship to be given to the best two science students, which is sponsored by the Old Boys Association of his school. They were asked to listen to the news every day and read newspapers for current affairs, which will form part of the interview. Jide tells Tunde that the television will be repaired tomorrow. He advises Tunde to study extra hard now, and that he should keep the news within the family. He then tells him to call his mother so that he can disclose the news to her himself.

The succeeding scene shows the family of the Ojos seated. Also present are Joke and her husband, and Jide's landlord, Mr. Otubanjo. Peter arrives and narrates how his wife fell into the hands of fraudsters (419). Chief Ladipo and his people arrive, after formal introductions, Jide tells him to sponsor Tunde through his university, Chief Ladipo accepts. Jide then tells him to wait one more year to enable Adeola complete her secondary school before he marries her. Chief Ladipo is infuriated by this and says he cannot wait. He is about leaving with his people when Jide hands him the sum of five thousand naira in an envelope, then he leaves angrily with his people.

The last scene shows Bisi and Jide discussing in the parlour. Bisi says she is happy that Chief Ladipo is out of their lives. Jide tells her that the rich also cry because God gives the poor what riches cannot buy, and makes the rich sometimes hunger after what the poor have in abundance. Bisi tells Jide of a man who asked her to put in an application as a food vendor, because the government is opening a big soap factory at Ilupeju, and they need a food vendor. He then said she would pay him one hundred naira every day when she starts supplying the food. Jide does not like the idea and discourages her from it. He tells her that the times are hard but they can't join the dirty games going on everywhere. He adds that when he settles with his part-time job, she may have to enrol in one of the catering schools around, so that she can have a certificate to apply for contracts; and she may even open her own restaurant. Bisi likes the idea. Tunde runs in from outside singing as he announces that he has won the scholarship, Bisi breaks into a joyful song, the play resolves as Jide joins and the whole family is agog in dances of joy and celebration.

### **Discussion**

The play *Echoes of Hard Times* is very relevant in the present times, especially in a time when the world is still plagued with the woes of recession that has affected not only advanced nations of the world, but even developing countries. The play is a reflection of the socio-economic situation Nigerians are facing at the moment: the rate of unemployment is increasing on a daily basis; companies are laying their staff off, crime rate is on the increase and security remains a major challenge in the country. The present government of President Muhammadu Buhari has done a lot in fighting corruption by recovering looted funds and blocking wastages, yet a lot of Nigerians, especially the poor are suffering because of the ailing effects of the recession in Nigeria. In an attempt to provide a solution to this situation, and recommend ways through which Nigerians can survive in these hard times, Felicia Onyewadume's *Echoes of Hard Times* provides a blueprint on the survival mechanisms Nigerians can adopt to face the challenges of the recessed Nigerian economy.

From the play, one can infer that the main motivation behind Jide's decision to give his daughter in marriage to Chief Ladipo is for him to sponsor his only son, Tunde, through the university, which forms part of his responsibilities as a father. His wife's refusal to accept his proposal almost leads to a fight. Fortunately, their neighbours intervene to prevent the fight. This situation is very common amongst poor families, as most fathers, especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular, think that marrying their daughters out to rich men is an alternative means of getting wealth, and any opposition to this, leads to constant fights and quarrels in the family. Jide, still unwilling to give up his idea, tries to convince his daughter, Adeola to accept Chief Ladipo's marriage proposal, but she refuses and begins to cry. He then gives her an ultimatum to either drop out of school and join her mother in the kitchen or marry Chief Ladipo. His wife Bisi comes in and intervenes. She tells him that she dropped out of school to marry him, while her mates are driving big cars. Today, she cooks and sells to feed and clothe her children all because she dropped out of school; and the same thing is about to happen to her daughter. She tells Adeola to wipe her tears, that even if the economy is bad, she will not marry Chief Ladipo. This scenario shows that poverty, induced by recession; makes a lot of poor Nigerian fathers take wrong decisions by making their daughters drop out of school to marry rich

men, just to survive, even when this is against the wills of the ladies in question. The result is a life filled with the feeling of non-fulfilment on the part of the ladies, who realise that their futures have been short – changed because of poverty. Consequently, most women who suffer this, determine to do all they can to give their children a better future. This is what Bisi strives to achieve in the play.

Finding a way around the present challenge, Bisi decides that her two daughters, Adeola and Wumi would assist her in the market after school. She tells them to study harder and possibly get scholarship awards. Tunde, her son, would assist his uncle in his car-wash business after school, so that he can get pocket money from his uncle whenever he requests. While Bola, the youngest daughter will stay at home to attend to her father by providing his meals. She tells them that they shall survive one way or another. From Bisi's resourcefulness and wisdom, we construe that in desperate times as this period of recession, for one to survive, one must adopt desperate measures by thinking outside the box, rather than crying, indulging in self-blame or begging others for help. Bisi represents every strong Nigerian mother, who despite the hard times, have refused to resign to fate or depend on their husbands for help, instead she takes the bull by the horn by determining her fate and that of her children.

In the play, Tunde observes that his father's decision to give his sister out in marriage to Chief Ladipo is as a result of the economic mess the likes of Chief Ladipo have forced Nigeria into. In his words:

**Tunde:** ...I know Papa would never have consented to that ugly scheme but for the economic mess the likes of the Chief have forced this country into. I hear he became an emergency millionaire through series of contracts awarded him by some unscrupulous government officials, contracts which he never executed (Onyewadume 8).

From Tunde's lines, we can see the replication of the Nigerian situation in the play. Chief Ladipo represents all corrupt Nigerian politicians and government officials who siphon public wealth through poorly executed or unexecuted contracts, just to amass wealth and keep the masses in poverty. The activities of the likes of Chief contributed to the recession Nigeria is facing today. In this regard, Kale, Maigari and Haruna observe that:

...when the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) was selling dollars at N197 and people were buying at N300, the highly placed individuals in the country were putting call across the banking industry to get dollar at the official rate. This they later resell at the parallel market rate of N300. Think of how much some of them were making. An individual can make as much as N1 billion naira without doing anything according to the former CBN governor (Lamido Sanusi). The people that were profiting from this were people that were telling the government that if it didn't devalue the naira people would suffer. The poor paid the price of a devalued currency and the rich schemed off the profits (55-56).

Jide visits his friend, Peter, who has been out of job for the past six months. Peter narrates his ordeal and tells Jide that he has lost his place as the man in his house. His wife, who is a contractor, is now his boss. This shows that recession can make a man lose his position of authority and respect; especially when he can no longer fulfil the financial responsibilities that the roles of a husband and father demand of him in his house. The result is that such a man becomes a houseboy to his wife; mainly when the woman is the breadwinner of the family. A similar situation is seen when Jide returns from work hungry, and requests for his food. He realises that his wife put just a piece of meat for him. He complains about this, but financially handicapped because of the economy, he later eats the food.

The situation begins to take a different turn when Jide's sister, Joke, visits him and tells him that her husband now does cobbling as part-time business, which he uses to augment the money he gets from his government job. Jide discloses this to his friend Peter, and Peter advises him to follow the steps of Femi, Joke's husband, by taking advantage of his barbing skills. He tells him to look for a shop and promises to assist Jide with some money, which Jide would pay back gradually. Peter also tells Jide to ask Chief Ladipo to train Tunde through his university and wait until Adeola completes her secondary school education before he marries her. Thus, providing Jide with alternatives to solving the challenges he is faced with. Jide discusses Peter's suggestions with his wife Bisi, and she agrees to provide Jide with some money from her savings to help him secure a shop, buy some tools and start his barbing business. She also uses this opportunity to tell her husband to give up the idea of her daughter marrying Chief Ladipo. Jide accepts and they agree to return Chief Ladipo's five thousand naira to him when he comes on Monday, and present him with the requests of training Tunde in the university and waiting till Adeola completes her secondary school education before marrying her.

The foregoing shows that all hopes are not lost even in the midst of difficulties, and serves to dissuade Nigerians from depending only on one source of income, as well as the preference for white-collar jobs, especially in this period of recession. From Femi's decision to go into cobbling as a part-time job and Jide's decision to go into barbing to support his half-salary job, we learn that Nigerians can seek alternative means of surviving by going into jobs that require informal training, in the form of unskilled labours. By this, both white-collar workers and the unemployed are encouraged to acquire non-vocational skills and training, as this can ensure their survival in this period of recession. In the play, both Femi and Jide found alternative means of survival by going into non-vocational jobs. Even Peter was pursuing a bank loan to start a business of his own, as he said that he can no longer work for anybody. Having found the answers to his problem, Jide is better equipped to face Chief Ladipo, who rejects Jide's proposal that he waits one more year for Adeola to complete her secondary education before marrying her. Consequently, Jide returns the five thousand naira Chief Ladipo gave him, after which Chief Ladipo leaves angrily with his people.

Having got his place back as father and husband; Jide confidently tells his wife that when he is settled with his part-time barbing business, she may have to enrol into one of the catering schools around, to enable her get a certificate which she can use to pursue

contracts. She may even set up her own restaurant, and to crown it all, Tunde returns with the good news that he has won the scholarship award, and the family is thrown into a celebration and singing galore. Jide summarises the play's message when he tells his wife:

Jide: Can't you see that the antidote for stomach adjustment palava (SAP) is to engage yourself in whatever you know how to do best? (Onyewadume 40).

This, therefore, is the message which Nigerians must embrace and take seriously if they must survive in this period of global recession.

### **Conclusion**

The world is currently facing recession and a lot of measures have been put in place by world governments to mitigate the effects of recession on the masses, and Nigeria is not an exception. The play, *Echoes of Hard Times*, typifies the cries and the echoes of the hard times Nigerians are facing currently because of recession, and as a solution to these challenges, the play opines that, Nigerians should engage in non-vocational jobs, as well as acquire non-vocational skills if they are to survive the recession.

Drama is a reflection of man's life and the age in which it is situated. By this, drama serves to entertain, but while entertaining, it informs and also educates. The foregoing is what this essay is concerned with, as it strives to use drama as a tool to answer the Nigerian economic recession question, by providing a tangible solution to the untoward hardships. The study observed that studies bordering on the role of drama in dealing with economic recession are limited, and by way of recommendation, it calls for more studies to be carried out to fill the knowledge gap in this research area.

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# BEYOND ECONOMIC RECESSION: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE UNEMPLOYED IN OKOH'S *WHO IS AFRAID OF JOB INTERVIEW*

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## **Abstract**

*Recent studies on unemployment and Nigerian drama focalise a specific narrative: economic recession kindles joblessness. Straying from existing scholarly works, this research argues generally that any developing economy incurs stagnation or recession. Whereas stagnation signals unimproved or optimal economic growth, recession indicates a consequence of economic policy error. Economic recession explains a situation whereby the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) recedes in negative figures in two consecutive quarters, and manifests on paperwork. Therefore, it does not directly result in unemployment. Adopting the textual analysis approach which facilitates the revelation of underlying meanings in a script, this study critically examines Julie Okoh's **Who is afraid of Job Interview** for other factors that generate unemployment in Nigeria. The ignorance of university graduates on interview ethics combines with their largely theory-based knowledge to worsen the menace of unemployment in the country. Thus, the study concludes that, beyond Economic Recession, unpreparedness and lack of social skills required at interview sessions play contributory roles in generating joblessness in Nigeria.*

## **Introduction**

Unemployment (or joblessness) occurs when people are without work and actively seeking employment. It refers to a situation wherein an individual is unable to get a job despite being able-bodied, qualified and willing to work, as in the case of young university graduates. According to Scott and Marshall, unemployment is "the state of being unable to sell one's labour-power in the labour market despite the willingness to do so" (675). Unlike economic recession which explains a situation whereby the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) recedes in negative figures in two consecutive quarters, and manifests on paperwork, unemployment has a direct bearing on the unemployed.

The problem of unemployment has posed a great challenge to many countries (both developed and developing). In recent times, joblessness in Nigeria has become widespread, cutting across all facets of age groups, educational strata and geographical entities. Hussain and Nadol record that,

One peculiar feature of the unemployment problem in Nigeria is that it was more endemic in the early 1980s than any other period (*a la* official

statistics) ... for instance, the unemployment rate rose from 4.3 percent in 1976 to 6.4 percent in 1980. Though it recorded some marginal decline between 1981 and 1986, the rates were relatively higher than what obtained in the 1960s and 1970s (15).

Continuing, Hussain and Nadol explain that this development was as a result of the “lull in the economy” and high import-dependency of most manufacturing enterprises (16). Indeed, the trend forced many companies to operate below installed capacity, causing most of them to shut down or retrench a significant proportion of the work force. Till date, companies continue to shut down operations in Nigeria and, as a consequence, the country continues to witness a rapid increase in the unemployment rate.

Presenting its unemployment report for the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) provides the details of how 3.67 million Nigerian become unemployed in one year (Olasinde 1). “Also, the number of unemployed Nigerians rose from 7.51 million at the beginning of October, 2015 to 11.19 million at the end of September, 2016” (Olasinde 1). These troubling statistics on unemployment signals reduced productivity and decreased contribution to the economy because jobless people spend less.

Unlike in America where the government still gives unemployment compensation to the unemployed, the Nigerian experience, however, is entirely different. Jobless Nigerians are not paid stipends for sustenance by the government. As a last resort, therefore, some of them who cannot contain their state of despondency take their situation to the extreme by indulging in social vices, all in a desperate bid to eke out a living. Certainly, this mindset of depositing one’s creative energy in anti-social activities ends up constituting terror to the society at large.

The seriousness of the unemployment menace has attracted government attention over the years. Therefore, employment generation has featured prominently in successive budgets of the Federal Government. This has led to the establishment of several government parastatals (whose primary assignment is to generate employment opportunities) in addition to the creation of institutions such as the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), to drastically reduce the problems of unemployment and underemployment. The adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme also led to the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) whose major charge was to generate employment opportunities with emphasis on the development of entrepreneurship and self-employment.

In addition to the aforementioned, Jamiu informs that the federal government, in recent years, has come up with different employment provision agencies/programmes which include: the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure; the Better Life for Rural Women/Family Support Programme; the development of Small-Medium Scale Enterprises; Poverty Alleviation Programme; the Peoples’ Bank of Nigeria; the Community Banks, Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) and Youth Enterprises with Innovation (YOU-WIN) (7). The most recent Federal Government intervention on job creation is the N-Power programme. Continuing, Jamiu laments that, “these initiatives have only scratched the surface of the unemployment problem; they have not significantly

improved the situation” (8). More depressing is the fact that many youths are stranded and locked outside the nation’s economy. This trend, indeed, is a recipe for social unrest and disaster.

It is for the foregoing that this study examines factors – beyond economic factors/recession – which give rise to unemployment, using Julie Okoh’s *Who is afraid of Job Interview* as a miniature Nigeria.

### **Theories of Unemployment**

Since this research effort focuses on Nigeria, and employment in the country rests in the hands of both private individuals (or entrepreneurs) and the government, studying the theories of unemployment vis-à-vis the labour market shall be based on both the private and government employers. In other words, this research shall depend on economic theories on unemployment to unravel the possible causes of unemployment in the production unit of the labour market. Conversely, sociological theories shall be reviewed to examine the causes of unemployment in government-owned institutions.

According to Keynes, unemployment is an involuntary phenomenon. It is “a basically cyclical” experience “generated by the deficiency of aggregate demand” (74). In expatiation, Keynes theorizes that capitalists (or entrepreneurs) hire workers and invest to produce output “when the expectations about the economy and profits are favourable and optimistic” (75). This implies that entrepreneurs’ will to invest is dependent on the probable clemency of the economic atmosphere. In grinding the Keynesian theory to the thinness and translucency of plane glass, this researcher views it as predicating the cause of unemployment on deficiency of aggregate demand. The idea is that if expectations about the future of the economy are favourable, the entrepreneurs would have the entrepreneurial confidence to make investments which would, in turn, culminate in the employment of labour. Inversely, if the future of the market is bleak, capitalists would withdraw from or reduce investments. The causal effect of this is that there would be no employment of labour. At the very best, the already employed would be laid off – unemployment.

Comparable to the Keynesian theory of unemployment is Schumpeter’s theory of the Business Cycle. Although Schumpeter’s theory of the Business Cycle is not synonymous with unemployment theory, its relationship with joblessness constitutes its essence to this study. According to him, “Various innovations which create more new jobs relative to job destruction represent the basic forces beyond the increases in employment and the decreases in unemployment” (25). This theory is based on innovation as a pre-requisite for employment creation: when entrepreneurs find something new such as the production of a new product, a new market, a new service or a new method of production, they become inclined to investing to materialize such innovations. Expectedly, other entrepreneurs will imitate the trend and, of course, labour and materials will be employed to produce the new items. The foregoing implicates an increase in wages and employment and a decrease in unemployment, since innovations create employment; “new innovations create a situation whereby employment creation outweighs employment destruction” (Schumpeter 26).

From an antithetical standpoint, however, it is immediately apparent that lack of new innovations stagnates the labour market and, consequently, retards the employment

rate. Once the labour market stagnates, the adverse implications become numerous. Prominent among such numerous adverse implications is that there hardly would be any vacancy for fresh graduates of tertiary institutions and skill acquisition centres, regardless of the fact that graduates are constantly churned out from such institutions on an annual or quarterly basis.

Among the economists that have theorised on unemployment is Hobson. He propounded the doctrine of under-consumption as the cause of unemployment. Hobson says that,

If income is equally distributed amongst the populace, there is the tendency for the rich in the population to save a large portion of their own income because they are already supplied with the bare necessities of life. This saved income will be invested in plant and machinery and raw materials to produce consumer goods. This will in turn increase the output of consumer goods with a corresponding increase in the demand for them (qtd. in Krugman 7).

The assertion above implies that over-production of consumer goods with an attendant under-consumption of same leads to unemployment. Therefore, in the next round of production, the entrepreneur will be compelled to reduce production. The underlying meaning here is that reduction in production would equally amount to reduction in the number of employees, in the next round of production – retrenchment and unemployment. As the production continues, the next round of production is more likely to require an even lesser number of employees than the second. As the production progresses to its fourth and fifth cycle, the situation could degenerate to chronic unemployment.

Akin to Hobson's theory of under-consumption is Veblen's theory of overproduction. Veblen argues that, "the basic motive behind production is to achieve a reasonable profit" (qtd. in Mouhammed 5). Vinning further explains that the concept of effective demand is implied in Veblen's statement that the difficulty of overproduction is a question of prices and earnings (qtd. in Mouhammed 5). According to Mouhammed, the difficulty is that not enough of a product can be disposed at fair prices to warrant the running of the mills at their full capacity", and fair prices, according to Veblen, mean "prices that will repay the cost of production of the goods and leave something appreciable over as a profit" (6). A further interpretation of the Veblenian Business Cycle proves that deficiency of effective demand results in little or no profit. As a consequence, the next round of production cycle would necessitate the retrenchment of some employees – unemployment.

Having attempted a review of some economic theories on unemployment, we shall investigate the causes of unemployment in government-owned sectors. This section shall rely heavily on sociological theories, such as, Functionalism and Marxism. Functionalism is a sociological theory that was popularised in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by Emile Durkheim and Parsons, respectively (Haralambos and Holborn xiv). Functionalism views the various parts of society as interrelated and, taken together, they form a system. To

understand any part of the society, therefore, the part must be seen in relation to the entire system.

At its simplest, function means effect. Thus, the function of the family is the effect it has on other parts of the social structure and on society as a whole. In practice, the term function is usually used to indicate the contribution an institution makes to the maintenance and survival of the social system (Haralambos and Holborn xv).

A typical example is that a means of producing food and shelter may be seen as a functional pre-requisite, since without food and shelter, members of society cannot survive. The implication of the foregoing is that every sector of the society must contribute to the totality of the society lest there would be a disconnect between the organs of the superstructure. In other words, “every pattern has consequences which contribute to the preservation and survival of the larger systems” (Ritzer 214). From a functionalist viewpoint, the society is regarded as a system that is made up of interconnected and interrelated parts. Consequently, each part would affect the other parts and the society as a whole. The minimum requirement of every part is a certain degree of integration; a certain degree of compatibility; a certain degree of co-operation.

If the educational system is faithful to its function of imbuing young ones with requisite skills for contributing to the society through working towards production, then it follows that optimal production can be achieved for the benefit of the entire system. The explanation to the functionalist theory is that social order can be achieved when the disparate parts of the society carry out their functions creditably. Once there is a lacuna in the performance of a sector’s function, it automatically follows that other sectors would be negatively affected. The key words in functionalism are consensus and compatibility.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the context of this research work, the failure of government to spark off innovations that would kindle the absorption of fresh graduates can be equated with its failure to guarantee that the basic needs of the citizenry are met. Similarly, the failure of the education sector to instil in students the basic skills that would make them employable can be regarded as a breakdown in a sector that is capable of ruining other sectors. Indeed, half-baked graduates are most likely to perform below expectations, if employed. The result of this anomaly would manifest in institutions working below installed capacity. It is from this kind of faulty social set up that such corrupt practices as god-fatherism, tribalism and favouritism draw their inspiration.

Due partly to the decline of the functionalist theory on account of its trivialisation of conflict, several conflict theories began to spring up. One of the most popular theories is Marxism which gained popularity in the 1970s. Marxist theory derives its name from the theorist, Karl Marx (1818-1883). While acknowledging his many writings and philosophies, this study shall only concern itself with the aspect of the social system, not necessarily the whole of his works. Marxist theory stipulates that:

in order to survive, humans must produce food and material objects. In doing so, they enter into social relationships with other people. From the simple hunting band to the complex industrial state, production is a social enterprise. Production also involves a technical component known as the forces of production, which includes the technology, raw materials and scientific knowledge employed in the process of production. Each major stage in the development of the forces of production will correspond with a particular form of the social relationships of production. This means that the forces of production in a hunting economy will correspond with a particular set of social relationships (Haralambos and Holborn xv-xvi).

The argument in the explanation above is that the forces of production and the social relationships of the production form the economic basis or infrastructure of the society. “The other aspects of society, known as the superstructure, are largely shaped by the infrastructure” (Haralambos and Holborn xvi). The reflection of an anomaly in a sector on the products of the sector and, by extension, the entire society conforms to Marx's position that a change in infrastructure reflects in the superstructure (Haralambos and Heald 71). The implication is that any change in the infrastructure will produce a corresponding change in the superstructure. Thus, the political, legal, and educational institutions, etc. and the belief and value systems are primarily determined by economic factors.

It is in this frame of mind that this study shall examine the changes in infrastructure that have resulted in unemployment in the Nigerian society – the superstructure. Relying on the play under study as a microcosm of the Nigerian society, this study shall analyse the portraits of the unemployed in Nigerian drama, using Julie Okoh's *Who's Afraid of Job Interview* as a case in point.

#### **Synopsis of Julie Okoh's *Who's Afraid of Job Interview***

Daniel, an unemployed first class graduate, receives a letter of invitation to an interview in a firm. On informing Moses, his friend, of this development, the latter tutors him on the extra-academic techniques needed to pass a job interview. In the end, Daniel applies all the social skills Moses teaches him and becomes more confident than ever before. A highly pedagogic drama, *Who's Afraid of Job Interview* reveals the salient points in an interview process, which a bulk of Nigerian graduates are unaware of.

#### **The Representations of the Unemployed in Julie Okoh's *Who's Afraid of Job Interview***

Okoh's *Who's Afraid of Job Interview* is a graphic manifestation of the theatre dictum which emphasizes drama as a tool of pedagogy. In the words of Afolayan, “plays are carried along by dialogue – conversation that reveals habits and gives insights into character traits...” (77). This section shall therefore, pay close attention to the dialogue of the play under study, as a means of unravelling the representations of the unemployed.

Beginning with the opening scene, the stage direction states, thus:

Daniel, a university graduate, has been looking for a job for the past two years... he has just gotten another letter of invitation (to job interview). He is not enthusiastic about it. He goes to his friend, Moses, an Executive Director in a company. The latter gives Daniel some information on how to prepare for and participate in a job interview (Okoh 2).

Daniel made a first class degree in the university. However, his securing a job is dependent on the “information on how to prepare for and participate in a job interview” (Okoh 2) that he receives from Moses. This is not only paradoxical but also calls for questioning the worth of Daniel’s first class university degree. His uninformed status portrays the unemployed as a bunch whose misfortune is rooted in ignorance. The social relevance of Daniel’s ignorance is located in university students’ obsession with making good grades, at the expense of personal development. Hence, they graduate ignorant and ineffective in the labour market. According to Daniel, “I’ve attended several job interviews these past two years... how am I sure that this is not going to be another waste of time?” (Okoh 6).

The pessimism of Daniel highlights him as a victim of the kind of education he acquired in the university. Even with his glowing results, He is grossly naïve and oblivious of that fact that “Job interview requires more than intelligence. You need to acquire certain basic tools for handling the process” (Okoh 7). Without Moses’ intervention, Daniel would have remained jobless with his first class degree as a burden to him. His condition proves that good grades do not guarantee a good future in a country that has become of a cesspit of corruption and misrule. This stance coheres with the views expressed in “Five Major Causes of Unemployment in Nigeria” thus:

Corruption is a cause of unemployment in Nigeria because when those in government who are to use public money for building more industries are busy embezzling the funds for their selfish use, the result is massive increase in unemployment rate. When corruption is taken as a normal routine, functions which are to be performed by three or even four persons are taken up by one person (who) collects all the salaries meant for the three or four persons (2).

This results in the evolution of the “ghost-worker” syndrome – a situation where non-existent workers’ names are included in an institution’s payroll for the selfish benefit of an individual or group. As a consequence, inefficiency and unavailability of employment opportunities reign. No doubt, this anomalous trend constitutes a breakdown of the functional system and its attendant adverse effects on the entire superstructure.

The situation above plays a contributory role in rendering redundant one’s training in the university. Hence, Daniel’s inability to secure a job in spite of his lustrous academic harvest. This is reminiscent of Irobi’s *Hangmen also Die* wherein seven Nigerian graduates with varying academic degrees (including Ph.D.) metamorphosed into terror in their neighbourhood, on account of unemployment. They once hoped that life would get better but such hope vanished too soon as frustration accosted them squarely. According to them:



Acid: ...Then the years went by and we graduated.  
Dayan: (*Turns*) And we started looking for jobs.  
Chorus: No jobs.  
R.I.P.: (*Vehemently*) We have no jobs.  
Acid: Therefore we have no money.  
Dayan: Which means we cannot marry.  
R.I.P.: And consequently cannot have children.  
Chorus: We are the rejects of the world...  
Chorus: Our job in this nation is to look for jobs (Irobi, *Hangmen* 45-46).

An attempt to reconcile the fact that Moses was Daniel's mate who travelled abroad to study, with Daniel's apparent gullibility and ignorance, reveals an appalling portrait of unemployed Nigerian graduates. In other words, the drama bespeaks the unemployed in the play as products of third world countries' universities wherein a boatload of theories supplant practical matching skills that are desirable in the labour market. Suffice it to say that the authorial voice from whom Daniel learns of tips on participating in a job interview is a product of a Western university. This researcher is constrained to accepting that attending foreign universities automatically places one above one's contemporaries. After all, students in Nigerian universities equally engage themselves in extensive and rigorous study. Therefore, Daniel should be held accountable for his incompetence on one hand, while the quality of teaching that goes on in Nigerian universities should also be considered, on the other. Interviewer I and Interviewer II buttress the point on the state of Nigerian universities and link it to the incompetence of Female Candidate and Male Candidate I, thus:

**Interviewer I:** Is this a classroom? That speaks loudly of our educational system. There are so many graduates everywhere. But they can't discern the difference between their right and left hands.

**Interviewer II:** What do you expect? Strike today, strike tomorrow, our universities end up producing graduates with half-baked knowledge.

The foregoing implicitly portrays the unemployed as helpless victims on a double account: Nigeria's educational system that is essentially theory-based and the absence of industries or platforms that provide the opportunities for individuals to ply their skills. Consequently, this study calls on the Ministry of Education to review the nation's educational system to ensure that university education is linked with the satisfaction of the needs of the labour market. That is, training should be aimed at imbuing students with practical matching skills that would make them desirable in the society, upon graduation. The current unemployment rate can be mitigated if courses of study are designed to accommodate extra-disciplinary knowledge, such as, tips on securing job opportunities; tailoring a standard curriculum vitae; and participating in interviews, among others.

Much as this study encourages government to establish industries with funds accruing from sales of crude oil, the need to marry theoretical and practical knowledge in university education remains an important means of making university graduates employable. The opportunity cost of neglecting practical or theoretical knowledge is the creation of a lacuna that can collapse the functional system. Indeed, such anomaly in the education sector is bound to have ripple effects – including unemployment – on the superstructure.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the concept of unemployment and the portrait of the unemployed in Nigerian drama. Accepting drama – Julie Okoh’s *Who’s Afraid of Job Interview* – as a miniature world, the researcher critically examines the play under focus for other factors that generate unemployment in Nigeria. The ignorance of university graduates on interview ethics combines with their largely theory-based knowledge to worsen the menace of unemployment in the country. Thus, the study concludes that, beyond economic recession, unpreparedness and lack of social skills required at interview sessions play contributory roles in generating unemployment in Nigeria. Students should be trained in the university to be relevant to the needs of the society, in order to make them attractive to employers.

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# EXPLORING POTENTIALS OF THEATRE FOR ECONOMIC PLANNING AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM JULIE OKOH'S *THROES OF LEADERSHIP*

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## **Abstract**

*Economic recession and quest for survival are major issues that threaten the existence of an average Nigerian presently. Change is a constant variable in every society, particularly in that which strives to fulfil human needs. Hence, the attitude of people towards adaptation and change management is usually daunting. Suffice it to say that, it takes committed and visionary leadership to accomplish a propitious economic change in the society. This involves re-orientation of the people into adopting proactive measures and values, with sophisticated skills and highly motivated workforce. This paper uses Julie Okoh's **Throes of Leadership** to substantiate this fact. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the academic conversation about the way out of the prevailing economic recession. The work uses mainly content analysis of the selected play text to show that leadership is about making positive differences, by creating a climate in which people turn challenging opportunities into remarkable success. Julie Okoh posits that the travails of leadership goes beyond mockery and dissatisfaction from the people, but the ingenuity and practice of a leader to mobilise and transform values into action, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risk into innovations. Thus, the process of engendering change demands the institution of sound economic policies to diversify the nation's mono-product economy.*

## **Introduction**

The relevance of a playwright is seen in his ability to create and recreate without ambiguity, the events and issues that led to certain agitations and remarkable challenges of the people within his environment. Creative works are naturally inclined to those physical and emotional problems that touch the social fabrics of the masses. Therefore, the values of most playwrights are traceable to the contexts within their immediate environment; which are often represented by offering human characters in situations and conflicts that project socio-political struggles of man. As such, literary critics and writers over the ages have presented their thoughts, and have shown considerable concern regarding the state of their societies in writing.

Suffice it to say that creative works have often represented the conscience and voice of the people through various means of expressions. In other words, creative arts

reflect the social realities and aspirations of the world around the playwright. Adeoye succinctly captures this when he posits that:

Arts mirror the society, especially the society from which it grew, by so doing; it summons the viewers or the arts connoisseurs to necessitate a change in the status quo by responding to what it sees (6).

Man, as a social and political animal, has constantly desired change and development, with the aim of fostering harmonious relationship with his fellows. The issues of man and his socio-political inclination cannot be divorced from corrupt practices. This is so because; politics and corruption are intertwined, as the former begets the later. Therefore, one can unequivocally state that, since politics is the dominant issues of man in his social environment, and corruption the aftermath, the two concepts cannot be separated from each other. This substantiates the reason why most creative works are thematically and predominantly based on the issues of politics and corruption. Instances can be drawn from Emeka Nwabueze's *Dragon's Funeral*, Julie Umukoro's *Marriage Coup*, Esiaba Irobi's *The Other Side of the Mask*. Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin* and Rasaki Ojo Bakare's *The Gods and the Scavengers*, to mention but a few. These plays portray, in no small measure, the themes of human struggle and agitations for change in the social system.

Obviously, theatre has always been identified as a potent weapon for communication, conscientisation and sensitisation of the masses, by mirroring and reflecting on the social challenges of man. As an expressive and dynamic art form, theatre is always alive to social realities of the people and has served significant functions in projecting and protecting the fundamental human rights. Hence, some writers in Nigeria have used their creative enterprise to express and expose the ills in the society, creating the need for effective management of the nascent democracy of the country. In affirmation to this fact, Iyamah and Obire observe that:

Nigeria's democracy is one achievement that is partly credited to playwrights and theatre critics who acts as watch dogs and social crusaders in the society. Through their various works they were able to protest against autocratic system of government under the military rule, which denied the people their fundamental human right to express themselves and have a voice in matters concerning them as citizens of a nation (83).

Indeed, theatre is a sophisticated expression of basic human needs which is borne out of the instinct to imitate or to project stories and create meanings through narrative and metaphoric paradigms. Beyond the façade of entertainment, theatre focuses on a better humanistic value experience, which practically helps in shaping and restructuring the prevailing challenges in the society. Chijindu Mgbemere argues that:

The shape, outlook and presentation of theatre reflect the yearning of the people. It is these attributes that bestow on the theatre the role of a

vanguard, a watch dog, the barometer of the society and a major factor in nation building (425).

In essence, playwrights aim at creating their dramatic works to be interpreted through theatrical medium. Hence, theatre and drama are two familiar words, but invariably distinct. These two words require further explanations in the context of their operations; since they have important consequences with regards to the objects and issues at stake. Within the context of this study, theatre can be described as the complex phenomena associated with the performer-audience interaction, which is the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it. While drama on the other hand, is that mode of fiction designed for stage presentation; constructed according to a particular dramatic convention. In other words, theatre is limited to what takes place between the performers and audience, while drama indicates the network of factors relating to the represented fiction. These two terms go together and are always in mutual agreement with each another, since theatrical performances are devoted to the representation of the dramatic fiction.

The society and theatre have come a long way and both complement each other to provide a way forward. The society offer creative direction to drama in both literary and performative spheres. The growth of theatre and its impact on the society therefore depends largely on a healthy artistic intellectualism that will promote change, and not the type that creates grounds for polarisation and clash of supremacy with unnecessary attention and vainglory. In this era of economic crisis and recession in Nigeria, the theatre should be a dependable tool for socio-economic change. No wonder Ngugi Wa Thiongo asserts that,

A writer responds with personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of a sensitive needle, he registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society. Thus, the same writer will produce different types of work, sometimes contradictory in mood, sentiment, degree of optimism and even world view. For the writer himself lives in, and is shaped by history (cited by Aondohemba 64).

It is based on this sentiment that this study takes a cursory look at the struggles, deprivations and economic degradation of Nigerians, and aligns them with the theme and theatrical performance of Julie Okoh's *Throes of Leadership*. This study believes that the resolution in the play directly or indirectly provides an escape route to the economic crisis in Nigeria and equally creates the need for adaptation to the present realities and effective change management.

### **An Overview of the Nigerian Political System and the Need for Social Change**

The term social change can be described as a significant alteration of social structure which affects the life of the people positively or negatively. Social structure involves the pattern

of social action and interaction that encompasses norms, values and cultural phenomenon. Change can be seen as variations or modifications in any aspect of social process, pattern or form. It can also be described as any modifications in established patterns of inter-human relationships and standard of conduct. More so, change is a natural phenomenon in human's continual existence. As man develops and progresses in social connectivity within and outside his environment, the desire and consciousness to make remarkable achievement and reach the zenith of his goals is heightened and also threatened by social change. Therefore, change is ubiquitous in every society.

Since Nigeria got her independence on 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1960, the country has experienced severe social, political and economic instability. The issues of military dominance, predominance and prolongation of military rule; with associated corrupt practices which undermined due process, rule of law, transparency, accountability and efficiency in government, among other factors contributed immensely to the stunted growth of the country. Agbefe observes that:

During these years of military rule, Nigeria is plagued with socio-economic and political uncertainties, societal decadence and damage, institutionalised violence and ethnic strife, destruction of the rule of law, the accentuation of ethnic, religious and cultural polarisation of the country's stunted institutional development, grinding poverty, corruption, weak governance and a range of other pathologies (127).

As a point of fact, military rule in Nigeria was characterised by authoritarian leadership and extreme dictatorship that brought about hunger, frustration and deprivation of fundamental human rights. Consequently, Nigerians rejected military rule and ushered in democracy with the election of a civilian president in the person of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who assumed leadership on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999. Yet, no significant changes have been recorded so far. One of the perceived reasons could be that some of these leaders are either military turned civilians, with military mind set and dictatorship, or are under the influence and tutelage of god fathers, whose personal interests must clash with that of the masses. There is no gainsaying that the governance of Nigeria has been hijacked by conscienceless leaders, who do not have the interest of the masses as a top priority. As such, their visionless road map has kept the country in perpetual hardship and lack of trust for the future. According to Tignor as he opines that:

Nigerian political history since independence from Britain in 1960 has been a circle of authoritarian military regime with episodic interregnum of civilian government. Rental politics in Nigeria has been characterised over the years by the dominance of electoral machinery, comprising largely of wealthy former military officers and their civilian business cronies (cited by Mbachaga 50).

Notably, the independence gave rise to massive rural urban migration, which led to a drastic change from agriculture to industrialisation, political power tussle between the

regions and later geo-political zones. These changes have not been in favour of the common man; rather, only those at the corridors of power have gained immensely with multiplicity of riches, while the ordinary man has remained in abject poverty. As such, the masses have been preoccupied with these struggle for daily survival, with little or no difference in the lives of individuals and the society in general.

The question that begs for answer is: Can this pretentious and vicious act of leadership maintain the tempo of positive change in Nigeria? If the desired answer is no, then this study is unequivocally stating that, for any intended change to occur in Nigeria, an honest, visionary, dynamic and skilful leader must be elected. This will go a long way in repositioning the mind-set of the people; to believe that such a leader has the capacity, zeal and possible ideas that can drive the change in the system. Obviously, positive change in the society can be achieved with a systematic set of ideologies that will reflect the feasibility and desirability of the people. This demands policies that can interpret the past, make meaningful the present and portray an ideal future. It had been argued elsewhere that,

The primary policy objective of any meaningful and worthy administration should be based on growing the economy and improving the standard of living of its citizens. A nation's economic growth and development can only be determined by the quality of its human capital, viable monetary policy, functional institutions and infrastructure, which are attributes of good governance. There is no doubt that Nigeria's economy has not experienced any appreciable transformation since her independence in 1960, as a result of failed visions and policies of different administrations. It is morally right to plan or set target, but one thing is to set the target and another is to achieve it (Uzondu 17).

Economic planning and change management requires the recognition of institutions responsible for human capital, which should be funded, equipped, and managed to enable them produce skilled manpower to manage the affairs of the nation. Alternatively, it equally involves re-orientation of the people into adopting proactive measures and values, with sophisticated entrepreneurial skills and highly motivated workforce. Therefore, without proper recognition and integration of institutions capable of stimulating economic change, good monetary policy, vision, transparency and accountability, Nigeria's economy will continue to diminish, with high level of poverty, unemployment, collapsed infrastructure, wrong value, poor attitudinal practices and crimes.

### **Synopsis of *Throes of Leadership***

The play, *Throes of Leadership*, is one of the over 20 plays written by Julie Okoh, a professor at the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Port Harcourt. With plays like *Mask*, *Edewede* and *In the Fullness of Time*, among others, Julie Okoh, in the analysis of Barclays Ayakoroma, "has over the years become a very prolific dramatist"; and that,



apparently, her transfer from the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics to the Department of Creative Arts (now Department of Theatre and Film Studies) at the University of Port Harcourt appeared to have fertilised the ground for the creative fecundity of this professor of playwriting and dramatic literature (8).

The play, *Throes of Leadership*, is a true life story and a framework that discusses the historical events, that culminated into social and political crises in the leadership of the then Vice Chancellor of University of Port-Harcourt. As the political head of the institution, the Vice Chancellor suffers criticisms and humiliations in the course of his administration, as a result of the economic crisis of the nation; where monthly subventions for salaries and allowances were not enough for staff salaries and allowances. The administration witnesses lots of deprivations and sufferings that cause disaffections and tensions between the leader and the lead. In the midst of the crisis, the Vice Chancellor succeeds in alleviating the sufferings of his people through strategic planning. He encourages his people to rather adopt proactive measures, by diversifying their potentials into more profitable ventures, rather than waiting endlessly for government intervention. Adhering to the admonition of the Vice Chancellor, the people became less dependent on government through their various entrepreneurial skills, which in turn boost their social existence and the economy of the nation as well.

*Throes of Leadership* is an apt description of the socio-political and economic situation in Nigeria presently, as played out in University of Port-Harcourt scenario. At one point, it paints a picture of the struggle of the people who have been rendered hopeless and ineffective by the manipulation and long neglect by government. At another point, the people see the Vice Chancellor as the course of their problems. The play teaches that conflict is a natural phenomenon which must find some expressions in communicable forms. But when they are not properly managed, it may snowball into social disorder that may be expressed through conflict, violence and restiveness. The play equally teaches the need for a leader to be selfless, transparent, visionary and committed to the course of his people. These are some of the qualities of the Vice Chancellor that paved a way for conflict resolution and transformation of the society as established in the play.

### **The Themes of Economic Planning and Change Management in *Throes of Leadership***

*Throes of Leadership* is Julie Okoh's statement on the travails in leadership. Leaders arise in every family, society and organisation in large and small, simple and complex situations. In fact, in every historical period and every part of the world, a leader must emerge to take the lead. The play discusses catalogues of issues and restiveness that shows that leaders are often at risk of being threatened, insulted, humiliated and tormented by all sorts of cruelties and unprecedented behaviours by the aggrieved followers. Leaders are often subjected to criticisms and blames when the going is rough, even when they are not the remote or immediate cause of the ugly situation.

The play is simple, devoid of complex settings and movement in its social message. However, there is no doubt that the play succeeds, even partially in the presentation of the human dimension of the struggle and the aspect of being proactive, which most people

either ignore or take for granted. An important effect of Julie Okoh's social vision and artistic preoccupation of portraying the emotional hangovers, attendant pain and suffering of the struggle is that the work does not hang in the air, but subtly hits at dialogues and moderations as antidotes and emotional purgation to the issues and challenges facing both the leader and the people.

It is the contention of this paper that, it is not enough for writers or dramatists to just mirror the prevailing social and political contradictions within an environment, but should deploy their creative weapon directly and coherently, in the process of sensitising, conscientising and preparing the people for actions capable of stimulating positive change in the society. The plots of the play are sequentially arranged, and link to each other. This makes it easier for the audience to understand the lines of argument without contradictions.

Principally, the period of this play was the dictatorial military rule of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (1984-85), which was characterised by severe starvation, deprivation and strict measures on allocations that should be used to run the affairs of higher institutions and other government agencies and parastatals. Salaries and allowances were not enough for worker as prices of goods and services were skyrocketing on daily basis. This can be substantiated in the following dialogues:

- VC:** On the issue before us, please remember no one runs a university with empty hands. At the root of any administrative success is the provision of funds and sound management. All the problems you have enumerated can be easily resolved with adequate funding.
- Dean Hum:** The University of Port-Harcourt is owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Do you mean that the Government has not been providing funds to run this university?
- VC:** The grant has been inadequate. It can't keep up the growth in undergraduate enrolment. Besides, for some time now, the grants from Government have dwindled. Moreover the remittances are often delayed. We are always in panic as pay day approaches. The bursar has to source for fund from anywhere; otherwise, staff will go on strike over delay of payment of salary (13).

The Vice Chancellor and the Deputy Vice Chancellor made it clear to the people that there is need to diversify their potentials into other profitable ventures to augment their salaries. Though, it was difficult for them to adapt to the new realities, but they certainly discovered that they could do some other things, apart from waiting for salaries monthly. This is established in the following lines:

- DVC:** Colleagues, let us look at the situation before us objectively. For example, most of our official cars need repair. But, where is the money to repair them. The Nigerian educational system started to decline since the beginning of the 1980s. The economic collapse of the period also greatly hurt the scholarship community. Moreover, the military rulers look upon the universities with deep

suspicion. Hence, the funding of the academia is not one of their priorities (14).

**VC:** We can't wait for Government forever. We must do something on our own to move the university forward. You and I, all of us have a stake in this matter. This is our university. I am only the head. When the head goes down, the entire body goes down with it.

**DVC:** The vice Chancellor has spoken clearly. This is a challenge to all of us

**Dean Hum:** A big challenge indeed.

**Provost:** Sir, thanks for explaining this situation to us. We shall put our hands together and come up with proposals on how to generate fund internally (15).

This sudden awareness and the will power to adhere to the advice of the VC and his Deputy to adapt to the changes in the society by diversifying their potentials brought certain level of comfort and contentment in the people. Most of them stayed away from idle gossip at the staff club with frivolous spending and womanising, and divert their energies in more profitable ventures such as agriculture, poultry farming, fish farming and many more. The following dialogues substantiate this fact:

**Lecturer I:** (*Shaking hands.*) Old boy, long time, no see. How now?

**Lecturer II:** Struggling! Just struggling to survive.

**Lecturer I:** I know, the economic crunch is whipping everybody. That is why you don't see me again at the staff club.

**Lecturer II:** Staff club! Who can afford such luxury these days? The economic crunch is biting everybody.

**Lecturer I:** But, I hardly see you on campus. I have come to your house twice, you were not found. So, what's happening?

**Lecturer II:** One is trying to earn extra money to keep body and soul together, under this austerity.

**Lecturer I:** Is that so! Please tell me more about it.

**Lecturer II:** Since I don't want to die of hunger, I now do part time job at Ella fish farm.

**Lecturer I:** How about our friend Patience, I hope he is well?

**Lecturer II:** Everybody is struggling to survive. I heard he now uses his old car as taxi in the evening to make ends meet (52).

*Throes of Leadership* is a true reflection of the past and current situation of Nigerian society of Buhari's military and civilian regimes, where people are struggling for survival as a result of the recessive economy of the country. Indeed, people always want the easy way out of their difficulties. When any visible threat is perceived, it may snowball into catastrophe if not properly managed. Despite the vision, simplicity and sincerity of the Vice Chancellor, he was at first made a laughing stock by his colleagues and his people in general. This made him to almost give up the fight of changing the social system in

University of Port-Harcourt, but he held unto to his positive ideologies. His perseverance helped him to pull through the challenges of time.

The only solution proffered by the playwright is for people to engage themselves in life coping skills which may be a palliative measure in a recessive economic system to make ends meet. At the end of the play, the Vice Chancellor was exonerated from the plight of the people, as the proactive measures adopted by individuals helped to transform their lives and the society as a whole. This can be defended by the dialogues between the VC and the market women that visit his lounge:

**Woman I:** Our able and capable Vice Chancellor, please, walk with confidence. Walk with reassurance. Walk tall with your shoulders high in the sky, for the women of the three communities surrounding Uniport are here to pay you a courtesy visit.

**VC:** Why do I deserve this visit?

**Woman I:** We come with joy; we come with gratitude on behalf of our communities. Our husbands send their greetings. Our children send their appreciations. Our elders send their best wishes. They all thank you for your foresight, for bringing joy into our families. For bringing wealth into our homes. And for bringing peace into our communities. Does a person whose belly is full complain of hunger? ( 56)

The dramatic performance was not limited to the use of dialogues; rather the director employs various dramatic techniques such as storytelling and flash back to propel the movement of the dramatic action in the play. Okoh proves that leadership challenge goes beyond mockery and disaffection from the people, but on how a leader mobilises his subjects to get things done in an extraordinary way. She proves that leadership is the practice and ingenuity of a leader to transform values into action, vision into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity and risks into reward. It is about making positive difference in the workplace and creating the necessary climates in which the people can turn challenging opportunities into remarkable success.

## **Conclusion**

The play, *Throes of Leadership* by Julie Okoh explores to a great extent, the travails of leadership. This is made possible through the historical and political linkages that bedevilled the Vice Chancellor of University of Port-Harcourt. Okoh proves that leadership demands positive ideologies and strategic planning that can propel positive economic changes in the society. These are the major preoccupations of the play, where the Vice Chancellor is finally exonerated and celebrated for his ingenuity; after suffering varying degrees of insult and humiliation from his subjects. The leadership challenges of the Vice Chancellor were enormous, but his honesty, transparency and hard work helped him to excel.

Having raised a catalogue of issues in the play, *Throes of Leadership*, Julie Okoh carefully weaves a likely way out of the problem. This by implication is a clarion call to everyone to always examine those issues that give rise to conflicts and strive to proffer solutions in order to arrive at a peaceful resolution that will make the society a better place. In essence, play productions activate the audience sensibilities into imaginative exercises that enable them to relate the subject under study to life occurrences. Within the ambiance of drama, the audience travel with the plot, creating an ample opportunity to investigate into the character and their actions. In the course of this exciting dramatic performance, they advance into the thematic pre occupation of the play, into a higher pedestal, thereby gaining knowledge and skilfulness at the resolution of the play.

*Throes of Leadership* stresses the need for selfless and visionary leaders who will put the need of the people before their personal needs. The play teaches that an average human being have more than one potential, which could be diversified to suit any giving circumstance. It teaches the need for people to be proactive and sensitive to their environment as well. It offers the best solution to people living in a distressed economy. Presently, Nigerian people are facing terrible times as a result of the recessive economy occasioned by devaluation in oil production. A mono economy has never helped any family, society or nation. The play creates awareness and establishes the need for Nigerians to develop and improve multiple intelligences and potentials, which could be diverted into more profitable ventures that could help to stabilise the economy of the nation.

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# **THEATRE PRACTICE AND ECONOMIC RECESSION IN NIGERIA: THE JOS REPERTORY THEATRE (JRT) EXAMPLE**

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## **Abstract**

*Economic recession, which narrows human priorities to the basic needs of life, portends shortfalls to arts and entertainments, including theatre practice. This is an analytical study of the performance practice of the Jos Repertory Theatre (JRT) that sustains her annual Jos Festival of Theatre amidst the 2016 economic recession in Nigeria. It evaluates the JRT minimalist performance approach adopted in the just concluded 10<sup>th</sup> edition of Jos Festival of Theatre, against the odds of harsh economic conditions. Among other performances, the study focuses on the performance of Akolo James Anthony's "Late Pam", and examines its minimalist characteristics of the performance as paradigms for sustaining theatre practice in harsh economic conditions. The study relies on participant observation and in-depth interview as primary sources of data. Among other things, it reveals that the minimalist approach, which deploys alternatives to realistic exactness, and simplifies production complexities, is a genuine means for achieving cost effectiveness in the theatre practice. The study hereby recommends that the minimalist approach to drama performance is an innovative strategy for surviving economic recession.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has wallowed in perpetual harsh economic conditions in the past four decades. The situation, which appears as a congenital disorder, has consigned the nation to a high level of underdevelopment through turns of military and civilian headship. The factors that precipitate bad economy of most developing countries, such as Nigeria, range from externally imposed to internally induced conditions. The external influences include foreign debt burden and the attendant high interest rate, which combine with the internal strings of corruption and lack of goodwill for national development that bedevil the Nigerian economic system till present days. Samies Foundation sees global economic downturn, fluctuation of global market prices, and unwholesome demand for export commodities as the as some of the major causes of the 2016 economic recession in Nigeria. Furthermore, inept and corrupt leadership, poor economic planning and adverse government policies are some of the internal conditions associated with the recession. The fallout of this economic downturn on the masses includes retrenchment, wage reduction, lack of infrastructure, low standard of living and high cost of living, which has consequently widened the gap between the rich and the poor. It is in the face of persistence

of such economic downturn that an economic recession is reckoned (Samie's Foundation n.p.).

Economic experts have suggested that a cardinal indicator to a healthy economy is the increase in production (Smith n.p.). This consideration, which seems true of industrial manufacturing production, also applies to small, medium and large scale business ventures in every sector of the economy. Thus, the experience of a perpetual decline in the activities of production/manufacturing industries is a signal that the economy is experiencing a downturn. Much more, it has been observed that when the economy lags, the entertainment and art sector appears to feel the heat more, as financiers and benefactors become unwilling to sustain their support for artistic productions. In the same light, patrons immediately consider the sector as not a necessity of life and existence.

The experience in Nigerian theatre practice has not been different. The economic recession has not only crippled theatre culture across the nation, it has rendered many theatre practitioners redundant. The experience of theatre practitioners who migrated to make a living in the cinema industry as an alternative to the stage in the 1970s was critical in this regard. Barclays Ayakoroma notes that, "the glorious years" of the cinema industry collapsed due to the economic recession in the 1980s, and at the instance of poor government policy:

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAD) put in place by the Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) regime in fulfilment of conditionalities for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, sounded the death knell for the cinema industry among other sectors of the economy (38).

This perpetual sting on the Nigerian economy has continuously affected theatre practice and the creative industry at large. Due to lack of facilities and funding, the growth of the industry has been stunted. More so, the prevalent low standard of living leaves production companies with no assurance of return-on-investment (ROI). Consequently, most theatre companies have gone moribund, and apart from educational theatres that domiciled in Departments of Theatre Arts in Nigerian Universities, only few companies manage to stay afloat when the economy bites. Nevertheless, some theatre companies in Lagos metropolis have continued to thrive, and new ones are emerging against the odds. This peculiarity, which distinguishes Lagos as the commercial hub of the nation, explains why most companies that stop operations in other parts of the country still carry out their operations smoothly in Lagos. However, amidst the uncertain economic conditions that pervade every other path of the country, Jos Repertory Theatre (JRT) has sustained its annual Jos Festival of Theatre.

The Nigerian economy was plunged into another season of economic recession in 2016. According to Barclays Ayakoroma, the reasons for the recession range from:

leadership deficit, massive corruption, national insecurity challenges, overdependence on oil, plummeting price of oil in the global market,



falling value of the naira in the forex market, reduced foreign earnings, bilateral trade deficit, to the breakdown of the value system... (5).

Expectedly, the arts and entertainment get poor attention whenever economic crunch sets in. Nonetheless, Jos Repertory Theatre went ahead with preparations for the 2016 edition of the Jos Theatre Festival, in spite of the economic condition. This underscores Ayakoroma's position that, "in spite of the economic recession Nigeria is undergoing, live theatre practice can still thrive because it depends, to a large extent, on theatre artists" (7). Thus, he maintains that the survival of the theatre depends on the approach of the practitioners. It is in this light that this study examines the minimalist approach of Jos Repertory Theatre to performances. The focus is the performance of Akolo James Anthony's "Late Pam", produced at the 2016 edition of Jos Festival of Theatre, as a survivalist strategy for the theatre in the face of Nigeria's dire economic conditions.

### **The Minimalism Approach to Drama Performance**

The term, *minimalism*, enjoys diverse usage and meaning, from varying stand points; but they all share a common etymology that derives from the word, "minim" (down-scaled portion) and "minify" (downscaling approach). In plastic and visual arts, minimalism refers to a reaction against "abstract expressionism", which gives liberty to an approach that conforms with "logical systems and universal physical principles rather than mere impulsive artistic sensations (Princenthal n.p.). Whereas, according to Obendorf, minimalism in music entails the "reduction of structure and sound, often by employing repetition and combination of simple pattern" (50). Other fields such as advertisement, fashion, literature and interior design also express different perspectives on minimalism.

Minimalism gained first mention in the arts through the British philosopher, Richard A. Wollheim (1923-2003), in an article he wrote in 1965, entitled, "Minimal Art". Although Wollheim's thoughts were directed towards the development of abstraction and the avant-garde, which, according to Peter Shelley, were different from what minimalism in the arts was developed to be afterwards (12). Donald Judd (1928-1994), Robert Morris (1931- ), Dan Flavin (1933-1996), and Carl Andre (1935- ) are plastic and visual artists, who are worthy of mention as leading exponents of minimalism in the arts. Though the concept of minimalism might seem new in Theatre and the Performing Arts, its precepts can apply to artistic performances. According to Nancy Princenthal, the minimal art comprises of sculptures and paintings that are composed by the design attributes of "simplicity", "geometric shapes", "basic colours" and "hard straight lines", as against the use of "uninhibited brushwork" (n.p.). Minimalism in visual arts thus demands the physicality of a work of art to be more imposing than its illusionary effects. The theory is characterised by simplicity of composition and the omission of superfluous elements, which Obendorf terms the "displacement of visual abundance" (26).

In the light of the above, there is a place for minimalism in the performing arts and indeed the arts of the theatre. Inferences from the use of theatrical techniques and devices that agree with the established traits of minimalist characteristics, with the precepts of minimalism, can conveniently be regarded as minimalist approach. Such traits include the preponderance of physicality over illusionary presentation, simplicity of composition over

extravagant exhibition, and preference for a cost effective approach. A survey of the development and history of Western theatre practice reveals different instances of minimalist approaches to theatrical performances. The theatre at Athens, Greece, was believed to have evolved from religious rituals in honour of Dionysus, through the content development of dithyrambic renditions, which had become regular contests at the City Dionysian festival by 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Brockett 16-17). Also, Robert Cohen describes the dithyrambic display as, “an ancient drunken dance-chant fertility ritual” that consisted of about fifty revellers (62-63). Obviously, the dithyrambic performances seemed like fantasy display of cluttered exhibitions; and theatre history has it that Thespis, Choerilus, Pratinas and Pymachus were leaders of the dithyrambic groups that engaged in the inter-tribal contests of the era.

As drama performances evolved into robust secular entertainments, it evolved into robust secular entertainments, and the foremost dramatist of the era, Thespis’ legacy of one-actor and fifty-man chorus (revellers), was minified by Aeschylus, who introduced the second actor to simplify the complexities of mono-acting. Furthermore, the numerical strength of the chorus was minified by Sophocles, who introduced the third actor; while Euripides depleted the numerical strength of the chorus to just five (Brockett 50-56). These developments are minimalist strategies to performances, which simplified the complexities of role-playing to engender far-reaching possibilities, while expunging superfluous elements from the essence of the chorus. These served to distinguish dramatic personae by imposing character features, and distinguished the display of individual chorus members in the group. Ultimately, this is cost effective and makes mounting productions convenient and with minimal production challenges.

Furthermore, history records that the general decline in economic and cultural activities that characterised then Dark Age did occasion the death of theatre practice in the mediaeval period. Invariably, when theatre practice resurfaced later, performances held in the Church Temples and later outside and away from the Church (Brockett 18). The staging convention and aesthetics that characterised that era are best described as minimalist. Since drama merely played an ancillary role in the Church, its activities were accommodated in spaces designed for liturgy. The alter-vestry orientation of the temple informed *Mansion-Plates* stage configuration. Pickering explains that the mansion was a small booth covered with beautifully decorated canvas that served to conceal actors and other stage items before they appeared on stage; while the *platea* served as playing space in front of the stage and by the sides of the *mansion* (143). The minimalist approach in this era heralded the stage-waggon alternative to mediaeval production.

Significantly, the modern temperament, which developed with Western theatre in 19<sup>th</sup> century, stemmed a dichotomy of style to theatre performances: the realistic and anti-realistic performances mode. Though both forms tend to share a similar objective that sought to break away from the conventions and ideals of previous theatrical traditions, the anti-realistic form is averse to the realistic order; and it has developed different perspectives of minimalism to curb the illusionary complexities of realistic performances. Physicality, therefore, which is a core attribute of minimalism, occupies a significant place in most anti-realistic performance modes. In tandem with the position of Samuel Coleridge, who posited that, members of the audience “willingly suspend disbelief” in the theatre, the exponents

of anti-realistic performances give free reign to minimalism. Their practice seeks to minify, and sometimes eradicate aesthetic distance, to replace realistic setting with geometrically-shaped set items, and to ultimately cut down on visual abundance.

Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), for instance, broke away from his foundation mode of realistic performance, and led an Anti-realistic theatre movement that emphasises theatricality (Mark 32-33). His approach to minimalism is what Susan Bennet describes as, a “denarrativising” process, which refers to Meyerhold’s use of spectacle to minify verbal effusion and stimulate visual attention (6). This appears to underpin Meyerhold’s assertion that, “words do not only tell the story, a pattern of movement is used on stage, which will force the spectator into the position of being a keen observer” (174). With elaborate movement, large gestures and exaggerated facial expressions, Meyerhold imprinted bold designs and patterns on the performance space. As such, Meyerhold’s theatre performances were devoid of the encumbrances of set and scenic composition, so that the performers can utilise space with the boundless scenic possibilities formed by geometric shapes and body modelling.

In the same token, Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) had demonstrated minimalist approach in his “Poor Theatre” experiments. He maintained that drama performances should be devoid of external effects and design accompaniments for it to impact an actor-spectator relationship of perpetual, direct and live communion (Grotowski 19). Grotowski insisted that the use of costumes, props, scenes and light designs were extraneous and should be minimised. Thus, his poor theatre is a deliberate attack on the realistic illusion of “rich” performance, to project minimalism in it entirely (Grotowski 17). Although, the elimination of elements that are not exclusive to the performances on stage is a crucial preoccupation of avant-gardism, it is important to note that minimalism in theatre is not squarely an avant-gardist device. According to Barbara Haskell, minimalism epitomises the “reductivist” possibilities that seek to express a “non-illusionistic and non-metaphoric correctness” (99-101). As such, minimalism in drama performance alludes to a mode of presentation that rids the performance of a measure of its illusionary texture. Its characteristics range from the use of basic geometrically shaped set pieces, basic colours, displacement of visual abundance, simplicity, distinction, clarity, and indeed cost effectiveness.

### **A Brief on Jos Repertory Theatre (JRT)**

The Jos Repertory Theatre (JRT) was established in 1997 by Jude Oteh, a passionate theatre professional and former lecturer at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Jos. The Repertory Theatre commenced full operation in year 2000, as a not-for-profit theatre outfit. In an interview, Oteh, a holder of a doctorate degree in Theatre Arts, recalled that his stint with J.P. Clark’s PEC Repertory Theatre in Lagos, inspired his venturing into the theatre repertory model. Remarkably, JRT thrived by developing unique strategies for self-sustainability amidst the unfavourable economic conditions in the country. Victor Dugga and Jude Oteh corroborate the above when they note that, JRT is “an on-going experiment that shows new ways of handling age-old problems” (82). At inception, JRT was confronted by the challenges that militated against most Nigerian theatre groups, especially with regards to poor funding and infrastructure deficit. But as time went on, the

organisation devised innovative means of survival. For instance, the organisation engaged in the production of dramas in the secondary school curriculum and plays that assisted government and non-governmental organisations (NGO) to propagate their programmes and activities.

By the character of its mode of operation, the Repertory has a rich collection of performances. It prepares for an array of performances in any particular season. Hence, the adoption of the minimalist performance approach, which has engendered cost effectiveness in the production of a number of performances by the Troupe in any season. Dugga and Oteh note that, though JRT had enjoyed the rare opportunity of prolonged and renewed funding from The Ford Foundation and British Council for purposes of Theatre in Education (T-I-E) and Theatre for Development (TfD), it also engaged in a number of commercial performances. According to them, JRT initiated the Jos Festival of Theatre, beginning with performances of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the Kings Horseman*, Yahya Dangana's *The Royal Chamber*, an adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and an in-house devised drama, entitled, "Our House" in 2004 (Dugga and Oteh 84-87). In an interview, Oteh stated that, "if everything had gone well, this (Jos Festival of Theatre) should be the 13<sup>th</sup> edition. We missed three editions because of the Jos crisis". He stressed that, apart from poor funding, the only factor that can militate against staging festival performances is insurgency. The minimalist approach, which enables JRT to handle many productions with minimal funding, is the organisation's strategy for the sustenance of production performances.

Furthermore, the benefactors who often reconcile value for money with the magnitude of deliverables look forward to an increased number of productions at the annual festival, without necessarily increasing the financial support, in spite of the persisting dwindling economic situation in Nigeria. According to Oteh, the Jos Festival of Theatre got less founding in 2016 than the previous year, understandably because of the economic recession. But rather than cancel the festival in 2016 on account of inadequate funding, Oteh adopted the minimalist approach and delivered no less a fulfilling theatre experience. The festival, which held on Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> May, at the Alliance Francais Cultural Centre, featured three plays: "Late Pam" by Akolo James Anthony, *Bullion Stride* by Kingsley Ubong Umoren, and an adaptation of Miguel de Cervantes' *Rinconet y Cortadillo* by Jude Oteh on the first, second and third day, respectively.

### **Minimalism and the Performance of *Late Pam***

The performance of Akolo James Anthony's "Late Pam" opened the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Jos Festival of Theatre in 2016. As stated above, the venue was the outdoor performance space of the French Cultural Centre in Jos, Plateau State. A sheltered elevated rectangular space, with a cyclorama, served as the stage; while an ample space flanked by two buildings, which define it like a proscenium auditorium to the elevated stage, sat over a hundred audience members. On the left side of the stage and adjacent to audience, a Chorus of three consisting a pianist, a guitarist and a vocalist, were visibly positioned. Somehow, the audience was enthralled with the performance of "Late Pam". The one-act performance had only two characters: Pam and Bala. The playwright, Akolo James Anthony played the

role of Pam; while the director, Jude Oteh played the role of Bala. The play, “Late Pam” is a witty existentialist drama that is set in Bala’s one-room apartment.

Observably, the dramaturgy of “Late Pam” indeed agrees with the minimalist performance approach by creating two characters that are well-developed in their geometric forms. In essence, the characters of Pam and Bala can be described in terms of their depth, height and width. This pertains to the richness and roundedness of both characters, and how they go through dramatic change of fortunes in the course of the dramatic action. The strength of the performance lies in the character development and interpretation; and other characters that were not seen but mentioned in the play were appropriately aligned to the two characters on stage, in a way that is central to the spine of the plot.

In the play, Bala gets drunk after an unfortunate breakup with his girlfriend and returns home with a bottle of local gin, which he had purchased. But he changes his mind after and dumps the drink in a refuse bin. He then decides to catch a little sleep, when a gluttonous drunk (Pam), whom he does not know, knocks on his door unexpectedly. Since Pam is somebody he is unfamiliar with, Bala denies him entrance into the house. The witty interactions between Bala and Pam hold across the separating wall between Bala’s room and the veranda. Pam arrives at his wits’ end and confesses his real mission. He had trailed Bala from the bar to his apartment, so that he can share in the drink; only that he had seen the bottle of gin in the refuse bin and had consumed it. Bala consequently changes his mind and tries to open the door in order for Pam to join him in a meal; but the key breaks in the hole and he is at Pam’s mercy. Bala begs Pam to rescue him by either helping to break the door, or call a carpenter; but Pam declines after he gets an urgent call to join in a free drink session at the bar. He abandons Bala and runs off to the bar.

There is no gainsaying the fact that, Pam is an alarmist. He knocks on Bala’s door and claims that he was wrongly alleged of theft; and that a mob is after his life; but the sceptical Bala shuts him out. He wants him to say the truth as regards his claims. The ensuing conversation and arguments open a broad spectrum of salient social issues that audience members could readily connect to. Pam characterises the misery of youthfulness. He is a victim of parental neglect and poor career guidance; he had been subjected to career imposition. Thus, he led a reckless life in the University until he dropped out of school. Ironically, Pam attended the same school with Bala; but they did not know each other then. He was one of the school drop-outs, who lived on Campus to foment restiveness, when Bala was the Secretary General of the Student Union Government (SUG). Pam is a drunk, while Bala is undergoing his National Youth Service Corps scheme, having been called to bar as a lawyer. Aside the theme of youthful recklessness that characterised Pam’s life, other sub-themes of the performance include the shortcomings of the Nigeria Police and the judicial system, jungle justice, prostitution, homosexuality, sexual immorality, and dearth of virtuousness, among others.

### **Findings and Discussions**

In the first place, the performance of “Late Pam” featured a stage that was scantily-furnished, and mostly with representative scenic units. It was symmetrically divided by a door for the dual setting: room and veranda. The door, which was represented by a 7ft high,

4ft long and 1.5ft wide wardrobe, stood profile right at centre stage; and its length stretched towards up stage and the width faced the audience. As such, the back side of the wardrobe with the plain surface faced the veranda; while the other side that also had a curtain, faced the room. Hence, Bala and Pam were constrained by dramatic setting and the plot to engage within the two halves of the stage: stage left as Bala's room and stage right as the veranda. Other items in Bala's room consisted of a reading table and chair, a bag, a small mattress on a small bed, and clothes hanging on nails driven into the door (wardrobe). On the other hand, the veranda consisted of a waste bin, flower pot, a ladder laid-down, a bench, and a small water jar.

The performance deployed the representation mode alongside its predominantly presentational mode in the use of anti-realistic techniques, which served the style of production, and connected the audience to the dramatic action. Through the 90minutes performance, Pam crossed the stage right confinement twice. First, while singing, he goes down stage and crosses towards the audience, singing alongside the chorus. Second, at a later moment, he exits backstage to feign the attack by his adversaries; but Bala remains in the stage left area.

The performance was a success in every regard, as audience members followed with rapt attention and responded appropriately. This was also evident at the curtain call, when audience members received the cast with an overwhelming standing ovation and prolonged applause for a very fulfilling theatre experience. Thus, the first night performance of the 2016 festival was a great opening that sustained audience interest and attracted increased number of spectators for the next set of performances.

Incidentally, the performance of "Late Pam" was a matinee; it was an early evening performance before nightfall. Thus, there was no need for stage lighting. There was also no change of costumes, as all dramatic actions in the play took place between evening and morning. The actors deployed the essentiality of the body and voice in space to draw out strong designs in the performance space, like hard lines with edges, which are imprinted on the minds of the audience. This seems to have made up for the use of minimal scenic elements, without subtracting from the aesthetic essence and composition of the performance. As a point of fact, the performance showed that audience satisfaction, which is the hallmark of a fulfilling performance, is not necessarily the result of rich and attractive production designs, but of the creative engagement of the performer with the use of body and voice.

## **Conclusion**

This study posited that minimalism is a possibility in theatrical performance. This may come into play in the adoption of a performance approach that subverts the use of magnificent scenery, extraneous characters, and romantic elements for the essentials of performance, which lie solely in the skill of the performer. The study maintains that *minimalism*, which is highly suggestive, places demand on the imagination of the audience, as they become part of the task in the meaning-making process of the performance experience. Hence, audience members derive increased aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction thereupon.

Consequent on the foregoing, the minimalist performance approach does not only leave strong geometric impressions on the audience; it also *minifies* the production cost of performances. The resultant cost effectiveness presents the minimalist performance approach as suitable for the survival of the theatre under harsh economic conditions. Benefactors and financiers can be encouraged to sustain their support for theatrical productions. On the other hand, returns from gate fee can serve to lighten the burden of production cost. Thus, this study recommends that the example of “Late Pam” at the Jos Festival of Theatre in 2016 is an example for minimalist drama performance, which can service theatre practice and patronage during economic recession.

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# **SURVIVING ECONOMIC RECESSION THROUGH THE PRODUCTION OF INTERNET COMIC SKITS: THE CASE OF OKOI SIPHON AND DAVID IGWE**

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## **Abstract**

*The economic recession in Nigeria has become a motivation for both positive and negative practices among citizens. Survival is fundamental to man and so man adapts to changes in his environment in order to survive. Recession in Nigeria has brought with it untold hardship to the Nigerian citizenry and this has triggered the ingenuity of the common man in a bid to survive the debilitating economic condition. A certain evidence of this is the surging trend in comic skits that has become ubiquitous in the Nigerian internet space. This article posits that the burgeoned output of comic arts in Nigeria's internet space reflects the current economic recession in Nigeria. The researchers used qualitative research methods in unbundling this claim. The study is hinged on John Marslowe's 'Need Theory'.*

## **Introduction**

Economic recession in Nigeria has elicited resilience in a lot of Nigerians whose creative abilities were not hitherto inspired. Many Nigerians have been ignited to use their innate artistic ability and the very many benefits of the internet to keep themselves going in these hard times. The English adage which says that 'every cloud has a silver lining' can be said to be true if related to the current increase in artistic works in Nigeria due to the current economic recession. There has been a sudden hike in the production of internet comic skits in Nigeria which came as a result of the peoples' strives to survive the current economic recession.

Although this artistic work has been in existence before the current All Progressives Congress (APC) leadership, it sees an increase in production and release mostly due to the economic setback brought about by reforms of the current government. Nigeria is currently experiencing economic recession. The country's economy nosedived into inflation in 2016 experiencing a reduction in the oil barrel. Ibenegbu reports that, while

Nigeria was able to produce 2.11 million barrels of oil daily at the beginning of 2016, the country could only produce 1.69 million barrels daily at the end of the same year (asknaij.com). This and other militating factors brought about inflation in the country. So Nigeria has been experiencing one of the worst financial crises in the country since 2016.

Although the recent recession led many Nigerians to groaning and grumbling, many others have been motivated by the hardship of the same economic recession to discover their artistic talents. A lot of Nigerians have been forced by the adverse effect of the recent economic recession to recline and explore their innate talents. It has prompted so many young Nigerians to go into the production and release of internet comedy skits, thereby increasing the number of internet comic sketches in the Nigerian internet sites. One might be prompted to ask how one could yield income from an ordinary short internet video. This and other issues will be the focus of this paper as we go further.

### **Economic Recession in Nigeria**

The economy of Nigeria began to contract in 2015 with the global fall in oil price. The global nose-diving of oil price drastically affected Nigeria's economy because Nigeria is running a mono-economy. Almost all the country's earnings and revenue come from one source, which is oil. Robert Dode reports that, "for the past three decades, oil has accounted for between 80% and 90% of the country's foreign exchange earnings" (3). So, the country's economy began to ebb simultaneously with global oil price. By the mid-2016, the country's economy had started to experience a significant decline. This decline plunged the nation into recession. Nigerian's dwindling economy was also affected negatively by some reforms made by the president Muhammadu Buhari-led administration.

Datatrust Consulting Limited, a firm of financial analysts, had maintained that, Nigeria's economic recession was due to failure in the government's monetary and fiscal policies. In x-raying the Nigerian economy and the banking industry, Datatrust found a major link between the ravaging economic recession and delayed fiscal action on the part of government. Mike Uzor, the chief financial analyst of the firm posits that, "with the long delay in approving the 2016 budget... the policy of Treasury Single Account hindered the ability of monetary policy to sustain the flow of goods and services within the economy". The Datatrust report further suggests that, in 2016, Nigeria's economy experienced a macroeconomic policy lull during which neither fiscal nor monetary policy was effectively deployed to sustain the momentum of the nation's economic activities. Eneji, Mailafia and Umejiaku attribute the economic downturn on the "global oil price shocks and volatility, worsened by oil pipeline vandalism and depletion of foreign reserves by the previous governments" (2). Adetoya, Onuba and Abioye report that the release of 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter's Gross Domestic Product figures of 2016 by the National Bureau of Statistics showed that the nation was in recession. The Honourable Minister of Finance, Mrs. Kemi Adeosun said this much when she admitted that, Nigeria was in its worst possible time. Umoru notes that, "Mrs. Kemi Adeosun did not hide the fact that the nation's economy was sick; she told the senators bluntly that Nigeria as a country was in recession and in a very tough place". The local currency has also been devalued. These and other militating factors helped in aggravating the sufferings of the Nigerian masses. Thus, a lot of Nigerians were moved to look inward to device means of surviving the hardships of the economic recession.

The production and release of internet comic skits became a viable alternative source of livelihood to cushion the effects of the economic recession. One of the most popular comic skits in Nigeria, *Mark Angel* and other comic skits motivated others to join this lucrative venture of internet video skits series.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research experience is predicated on Abraham Marslowe's 'Theory of Need'. The theory is alternatively known as the 'Marslowe's Hierarchy of Needs'. This theory was propounded by Abraham Marslowe in 1943 in a paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation". The theory is a psychological proposition on the hierarchy of human needs. Marslowe categorises the human needs into strata and suggests that the actions of man are proportionally motivated by his desire to fulfill any of his needs. From bottom of the pyramid upwards, the stages are physiological needs, safety needs, love needs and belongingness, esteem needs, and self-actualisation needs.

According to Marslowe, man's psychological growth is a journey through this pyramid. The journey starts from the base (physiological) and graduates through to the stage of self-actualisation. Analysing this theory, Saul McLeod (n.p.) divides the needs in pyramid into two sub-categories: Deficiency needs and growth needs. Physiological needs, safety needs, love needs and esteem needs constitute the 'deficiency needs'; while self-actualisation constitutes the 'growth needs'. The deficiency needs are basic needs. They are needs necessary for the survival of human person. A denial or inability to meet this need therefore may result in demise or stunted growth and progression. Deficiency needs are motivational. They drive the individual to find varied means of ensuring survival. McLeod posits that, "deficiency needs arise due to deprivation and are said to motivate people when they are unmet" (n.p.).

The economic recession in Nigeria threatens this need. Its effect on the basic means of livelihood directly affects the deficiency needs of the citizenry. The rise in unemployment, cost of living and scarcity of food supply directly promotes hunger and this will motivate the affected individuals to creatively devise alternative means of ensuring survival. While some may respond to this motivation negatively by resorting to crime, others equally may employ their creative ingenuities to close up the gap. One of such creative cords that have been resurrected is the internet comedy which is the major preoccupation of this research experience. The choice to stem this research experience on Marslowe's 'Needs Theory' stems from this. The financial hardship that emanated from the economic recession currently suffered by Nigerians has brought with it some positive outputs. In order to make ends meet, a lot of Nigerians have been motivated by untold hardship to seek alternative means of livelihood. The result is an increase in artistic works. One of the artistic works that has recently been proliferated is the internet comic skit. A lot of Nigerians have been motivated to create and shoot their own hilarious web series or skits owing to the difficult times.

### **Economic Recession in Nigeria as Motivation for increase in Internet Comic Artistes**

The economic recession in the country has occasioned a surge in the number of artistes who practice internet based comedy. Many of these have grown big and have become

motivations for others to join. However, for the purpose of this analysis, the researchers will focus on the internet comic arts of David Igwe and Okoi Siphon.

Comedy is the genre of literature that aims at eliciting laughter and creating light moods. It is an old genre which preceded tragedy during the Greek classical era. Brockett opines that, “Greek comedy developed later than did tragedy” (93). It humours its audience through the presentation or representation of human follies. According to Lucas, translation of the *Poetics*, Aristotle in the *Poetics* classifies comedy as a lower art which must imitate the lives of the common people. For Aristotle, according to the English Hawaii’s online post, comedy represents human being as “worse than they are”, but he notes that comic characters are not necessarily evil. They are just ridiculous and laughable. Thus, comedy has evolved over time and has taken different forms depending on the socio-cultural disposition of its host society. Comedy in Nigeria has lasted over time. Stand-up comedy has revolutionised the comedy craft in Nigeria and made it a worthwhile profession. Aderibigbe Tolulope reports that it has become a source of livelihood to many Nigerians who in recent times have become superstars, celebrities and millionaires from the stand-up comedy craft (para.1).

However, with the advent of the social media, there has begun a radical cross in medium. While stand-up comedy still thrives in live shows, the social media have given comedy a more viral access to designated audiences. Tinkafrica.com posits that, “social media is slowly snatching the mic from the stand-up comedians and is handing it over to a new breed of jokers, winning mostly the millennials and a bit of the generation before them”.

Internet comic skit is a single dramatised short and funny theatrical performance on the internet. It is a theatrical genre comprising a series of short funny scenes or vignette performances on the internet. It has its origin in the vaudeville which was especially popular in the United States of America and Canada in the early 1880s until 1930s. A typical vaudeville performance was made of up a series of separate, unrelated acts grouped together on a common bill. It include among others: one-act plays or scenes from plays, singers, dancers, comedians and movies. It emerged in the contemporary times as web series.

Web series became a possible alternative to traditional series production which was formerly mostly done for broadcast and cable television. It is a series of screenplays or non-scripted videos generally in episodic form released on the internet. The QuantumLink Serial is considered the first episodic online series. Swaine posits that, “it is a pioneering work of episodic online fiction by the American writer Tracy Reed” (7). However, according to Swaine, the Spot or thespot.com created by an American, Scott Zakarin, was the first website to integrate episodic online story, photos and videos and what later became known as blogs into storylines. It was the second online story after an experiment by AOL’s QuantumLink Serial.

The rise in popularity of the internet and improvements in the accessibility and affordability of high speed broadband and streaming video technology facilitated the production and distribution of web series. In addition to these is the fact that internet series are less expensive to produce. This has allowed a wider range of creators to develop internet series, encouraging ordinary Nigerians who might not have been able to produce the traditional television series (which is more expensive to produce) to produce internet comic

skits. These videos are made available online. The internet enables these producers to reach potentially global audience who can access the videos 24 hours a day and seven days a week at their own convenience, whether they are at home or on the go. Also encouraged by the rising affordability of tablets and smart-phones, more people have entered the trade. Owing to this advantage, producers are able to reach wider range of potential viewers including commuters and travellers who are on the go.

The emerging potential for success in internet video has caught the attention of thriving Nigerian citizenry especially at this period of economic recession. Those who have been attracted to this trade use social media and social networking platforms, such as, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter, to mention the most popular among the social media, to market their internet videos and seek increase in viewership. They also monitor these social media and networking comments as ways of obtaining fan feedback on their performance.

### **Siphon Okoi: A Brief Introduction**

Kalistus Yawa is the brand name used by Siphon Okoi to arrange and present his comic skits. Siphon Okoi is a native of Eket, Akwa Ibom State. He attended Government Secondary School in Karu, Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, and later obtained his first degree from the Sango-Ota Polytechnic, Ogun State, where he studied Business Administration. Siphon Okoi is one of the most hilarious and humorous comedians to have graced the internet comic skit art in Nigeria. His sense of humour is greatly burgeoned and further pronounced by his frail looks which most times complement themes of poverty, street hustle and dubiousness that characterise the *Yawa* series.

### **Siphon Okoi's Comedy Series**

The *Yawa* comedy series is mostly designed to showcase the daily hardship the common man faces in his quest to survive the economic downturn. Siphon, in a bid to tell the stories of this ubiquitous hardship which has enveloped the common man in Nigeria, takes on different characters and situates them within the life of an average man. For the purpose of this analysis, the researcher will discuss Siphon Okoi's internet skits using the following episodes: *BVN* (Episode 5), *The Job Seeker* (Episode 6), and *Sharp Guy*.

### **Synopsis of *BVN***

In *BVN*, Siphon (playing the role of Calistus) impersonates the role of a typical Nigerian fraudster. He hoodwinks a gullible man into giving him his bank verification number (BVN) with which he siphons all the money in the man's bank account. As a result, the man begins to torment him through phone calls. He throws away his SIM card and buys a new one in a bid to escape the torment but the man mysteriously begins to call him on the new one and continues to torment him. As he throws away the phone, the mystery caller uses the phones of people nearby to call Calistus. His several attempts at escaping the mysterious caller only brings more torment. Calistus loses his quiet and is knocked down by a car. However, Calistus wakes up on a bench and realises that it was a flash dream.

## **Discussion**

Fraud has become a burgeoning business in Nigeria most especially among the youth. While *Yahoo Yahoo*, as it is popularly called, dates back to the 1970s, it has suddenly become an envied life style among many people especially the youths in this era. The reason is simple and conspicuous; hardship. The need to survive the recession induced difficulty has made many youths to begin to fancy crime and other illegal ways of making money. This only solidifies Marslowe's positions in his need theory that the drive to fulfil a particular need can be motivational in itself. However, in the case of Calistus, the motivation is more negative than positive. Rather than channel his frustrations into a positive creative endeavour, Calistus responds to the pangs of hunger by devising means of defrauding people of their hard earnings. The case of Calistus is a simulacrum of the Nigerian society in the face of economic recession where many youths have responded to the frustrations of job loss, unemployment, hunger and hopelessness by transforming their creative abilities into negative endeavours dangerously. This accounts for the unimaginable boost in the number of youths who pride themselves in fraud and public celebrate the ill-gotten wealth. However, Siphon Okoi rather than responding to the pushing of negatively like Calistus redirects his frustrations to positive minded ventures. He rather tells the story of the many misguided youths who engage in the business of fraud and makes a living from it. He, however, does not fail to show that the glitters that come with fast money does not last; and that, perpetrators of evil are liable to their actions.

## **Synopsis of *The Job Seeker***

In *The Job Seeker*, Siphon impersonates an unemployed electrical engineer. He designs a placard on which is written 'Graduate but unemployed' and dubiously collects money from sympathetic Nigerians who fall to his antics. People feel pity for him and begin to give him money with which to take care of himself until he gets a job. Unfortunately, Calistus becomes more comfortable with the money he is given out of sympathy and becomes a con artist. He refuses to accept real job offers so he can collect the sympathy money that comes with the placard. Unfortunately, Karma catches up on him as a contractor decides to offer him a job to repair malfunctioning circuit. Rather than open up to his folly, he accepts to do the job. He cuts the wrong wire and he gets electrocuted though he does not die. He abandons the man and leaves the office.

## **Discussion**

Okoi Siphon once more presents Calistus as a vulnerable youth faced with the most basic in Marslowe's hierarchy of needs. He is jobless and as a result is perpetually hungry which affects his confidence as a person. Just as Marslowe posited, Calistus is motivated by the need to meet his need for food and security. He begins to carry placards in a desperate move to get a job. Unfortunately, Calistus loses sight of his intent and recreates his motives to immediate gratification and like in episode five, he becomes a con star. Okoi Siphon has a way of presenting worrisome national issues while living out his comic carrier. He does not fail to show the many negative effects of the hopelessness that faces the Nigerian youths. Abandoned by government and left on their own, Okoi Siphon once more shows

the many consequences the society will suffer for not paying attention to able youths who are frustrated daily by stories of hopelessness.

Unemployment in the country is a reality that did not come with the economic recession of 2015/2016. It is a reality that has been with the country which many past governments have been struggling. However, the event of the recession has only made it worse as many who even had jobs prior to the recession have either been completely laid off or have had their salaries drastically slashed. This in effect has seen many more youths wondering the streets frustrated, angry, jobless, hopeless and visionless. It is obvious that Siphon Okoi taps his motivation from these narratives that are rife in every corner of the country. Once more, rather than channelling his frustrations to negative use, Siphon Okoi is positively motivated to employ his creative ingenuity to meet his needs by tapping from the stories of despair that has become ubiquitous in Nigeria with the economic recession. This is also very evident in many other of his *Yawa* series. In *Man Must Chop* and *Sharp Guy*, Siphon Okoi continues with his narrative of the drive to fulfil the basic needs that have been made more ridiculous by the taunts of a recessed economy.

### **About David Igwe**

Osas Comedy is propelled by David Igwe, who is an Awka-based comedian, popularly known as, Osas. He studied Theatre Arts at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, and graduated in 2013. He started his comedy series in 2015. His comic skit, *Longest Name in Africa*, has had over 1.2million views on YouTube, as at the time of this study. Three of David Igwe's internet comic skits will be discussed, specifically, *Come and Join me*, *Blood Money*, and *Otapiapia*.

### **Synopsis of *Come and Join Me***

Osas in *Come and join* is worried by hunger. He goes to buy food on credit and comes home to eat it. A friend visits with his girlfriend and Osas innocently invites them to join him in eating the food out of courtesy. The friend and his girlfriend pounce on the food and finish it to Osas's consternation.

### **Synopsis of *Blood Money***

In *Blood Money*, Osas is faced with hunger and despair as a jobless youth. He discovers a hospital, where he can sell his blood for money. He sells the blood and tells his friends, who are addicts to betting. The friends rush out to go and sell theirs too. In the process, one of them dies.

### **Synopsis of *Otapiapia***

*Bank Robber* tells the story of three jobless youths, who, in a bid to make money and escape poverty, decide to go and rob a bank. However, they decide to fortify themselves against bullets. They ask a native doctor to prepare the amulets for them. After preparing the ritual and fortifying them the native doctor decides to test the amulets. And to do this, he has to shoot one of them to demonstrate the potency of the amulet. To their consternation, the bullet pierces the body of their colleague, who slumps to the ground and dies. They all panic and run away.

## **Discussion**

In *Come and Join me*, David paints the picture of jobless youths, who must feed against all odds. David showcases the level of hunger, which people pass through as a result of the economic downturn being experienced in the country. David buys a plate of food to eat and then extends the customary invitation to his friend to join him to eat. To his greatest disappointment, the friend immediately produces a spoon from his back pocket and within the twinkling of an eye, eats up the whole food with his girlfriend to David's consternation.

The theme of recession and its effects is further explored in *Blood Money*. In this episode, Osas, an applicant, sees an advert blood donation which is paid for. He visits the address and sells his blood at five hundred naira (N5000.00) per pint. He comes home only to meet his friends who are greatly aggrieved over the loss of the money they had staked in pool betting. He tells them the 'good' news and the two rush out to the blood centre to sell their blood against the admonition of others. The episode ends as Osas and the rest of his friends are seen carrying the lifeless bodies of the two, who went to donate blood, in a wheel barrow.

In *Otapiapia*, David further showcases the plight of the youth in the face of a most debilitating economy. In the bid to escape the hunger and desperation that has engulfed them as the result of Joblessness, Osas and his friends resolve to rob a bank. To do that, they would need protective amulets (*odeshi*) that could protect them from machete cuts or gun shots. As a result, they visit the shrine of a native doctor, Akirika, who readily takes them through some rituals. At the end, in a bid to test the potency of the charm he has prepared for them, he decides to shoot one of them. Osas volunteers do the test and he is killed as Akirika's bullet penetrates through his heart.

All these little comic skits from Osas clearly show the state of desperation by the youth in the Nigerian nation. Through his art and creative ability, David Igwe, like Siphon Okoi, showcase the challenges people are confronted with due to the current economic recession. They may be comic, but they x-ray the underbelly of the current harsh economic conditions in the country.

## **Conclusion**

Precious minerals are most times discovered in the belly of dumps buried millions of miles beneath the earth surface. In the same vein, this research experience has shown that while the recession represents tales of mares and horrors for many Nigeria youths, some others in the likes of Siphon Okoi and David Igwe have creditably explored these tales of woes and horror as viable motivations to spring the art careers. The truth of Marslowe's assertion that needs are springboards (n.p.) for motivation have best been made manifest in the works of the two artistes in discuss. While some may argue that the recession may not have been their sole motivation for embracing the internet comic skits art, this work have proven that the recession has provided with creative elements on which their careers have trended. The researchers therefore conclude that the internet comic skits in Nigeria have had a humongous boost through the instrumentality of the economic recession that proven a great source of motivation for many of its artistes.



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# CHALLENGES OF PROGRAMME CONTENT FOR DIGITAL BROADCAST: TARABA STATE TELEVISION IN PERSPECTIVE

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## **Abstract**

*Television production is a dynamic art in the electronic media and it is central to contemporary entertainment and social trend in Nigeria. Television audiences consciously dissect professionalism from mediocrity and make choices of stations and programmes based on such indices. The exigency of switch over to digital platform by television stations across Nigeria is rife but how prepared are they? The quality of programmes is determined by the finances available for production and this is the bane of many producers who lack sponsorship by multinational organizations. The quality of programme content determines viewership and ultimately affects the revenue base of the organisations. Using Taraba State Television (TV Taraba) as a sample of a public television station and a case study, the research employed observation and oral interviews with programme producers, television station management and sections of television audiences to sample opinions on the subject for analysis. The paper concludes that the current economic recession experienced by such organizations can better be managed when critical decisions are made to solve the needs of equipment, staff welfare and training with an eye for future gains of the television entertainment business.*

## **Introduction**

The electronic media, particularly the television and radio, has active and engaging attribute that attracts significant audience. Its immediacy in terms of news and programmes on another level avail instant information or entertainment with the possibility of feedback from the audience. The audio-visual characteristic of television particularly makes it a magic medium which gives viewers access to the world from the comfort of their homes. Television images are memorable and stick to the mind because seeing is intrinsic to human nature and what one sees supersedes what one hears when committed to memory. The transitory nature of television news and entertainment draws audience on a race to keep up with timing schedule of programmes like drama series or live shows. The audience thus establishes some emotional attachment to anchors of television programmes or characters featured in drama or reality shows. This puts competition at the peak of the business of programme production where each producer looks out for ways to attract and sustain viewership. The viewership of a programme and by extension a television station determines the money it will make from sponsorship and advertisements. The increase in

the number of television stations that are well positioned to deliver high quality programmes increases competition for viewership and public media stations are disadvantaged in this case primarily due to their dependence on the dictates of their sponsors.

Content refers to any material that is packaged for broadcast on television, radio or the internet via various social media platforms. While the television, radio and internet serve as the media of conveying the content to the target audience, the core of any form of broadcast is the content. It carries the message that the content designer wishes to share and this may reach the audience as news, drama series, talk show, movie, feature or documentary film and so on. Content management is critical to broadcasting because its design and choice of expression is determined by a number of factors such as target audience and the financial benefit to the stakeholders. The quality of content matters in broadcasting irrespective of the format adopted by the designer hence the subject of quality is considered in this discourse.

Television broadcasting in Nigeria started in Ibadan, the capital of the then Western Region on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1959 with the establishment of the Western Nigeria Television, WNTV (Omosa 1). It is reputed as the first television station to be established in tropical Africa. The pioneer, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, amidst the perception by the people in the region that it was a wasteful venture, asserted that television will serve as a teacher and entertainer. Two other regional governments – the Eastern region launched Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service Television (ENBS-TV) and the Northern Nigeria Government established Radio Television Kaduna (RTK) in March, 1962. A month later, the Federal Government established Nigerian Television Service (NTS) in Lagos, bringing the number to four as at the early 1960s (Umeh 57). This competitive spirit in the establishment of these stations and the political aspirations they sought to promote via this potent medium kick started a process that has continued to evolve. The creation of states saw the establishment of state-owned television stations, leading to what Umeh described as proliferation of these organisations. He further posits that:

One remarkable feature of the rapid growth in the number of television stations in Nigeria is the corresponding rapid growth in the number of both trained and untrained manpower for the industry. The Federal and State governments recruited a large number of indigenous television staff and many of these were sent to the United Kingdom, United States and other developed countries for professional television training. The resultant rapid increase in the number of trained television personnel in the country helped to bring about a remarkable increase in the number of locally made television programmes (59).

This sort of drive for training has significantly dropped particularly with the wave of recession that swept over the country, affecting the finances of states and the capacity of public media houses to perform optimally.

The establishment of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) by the Federal Government was a major step in coordinating the broadcasting industry. This was

especially evident during the second All Africa Games hosted by Nigeria in 1973. Coming together under the umbrella of Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON), all the stations were fed from a central pool for rebroadcasting instead of individual stations crowding the sports arena with their crew. *Decree No. 24 of 1977* conferred on NTA the exclusive right of broadcasting across the country in the spirit of promoting unity and reflection of the culture of each zone. Thus, NTA took over the existing television stations and added more in other state capitals where none existed as well as Abuja (Umeh 60). With the return to civilian administration in 1979, the decree was amended to become an Act and further gave the President the power to allow state governments own and operate television stations thus returning to the previous status. Many states took advantage of this deregulation and established their own television stations and by 1983, at least nine such stations were established by Anambra, Bendel, Imo, Kano, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo and Plateau states. The proliferation of television stations got a corresponding increase in ownership of television sets in homes across Nigeria, boosted by the oil wealth that drove the economy at that period.

The promulgation of *Decree 38 of 1992* under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, now an act of the National Assembly, ended the monopoly of broadcasting in Nigeria and paved way for private ownership of media outfits. The same decree established the National Broadcasting Commission and charged it with the responsibility of regulating and deregulating broadcasting in the country (Balarabe 2767). The Commission was empowered by that law to generally set standards for quality broadcasting and they had the mandate to license stations and regulate content. This liberalisation of the right to own and operate media houses began a revolution in the Nigerian broadcast industry which has today led to license grants and the establishment of several stations for terrestrial and cable television as well as radio. The NBC's mission to "evolve defined standards in all aspects of broadcasting to effectively license, monitor and regulate an environment that encourages investment and development of quality programming and technology for a viable industry..." (NBC 1) aligns with the global demands of the sector. One of the principal demands of meeting up to global standards of broadcasting is upgrading to twenty hours operation which many public media houses have hitherto not been practicing. Some other demands include upgrade of equipment and training of manpower to operate them. In assessing the challenges of local media houses in contributing to the noble mission of NBC, this paper uses Taraba State Television (TV Taraba) as a case study to magnify the hurdles faced by public media organisations and their attempts to chart a progressive course as they join the digitisation revolution.

### **Nigeria's Quest for Transition from Analogue to Digital Technology**

The tech craze is on an irreversible voyage and the digitisation fever is only an offshoot of the global revolution. In June 2006, participants at the Regional Radio Communication Conference (RRC-06) of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in Geneva, a Switzerland unanimously endorsed a motion for broadcast stations to migrate from analogue to digital broadcasting (Ihechu and Uche 38). The government of Nigeria realised the need to key into ITU-led global digitisation movement in 2007 and approved 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2012, as transition date, ahead of the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2015 deadline set by ITU. Late President

Umaru Yar'Adua kick-started the digitisation process in Nigeria on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 2008, with the inauguration of the Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC) on Transition from Analogue to Digital Broadcasting (*IDIGEST 3*). This date was however shifted to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2012 and again to 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2015; but even then, full compliance has not been achieved. While some countries like the United States and at least eighteen European countries have completed their transition to digital broadcasting (Balarabe 2770), the finish line for Nigeria seems quiet far.

Experts and analysts have also identified other factors that pose as impediments to the successful migration from analogue to digital broadcasting to include unawareness, scarcity of qualified manpower, poverty, inadequate power supply and inadequate digital equipment (Agbo and Chukwuma 123; Ihechu and Uche 42). Some of these challenges were in existence in public media houses long before the decision to join the ITU led analogue to digital broadcasting platform. Nigeria's advanced plans for switch over, though beautifully made, did not advance beyond planning due to lack of political will to implement them (*IDIGEST 3*).

In keeping up with the mandate to key into the ITU initiative, broadcast professionals, broadcast equipment manufacturers, content providers, the academia, strategic industry stakeholders and broadcast partners have had brainstorming sessions at various times to chart a course for the switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial broadcasting. However, lack of funds has been a major setback for this objective. The digitisation project for Nigeria is estimated at N69 billion where the Federal Government is expected to provide substantial part of the budget while the NBC will independently source the remaining. However, half a decade after that submission, the funds never came. *IDIGEST* further notes that:

This budget include the cost of subsidy for some homes in Nigeria to provide them with setup boxes and the cost of buying back analogue transmitters from all the operators, cost of publicity, roll-out obligations and some subsidy for signal distributors to make sure they meet up with the roll-out time, funds for content and consultants (5).

Again, commitment to the course has not translated into action thus impeding the progress of the plan and further distancing the reality of the set date for transition.

The transition from analogue to digital technology offers options for the media industry in terms of clearer picture and sound, multiple channel reception and immunity to signal distortion and interference from adjacent analogue transmission (Balarabe 2770; Ihechu and Uche 41). Signal interference common with analogue technology will be abolished as digital technology places bands in definite positions. The transition to digital technology also offers television stations the option of broadcasting of multiple television channels from only one in the current analogue system. On 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2014, Nigeria launched its first phase of the digital switchover using the NTA Star Times backbone in Jos, Plateau State (*IDIGEST 4*). The successful transition is set to give viewers a new experience and ease of access to clear signals and several stations to choose from. With the new development, viewers with analogue TV sets only need to get a Set Top Box (STB),

which is a digital analogue TV converter and looks like the ordinary decoder that easily plugs into a television set (Balarabe 2770). While media organisations are making their plans for compliance with the date for switchover, the success does not end with that action. The hurdles they must surmount include adapting to demands of digital broadcasting amongst which are twenty four hours operation, qualitative programmes, upgrade of equipment and training of staff. This makes the digital switchover a journey rather than a destination for media organisations. The next section does an assessment of the place of public media houses in the equation of digital switchover.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The definition of public media houses in the context of this paper covers media organisations that are sponsored and owned by the government at the federal or state levels. Their operations are subject to the dictates of the sponsors who determine what can be aired or restricted from public consumption via that particular medium. The instant image conjured about this group of media organisations when compared to privately owned media organisations is that of subjectivity to the political leanings of the government and interest at any given time. Premised on “who pays the piper dictates the tune” perception, the objectivity of government-owned media houses has often been questioned when government interest is on the weighing scale. Liwhu Betiang acknowledges manipulative one way communication against NBC code and abuse by political office holders especially state owned media houses which he says “are invariably treated as extensions of the states’ Ministries of Information and Public Relations” (6). Nsereka also observes that private media houses in Nigeria do not enjoy subventions and grants from government like their public counterparts, yet they are established on business lines and in order and to maximise profit (58). Thus, it is likely that the latter will seek ways to attract and keep viewers through quality programming and broadcasting.

There is also the angle of chain of command which comes into play in all circumstances in the public organisations, argued by this paper from the viewpoint of Max Weber’s sociological analysis of bureaucracy and later economic theories. This work draws its assessment principally from among other things, the position of the theory that public sector organisations provide goods and services that are free at the point of use and are often not constrained by market conditions. Erkoc posits that the public sector suffers political manipulation on the provision of welfare services and other factors that lead actors in the public service to act in reluctant ways on the allocation of resources (5). Ultimately, Erkoc argues that the lack of competition and the monopolistic nature of public production do not drive the actors in the public sector organisations to be wary of the efficient usage of resources compared to their competitors in the private sector (6). Bureaucracy has strangulated efficiency in so many public institutions and promoted severe laxity in performance from the topmost managerial personnel to the lowest ranking staff. Having to wait for approvals from the top to enable execution at the lower rungs of the ladder is detrimental to efficiency in sensitive sectors of the public service.

This paper holds that a wide margin exist between Nigeria’s public and private media organisations in terms of operations and efficiency based on the preceding arguments and that this is conditioned by the system rather than a fault of the public sector

actors. A major problem is financing. Government establishments are often victims of shortage of funds leading to neglect of vital functions. This situation became rife in the face of economic realities of recession when many states in Nigeria suffered shortage of funds to the extent of owing workers' salaries until the Federal Government bailed them out. In situations where such paucity of funds becomes severe, governments limit their expenditure to sectors they consider very much in need thus neglecting some. Public media houses are among the victims in such situation because the media is stands the chance of being considered a luxury when placed side by side with sectors like health and security. When the limited funds get to the media organisations, they in turn direct the funds to aspects they consider critical such as fuelling of generating plants in order to be able to transmit.

Staff training is a critical factor in updating the knowledge of the staff and to sharpen their skills for efficiency. This important aspect of staff development is gradually going extinct in many public institutions and has virtually stopped in others. Nsereka opines that lack of funds accounts for inadequate technical facilities coupled with amateur personnel lacking skill to operate equipment account for poor quality of programmes in public media houses (59). TV Taraba's experience falls within this boundary as organisation-sponsored trainings have faded out to extinction. Interviews with some producers aspiring to improve their knowledge and skills in the art of production indicated that they embarked on personal efforts and self-sponsorship to receive training. However, some formal specialised trainings like courses in NTA Television College in the area of television production are rather expensive and beyond the reach of average civil servants struggling to survive on low wages.

### **The TV Taraba Experience**

Taraba Television Corporation was established on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1993. It got its legal backing through the enactment of *Taraba State Edict No. 2 of 1995*, the same year it was licensed by National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). The station transmits from the state capital (Jalingo) on Channel 22 UHF and Bali (Booster station) on Channel 25 UHF, at a frequency of 479.25MHZ. They transmit on 20 and 10 KW solid state transmitters, respectively. The signal covers most parts of the state and reaches parts of neighbouring Adamawa, Gombe and Plateau States. The estimated population of the State is put at above two million, while over 600,000 households are claimed to have television sets (Kundu 2). TV Taraba has a high viewership primarily due to its culture of detailed news and the contents of its programmes, many of which are local and people-based (Ukwen 36). Prior to the proliferation of cable TV, particularly in Jalingo metropolis, TV Taraba was popular among the viewing population and they keenly followed local programmes.

Taraba Television has had its fair share of romance with financial challenges of running the station. This can be adduced to many factors primary among which is the little or no access to adequate power supply to operate the production and transmission equipment of the station. It took a while following the creation of the state on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1991 for Jalingo, the state capital to be connected to the national grid. Electricity was a challenge for businesses and households as the whole metropolis depended on power extension from Yola, headquarters of the neighbouring Adamawa state. Load-shedding



was the practice and irregular power supply was a major setback for a growing city experiencing rapid rural-urban migration which expectedly overstretches facilities. Even then, the transmission station, located outside the metropolis near Mallum satellite village was not connected to the power line. The sole source of power was a diesel-powered generating plant which was expectedly difficult to maintain. Their income sources range from paid news, local adverts, domestic sponsored programmes and adverts of companies syndicated to them by advert firms based in Lagos. The organisation, like other government ministries in the state ideally gets a monthly funding for its running but these are far from regular. Again, it is mandated to meet a certain revenue generation target which is remitted into the government's treasury.

The commitment of the current administration of Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku to reposition the television and radio organisations in Taraba State translated to an accelerated procurement and installation of new equipment for the two stations. TV Taraba now has a newly constructed virtual studio in addition to its news studio as well as state of the art facilities that make live shows and automated transmission possible. TV Taraba now transmits for an average of eighteen (18) hours on Star Times platform and broadcasts on Channel 113. This runs concurrently with existing UHF channels transmission, making it possible for viewers without Star Times receivers to also watch the station's programmes. Presently, the transmitter house and studios are the only structures presently located on its fenced permanent site where uncompleted office structures stand as a proof of the wide gap between planning and execution. The administrative base of the station remains within Jalingo city centre on Barde Way at the foot of a hill that housed its first transmitter when it began operation in 1993. It is from here that operational staff who run three shifts, converge and are transported by a staff bus, which shuttles between the two points at specified times.

### **Economic Recession and the Challenges of TV Programmes Production**

In mid-2016, Nigeria's economy slid into recession when growth figures between April and June showed a contraction of 2.06%. The oil industry, heavily relied upon, turned downwards the fortunes against Nigeria when crude oil prices fell from \$114 per barrel in 2014 to \$50 in 2016 – the source that accounts for 70% of the country's revenue (Martin 1). The warnings by experts for diversifying the economy and relying less on oil revenue became a stark reality for Nigeria, a country with bright opportunities in agriculture – the first driver of its economy prior to the oil boom in 1960s. Martin further observes that, a related cause of the recession was the fall in Nigeria's currency, the naira, which was allowed to flow freely as a means of kick-starting the economy, an action many critics said was delayed. The effect was a rise in cost of goods and services across the country, the ripple effect reaching every sector, the media inclusive. The rationing that set in as a result of the low funds allocated to public media organisations resulted in delayed or non-payment of workers' wages in many cases, dampening their morale. Creativity only struggles to thrive in such atmosphere thus leading to an inversely proportional low output particularly in public media organisations.

As the economic recession takes its toll on the various sectors, the public media houses ought to strategise and face the onslaught with creative responses to remain afloat.

The experience of economic recession in the US forced some weak television stations to adopt a survival strategy by sharing reporters, Television anchors, news footages etc, after laying off most of their staff (Stelter 1). Though they compete for viewers, the stations had an agreement where they collaborate in various ways to cut cost and maximise profit. The viewers watch news on different stations but find that the sources of the video sections are from the same camera and the scripts are identical – an evidence that the stations maintain a technically separate ownership but share their content. In some Nigerian public media houses, there existed a culture of programme exchange among Television stations especially in the Northern parts of the country. For example, TV Taraba had exchanged its Hausa drama productions, *Hausa Bakwai*, with Bauchi Radio and Television (BRTV) and Plateau Radio and Television (PRTV), as well as traditional dances. This strategy, in addition to expanding the programme base of the stations, was an attempt at enhancing appreciation for cultures and strengthening bonds of unity across states of the federation (Okonwo 25). The creativity of the producers, artists and technical crew of the various stations were avenues to learn from and prompt improvement by positive challenge.

The development in the television industry and the changing expectation of viewers calls for pragmatic responses on the part of key players. From the onset, the television industry was positioned for phenomenal growth as Umeh observed that so many television stations were established between 1960 and 1980, giving viewers in the Western states and Lagos options of at least twelve stations to choose from (12). This development meant competition for viewership and the quality of programmes and news determined the station's popularity. Today, such competition is on the increase, giving viewers options to numerous local and international television stations for news and entertainment across the globe. Domestic television stations therefore have the burden of promoting local content for consumption for local and international audience and at the same time achieving certain standards to meet global expectation. The challenges require practical action on the part of the media organisations, programme producers and content providers. It is no longer realistic to rely on the traditional ways of achieving results in terms of television programme production. Public media organisations ought to look beyond what has been in practice and explore lucrative avenues to meet revenue demands of their sponsors. Producers, presenters, camera operators and film editors should not only be trained but motivated to aim for professionalism.

Cheap foreign programme content strangles the promotion of local content as Betiang notes that, “the low motivation of government-employed TV producers and hard-to-come-by sponsorship encourage this over-dependence on foreign programmes that are of course cheaper and easier to acquire than local culturally relevant productions”(10). One major challenge is the funding to produce a programme. In the course of in-depth interviews with producers, the study found that they are under obligation to produce programmes without regard for how they will achieve the goal. Here is a typical scenario: A producer signs out a camera from the office for a specified period, perhaps two hours within which it must be returned for another producer waiting on cue to also use. Limited by time, he/she is forced to work within that window and accept whatever is obtainable in the circumstance; no room to be creative or explore other opportunities to garnish the work. Now consider the cameraman (who the producer has the burden of transporting to

location), a part-time staff who perhaps has not received allowances in three months. He/she is armed with a camera without a tripod, doing the assignment as routine and under coercion rather than passion which result in generally poor visuals. In any case, as it is often quipped in performance parlance, “the show must go on”. This is only a scenario in a range of possible challenges encountered in the course of programmes production in public media organisations. It takes a resilient team to dare the odds and come up with what may be judged a poor production without consideration for the factors responsible for the output.

In another instance, local children programmes that can match popular animations that are trending today are feasible but will require huge resources to achieve. Public television stations are battling with major challenges of finance to operate their stations and remain on air and will hardly consider training producers on animation and also procure the necessary equipment. It will be a touch of variety and cognitive development for children to produce and air children’s programme with animation of characters reflecting the local environment, familiar names and situations. Viewers in other parts of the globe who tune in will also have much to learn and appreciate about Nigeria’s varieties of local programmes but this will only happen if the programmes have the requisite quality to sustain their attention.

These samples bring to the fore the realities that stare domestic programme producers in the face. Looking at this plethora of challenges, it is tempting to attempt justifying the programme output of public media organisations due to the existing conditions surrounding production. However, stepping into the global field of play in terms of media operations via the digital platform means unrestricted access to domestic programmes by viewers across the world thus the need to key into the system. It is no longer acceptable to compromise technical quality of domestic programmes for any reason since the stations now have a global audience. They should seek collaboration with content producers and consultants who also need to expand their scope to reach out to local stations and sell contents at affordable rates for mutual profit.

## **Conclusion**

The forgone assessment focused on baring the challenges faced by producers in public media houses as it relates to producing programmes to meet the needs of the media houses in the face of transition from analogue to digital broadcasting. Television broadcasting requires substantial financial commitment, machinery and experienced people to handle the complex technology and organisation involved particularly expertise for the digital revolution. However, public media houses are at the mercy of fiscal allocations that are irregular, low or even non-existent. Depending on such sources are unlikely to grant them opportunities to maximise their potentials and meet up with the global competition in the digital broadcasting market. Consequently, this paper recommends the following:

- a) Public media stations should explore alternative sources to raise funds to train staff, procure equipment, exchange programmes and motivate their producers to improve the quality of programmes that will attract the right audience and corresponding revenue through paid adverts and retainership.

- b) Independent media experts (including professional serving staffs and retired officers) should widen their horizon to see the business opportunities in content production to sell programmes for broadcast to media houses.
- c) Government at the federal and state levels should create enabling environment and particularly boost entrepreneurship through friendly loans to enable aspiring content producers procure and own television programmes production facilities.

The thinking is that adopting the above key considerations for the media industry, among others, will enable public media houses to have an edge in this digitisation revolution.

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# HARNESSING THE POTENTIALS OF DOCUMENTARY FILM IN THE FACE OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC RECESSION

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## **Abstract**

*The world of film is broadly split into two types: the feature/fiction and the documentary genres. It is, however, the former that readily comes to mind whenever the subject of film is raised. The documentary incidentally is the less known notwithstanding that it is the older of the two. Indeed, the documentary film is the type of film that should be harnessed for its potentials in addressing human problems everywhere. The reason is that the documentary is closer to the needs of man as a film of fact; as a genre that addresses the challenges which confront humanity in the course of daily living. It is for this reason that this paper is embarked upon in order to enlighten humanity on how the documentary can be employed to address the problems of global economic recession and bring relief to mankind, with special focus on Nigeria. It will also provide reasons for the relegation of the genre by practitioners and scholars alike. The paper concludes that if the documentary is given even 5 percent of the attention given to the feature film, humanity would be economically, socially, politically, spiritually and culturally better off and would therefore, be able to cope with economic recession.*

## **Introduction**

Man by nature is a being prone to disbelief and doubt. In all things, he wants to be convinced beyond reasonable doubt before he can allow himself to be taken in. The only exception to this is, perhaps, in matters of religion, where faith all too soon takes the place of logical reasoning. But both faith and reason tend to desert man when he is confronted with visual reality: the evidence of his own eyes. Prior to improvement of technology and the evolution of photo shopping, we were made to believe that “photographs do not lie”. In other words, what one has seen with one’s two eyes can neither be faulted nor be a lie. All that now, is past. The digital era has made nonsense of reality because as the saying goes, in the world of film, impossibility is nothing, creativity is everything and this covers both the documentary and the feature/fiction genre. This paper makes a case for the documentary, however, hinging it on the focal point or objective of the filmmaker for embarking on the project. In other words, a documentary filmmaker who sets out to project reality would succeed in spite of the manipulations of the camera or editing.

The theatre requires of its audience a willing suspension of disbelief while the film expects of its viewers a willing postponement of belief. This is because both media have the capacity to distort reality. Their fares are more fiction than fact. The documentary on

the other hand, is a film genre, which specialises in reality. Indeed, one could say that where the feature film employs the figurative language, the documentary uses literal language. It uses the unembellished everyday language, the language of news to put its message across. This is because, the truth like good wine, needs no bush. Thus, this paper looks at ways in which the factual elements of the documentary as a film of fact can be harnessed to advantage in the face of the present day global economic recession. The premise of the paper, therefore, is that the documentary film, when properly utilised, given the avenues for its use in Nigeria, is in a better position to help us overcome the problems of global economic recession provided the filmmaker does not allow the opportunities for distorting reality becloud his focus.

One of the reasons for this submission arises from the fact that the documentary film endeavours to adhere as much as possible to reality, not using professional actors nor engaging professional studios to narrate its experience. Above all, the documentary strives to be faithful to its subject notwithstanding the few instances where it deviates from actuality like in trying to recreate the life and times of a dead man, or someone not immediately accessible for camera appearance. The selling point is that there is a very high degree of actuality in employing the documentary to narrate a story. This is clearly unlike the fiction/feature film where the entire narrative from conception of the idea to screening is almost entirely and wholly based on imagination and where the filmmaker is in complete control. The documentary filmmaker strives for faithful depiction of reality and this gives him an edge in credibility over his fiction filmmaker counterpart.

### **Definition of Concepts**

Hyginus Ekwuazi, notes that the basic difference between drama/feature film and the documentary is that the former, “even if and when based on actuality, is acted”. He goes on to say:

The documentary is based wholly and entirely on actuality. For, essentially, the documentary contains the real words of real persons (or their writings, published and unpublished, including letters if they are not living or cannot possibly be reached and there is, no record of their voices), the moving pictures of their actions (or photos and drawings if films or video tape is unavailable or if they lived before motion pictures) and, concomitantly, the sounds and visuals of real events. The documentary documents actualities (14-15).

From the foregoing, one can see that unlike the feature film whose central focus is entertainment and which draws its materials from imaginative and creative manipulation of reality; the documentary film is wholly and essentially concerned with actuality. Indeed, even when exigencies dictate a leaning towards dramatisation, all such concerns are incidental. The focus is to be as true as possible to life and to this end every effort is made to reduce to a negligible extent, any trappings of fiction. Again, no matter the manipulations, no actor can imitate to the minutest details the dancing patterns of say, Michael Jackson. The movements can be followed, but not the exact gestures, facial

expressions and vocal nuances, among others, which no two people can have in every detail. Drawing from Paul Madsen, Ekwuazi, gives various definitions of the documentary film as follows:

- a) A creative treatment of reality.
- b) A selective dramatisation of facts in terms of their human consequence.
- c) A film, usually non-fiction in which the elements of dramatic conflict are provided by ideas and political or economic forces.
- d) Documentary films are defined as those that deal with historical, social, scientific, or economic subjects, either photographed in actual occurrence or re-enacted, and where the emphasis is more on factual content than on entertainment.
- e) Documentary films are those which reproduce life in all its manifestation- the life of man, of animals, of nature- without the assistance of professional actors or studios and on condition that the film represents a free artistic creation. We are led to name this genre film of facts (15).

The above definitions are self-explanatory and all point to the fact that documentary film concentrates more on actuality than entertainment. Also, while not dispensing with entertainment or creativity, all efforts are channelled towards projecting facts over and above other elements. This perhaps accounts for why many film makers stir clear of it. The fact is that unlike the feature film where the director has control over all the stages of production, in the documentary film, the director's degree of control is quite minimal, even negligible. This is because the filmmaker is dealing with real life. For instance, at a wedding, the priest says to the groom: "You may kiss the bride". If the groom merely gives a peck to the bride, he (the groom), cannot be asked to "take it again", as it obtains in film directing. The documentary filmmaker is not striving for perfection of the action where everyday errors are discountenanced. Indeed, if the subject has speech impairment, he is recorded, warts and all.

Having dispensed with the definition of the documentary film, we now turn our attention to economic recession. Recession literally means "a temporary economic decline during which trade and industrial activity are reduced". Indeed, one would say that economic recession is a time during which the economy of a nation experiences a temporary menopause, retardation or in the Nigerian parlance, the economy goes through a "go slow," which is a traffic gridlock. If it is on a global scale, then it's a global economic paralysis where the values of global currencies do not measure up with the value of purchase. It necessarily affects all segments of the society, political, social, religious, cultural, etc. since they are all prone to the vagaries of the capital market economy. Life itself becomes traumatic because neither capital, nor materials are enough. Everything seems to be in a kind of dormant state. Even laughter becomes mirthless, as if one were mocking oneself.



## **Documentary Film and the Economy**

The media in all forms have direct effect on the economy and are also influenced by the economy. Indeed, economic factors universally drive the media and are in their turn affected by the media. The MacBride Commission submits that:

Both in its structure and its content, communication intermeshes with, and is dependent on, the economy in many ways. A constant flow of information is vital for economic life. As well as being a great economic force, with incalculable potentials, it is a decisive factor in development. As an element of increasing importance in all national economies, communication represents a growing segment of a country's gross national product and has direct repercussions on productivity and employment (23-24).

When properly harnessed, the media through communication which is their forte and focal point of relevance through their watchdog role, call attention to those areas of need which are of particular relevance to economic growth. This is particularly true of the documentary film one of whose definitions already cited under item (d) of definition of concepts reveals that, it "deals with the historical, social, scientific or economic forces". And because the genre functions to solve today's problems today; it is of great significance to the economy. This is because through research the documentary film maker discovers those aspects of a people's life which need exposure, attention, projection and of general interest. For instance, the vexed issue of female genital mutilation has engendered both feature fiction films as well as documentaries in the bid to correct the anomaly. The same is true of the Human Immune Virus (HIV) and its affiliate, the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other related health issues.

No doubt, the feature fiction film has the power to do twice the job of the documentary but it lacks that factual plausibility of the documentary. One can echo Robert Maurer, a clinical psychologist, cited in Kondazian, when he observes:

Art has played a powerful and unrecognized role in the history of the world. I think the major motivation for people to be artists, and it can sometimes get complicated and/or corrupted, is this powerful need to express their spirits. There is a passionate need to be creative, to be expressive, to be seen and heard (xiv).

The above statement is particularly true of the documentary, which has a high tendency to be abandoned once it has achieved its purpose. However, because of the desire, a passionate one at that, to be heard, to express oneself and be creative, the documentary has continued to survive. Also, there is the danger of its being corrupted through the desire to be creative or unconsciously manipulative of the material, it can be abused. But this desire is usually suppressed for the higher goal and desire to be factual, to tell it as it is, which is how the documentary genre works.

The documentary film functions like the news media. It ferrets out human interest concerns especially those which border on development and sustainability of human life and brings them to the domain of national and international attention for the overall benefit of humanity. This is one of the strong areas of the documentary genre, to bring issues to public attention. It more or less exhumes abandoned and or, neglected areas of human interest and brings them to public domain so that such issues can be discussed. For instance, the issue of the dying Nigerian languages or the education of the girl-child would be of concern to a documentary filmmaker. These are necessarily discovered through careful research.

Such aspects of culture that have the tendency to be explored for cultural tourism like the source of River Ethiope in Abraka, Delta State, the Osun Oshogbo grove in Osun State, the Biafran Airstrip and Ojukwu Bunker in Abia and Imo States, respectively, or festivals which dot the length and breadth of Nigeria; mega churches that attract religious tourists, the famous Obudu Ranch in Cross River State, among others are a tip of the iceberg of the areas which engender documentary films. All the places of interest mentioned above when subjected to the documentary film process, help to add to the economy thus making it more viable. Besides exposing such places to global attention, it helps in no small way to add to the socio-economic growth and development in all aspects of the life of the community where they are domiciled or take place if festivals. The documentary filmmaker is like a journalist. He brings to public attention the human interest subjects in all their variety into sharp focus. He does what the journalist does in news selection. Thus, he is very careful in his choice of subjects to treat. Herein lies the merit of the documentary film over the feature: that the natural locations remain the same, the people live their lives without the assistance of professionals, things are done in their natural order without recourse to distortion, all dependent on the goal of the filmmaker though.

It is important at this point to discuss how the documentary film can be used to tackle global economic recession and be of benefit to both national and global economy. It has been posited here that the documentary film is concerned with tackling human interest issues and endeavours to project such issues which are of immediate relevance; the issues of now. How does the documentary do this? We noted that the major technique is through the use of research. Thus, having discovered people, events or places of interest or issues of general concern such as the endemic fuel scarcity and subsequent price hike and protests which follow it; the documentary film maker latches on it and places it on the front burner. Not stopping there, the 'documentarist' would proffer suggestions for solution which when adopted by the stakeholders would put paid to such problem if not permanently, then temporary relief would be given. In this way, the economy gains as life would return to normal. Fuel or premium motor spirit (PMS) would then be available at affordable price and for vehicular, business and domestic uses as well.

The issue of religious/evangelical tourism is gaining ground globally. Nigeria hosts the largest religious congregations/crusades in Black Africa. The glamorous life styles of the resident pastors and "men and women of God" who control these churches are enough and good subjects for documentary. The documentary filmmaker can interrogate the impact of these pastors and their teachings on their members, the community where

they are domiciled and the entire Nigerian even African society. Some of these Pastors have questionable live styles; employ suspicious methods/techniques for healing and miracles, among other behaviours which deserve investigation. The social media are replete with the antics of these pastors and *Sahara Reporters* are always carrying information on them – from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, and other African countries. These reports can be further investigated by the documentary filmmaker. If the investigations are positive and these pastors are seen to be true men and women of God, the documentary on them can help boost membership as more converts would join the churches and this means more money from the various money generating programmes of the church.

For one, if their methods are healthy, people can be encouraged to invest in them and if otherwise, they channel their investment financial, spiritual and physical elsewhere. This will also help in the economic well-being of the individual who is equally a member of the global community as well as the overall society.

Other places of interest like the source of the beautiful and clear Ethiopia River in Abraka and the Turf Club, also in Abraka, are decidedly subjects of interest for the documentary filmmaker as earlier noted. When the documentary filmmaker calls attention to them; he raises awareness to their tourist potentials. The response from such attention would lead to investment and tourist presence which would reduce the effect and impact of the economic recession. The McCarthy Beach and Abraka River Resort are always besieged by tourists and people seeking recreational and relaxation outlets during the dry season. These are pure avenues for the ‘documentarist’ to contribute his quota to the issue of economic recession as people would come from all walks of life to enjoy the offerings from these national phenomena.

Again, some aspects of religious worship like the African Traditional Religion (ATR) deserve attention from the documentary filmmaker for several reasons. In the first instance, African traditional religions like Igbe, Ifa and Igo Mmuo practices need to be documented. Attention should be called to them in order to upgrade them both in terms of removing what is objectionable in them and infusing into them modern acceptable practices. Ifa worship for example, is practiced all over the world, United States of America, Brazil, Spain, North America and, other parts of the world. Its headquarters is situated in Yoruba land and it attracts thousands of adherents universally and has engendered much academic and scholarly interest. The documentary filmmaker can latch onto its established reputation which revolves around the festive period of Osun Oshogbo and give it more creative and artistic colouration that will boost its economic potentials. This in turn would help to reduce the economic recession as more money would come into the state and its environs. Also, the documentary itself, if well packaged, can be sold out to television houses both nationally and globally.

The documentary as a medium should be encouraged because it is our nearest visual record of history and social reality which has credibility in terms of faithfulness to reality. We cannot depend on the feature film to give us a faithful reconstruction of history that can be plausible and acceptable. Notwithstanding the many buffetings the documentary has received from all quarters, it has continued to survive, which is on its own evidence of its uniqueness. As Hyginus Ekwuazi has noted:

And today, though stunted, the documentary has continued to grow, thanks, largely, to the combination of the following structural factors: a fast growing television industry; a steady growth in the number of independent television/film producers and directors; and the growth in the number of polytechnics and universities where the documentary is a vital complement to the courses in broadcasting and film (286).

Nigeria is a multilingual society. Language is not only a vital part of culture; it is also a major purveyor of culture. Thus, the over five hundred languages in Nigeria represent over four hundred distinct cultures each of which has a crying need to be relevant. One major way to achieve this relevance therefore, is through the deployment of the documentary film genre to ensure their survival and relevance. This is a challenge which documentary filmmakers can focus on, especially those from the affected cultural/language cache.

Beyond the languages, each of these cultures also has a unique festival, ceremony or landmark, which needs national awareness and thence global attention. For example, in Imo State, the Oguta Lake Resort, the Nekede Zoo, and the Mbari Centre, as a symbol of a community's dwelling place for their gods, are attractions for tourists and further enlightenment for the people. In Bauchi, the Yankari Games Reserve; in Kano, the erstwhile Groundnut Pyramids; in Sokoto, the Emir's Palace; in Enugu, the abandoned coal mining sites, among others, are good for historical documentation and deserve a second look to discover how those things functioned or function; how the natural phenomena among them can be gainfully utilised or how the other unexplored aspects of the people's lifestyles can be made to yield the good in them. These are all avenues through which the documentary filmmaker can help in generating interest and create jobs and thereby whittle down the impact of the economic recession. Every effort made in creating jobs is a positive step that impacts on the economy. One does not have to carry the entire universe on one's shoulders to make positive contribution to the society.

Again, the documentary is a veritable source of creating awareness on health related issues. Such health challenges as STDS, sickle cell anaemia, genotype, female genital mutilation; all sorts of violence to humanity, environmental cleanliness, are all areas which the documentary has employed and needs to employ to impact on the consequences of global economic recession. This is because even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, young people still get married without recourse to checking their genotypes. Only recently, this author lost a relation a week after his wedding. The young man was a sickle cell carrier and the stress of the wedding must have had serious negative effect on his psyche and thus led to his death. This was one avoidable death if only proper care had been taken to address his health challenges or even prevent the parents from dabbling into marriage when they were unaware of their genotype status.

A documentary on sickle cell anaemia and genotype with their attendant health challenges, if properly packaged and circulated, would go a long way to create awareness and reduce their negative consequences. A healthy person contributes to the societal well-being in productive terms materially, psychologically, intellectually, and so on. A person who is battling with his life in terms of good health would be so preoccupied with how to

survive the next day that he would not find anything outside his health concerns interesting. A good documentary would proffer suggestions on how to avoid the pitfalls from such health issues.

Governments in the bid to make statement of relevance and bear witness to themselves in terms of their achievements use the documentary and thus empower people economically. In the “Foreword” to *Delta State: The Ibori Years – Events and Achievements*, produced by Delta State Ministry of Information, Okubor captures the basis for the various governments’ involvement in the documentary whether for the screen or print, when he says:

The production of this work arose from a desire to chronicle pictorially in one publication, the highlights of the activities over an eight-year period, in order to provide posterity a rational basis for correctly assessing the administration now and in the future and accord it its proper place in history. The publication’s purpose is therefore, two-fold: first, to capture in a nutshell, most of the numerous landmark accomplishments of the Ibori-led government in the hope that succeeding administrations will draw from this, the impetus to seek to excel too in their service to the people for whom a record has now been set below which performance they will find totally unacceptable (6).

He says that the second reason was to have the publication as “a keep-sake”, from an administration that was leaving office and desirous of being remembered. And this, no doubt, has been one of the main reasons for the continued survival of the documentary film genre in Nigeria at least: The desire of governments to wish to be remembered. And this is even when they made no laudable policies or impacted on the people. They still want to be remembered! And how much more handy the documentary would come if the government did something worth remembering!

Marcel Okhakhu provides one of the reasons for the use of the documentary in his article on “The Use of Mobile Cinema in Promoting Health Issues in Nigeria”. According to him:

In the area of malaria, the exercise was also an eye opener. As old and prevalent as malaria is in Nigeria, it is frightening to note that in some communities, people still do not know that dirty environments produce congenial habits for the growth of the mosquito larva which – ultimately produces mosquitoes, the carrier of malaria disease. However, the information on the treated mosquito nets was received and enthusiasm was generated among the people for this anti-malaria product (21).

From Okhaku’s work, one could see one of the functions of the documentary which is to address today’s problems today. And having shot the documentary on a given social problem, the mobile cinema furthers the effort through screening by taking the problem straight to those concerned. As in the case above, having known the negative consequences

of an unclean environment, the people embrace the change that ultimately leads to better and healthier living, hence of longevity, greater productivity and a boost in the economy.

### **Conclusion**

The documentary as a film genre that is quite amenable to handling issues of social, economic, cultural, even religious relevance has been explored in terms of its potentials in whittling down the challenges posed by global economic recession. The various areas where the genre can come in handy were also highlighted.

In all that has been said, the documentary film was seen as a genre that is close to addressing human concerns in terms of providing solutions. This is because filmmakers are free to dabble into any areas of man's need in order to bring them to global attention for solutions. By pointing out such neglected yet significant aspects of man's desires, the nation is spared unnecessary expenses as lives would be saved and productivity enhanced. With increase in productivity made possible by good health, national, even global economic recession would be drastically reduced if not eradicated over time. Moreover, a documentary on the supposedly volatile areas, which are made so by media reports rather than what reality holds, can help allay the security concerns in such places. For instance, Warri in Delta state has been so negatively portrayed by the media as an enclave for militants thereby scaring away foreign investors. The same applies to other parts of the country where such security concerns are evinced.

The documentary is best suited to achieving this end because of its plausibility, credibility and allegiance to the truth. The truth of the documentary is substantiated by the fact that it makes the people see where they have faulted as in the case of the causes of malaria among others. Thus, conviction is achieved because the people are witnesses to their own actions.

### **Recommendations**

- a) Arising from the foregoing, the following recommendations if adopted could help in using the documentary film to assist in solving the problem of economic recession in Nigeria and elsewhere where such issues of concern rear their heads.
- b) Government should invest in the documentary film beyond using it to sing political and personal praises by focusing on areas which would have national interest such as festivals of the various communities that are relevant and have economic potentials.
- c) Researchers especially staff of the various cultural ministries can be engaged to ferret out such subjects of interest in order to ensure their continued preservation.
- d) Governments and individuals, even corporate bodies, can sponsor documentaries to allay the fears of insecurity in states and areas where the media have painted negative pictures of security. This would help to counter such negative reports and portray the real image.
- e) Media houses, especially government-owned ones like Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and state-owned ones can be mandated to air such documentaries when produced.

- f) The films can serve as avenues for cultural exchange and diplomacy with other nations of the world hence conscious effort and defined objective should be the watch words in their packaging.
- g) Documentaries should be made to highlight the positive aspects of our culture with emphasis on our hospitality, security, regard for other human beings and above all, the mutual co-existence inherent in our multi-ethnic relationships.

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# **SUBVERTING ECONOMIC RECESSION IN NIGERIA THROUGH STERLING DESIGN IN THEATRE PRACTICE: THE VENDOR, AKSU 2017 COMMAND PERFORMANCE IN FOCUS**

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## **Abstract**

*From its inception through its deferent ages, theatre practice has been highly identified with its enormous contributions to the sustainable development of a given country or nation though not readily acknowledged by some, perhaps due to their bias perception of the arts in favour of the sciences and engineering. This research endeavour on "Subverting Economic Recession in Nigeria Through Sterling Design in Theatre Practice" is aimed at bringing to the limelight the need for the wealthy citizens, the private sector as well as the government of Nigeria to get involved in the sponsorship of theatrical activities in furtherance of sterling design in theatre practice. This would in turn enhance audience patronage thereby invigorating the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as the Gross National Product (GNP) of Nigeria to the extent of subverting economic recession in the country. In doing justice to this topic, both the primary and the secondary sources of data collection were utilized. At the end, the conclusion that economic recession in Nigeria could be subverted through sterling design in theatre practice in furtherance of improved standard of performance and by extension improved audience patronage as well as improved gross domestic product was arrived at. Sequel to the above postulation, this research recommends that there should be joint sponsorship of theatre activities between the private sector, the wealthy citizens and the government in Nigeria.*

## **Introduction**

The economy of any country of the world is highly dependent on the various activities of the citizens of that country. These activities are usually grouped as either Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Product (GNP). While Gross Domestic Product (GDP) refers to the total values of goods produced as well as the total services provided in a



country within a specified period of time, the Gross National Product (GNP) on the other hand refers to the total value of goods and services produced and provided by a given country plus the net income from foreign investments within a specified period. These may be assessed either quarterly or yearly. This is regarded as the “best way to measure a country’s economy” (<https://www.thebalance.com>). In Nigeria, the activities in theatre practice in which Theatre Design and Technology forms a significant part contribute immensely to both the GDP and GNP of our dear country.

Since Nigeria gained her independence in 1960, the country has witnessed different economic experiences through mixed regimes of military and civilian rules. The present government came into power on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 2015. Within the period of two years, the country has experienced severe economic hardship that has resulted in what is generally referred to as, “recession”, in economics parlance. The survey of world theatre shows that from the inception to the contemporary era, it is quite glaring that theatre practice has contributed immensely to the economy of different countries in diverse ways. Theatre practice is noted to be a virile tool of liberation, employment and wealth creation. It is a veritable agent of subverting economic recession through its veracity in presentation, hence the significance of this study.

### **The Concept of Economic Recession**

The world is filled with ups and downs; a time of plenty and a time of need. Economic recession therefore is not in any way a strange word in English vocabulary. A close examination of the concept of economic recession reveals that the concept is made up of two key words – *economic* and *recession*. Economic as a word has to do with trade, industry and the activities relating to the management of money within a given society. Recession on the other hand, relates to a difficult time in a country when there are less trade, investment and other business activities.

Based on the above discussion, the concept of economic recession can be seen to refer to the period of a significant decline in general economic activities in a country. Economic recession therefore refers to:

A period of general economic decline and is typically accompanied by a drop in the stock market, an increase in unemployment, and a decline in the housing market. Generally, a recession is less severe than a depression. The blame for a recession generally falls on the federal leadership, often either the President himself, the head of the Federal Reserve, or the entire administration (<http://www.linkedin.com>).

During the period of economic recession, the citizens face a whole lot of hardship due to the level of inflationary rate. Economic recession is always caused by some factors as enumerated below.

## **Causes of Economic Recession**

In any given society, economic recession is hinged on certain factors and some of the causes of economic recession are high interest rates and increased inflation resulting in general rise in the prices of goods and services over a period of time (<http://www.linkedin.com>). Amongst the known causes of economic recession also include difficult economic policies resulting in decline foreign investment and low economic activities. This is the case in Nigeria from 2015 till 2018 in which the country is still struggling to grapple with the phenomenon.

## **Economic Recession in Nigeria**

Economic recession in Nigeria set in after the change in the mantle of leadership at the federal level in 2015. The new Federal Government that took over leadership in 2015 changed policies and structures to conform to the policies of the party and this consciously or unconsciously resulted in economic recession that has lasted till date in 2018. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), a recession is defined as, “a significant decline in economic activities spread across the economy lasting more than a few months, normally visible in a real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale – retail sales” ([www.educinfo.com](http://www.educinfo.com)). Based on this fact, and considering the duration in which all these indications and factors of recession have prevailed in Nigeria, one is therefore correct to say, without equivocation that there is economic recession in Nigeria but the question is, how do we subvert this economic recession in Nigeria?

However, before an attempt is made to proffer answers to the above question, it is worthwhile to examine the concept of design in theatre practice, the different areas of theatre design and technology, the relevance of technical aids in theatre practice as well as how to subvert economic recession in Nigeria through sterling design in theatre practice.

## **Design and Technology in Theatre Practice**

In contemporary theatre practice, theatre design and technology occupies an esteemed position as it plays salient roles in aesthetic and mood creation as well as the revelation of the setting of the play thereby adding value to theatre practice, communicating volume to the audience. Let us now examine the concept of design for clarification.

### ***Design***

Design as a word in isolation attracts a good number of meanings to itself depending on the user's intention. Generally speaking, design is a problem solver because it is “the creation of a plan or convention for the construction of an object, system or measurable human interaction” (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>). In this sense, design is seen as the planning and making of decisions about something that is to be created or built. It is based on this understanding that Jacob asserts that, “design is a concept that has attracted momentous attention, because virtually all the facets of the economy make use of it in one way or the other” (277).

Design therefore is an art of purposeful planning for an intended result, that is, “the purposeful visualisation and planning on how something is to be made or done” (Jacob 2).

In theatre practice however, Olaide opines that design is contextual because of “the context of its use in that the designer is faced with that problem his design is supposed to solve: for whom and at what point in time?” (102)

What this means is that in theatre practice, all the technical aids applied for diverse purposes are the products of design of one form or the other. Without the product of design, theatre practice would be virtually impossible and meaningless. In this contemporary theatre practice, design is closely aided by technology as examined below:

### **Technology**

Technology generally is concerned with the application of scientific knowledge for practical purpose with a view to solving an identified problem. Technology is “the purposeful application of information in design, production, and utilisation of goods and services, in the organisation of human activities (<https://www.useoftechnology.com>). Etymologically, Ibe-Bassey says that “technology derives its name from Greek and Latin words. Greek form, ‘techne’ and ‘logos’, referring to the ‘study of art/craft’. Latin form, ‘texere’, referring to ‘weave/construct’. Most of us erroneously believe that technology involves machines and men. Far from it, rather it refers to any practical art using scientific knowledge (5). This is perhaps the reason why the five specialised areas of theatre practice that constitute the technical aids are intertwined with design and technology as examined thus:

### **The Different Areas of Theatre Design (Technical Aids)**

Theatre practice mostly in this modern (contemporary) era revolves strongly around the efficacy and potency of design and technology. The design and technological application in theatre practice is generally referred to as, the “Technical Aids”. Speaking comprehensively on the issue of technical aids, Ododo asserts:

Technical aids are elements used in theatrical presentation usually to give depth and meaning to the artistic fare. These are either manually, electronically or mechanically employed. They include stage set and property, lighting, sound, effects, costumes and make-up. Though essentially visual elements, where meaningfully handled with the oral aspects of theatre production, they help the understanding of the audience apart from their aesthetic values (154).

From the words of Ododo above, technical aids are quite essential in theatre practice. Examining the virility of these components, Jacob opines that:

All different areas of technical theatre are welded to the concept of design. This is why design as a concept is attached to all of them. These different areas of technical theatre are:

Scene /set design  
Lighting design  
Sound design

Costume design  
Make-up design (*An Introduction to Theatrical Design 2*).

It should be noted that the above five (5) mentioned different areas of technical theatre practice though seemingly independent, are professionally synergized because the success of one area is highly dependent on the effective functionality of others, hence Parker, Wolf and Block say, “many things influence the form of a final design for the theatre..., however, design does not stand alone.... The preparation of any production requires the close cooperation and collaboration of many specialists” (7).

The above five (5) recognised different areas of technical theatre practice are briefly examined for the purpose of comprehension thus:

### **Scene /Set Design**

In the design process of theatre practice, scene/set design seems to command priority because every performer needs space to exhibit his/her actions. Irrespective of the style of production adopted, this performance space must be consciously, intentionally and deliberately arranged to conform to the nature or style of the performance as well as the overall production objectives. This intentional and purposeful arrangement of the performance space for the performers is simply referred to as scene/set design.

Based on this exposition, Asomba opines that “scene design is the art of conceptualising, planning or conceiving suitable environment to house a dramatic action. A dramatic environment in this context is the totality of all pieces of sceneries including stage properties that culminate in defining the locality of the action” (6). Examining scene design and the designer in detail, Wilson expounds:

The scene designer creates the visual world in which a play unfolds. Together with the playwright and the director, the scene designer determines whether the scene is realistic or in the realm of fantasy. He or she decides on the colour, the shapes, the visual style which the spectators view and the actors inhabit. The set indicates the kind of world we are in – outdoors or indoors; an affluent environment or a humble one; a time period long ago, today, or in the future. When different locales are called for – in a play with an episodic structure, for instance – the scene designer must ensure that we move smoothly and quickly from one locale to another. Designer must deal with practical as well as aesthetic consideration. A scene designer must know in which direction a door should open on stage and how high each tread should be on a flight of stairs (279).

From the above discourse, it becomes quite clear that scene design is necessary in theatre practice as it determines how freely or otherwise the performers exhibit their actions. Besides this, scene design creates mood, aesthetics and visual metaphor for a given production.

## **Lighting Design**

After successfully determining the performance space taking into consideration the comfort of the performers, the next task before the design team is how to ensure perfect visibility by the audience members and realisation of the requisite special effects that relate to lighting. These fall within the ambience of lighting design in which the lighting designer is saddled with the responsibilities of actualising these objectives.

Pilbrow clearly asserts that, “Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig were the prophets of modern stage lighting and production” (14). Lighting design is an aspect of theatre practice that takes care of the task of ensuring that the actions of the performers are clearly seen by the audience members irrespective of where they sit in the auditorium. Without the activities of lighting design, theatre practice finds it difficult to actualise the set objectives. “A theatre lighting designer (or LD) works with the director, choreographer, set designer, costume designer, and sound designer to create the lighting atmosphere, and time of day for the production in response to the text, while keeping in mind issues of visibility, safety and cost” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/stage\\_lighting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/stage_lighting)).

Summarising the above, Wilson concisely says that the following are the primary functions and objectives of stage lighting:

- Provide visibility.
- Reveal shapes and forms.
- Provide a focus on stage and create visual composition.
- Assist in creating mood and reinforcing style.
- Help to establish time and place.
- Establish a rhythm of visual movement.
- Reinforce a central visual image (329).

Lighting design therefore is an important aspect of theatre practice and requires both the artistic and technical skills coupled with functional equipment, materials and tools for the actualisation of the production objectives.

## **Sound Design**

Sound design in theatre practice refers to the art of acquiring or generating, specifying and manipulating audio elements for theatrical productions taking into cognizance the holistic production objectives. It is the duty of a sound designer to generate and provide appropriately the required musical requirements as well as the requisite sound effects for a particular performance.

With the above postulation on sound, Robert D. Taylor and Robert D. Strickland, explain the basic functions in which sound fulfils in the theatre. They say that,

sound fulfils three distinct functions in the theatre: it amplifies speech, provides special effects, and supplies music to enhance the mood and meaning of a play. You can manipulate the sounds you produced by changing the tone, intensity, or balance of sound through the speakers (232).

Sound design in theatre practice therefore deals with the audio components of productions.

### **Costume Design**

Costume design is another very important area of technical theatre practical. Costume in theatre practice refers to what the actors or other performers put on during their presentation. Costumes range from exotic fabric and non-fabric materials worn by performers according to the requirements of the script. By this definition and by extension, costumes are so broad to cover even nudity in stage only if that nudity is what the script requires for a given action. Based on the above, Geddes and Grosset assert that costume is “a style of dress, especially belonging to a particular period, fashion, etc., clothes of an unusual or historical nature, as worn by actors in a play” (126).

In support of the above, Frank Whiting states that:

To one gifted with a knack for designing clothings, the theatre offers an exciting outlet, for stage costumes can be bold, colourful, and striking. They can display a theatrical flair, a dramatic imagination, and a streamlined simplification not possible in ordinary dress. In addition to a feeling for style in clothing, the costume designer must know period styles and be able to reflect character. Obviously, everything he does must spring from the needs of the play (206).

Also analysing costume as a salient component of theatre practice, Russell opines:

Costumes are the moving scenery of a production, and when worn by the actors, who are the centre of all dramatic action, they are the strongest elements of the visual scene; they project personality and individual motion and obtain the strongest audience focus. Costumes usually are the most pronounced accents of colour, line, and texture on stage (7).

From the above explanation, it is clear that costumes indicate both tone and style of a production. It also indicates the period and locale of a play. Costumes also identify status as well as personality among other notable functions of costumes. With sterling design in costume, the need of a given performance is likely to be met.

### **Make-Up Design**

On the list of the different areas of technical theatre is makeup design. Makeup in theatre practice refers to the cosmetics and other substances used on the face, hair, nails and other parts of the actor’s body during a performance in order to give the actor the required look in conformity with the spirit and the overall objectives of the performance. According to Griffiths,

Make-up can range from the grotesquely heavy to none at all and still be right for a particular production. There are four basic types of make-up:

straight, character, stylised and fantastic. Which of these is used depends completely on the show and the type of make-up will be decided upon as part of the show's overall style (127).

The above therefore means that a make-up designer is also expected to interpret and analyse the script based on the requirements. If properly applied, make-up, in collaboration with other technical elements are capable of enhancing the quality of theatrical performances in Nigeria in which when applied to specified storylines are capable of subverting economic recession.

### **Technological Implications in Theatre Practice**

As earlier on defined in this work, technology has to do with the application of scientific knowledge in the process of doing things or solving a problem. In theatre practice therefore, mostly in recent times, technology seems to occupy an esteemed position because virtually all the technical aids are technological oriented. In scene design, for instance, revolving scenery, multimedia, flying system, the art of measurement and scale drawing and so on all require the application of one form of technology or the other. In the same vein, lighting design is strongly linked to electrical engineering as it deals with electrical principles and theories like the Power Formula, Ohm's Law and Law of Charges. It also deals with electricity and distribution such as basic electricity, the electrical path, dimmers, circuitry, manual and computer control system, lighting instruments and colour perception among other technical issues.

Furthermore, sound design and technology is an integral aspect of physical science as it deals with sound and sound re-enforcement, the nature of sound, the issue of frequency and intensity, basic acoustic and acoustic balancing, basic sound system configuration as well as the sound system equipment and digital recording. All these and many others are domiciled within the ambience of science and technology as applied in theatre practice with immense implications

In costume design also, the technological implications are enormous beginning from the basic shop tools and equipment to both the fabrics and non fabric materials used in costume constructions. Fabric dyeing and painting also have technological implications in theatre practice. Finally, in makeup design, there are technological implications because the different types of makeup and makeup materials are chemically based. Makeup design and application also have technological implications with regard to the different types of makeup such as the cake makeup, the crème makeup, the liquid make-up, the dry make-up, the grease paint makeup as well as the makeup removers and many others.

Taking into consideration all the above discussed issues in respect of technological issues and the application of technical aids in theatre practice, it is easy to assess the relevance of technical aids as examined below.

### **The Relevance of Technical Aids in Theatre Practice**

Theatre practice from its etymological point of view belongs to the progeny of arts, but technology has been brought to impact on the noble profession and the products, hence the relevance of technical aids in theatre practice. Looking closely at the functions and roles

of the different areas of technical theatre practice, it becomes obvious that technical aids are relevant to theatre practice in Nigeria because through effective application of technical aids to theatre practice, the tasks of the personnel of the theatre have been made easy, accurate and less time consuming.

Technical aids therefore are relevant to theatre practice as they provide the following, among others:

- Make available conducive environment for both the performers and the audience.
- Reveal form on stage and ensures audibility.
- Create the mood of performance.
- Create the locale.
- Reveal the style of performance.
- Enhance theatre communication.
- Enhance safety
- Prevent reverberation.
- Enhance realism/naturalism.
- Create special effects and aesthetic.

### **The Place of Theatre Practice in National Development**

Right from the early days of modern theatre practice in Nigeria, theatre has always been impacting on the citizens and the economy of the country in one way or the other. The origin of theatre practice in Nigeria could be traced to the “Yoruba Travelling Theatre, which appeared to herald documented contemporary Nigerian theatre practice” (Ayakoroma, [www.nico.gov.ng](http://www.nico.gov.ng)). The champion of Yoruba Travelling Theatre was Chief Hubert Ogunde. According to Barclays Ayakoroma, “Chief Hubert Ogunde, sometimes referred to as the father of contemporary Nigerian theatre, was influenced by the Alaarinjo tradition and Egun masquerade” ([www.nico.gov.ng](http://www.nico.gov.ng)).

From the earliest days of theatre practice in Nigeria till date, the profession has metamorphosed through different composition and nomenclatures. This cut across what is generally referred to as the National Theatre, the state-owned theatres like the Cultural Centres and Centre for Arts and Cultures, the educational theatres like those of the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, the religious theatre and the privately-owned theatres.

Different people view the theatre in different ways but the major reason that people still practice theatre in spite of the negative impression is for the people to discover themselves. “Theatre has a culture of its own that many people do not understand. To those that do understand it, they often make it a very large part of their lives. Plays are sometimes attempts to spread awareness about problems like racism, sexism, homophobia, and other types of persecution” (<http://www.youtube.com>).

Theatre is always seen as the most collaborative form of arts because many people with various skills come together to work as a team towards the realisation of common objectives. As a result of the numerous advantages accruable from theatre practice, we have different forms such as theatre for development and theatre-in-education. Churches now evangelize through theatre and politicians also campaign through theatre activities.



In spite of all these, most people do not still see the reason why theatre practice should exist because in their ignorance, they think that theatre corrupts the minds, but the truth is that, theatre is only the mirror of life x-raying the ills and virtues of the society.

### **Subverting Economic Recession in Nigeria through Sterling Design in Theatre Practice**

To subvert in this context means to strive and join effort with other forces or agents to put an end to economic recession in Nigeria using theatre approach, via sterling design in the different areas of technical theatre practice discussed earlier in this work. Documented evidence abound the world over testifying to the potency of theatre usually being used as a tool to fight against racism, oppression, tyranny, tenure elongation and even recession. During the colonial era in Nigeria, Hubert Ogunde used theatre to sensitise the citizenry against colonialism. In South Africa, during the period of Apartheid regime, renowned playwrights like Athol Fugard, John Kani, Gibson Kente, Winston Ntshona and many other playwrights used their works to sensitize the citizenry. This is clearly seen in the plot of Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and other plays preaching vehemently against racism and unemployment. In the Northern part of Nigeria, it has also been documented that theatre practice in the form of Theatre for Development (TFD) has been used as an effective tool to fight against poliomyelitis and Guinea Worm.

Saddled with the success story of using theatre to solve different problems in the society, these researchers are therefore convinced that the current economic recession in Nigeria could be subverted through theatre activities garnished with sterling design in scene/set design, lighting design, sound design, costume and makeup design. Theatre is communication; and communication is the essence of human existence. No matter the negative remarks made against theatre practice by the uninformed and the misinformed, theatre remains a virile tool of communication and sensitisation. However, one of the major factors militating against the success of theatre practice as a profession in Nigeria is hinged on substandard design resulting from poor funding and sometimes total neglect. Below is the method to be adopted in furtherance of subverting economic recession through sterling design in theatre practice in Nigeria and by extension other African Countries.

### **Subverting Economic Recession through Sterling Design in Theatre Practice: *The Vendor in Focus***

In theatre practice, theatre design is the bedrock of technical aids and technical aids are the underpinnings of the success in theatre profession. Any theatrical performance without proper application of technical aids is not good enough for humans as such a performance lacks the vital ingredients of communication/information, education and entertainment. Dwindling patronage to theatre performances in Nigeria in recent times has been traced to unsatisfactory application and utilisation of technical aids.

However, for economic recession in Nigeria to be subverted through sterling theatrical design, there should be change of attitude in many dimensions in theatre practice. First and foremost, there should be a massive awareness creation with regard to the potency

and virility of theatre in tackling and preferring solutions to societal vices. Where this approach of theatre practice is packaged with storyline woven around economic diversification, emphasising agriculture as a significant means of livelihood and employment generation, deemphasising over dependent on oil, the people's psyche is likely to be influenced positively thereby changing their way of reasoning, motivating them to wake up and do something for themselves instead of over dependent on government. For this approach to actually succeed in subverting economic recession in Nigeria, there must be appropriate application of technical aids through sterling design in set, lighting, sound, costume and makeup in order to attract the people's attention to the theatre performance.

This approach is a sure way of subverting economic recession in Nigeria because, according to Vincent Diakpomrere,

The physical development of an environment is informed by the psychological and physical development of the individual or group of individuals within that given environment, while the environment influences the psychological development and often the physical development of the individual. The whole concept of development revolves around the pivot of culture and various constituents of cultures, as well as sense of value impact negatively or positively on the ability of a given society to develop (*The Parnassus* 172).

Another way of subverting economic recession in Nigeria through sterling design in theatre practice is by organising a vigorous drama campaign within cities, schools (both secondary and tertiary institutions) Churches and other residential areas using dramas with storyline on danger of over depending on mono-economy being oil and showing the advantages of waking up to do something good for the country such as farming of different magnitudes, trading, skills acquisition and entrepreneurship. These dramas should be made attractive through ensuring that all areas of theatrical designs of scene/set, lighting, sound, costume and make-up are properly handled to make live performances more attractive. This is quite necessary because, for theatre to compete favourably with other media and fulfil the functions of communication/information and education, there must be an entertaining components made possible through the appropriate sterling designs for the actualisation of the much needed special effects being a solid foundation in which the contemporary theatre practice is anchored on. Consequently, Emmanuel Emasealu explains that:

Nigeria is a developing nation that is plagued by conflict between the traditional method and the modern method of governance. Similarly, conflicts have arisen from such diverse areas as religion, class consciousness, economic considerations and political interests among others. Various experts have proffered solutions from different dimensions. The dramatist has equally mirrored these problems in his craft and, sometimes, suggested the way out (*In Parnassus* 64).

The above confirms the position of this paper that theatre, backed up with sterling design has the potentials of proffering solutions to some national problems in Nigeria, economic recession and corruption inclusive. This was tested and ascertained when these researchers studied the vendor, being the command performance of Akwa Ibom State University for the second and third convocation ceremonies held on Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2017. This performance was staged by the Department of Performing Arts.

### **The Synopsis of *The Vendor***

The vendor is a contemporary drama written in the 21<sup>st</sup> century setting in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. It is a play that mirrors the ills of the society with a view to proffering solutions in furtherance of the much needed change for the better. Some of the societal ills mirrored in this play under review include politics, corruption, child trafficking, poor educational standard, inflation, religion, maladministration, leadership misdemeanour, cultism, drunkenness, prostitution, insurgency, juvenile delinquency to mention but a few of the topical issues.

The play is structure into seven (7) sets and has thirty two (32) characters. Different sets in the play deals with various themes. At the end of the play, resolution or catharsis is arrived at for the ones possible while some issues are left for the audience and the society to come out with their diverse opinions. The vendor has the structure of a total theatre loaded with spectacles. It is a didactic play that is suitable or presentation in a wide range of situations and occasion depending on the directorial approach and the event in question. The vendor can be fine turned to embrace other topical issues in the society.

### **The Appraisal of the Performance**

As mentioned earlier, The Vendor was staged as a command performance for Akwa Ibom State University in 2017. The Technical Director was Okon Udofot Jacob, the Acting Head of Department of Performance Arts, Akwa Ibom State University. The venue of the production was the newly built edifice with complete state of the arts equipment for ebullient technical theatre practice. The set was effectively designed with the requisite sceneries and props. The lighting was efficiently and professionally rigged taking into consideration the different acting/lighting areas. The sound was properly designed and cued to conform with the requirements of the scripts as well as the production objectives. In terms of costumes and make ups, the designers embarked on thorough analysis and interpretation of the roles of the characters and designed accordingly.

As a result of the sterling design in the different areas of the technical aids, the performance was rated high in terms of standard and communication efficacy. The auditorium was filled to its capacity and the audience members were satisfied. The following day, the critics wrote positively about the production in different media of mass communication within and outside the campus. Based on this primary source of data collection and analysis, the result of the finding showed that subverting economic recession in Nigeria through sterling designed in theatre practice was a sure way in this direction.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of the enormous challenges plaguing theatre practice in Nigeria, it is not out of place to assert without fear of contradiction that theatre practice has enormous potentials of subverting human maladies in which economic recession in Nigeria happens to become one of the latest. However, one of the major hindrances militating against the potency of the theatre being a virile means of subverting human problems is “the gradual disappearance of some vital technical aids from the Nigerian theatres” (Ododo in *NTJ* 158). If there is an improvement in the standard of design in the different areas of theatre design of scene, lighting, sound, costume and makeup, there is every assurance that theatre practice in Nigeria would rise up to its task of subverting societal problems including economic recession in Nigeria.

## **Recommendations**

Having identified the factors militating against theatre fulfilling its responsibilities of societal transformation, it becomes worthwhile to proffer the following recommendations among others:

Since economic recession has affected virtually every facet of the economy thereby making importation of theatre design equipment difficult, we recommend that Nigerian theatre designers should fall back on the ideology of fabrication whereby essential scene/sceneries, lighting and sound equipment are locally fabricated in furtherance of sterling theatrical design for theatre practice in Nigeria. This fabricated equipment may be used side by side with the few available foreign ones for appreciable outcome.

We also recommend that Nigerian theatre designers should develop positive maintenance culture and repair the abandoned scene/sceneries, lighting, sound equipment and pick them to use instead of endlessly waiting for new ones that may not soon come.

Theatre designers must not completely abandon the manually generated sound effects. Ododo buttresses this point when he says, “experience has also shown that some sound effects manually produced are more effective than most of the electronic ones though somewhat limited in scope in terms of variety but when used, one gets a sense of authenticity” (Ododo in *NTJ* 161).

Costume and makeup designers should also endeavour to look inward by utilising local materials for the designs. Ododo also support this position when he posits:

Theatre makeup could also be simulated from the avalanche of local body adornment materials and beauty accessories such as cam wood, white chinks, shea butter, charcoal, red powder stones and even hair pieces from the barbers shop. Powdered white chalk mixed with body oil for instance is very effective for ageing actors, the powdered form of the red stone is very effective for face foundation and sometimes could be used to accentuate the actor’s facial features (Ododo in *NTJ* 161).

Private partnership initiative should also be encouraged where private sector partners and sponsors theatrical performances so as to ensure that adequate funds are made available for the purposes of sterling designs in theatre practice in furtherance of subverting economic recession in Nigeria.

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