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Nigerian Theatre Journal

A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists

Vol. 20 No.1 - 2020

ISSN 0189-9562

Nigerian Theatre Journal

A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA)

Vol. 20 No.1

ISSN 0189-9562

Editor

Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma

2020

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Nigerian Theatre Journal (NTJ) (ISSN 0189-9562) is published by the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), C/o The Editor, NTJ, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Africa, Toru-Orua (UAT), Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

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**THEATRE AS COUNTERACTIVE PARADIGM IN NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT: ANALYSIS OF DURUAKU'S *A MATTER OF IDENTITY*
AND BINEBAI'S *DRUMS OF THE DELTA***

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Abstract

Nigeria has undeniably faced issues that posed threats to the sustainability of the nation since its amalgamation in 1914. These issues have bordered on ethnicity, religion, resource control among other factors that team up to shake and question the Nigeria's national identity. To a greater extent, incessant clashes and insecurity have remained major clogs to the wheels of the state's environment and national development. Several approaches including military interventions engaged to forge headway have not helped the multicultural Nigerian state but rather have costumed a false federalism and remain very unfruitful in addressing the national questions. It, therefore, becomes necessary to look the way of theatre which intervenes in and re-humanises human society to explore and address the issues of national identity and development in Nigeria. In doing this, Toni Duruaku's *A Matter of Identity* and Ben Binebai's *Drums of the Delta* are critically reviewed to explore the impact of theatre in addressing environmental issues to enhance national development and fashion national identity.

Introduction

Before the visitors colonised and amalgamated Nigeria in 1914, traditional values ensured various aspects of cultural, artistic and technological development ranging from Igbo art to Benin bronze and Awka metal works amongst others. Apart from marketing the people's creative works, they engaged them in propelling developmental strides that made Nigeria to be not only a tourist choice, but an investor's haven. Austin Asagba implies this when he argues that, "it is a well-known fact universally, that there is a strong connection between culture and societal well-being and national development; from time immemorial arts and culture ... have always played vital roles in the transformation of societies" (19).

Nigeria has undeniably faced issues that posed threats to the sustainability of the nation since its amalgamation. These issues have bordered on ethnicity, religion, resource control among other factors that team up to shake and question the Nigeria's national identity. No doubt, the issues have come from near abandonment of the cultural values, skills and arts on the altar of perceived revered colonial values embraced as the messiah for socio-economic uplift which adoption has undeniably placed the Nigeria state in clogged wheels towards development.

By implication, this perception and new way of thinking affected our collective sense of patriotism, beauty, honour, respect for our past common goals and aspirations. Thus it could be said that cultural diffusion and acculturation were the forerunner of the dilemmas, cultural contradictions that we are confronted with everyday, as a nation today. They pertain to the negative attitudes; unacceptable behaviour patterns ... inept and colourless leadership, corruption in high places necessitated by incessant urge and drive for material comfort and aggrandizement (Asagba 12).

Nigeria as a multi-cultural state with a pluralistic ethnic nationality seems to have gambled with its developmental initiatives and today romances with chronic and anaemic conditions, such as, bribery and corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks and other institutionalised anomalies contracted from uncensored adoption of foreign values. Development, which creates “condition of economic and social progress for the whole community [nation]” (Nwamuo 75), and “represents ideas and practices designed to bring about positive change in human societies” (Akashoro *et al.* 107), has arguably been shifted from a public benefit to privileged individual uplift. The few privileged ones showcase their affluence while most downtrodden ones are easily bought over and used as agents for conflict and state unrest. No doubt this is a major setback towards national development in Nigeria. Successive government regimes and administrations have variously embarked on different projects aimed at ensuring developments but how successful they have been in the lives of the citizenry is there for all to see. No doubt, not much impact. To this effect, this paper looks at theatre as a veritable tool for necessary awareness towards mobilisation for environment and national development. This is based on the idea that,

... theatre is ... a potential check against tyranny, social ills and under development. This it does in a manner that promotes objective appreciation of genuine national political interests especially in a plural, multi ethnic and multi-cultural nation such as Nigeria. Theatre is an apt forum through which ideas can be exchanged and social awareness disseminated. It can stimulate national discourse on crucial political issues, which may not find expedient expression through the conventional political fora. Because it is a social art that thrives on collaboration, interest harmonisation and collective participation between the playwright, actor and the spectator, drama itself is a projector of democratic change (Umenyilorah 35)

Nigeria and National Development

The amalgamation of 1914 implied that different regions, ethnic nationalities and peoples of diverse languages were brought together under one nation state called Nigeria. Austin Asagba confirms this fact when he stated unequivocally that,

the 1914 political amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by Lord Lugard of Great Britain gave birth to Nigeria. Africa's most populous country Its land mass of 91,076 square kilometres is inhabited by more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups or nationalities with different and distinct languages, cultural attitudes, sensibilities, varied religious belief systems and practices (9).

This multi-resources enriched nation "lies on the South Coast of Western Africa, extending about 650 miles (1,050km) from North to South and 700 miles (1,130km) East to West" (Nwanaju 1); "between latitudes 4⁰20' and 14⁰ North, and between longitudes 3⁰20' and 14⁰31' East. Nigeria's geographical space is 923, 768 square kilometres" (Otite 1). The country is blessed with "large deposits of oil, gas and solid minerals and a sizeable educated and skilled workforce Despite these, the country has not been able to effectively harness its endowment to develop the economy sufficiently to improve the welfare of its people" (Akpobasah 1)

Regardless of the forced amalgam, the early Nigerians with their independent nationalities (later made dependent), had a united Nigeria in mind when they fought for a political independent Nigeria from the colonial masters with their regional wealth. The South Eastern Nigeria had palm produce, Middle Belt had timber and rubber, South West had cocoa and the North had farm produce. These were the national wealth of Nigeria which propelled the national development the state experienced before the subsequent discovery, exploration and exploitation of crude oil in commercial quantities.

Over time, borrowing Chinua Achebe's titles, *Things fall Apart* and living become *No Longer at Ease* in a once affluent and comfortable state, called, Nigeria. Hunger and starvation begin to reign supreme in the land as the nation lost control of production to importation of commodities. This situation may not have been peculiar to Nigeria as the United Nations, in Year 2000, adopted a seventeen point goals to uplift humanity otherwise called United Nations Millennium Declaration. These Millennium Development Goals, among others, include to:

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger;
2. Achievement of universal primary education;
3. Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women;
4. Reduction of Child mortality;
5. Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases;
6. Ensuring environmental sustainability;

7. Developing a global partnership for development (Nwanaju *et al.* 1128)

The Sustainable Development Goals are “the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice” (<https://www.un.org>).

Nigeria as a nation keyed in to this programme believed would ensure an improved living standard by 2015. How this has impacted on Nigerian environment and Nigerians is an issue for debate. Nneoma Emesini posits that, “little progress have been recorded in achieving MDG-7, as access to safe water and sanitation has not improved significantly, and there are other contending environmental challenges such as erosion and coastal flooding” (2). Jeffery Leke and Euphemia Leke also reveal that, “increased problems of water shortages, floods, droughts and desertification which threaten food security and human survival have become symptomatic of the effects of the ailing status of the environment on the Nigerian society” (2). This then portends that environmental issues have overtime been a major clog that thwarts the wheels of human existence and calls for urgent attention to ensure sustainability and the desired national development.

Successive Nigerian governments have at each given period introduced plans, such as, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) among others, meant to ensure sustainability and development (Ibietan and Ekhosuehi 299-308). Most of these programmes as beautiful as they are, assumed top – bottom approach where plans are made by the government, implemented by the government for the people without a considered opinion of or input from the supposed beneficiaries. This approach often has given the plans a status of stillbirth even before the end of the introducing government administration. This combined with “an education system that is not attuned to the production of the appropriate manpower required to support robust growth has led to high levels of unemployment and underemployment” (Akpobasah 1).

One may allude to the failures of these programmes to lack of understanding that development planning “is a strategy for the allocation/utilisation of resources to improve the standard of living of the citizens. Planning, therefore, entails the prioritisation of resources in order to meet desired ends” (Ibietan and Ekhosuehi 298). One would expect that development planning should be a continuum and “must contain an analysis of the economy’s recent development past, an evaluation of its probable development trend over the future years to be spanned by the plan, and some indication of the nation’s natural, physical, human and financial resources” (Onah 51), which successive governments implement for the good of the citizenry.

In their review of national development in Nigeria, Jide Ibietan and Oghator Ekhosuehi argue thus:

The pattern of development in Nigeria creates social problems of hunger, mass unemployment and social inequalities. Another factor is the idea of conceiving development planning as a “big push strategy” which attempts to do everything in one plan. This hampers development efforts as resources are overstretched and little or nothing is achieved in the process. Furthermore, institutional/structural inconsistencies and discontinuity have been adduced as explanatory factors in plan failures. Governments are scored high on promises, but lacking in delivery and succeeding governments are not committed enough in continuing and completing plans/programmes of their predecessors. This explains what Okoli and Onah ... referred to as the high turnover of development plans and littering the nation with uncompleted projects (308).

This report may account why most government plans do not command the confidence of the disillusioned Nigerians most of whom resort to uncivil actions which further frustrate national development. Overtime, actions of the Niger Delta militants, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and later Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) and other disenchanting groups are testimonials to this. There have been incessant conflicts in the nation which could have been preventable if government plans have been embracive and with a bottom-top approach. Government responses to the situations and conflicts in the country highlight insensitivity to the feelings and aspirations of her citizenry. Military interventions in the cases of Udi community and IPOB are examples.

Theatre as Counteractive Paradigm

A country that plans for development should carry the citizens along through opinion polls and sensitisations. The needs of the people should be put into consideration thereby making government development plans bottom-top in approach. Where this is not available, most government plans/programmes could be ill received. To this effect, Steve Oga Abah opines that,

the success or failure of any one project hinges on proper identification and the choice of the most biting problem for attention. The issue of *properness* also raises the question of who identifies the problems and finally decides what development a particular community needs” (cited in Umenyilorah 37).

Theatre then can be a veritable counteractive paradigm in fashioning environmental and national development in a multilingual, multicultural ethno-pluralistic country like Nigeria. Chukwuemeka Umenyilorah identifies corruption, exploitation, and oppression as precursors to cultural conflicts and development problems in a society and sees theatre as an essential tool for liberation struggle.

According to Umenyilorah, theatre does this by engaging “the attention of people through a dramatic presentation of problems ... [which makes] the audience see their problems in fresh and critical ways” (34), and either chart ways or embrace and support policies put in place to alleviate their situations.

The foregoing is possible because theatre as a sociological discipline studies human society and as an art form copies same and presents it before its audience to reflect upon. It coheres with Edde Iji’s position that,

such highlights purport to dispel misleading myths, stereotypes and misconceptions about theatre arts and its practitioners; notions that denigrate its deep intellectual, philosophical and aesthetic contents, at the expense of its potentials as a national builder; in terms of the development of man’s total mind and characters (117).

Theatre then is one sure way through which the “bastardisation and obfuscation of our cultural values and norms” can be remedied and “our traditional educational system and philosophies” (Asagba 11-12) reinvigorated for national development.

A reminiscence on theatre shows that theatre scholars and practitioners, such as, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal overtime have put the theatre to positive use in community development and human empowerment projects. Perhaps this informs why Umenyilorah maintains that:

... theatre has played a serious role in the liberation and emancipation of the society The majority of the people are rendered voiceless, socially degraded, psychologically dehumanised and economically disadvantaged by the oppressive leaders. In this oppressed society when an individual or group of individuals enact artistic performance, the oppressed masses are mobilised, having been conscientised, to stand up and fight against oppressive traditions (34).

Ruminating on the modus operandi of theatre practice for development, Ahmed Yerima posits that,

theatre feeds on the culture of the society; it endows some individuals of the society who are called playwrights, to observe and put down their observation in plays or works of art which must give meaning, understanding and form to the subconscious thought of the society (13).

This endowment is seen as a tool for service on which Matthew Umukoro argues that, the dramatist’s “service to humanity is vicariously predicated upon his service to his immediate community” (15-16). Borrowing from this service, Toni Duruaku’s *A Matter of Identity* and Ben Binebai’s *Drums of the Delta* will now be

considered to explore how theatre is employed for environmental and national development.

A Matter of Identity

In *A Matter of Identity*, Duruaku examines the socio-cultural well-being of a human society which forsakes its identity for an adopted lifestyle. The play focuses on Umukwenu, a fictitious clan whose forebears that instituted and made compulsory the celebration of her annual festival, suddenly forbid the community from celebrating the same festival. The play dramatises the spiritual journey of the emissaries of Umukwenu clan (Okoli and Nkechi) to the disappointed forebears in “the never-never land” (32). These forebears had invited them “to explain why ... [they] cannot celebrate the festival of the Rising Moon” which ... [they] instituted./ A ‘festival of peace’,/ ... progress!/ ... renewal!/ [and] ...life! (46).

The emissaries had to take on “a tortuous and dangerous journey” (44), to “the perpetual vortex of mystical space and time” (27), to answer queries on the crimes of the clan who has been accused of lacking “direction! ... progress!/ ... [being] Rudderless!/ ... A ship, lost in the storm of life, in a world of competition!/ ... Acrimony ...!/ Selfishness ...!/ [Abandonment of] Moral codes [and trampling on] Our Legacies ...! [thereby] becoming strangers in [their own] land; a people with no culture! No history! No identity!/ And no pride! (47).

Beyond the Umukwenu community, the playwright looks at a society blessed with environment full of resources; but instead of harnessing them for developmental purposes, loses her values to foreign contacts and association through unwholesome adoption of alien cultures. The traditional artefacts and skills, which hitherto had been the base for development, are lost in pursuit of foreign principles. Most traditional beliefs, practices and languages are going moribund as a result of neglect. Today, clothes, food, medical items and some other things which ought to be produced locally are imported. Traditional healthcare system is almost abandoned while the conventional ones is poorly maintained.

The play tries to re-conscientise a misdirected people who have lost touch with their culture and thus are in dire need of identity and development. It characterises culture and identification as a vital yardstick for development and places adherence to ethical codes and respect to ethnocentric identity and ideologies as gateways to national development. To this end, Obiocha consistently warns the people that, “our ancestors can no longer condone the collective self-deceit of an entire community” (30), who have abandoned their identity. He further reiterates that,

if the festival does not hold, we could be destroyed. Our children would become strangers in other people’s land. Without our identity, we would cease to exist as a people. The land of Umukwenu would become part of a folktale (31).

This reiterates the aspect of Nigeria's national anthem which calls out that "the labours of our heroes past shall never be in vain."

The foregoing further tells why the forebears reprimand the clan that, "Your generations have refused to build on the legacies of the past .../ No respect for heroes past!/ None for tradition! No concern for decency!/ None for identity!" (48). On account of these, they are made to face a bitter truth thus:

Your clan is losing your roots, direction and sense of self-worth./
There is something ugly and sad about a lack of an awareness of your background, and too much universalisation and liberal hospitality of your clan. It has tainted you./ Reckless adoption of other cultures is ruining your individuality and identity (53).

This is a society that had flourishing traditional medicine based on herbs and roots; a society whose judicial system, based on equity and truth, was transparent and respected; a society whose local produce was enough to sustain her people and neighbours. The pride in their skills helped maintain human dignity. The dramatist here posits that the neglect of one's culture (identity) and over-reliance on foreign cultures can demean self-worth and frustrate development.

Drums of the Delta

Drums of the Delta projects a deep psychological vision for a positive future in the midst of struggles. It is the playwright's dream of revolutionary victory for the Niger Delta; a dream which drums hope for survival in the midst of oppression, tyranny and genocide of the Niger Delta. The play is an egalitarian visionary effort towards self-humanisation.

Drums of the Delta argues that violent conflict in the Niger Delta hinges on the exploitation of the environment and inherent resources, especially oil, by the Federal Government without due compensation or reparation. The play argues that (good) environment is a yardstick for a healthy living since life must be nourished by resources found around any human milieu. It posits that since the zone does not have good environment as a result of this exploitation, development is hampered even when the area contributes to national growth, they now take up arms to agitate for better life or control of the resources from the zone. The youths form militant groups and threaten that, "if the empire does not stoop to the will of the Delta, there shall be no more peace" (41). The will of Delta, then, is "the return of Ebitimi ... for ... socioeconomic, political and cultural liberation" of the Delta (22). The liberation struggle has continued to raise armed entropy in the region and have meant that, "things have been dying rapidly in the Delta: peace dies, culture dies, our morality dies, and our pride dies along with leadership. People die, even nature dies" (47).

It is very unfortunate to note that the environment of Niger Delta is highly corroded from oil spillage; the people cannot fish in most rivers because of oil pollution; the land can longer be farmed and the little land available then becomes a

source of community quarrels and incessant conflicts. Such environmental conditions frustrate development and give people an imposed sense of slavery. The militant groups that fight for their rights and freedom believe that their “duty now and forever more in life and/ In death is to reject slavery” (27).

The import of the above is a perceived master/slave relationship believed to exist between the state and their region, where as slaves, they feel left out or not consulted by the masters before decisions concerning them are taken and implemented. They are denied the right and opportunity to present and suggest to government issues and ideas that will benefit them, so they lament government’s intimidating policies thus:

They put deliberate plan in place/ To make us even to be scared of our own voices./ ... Life is dominated by/ A great number of conflicting wishes:/ Personal wishes, the wishes of friends, enemies and/ Those of some unknown forces. For those of us/ In Delta, it is our desire that Delta becomes a/ Pride of place in the comity of regions but it is/ The wish of the enemies that we remain in darkness” (47).

Such adversities necessitated the struggle for the will of Delta. These fighters are also aware that they suffer internal challenges which affect their success. Thus, they lament: “Even among us, [the Deltans], the loudest dance is that of disunity and barbaric betrayal” (48), which has deepened their wounds and blurred the success of survival.

Some people find big business in the violent crises and would wish they continue for their business to prosper. The playwright calls such people “chameleonic cannibal” who feed on both the government and the people (63). The likes of Seigha and Oko represent the chameleonic cannibals discussed when Atala speaks to the Queen thus:

But, your Majesty, I have a strong feeling
That this chief is trading with the crisis in the land.
I mean, he comes here to fill his pockets
Whenever there is crisis but the crisis never ends (62).

This observation is not felt by the government alone, the people also see betrayal as a great obstacle to their success, liberation and settlement. Sam observes thus:

... Every Neighbour is perceived an enemy.
Even amongst us,
The loudest dance is that of disunity and barbaric
Betrayal (48).

The self-instituted chameleonic cannibals in the Delta fuel not just crises in the delta but the environmental degradations and underdevelopment snowballs; or put differently, development nosedives in the region through their selfish interests and treacherous attitudes.

Beyond the drum of liberation, *Drums of Delta* drums louder the drums of unity and peace necessary for development, which is encased in the question: “What will happen if Ebitimi dies?” (48). What will be the fate of the region and of the people should the oil exploited from the land dries up, or ceases to flow, especially in the face of the present hullabaloo? Sam, an elder, employs the voice of wisdom to say in this regard thus:

We shall surely be legendary losers and
There will be no replacement. A peaceful but
Brutal continuation of institutional neglect
Is certain. A furious fire of hunger and starvation
Is unavoidable. Hardly can we sustain our voice
Of liberation and prevent the collapse of our identity.
We shall be forced into the colony of destitution
And cease to clamour for self-determination.
... In fact we shall
Become the real and visible endangered specie (48-49).

Having enumerated these dangers occasioned by attitudes foreign to the people, although occasioned by situation, Sam unequivocally tells the militants that, “we must not be fools” (19), “we must truly fall our quarrels” (49). The alternative to violence will be sought in having a “good breed of leaders” (49), “who remember the problems of the society” (52). The reason is simply that, it is meaningless “fighting against the land” (27), since it is a “revolt” that will only “bring disaster to us” (27). In this disaster – looting, raping, burning, maiming, drowning, incarceration, incommunicado, decreed starvation, family separation – everything but safety, development, peace and unity is fair (43-44). These are factors and situations that frustrate environmental and national development and must be avoided by adopting consultative approaches instead of confrontation.

Conclusion

Apart from highlighting the essence of maintaining cultural identity and government responsiveness to the needs of the people as precursors to national development, this paper has portrayed theatre as a counteractive paradigm in fashioning environmental and national development in Nigeria through its sociological and artistic approaches. It has further presented theatre as a medium for sensitisation, conscientisation and stimulation of positive ideals necessary for national development in a multicultural, multilingual and polarised country like Nigeria.

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**THE HUMAN MINDSET AND NIGERIA'S
RESTRUCTURING AGENDA:
A STUDY OF JOHN IWUH'S *BIRTHRIGHT***

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Abstract

Nigeria is a politically and economically challenged nation, and for her to overcome these challenges, certain questions need to be asked and answers need to be given. Recently, the clamour for restructuring the country has taken the front seat of the nation's political discourse. Many believe that the solution to the nation's many challenges lies on the restructuring of its political and geographical boundaries while others think otherwise. This paper looks at the need for the restructuring of the country from the angle of attitudinal change. It proposes that restructuring the mindset is an imperative to the socio-political and economic problems facing the country. Using John Iwuh's *Birthright*, as a case study, the paper proposes that restructuring the nation will yield more positive fruit if it starts the restructuring process with change in the mindset of the citizens.

Introduction

The creation of Nigeria federation by British colonists in 1914 has led to the coexistence of a multicultural and multi-ethnic people with varying history and ideology, as one entity without proper orientation and or preparation. This unplanned federalism has led the nation into many years of tension, marginalisation, injustice and even secessionist attempts, and so on. Thus, according to Eyo Ita, Ebong Itoro and Tonye Immo-Etele, the Nigerian federalism "has come under severe criticism by some scholars and concerned citizens who see it as the potential source of the various problems facing the country today" (5). They further observe that, "most of the fears which tend to drive the present day agitation for self-determination seem to emanate from ethnic and tribal insecurity and economic marginalisation of the of the majority" (12).

Agitations become more intense when a particular ethnic group feels that they are not favoured. No ethnic group has ever agitated for the marginalisation of another. The situation is still a question of winner takes all mentality which is a very negative mindset for the effective development of a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria. As Ezeani Emefieani rightly points out, "a healthy and progressive country is one where no group, no matter how small in numerical calculations is a victim of discrimination or injustice" (303). Dan Chukwu also observes that, one of the effects of amalgamation of Nigeria was the "brewing of nationalism (*sic*) spirit in a people

that see themselves as Nigerians than as Igbo, Yoruba, Efik or Ijaw” (41). Thus, Sunday Mboho and Sunday Udoh are of the view that, “Nigeria since colonial period has favoured federalism given her heterogeneous character” (69). The essence of creating a nation is to ensure development and continuous nation building which Otoabasi Akpan-Umana describes as, “a process of creating an integrated society inhabited by a contented people” (140).

Recent happenings in the country have truly revealed that discontentment is a common issue among the citizens thus the call for restructuring. According to Oseloka Obaze, “the crux of the problem is that citizen alienation is rife nationwide to the extent that every ethnic jigsaw component of Nigeria feels sufficiently aggrieved, marginalised and therefore seek equity through restructuring” (<https://www.gamji.com>). The study sets out to determine the need for restructuring such perception. Restructuring is quite essential because many believe that it will give room for better accountability and transparency. To restructure is “a process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts that make up a system and redefining the inter-relationship between them in such a way that the entire system performs more effectively” (Okeke, Nnamani and Nwachukwu 107).

Restructuring is indeed an important means of making the political system less volatile. It is quite essential in the present day Nigerian situation because political observers have come to realise that Nigeria has been facing a lot of challenges that have continuously constituted some form of threat to its peace, unity and progress. Several attempts have been made by various government administrators to address these issues but not much positive result has been achieved hence the recent call for restructuring the country. However, as Simon Kolawole suggests, “a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and volatile polity like ours can use some less hard line position in devising the best way forward” (www.cablenews.com).

At various points of the nation’s history, Nigeria has witnessed one form of restructuring or the other, ranging from political restructuring, economic restructuring, geographical restructuring, administrative restructuring, physical restructuring, and so on. Somehow, it seems most of these restructuring processes did not bring in much result hence the current call for restructuring. It is therefore pertinent that before embarking in any other form of restructuring, “there must be an agreement among nationalities to co-exist with a sense of communality and shared destiny” (Dukor, “The Restructuring Debate”). We can only co-exist if we apply the right mindset towards the restructuring agenda of the country.

Restructuring, if well channelled will definitely position Nigeria for greater development. However, no meaningful progress will be achieved politically or economically “unless we first of all restructure and re-orientate the mindset and develop sound character” (Moghalu, “How to Restructure Nigeria...”). According to Funke Adekoya, “the fact that all the previous political restructuring (to date) have not resulted in enhanced development in the country is evidence that political restructuring alone will not solve the nation's problem” (32).

From the forgoing, one can conveniently state that the only component of the nation that has not received adequate positive restructuring, and one that is desperately in need of restructuring, is the individual mindset of the populace. “If we do not restructure our mindset, we would still not see great opportunities even in a politically and economically restructured Nigeria” (Adekoya 32). A nation can use its diversity to develop a strong structure provided the citizens are with the right attitude towards its developmental objectives. The prosperity of a nation is predominantly determined by the attitude of the people towards the set goals. Hence, “the conception of Nigeria as a united country must automatically neutralise the ethnic and sectional ties which have been our bane” (Obienyem 151).

The foregoing is purpose of this study as this paper examines the need for mindset restructuring as a solution to the restructuring agitations in the country using John Iwuh's *Birthright* as a case study.

Mindset and Restructuring of Nigeria

Mindset is defined by Carol Dweck as, “the view you adopt for yourself that determines the way you live your life, see the world and make decisions” (120). It is essentially one's particular perspectives or view of the world and the way one views life and people. On the other hand, restructuring is changing the existing way of doing things to a more efficient way. It is about adjustment to make the life of the people better. In the Nigerian context it is:

A significant alteration, re-organisation, re-formation and re-arrangement of an existing structure, form or status quo in a revolutionary or evolutionary manner, with the aim of making it more improved, effective, efficient and functionally competent (Nwafor-Orizu, Okolo, and Eze 28).

Politically, restructuring entails:

the systematic reform, reorganisation of the existing political structure in the nature of practice and in the way it relates to social and economic dimensions of the polity be it in governance and resource control or otherwise (Nwafor-Orizu, Okolo and Eze 29).

Restructuring in whatever form is expected to usher in a better society different from the existing one. As stated earlier, Nigeria has at various points witnessed some form of restructuring in the course of its history. Despite all these restructuring attempts, its polity is still bedevilled with many problems. This is because a major form of restructuring that will actually redirect it has received little or no attention. Bello Adebayo rightly observes that, “no amount of political or economic restructuring can bring any form of meaningful progress unless we re-structure and re-orientate the mindset” (“Restructuring Nigeria...”). The greatest

asset any progressive nation can boast of is its productive population that are ready to investing in the campaign for attitudinal change which will definitely uphold and enhance our values.

Mallam Nasir el-Rufai puts it succinctly that, “a restructuring of mentality and values is a key factor in the success of the restructuring of governance and political structure” (“Restructuring is a Nation Building...”). Contributing to the need for mindset restructuring in Nigeria, Simon Kolawole asserts that, “any mindset that is already confused to see realities of his or her own contribution to the economic/political problem of the country will remain in economic/political problem” (“Restructuring Nigeria...”). Any progressive nation needs to invest in the development of its human capital, which entails adequate attention to things concerning the wellbeing of the citizens. A very important aspect of political restructuring, according to Tope Fasua, is in the hands of the Nigeria people. She asserts that, “our approach to restructuring must be clear headed, people oriented and driven by a desire for development and progress” (“A Short History of Restructuring...”).

The evils of corruption, greed, ethnicity, tribalism, selfishness, insecurity and so on that have plagued the nation for years are not structurally driven but “arose mainly from human weakness and poor compliance with rules and regulations;” and that, “the solution to some of Nigeria’s socio-economic and political problems greatly lies more in a much needed change of attitude” (Ogih, “Restructuring Nigeria...”). A cursory look into the nation’s belief system recently reveals that some negative beliefs have penetrated the Psyche of the Nigerian citizens. Adebayo Bello was able to sum such thoughts in the following words, “corruption cannot be eradicated in Nigeria, we can never have correct census, if you do not bribe voters, you will not win elections, if you do not join the corrupt train, you will never get rich” (“Restructuring Nigeria...”). The need for mindset restructuring therefore lies on the call “on all Nigerians to rise up today and reject those habits which cripple our aspirations and inhibit our chances of becoming a modern and attractive country” (Achebe 2).

Political observers have confirmed that the problem with Nigeria is not its structure. Chinua Achebe rightly points out thus:

There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character ... land, climate, water or anything. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership (1).

Also, Val Obienyem maintains that, “a strong and united Nigeria must have leaders who understand the diversity of the people and their voices and can coordinate them effectively for the good of all” (152). This is because there are countries that have diverse structures and yet they accommodate each other in their diversity. Ethnic or religious homogeneity as Adebayo Bello observed is not a guarantee of political

stability. He cited Somalia and Switzerland as proofs for this assertion. According to him, Somalia, has been besieged with social, political and economic instability despite it's almost 99% ethnic and religious homogeneous state. Switzerland on the other hand, is a nation with three major languages without any mineral resources, yet, it is one of the most stabilised nations in the world. In the words of Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, "if we do not get our perspectives right under this current structure, what are the chances that we will suddenly reason better under a different system?" ("Restructuring is a Nation Building...").

Objectivity of thought and action is still lacking in our relationship with one another in Nigeria. We cannot co-exist together if we fail to open our minds to tolerate our differences and respect each other's weakness and opinions. To Achebe, true patriotism "is only possible when the people who rule and those under their power have a genuine goal of maintaining the dispensation under which the nation lives" (16). Val Obienyem also rightly observes that, "we cannot have and will not have a united Nigeria if we continue our destructive habit of failing to recognise in practice that any and every part of the country belongs to Nigeria" (152). We may not fair better as long as we still maintain this fixed mindset. Let our collective interest override our sectional desires and we will see this crippling giant of a nation called Nigeria leap majestically to its glory.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on Carol Dweck's *mindset theory*. According to Dweck, the human attribute can be developed or improved. She asserts that there are two types of mindset, fixed mindset and growth mindset. The theory indicates how people could have different mindsets towards varying areas within their interest. Dweck believes that an individual could either hold a fixed mindset or growth mindset and not both on a particular task. A fixed mindset, according to her:

represents a mindset that that makes an individual believe in his qualities that are to be carved in stone and also unlikely to change.... However, growth mindset deals with the belief that an individual may adopt a mindset which can grant changes and growth through his efforts (Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology*...120).

Analysis of the theory made by Emily Rhew reveals that people with fixed mindset avoid challenges, give up easily, ignore useful negative feedbacks and feel threatened by the success of others. Hence they are prone to achieve below their full potentials. Confirming this in her research with students' learning, Rhew observes that, "when students with fixed mindset experienced challenges or critical feedback, they blame outside forces for their uncontrollable failure" (Rhew, "The Effects of Growth Mindset..." 22).

On the other hand, people with growth or incremental mindset see challenges as the route that leads to a desire to learn. Consequently, they tend to embrace

challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, see efforts as parts to mastery, learn from criticism of others and are inspired by the success of others. The research confirms that mindset has great influence on achievement. Rhew also observes that, “the student who had more of growth mindset felt tested when she comes across a problem, but the sense of being tested motivated her to persist, and most importantly, she enjoyed the challenge” (Rhew, “The Effects of Growth Mindset...” 23). Mindset is not only applicable to education and learning but affects broader issues that affect life decisions. Those with an incremental mindset are said to be more likely to welcome challenges. They may view errors as opportunities for learning and tend to attribute failure to lack of effort rather than lack of ability. It recognises that the mind is susceptible to change and adaptations thus giving room for the possibility of change of attitude.

Mindset plays a vital role on how people cope with challenges. Cultivating growth mindset leads people to take challenges that they can learn from, to find more effective ways to improve, to persevere in the face of setback’s and to make a greater progress. Dweck’s theory therefore postulates that people are bound to fail unless they come to the realisation that failure is not actually lack of intelligence but an avenue for a re-think (Dweck, *Mindset: Changing the Way...*).

In applying this theory to the Nigerian situation, one can conveniently state that the theory encourages people to understand that effort is the key to success. Growth mindset allows people to remedy their weakness because it believes that weakness is not lack of ability. Growth mindset gives room for development of ability, acquisition of new skills and mastery of new skills. One will observe that the various conflicts and agitations being witnessed in the country are related to tribalism, religion and ethnicity. The perpetrators of these conflicts and agitations are usually unpatriotic individuals with selfish aims that relegate the objectives of the Nigerian state to background. It is worthy of note that the particular mindset a person has is not necessarily permanent. It is subject to change. The theory therefore suggests that if the populace is given adequate orientation on the importance of unity of purpose, their attitude towards the nation will change positively. For the effective restructuring of the nation, the citizens, therefore, need to develop incremental mindset which will enable them to be more progressive.

Synopsis of the Play, *Birthright*

The play is set in Igbo land during the Nigerian/Biafra War. The effect of the war is becoming increasingly excruciating on the people. Frustration and disillusionment is beginning to set in. Fathers are lamenting the absence of their sons and the inevitability of their return from the war front. Mothers are mourning the deaths of their starved children and the absence of their husbands. Disease and starvation is on the increase. Saddled with the role of village custodian, Nze Nwokike is doing his best to hold the people together. This he does with utmost carefulness and equity. At his death in the course of the war in the hands of their enemies, Nze Achumba is made the village custodian and he followed the footsteps of his predecessor. At the

end of the war, spirits are dampened because many sons and husbands did not return from the war front while those that returned are either sick or amputated. Suicide becomes a common issue in the community.

In the midst of all these, the clamour for change is on the lips of everyone. The women want to take over the mantle of leadership from the men. Some others, like Nwaka, feel it is their right to be king. In the cause of this struggle for power, vital needs of the people are neglected resulting to mass exodus of the younger generation to the city. Family disintegration and self disillusionment become a common issue. The play ends as Nze Achumba realises albeit too late that the needless power tussle in the community has shifted the interest of the leaders from the immediate needs of the populace.

Analysis of the Play

The perspective of mindset in the play is mostly replete of the dominant notion of need for restructuring that abound in the play. The Igbo society in which the play is set is known for their practice of oligarchy as a form of leadership. Thus choosing the village head is a communal decision and any one is free to contest for the post. In a bid to pass on this message, the author constructed a hardworking widow, Uredia whose husband has fought gallantly in the war and later died of injury sustained during the war, to make the community aware of the need to rally together to resist the likes of Nwaka, a self-conceited politician who believes that it is his birth right to rule the community. Through the actions and speeches of the characters, the author speaks volumes about the need for mindset restructuring in the country. The tone of the play is set by the narrator:

Narrator: Darkness fall, people fall. They fall as leaves from withering trees. It is war. Look into homes, someone is missing. Is it the head of a family, the youth of tomorrow or could it be the tree trunk of those fallen leaves. Does our dark skin impair our vision or is its imply a curse to be independent...? (13).

The monologue above creates a picture of a need for urgent action to be taken. Thus the author uses the characters of Nze Nwokike and Nze Achumba to convince the villagers of what true leadership is meant to be and the need to have positive attitude amidst the hostility and hardship plaguing the community. The characters are used as central metaphors carefully positioned to paint a picture of the imperative of mindset restructuring as the only way to pull the community out of the present situation. Nze thus informs the people:

Nze: ... this is a tempting period it is not easy to keep Obodo together especially one with disgruntled people. But let us

continue to be one even in the face of temptation to betray ourselves.... As they say it is easier to destroy than to...

All: ... build (15).

Nze's speech above is a clarion call for people to be patient no matter the difficulty of the situation.

The Chorus aids the speech by calling on the citizens together for the country because "something grievous has befallen us" (14). The need for caution in our ethnic and tribal reservations is emphasised thus:

Achumba: Nze, people from Umumili and Umuala found time to be with us today.

Nze Nwokike: This is Aladima everyone is welcome. Let us continue to be one. This war must bring us closer than ever before. You must refuse the tempting offers of the saboteurs (15).

The civil war has disillusioned the psyche of the majority. Though there are reasons for such perception, in the same vain, two wrongs can never make a right. There is need for change of mindset on our tribalistic and ethnic reservations. This is one of the major areas of restructuring that is needed. Also, Uredia is another character created by the author and carefully positioned to paint the picture of the imperative of restructuring the mindset especially where the leadership of the country is concerned.

The effects of the war have created a big crack on ethnicity and tribal relationship among the people. Iwu in the play advocates for ethnic tolerance if this current clamour for restructuring the nation is to yield good fruits. Nze cautions Okehi thus:

Nze: This woman has lived among us for ten years.... She is one of us.... I appeal we should not allow this war to make a beast out of us ... let those of us at home show love to one another (23).

Despite the reports of injustice, calamities and atrocities from the war front, Nze keeps on assuring his people that peace and unity is what is needed to create a better nation. He therefore admonishes the people:

Nze: I mandate *ofo* against anyone who kills unjustly... (24).

Nze's decision is a timely one as the narrator observes:

Narrator: It would have been war within and war without Isn't it good to have a leader in the community? There would have been bloodshed among brothers (24).

The timely intervention of Nze Achumba in the developing events ends up quelling the catastrophe that would have befallen the community.

Nigeria is bedevilled with series of problems that would have been guided by leaders who are sincere to the nation. A leader with the type of mindset exhibited by Nze Nwokike and later, Nze Achumba, in the play is what the nation needs. The author creates in these characters, leaders who see all as one; who believe that peace and progress can only be achieved with unity and trust. Sincerity of purpose and action needs to be maintained, irrespective of any unforeseen situation. Iwu in the play appears to be appealing to the leadership of the country to lead citizens to see themselves as brothers and sisters for the benefits of any restructuring plan to be reaped by all and relationship needs to be maintained without suspicion.

Nze thus queries the tribal rivals that is observed among the members of the community and wonders how we degenerate so low in our behaviour towards others.

Nze: Just by a single pronouncement, you have denounced what we stand for? Do you mean that this terminates what held us together since creation? (34).

How can progress be in a nation that shows no sympathy for helpless people and marginalisation is encouraged by the privileged few? Until we purge our minds of the winner takes it all mentality, it will never go well with this nation's development even in the face of all other forms of restructuring. The author seems to suggest that the moment we realise that the problem of one is the problem of all, Nigeria will become more focused.

The killing of Nze in the play portrays that until we learn to accommodate even the weakest among us, peace and progress will continue to elude us. Uredia advises thus:

Uredia: ... But I advise you to drop every racial and ethnic sentiment. It is anti-development (59).

The problem of the community does not end with the war because some of the people believe that they are born to be kings. Hence, Nwaka in the play parades himself as the rightful king, seeing the position as his birth right. On the other hand, Uredia tries to put him straight. This is explicit in the following dialogue:

Nwaka: They take away my birthright

Uredia: What birthright?

Nwaka: The right to be king and leader of my people

Uredia: Leadership is not the right of the person or family. It is the right of every one and any one that meets the people's consent (61).

The likes of Nwaka in the play need to first restructure their political mindset for equity and fairness play. They need to understand that leadership is not the right of any person. They should be ready to swallow the bitter pills as Achumba suggests because "democracy is a game of numbers" (23). Whether restructured or not, a strong and united nation should be in a position to produce leaders that are intelligent enough to perceive the areas of a common interest of the people. According to Obienyem, "where one's place of birth is a determinant factor in choosing leaders, objectivity in the choice is discountenanced" (152). This fixed mindset needs to be purged from those that harbour it. It is an anti-productive attitude. Uredia explains further to Nwaka:

Uredia: There are three kindreds. Yours happens to be largest, but it does not mean that leadership is your birthright. The other kindreds and infact the minority wards have a right to contest kingship (62).

The above explanation did not go well with Nwaka. Thus, he threatens to kill and punish anyone who dares to contest the kingship with him.

The author is trying to inform us that until we realise that time has come for us to resize our fufu balls for the soup to be enough for us, crises and confusion will be the lot of our political scene, even when restructured. The mindset of people like Nwaka needs to be restructured for effective political restructuring of our country, Nigeria. This is because when this "right" is taken away from them in the cause of restructuring without adequate orientation, more problem will be created as is evidenced thus:

Nwaka: Let anyone try. The political caterpillar will crush him...The political grave will swallow him.... I have enough *koboko* to wipe away your foolish desire to be my competitor (62).

The political implication of the above statement is the wrong notion that a particular section of the country is destined to rule while the others are meant to serve. This type of mindset constitute a clog to the wheel of democratic progress of any country, thus needs to be changed to save the country from total annihilation.

Conclusion

There is need for Nigerians to decide on issues concerning their national standing. However the general beliefs and attitudes of the majority of the populace perceive the country as an irredeemable country. In *Birthright*, John Iwuh has been able to show

that mindset restructuring is critical for the success of the national restructuring agenda. Through the study of the play, the paper discovers that mindset restructuring is critical for the success of the national restructuring agenda. It therefore aligns with Adebayo that, “no amount of political or economic restructuring can bring any form of meaningful progress unless we first restructure and re-orientate the mindset of the citizen” (n.p.). Every individual in the Nigerian society should avail himself of adequate orientation on the need for attitudinal change. The country should endeavour to imbibe in the citizens the attitude of positive values in order for it to be effectively restructured. Such positive values as hard work, respect, honesty discipline, integrity, love, truthfulness, and so on, should be seen by all as necessary for the development of the country. We should extricate our minds from negative values if we expect positive result from restructuring the country. The paper, therefore, recommends that restructuring the mindset is apparent for the development of the country.

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**RE-NEGOTIATING NIGERIA'S UNITY
TOWARDS NATIONAL STABILITY IN YERIMA'S
HARD GROUND AND IWUH'S BIRTHRIGHT**

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Abstract

There is an assumption from certain quarters that Nigeria has moved out of the economic downturn; that it has been freed from the incessant attacks by Boko Haram terrorists that had even occupied a large area in some states in the North-East region. Yet, the reality on ground practically relays hardship as the prices of essential goods and services remain consistently high. The death toll is on the increase on daily basis from the wanton destruction of lives and property due to the onslaught from herdsmen and farmers' clashes, banditry, armed robbery, and kidnapping, among other life threatening vices. Nigeria, with its heterogeneous ethnic and religious biases, is where it is today because of the on-going social dialectical agitations and aggression expressed by some ethnic and even regional groups and militia, (most especially those from the Niger Delta and South-East regions), who feel deprived or excluded from the scheme of things regarding issues affecting them. Therefore, it is not surprising that Nigeria is the third deadliest country in the world to live in, behind Iran and Syria; and it presently houses the highest number of poor people in the world. It is against this premise that this study, by way of textual analysis, will qualitatively examine Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* and John Iwuh's *Birthright*, using the Frustration Aggression Theory as a backdrop. This is with the view to highlighting possible measure(s) to ameliorate this head-aching peril on Nigerians. Among other variables, this treatise adopts a stance that there is the need for reconsideration and re-negotiating the present resource control policy between the Federal, State and Local Governments for an equitable finance sharing formula.

Introduction

The geographical region on the global map recognised as Nigeria before now was some large expanse of land space accommodating different ethnic, religious, cultural, economic and political administrative structures. In fact, before the 19th century, there

were several independent centralised city states. Some of these were the Oyo Empire, the Benin Empire, the Bornu Empire, the Sokoto Caliphate, and a host of others. These institutional structures gave each distinctive fiat and strength to consolidate on their peculiar internal and external affiliations, as well guaranteed their cultural values, oneness, fundamental rights, and sense of belonging, among others. Therefore, their socio-economic and political structures were heavily built on chiefdoms, emirates, kingdoms, and so on. This account Achor Akowe corroborates thus:

The entity known as Nigeria today actually came to being as a result of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates with the then Lagos Colony by the economic and political usurpers of this world. But prior to this arrangement, people of these regions had their unique political structures with highly respectful cultural values and customs which engendered democratic governance, social justice, equity, (*sic*) good inter and intra-tribal neighbourliness among others (81).

The above reveals that the then enforced marriage of these different independent ethnic groups, which have existed and co-habited with relative peace over the years, was of no effect; because there was no apparent reason for that in the first instance. It only thrusts to the fore, a clear evidence of a matrimonial configuration for the sole economic benefits of the colonial administrators, and certainly not for the benefit of the confederating groups. That notwithstanding, this enforced ‘merger’ has been able, to a large extent, manage its imposed nuptials for a span of decades of years, to the extent of celebrating its centenary anniversary some time in 2014. But not without an attempt of one major case of secession that lasted from 1967 to 1970.

Ordinarily, with this score of achievement, one would have thought that the cord of acculturation should have tightened the bond of togetherness, enough to continuously bind these groups together in harmony by virtue of their coming into terms to understanding more of their differences. Ironically, the story appears the opposite as the realities on ground about the question of its oneness replicate a severe threat to national stability. For instance, Akinsanmi Gboyega cites an annual report by Nigeria Watch, which claims that, “supported by the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) and French National Research for Development (IRD) ... violence claimed no fewer than 10,665 lives across the federation in 2018 alone” (<https://www.thisdaylive.com>). Apparently, that is traceable to ethnic, religious and even regional aggression.

The question this study will attempt to answer then is why there is this sudden viral surge in ethnic and regional aggressions, pummelling down almost every socio-economic and political structural space within the six geopolitical zones of the country. This has become an issue of concern considering the magnitude of the spate

of killings, maiming and loss of valuables, (almost on daily basis) running into hundreds of millions of naira. From every indication, this is orchestrated by the extremely cruel disposition of some religious, ethnic and regional elements, threatening to extend their ethnic, regional and cultural orientations beyond their original frontiers. The aftermath of the losses from this fallout come with huge economic and socio-political implications, which are not friendly, to its national growth and development, at least not at a time when Nigeria is just crawling out of a severe economic downturn. This veracity is why Majeed Dahiru observes that,

Nigeria has never been more divided than it is today. The various fault lines of our political space have been deepened and become more manifest in the various agitations from different segments of our society. Lines of our political space have been deepened and become more manifest in the various agitations from different segments of our society (<https://opinion.premiumtimesng.com>).

Therefore, in an attempt to answer the question on why it seems as if Nigeria is at a crossroad in its journey to stable nationhood, the opinion of John Ekei becomes pertinent. He opines thus:

... how the average Nigerians are governed in terms of provision of amenities, employment, security, human rights, internal relations, etc. provides the yardsticks for assessing the positive contributions and responsiveness of government to the citizens. It goes a long way to determine a corresponding stable and effective response from the citizens towards the government (104).

From Ekei's position, it could be surmised that the stability of any country is predicated heavily on how much of the citizens' wellbeing is of uttermost importance to the government of the day. Incidentally, Nigeria is a clime where there is a near absence of social justice and enabling business environment. It has one of the highest unemployment rates, globally; dearth of basic amenities and infrastructure decay dot the entire geo-political regions; and deficient safety apparatus to secure lives and property from both internal and external aggression, among others. Therefore, the people are disenchanted with the democratic style of governance championed by self-imposed leaders, who plot to win election at all costs. And while in power, they make life miserable for the populace.

Let us not then forget that this detached disposition of some of these devious elements in power comes with some non-palatable retaliatory consequences. Little wonder, Nigeria, as a theatre of anthropological disorder, is has been passing through one of the worst socio-economic and political gridlocks in its journey to national stability in the past four decades. To further reinforce the claim of this study, the

tumult Nigerians are subjected to, on a daily basis, is a reflection of the present state of the nation, as Ugo Aligo states in a report:

The 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released globally by Transparency International revealed that Nigeria neither improved nor progressed in the perception of corruption in the public administration in 2018.... The newly released index published by the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy International Centre (CISLAC) which is Transparency International Chapter in Nigeria revealed that Nigeria scored 27 out of 100 points in the 2018 CPI, maintaining the same score in the 2017 CPI (<https://www.thisdaylive.com>).

The foregoing documentation by Aligo brings the table of discourse to a logical stand that Nigeria is a corrupt nation where anything goes. Corruption in this context goes beyond money laundering and other negative monetary transactions, but embraces every form of arbitrary practices that negate the laid down rules on how certain procedural operations are carried out to the overall growth and development of a given institution. Hence, among other negative vices, money meant for the overall development of the Nigerians' welfare is still being amassed by a very few privileged persons at the corridor of power, with reckless impunity, to the detriment of the masses. This singular act is why there is severe lack of essential amenities and commodities and violent deaths traceable to land dispute, religious conflicts, unscrupulous cattle grazing and rustling, and terrorist attacks that are most times sponsored by these same power wielders to distract attention while they perpetuate their heinous criminal and demonic acts. The argument of Chinedu Mbalisi and Okechukwu Nwaneze succinctly buttresses the point being made. They state thus:

The challenges of ethnicity, religious fanaticism, corruption, politics by ethnic identity, and practice of prebendalism have created destructive security challenges and social instability bedeviling Nigeria's fledgling democracy. The struggle for power, control and distribution of the country's resources has continued to exacerbate insecurity and divisive tendencies (239).

From the above, there is no arguing the fact that Nigeria, as an independent entity, has been faced with many unthinkable vices so much so that the country has not come to terms with the reality that there is *strength in diversity*, like in other heterogeneous climes. Some ethnic and religious groups are yet to appreciate the country's divergent religious backgrounds, so much that they have taken their religious and ethnic affiliations beyond their frontiers to even becoming fanatical. Again, Nigeria remains a geographical region where one who controls and distributes the nation's resources is not only determined by his/her ethnic and religious background, but he/she imposes himself/herself on the electorates with reckless

abandon since elections are seen by the Nigerian political gladiators as a do-or-die affair. This is taking its toll heavily on the very fibre of its national stability because these unthinkable arrangements are enough to set the entire country ablaze in the order of the popular Rwanda genocide. For instance, Kingsley Nwaeze reports that, just recently, the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) of the United Kingdom “issued a security travel alert to British citizens, cautioning them against travelling to 21 states in Nigeria” (<https://www.thisdaylive.com>).

A glance through the discourse so far reveals that maladministration of state resources is why the average Nigerian is in a state of mental and social delirium because of the much unimaginable turmoil be devilling him/her from every sphere of the Nigerian economy. This pathetic graphic image of the Nigerian state should whip up sentiments among humane playwrights, whose obligation it is to mirror the society, with the view to at least reduce human sufferings. In the opinion of Chukwuma Anyanwu, drama as one of the theatrical activities,

functions as witness, prosecutor, plaintiff and judge in its various roles of addressing societal issues depending on what is prevalent at a point in time. It exposes the evils and tables issues of concern for discussion and dissection (6).

It is this thinking that informed the need to textually interrogate Ahmed Yerima’s *Hard Ground* and John Iwuh’s *Birthright*.

Theoretical Framework

Theories concerning the phenomenon of aggression, as articulated by Tanya Sharma, are three-pronged. To be specific, the theories are: Instinct Theory of Aggression, Frustration Aggression Hypothesis, and Social Learning Theory. Of these theories, the Frustration Aggression Hypothesis underpins this study because of its explanation of psychologically aggressive behaviour in connection to frustration. For example, in their summation, Mentovich and Jost posit that,

the hypothesis was applied in the studies of scapegoating and hate crimes, which indicated that as sources of frustration accumulate – during an economic crisis, for example frustrated groups may unleash their aggression on a convenient social target, often a minority group (<https://www.britannica.com>).

The frustration aggression hypothesis was postulated by a group of scholars, comprising John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears, in 1939 (<http://www.psychologydiscussion.net>). They posited that frustration is a circumstance which is present to prevent the achievement of a desired goal. Furthermore, they observed that frustrating actions obstruct “the individual’s goal oriented behaviour, threaten his self-esteem or deprive him of the opportunity to

gratify his important motives and immediate goals” (<http://www.psychologydiscussion.net>). The proponents of the theory maintained that aggression is always a consequence of frustration of some sort. They further asserted that, “although these action maybe temporarily compressed, delayed, disguised, displaced and otherwise deflected from their immediate and logical goals, they are not destroyed. It is therefore inevitable that aggression follows frustration” (<https://www.britannica.com>). In summary, this theory is said to remain the weightiest model to use to explain socio-dialectical inter-ethnic distrust and aggression, which plays out as the motivation for reaction, combat, and so on.

Synopses of Plays

The play, *Hard Ground*, set in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, is a story of a young militant, Nimi, who is obsessed by his desire to fight for the rights of his community members. In his thinking, dropping out of school and brandishing dangerous arms with other brigades of boys will yield the desired results. Unfortunately, twenty of his boys are killed; he is arrested and to face prosecution and to be executed eventually. He is rescued by his mother, Mama, with the help of his uncle, Inyingifaa.

As events unfold, Nimi feels his uncle, a Reverend Father, is responsible for the leakage of the information of the planned attack because he had earlier on gone to confess to him ahead of the operation. Coincidentally, the Reverend Father comes to warn him of the impending threat from the Don, who is after his life, to avenge the death of his boys. This infuriates Nimi the more as the attack was well-planned. Hence, he is warned not to return to the Creeks, where he finds succour defending the rights of his people. In the main, Pikibo, his heartthrob, who is pregnant for him is beheaded. The Don, who is after his life, is to visit him; and arrangements are put in place for the visit. Nimi and Mama carefully assassinate Don, only to find out that the Don is Baba, his own father, bringing an end to the action of the play.

Birthright, on the other hand, as a dramatic text, recounts the political, economic, socio-cultural, traumatic and emotional implications of the *common* people of Ndiala. The play begins with the council of elders, headed by Nze, meeting to chart a way forward out of the excruciating effects of the onslaught of Obodonile’s army and his cohorts. But at every point of the agenda, Nwaka tries to digress and distracts the meeting towards a selfish agendum of who becomes the next leader of the people of Ndiala. In his bid, some women, who are supposed to be part of the elder’s forum and are better positioned to become the leaders of the people, are forcefully pushed out of the council by Nwaka. This he did because he always claims it is his birth right to rule.

It is in the course of the deliberation, the revelation about Obodonile’s resistance to Ndiala’s independence is disclosed to be connected to the richness of their land in crude oil which it benefits from maximally. Secondly, most families whose male children are conscripted into the Biafra Army are gruesomely murdered, and parents and children who are suffering from malnutrition did not even know reasons why they are at the crossfire of the war. Ijeogu’s two sons die in the course of

the war; the only surviving male child is also carried away to join the army; while his two daughters are at the camp of the army fetching water and serving as sex-slaves, to satisfy the intense sexual desires of the war ravaged soldiers.

The above experiences explain why Ijeogu is traumatised. Ironically, the marriage among the people of Ndi-Ugwu, Ndi-Nda and Ndiala was actually stage managed by the Ndi Ocha, their colonial administrators. As things stand, the two other ethnic groups are in complete agreement with Obodonile. At the end, suggestively, Nwaka loses to Uredia, the women leader, since the majority of the men refuse to vote for him. As if that is not enough, his two wives, Nwanyimma and Maradie, equally leave him after all; and Nwanyimma's pregnancy happens to be for Ijeogu.

Examination of *Hard Ground* and *Birthright*

The two drama texts under study attempt a narrative of the socio-economic and political outlook of the people of the South-South and South-East regions within the Nigerian geopolitical zonal configuration. This study will not dwell so much on how this arrangement came to being. But it will attempt to address the issue(s) with regards to why the people of this configuration have refused to live in a good neighbourly manner with every government of the day, be it military and civilian, since the discovery of crude oil.

Over the years, some sociological assumptions should have, ordinarily, narrowed down some cultural, ethnic, and religious sentiments to the overall development of Nigeria; but the reality on ground is quite the opposite. Perhaps, the challenge at hand could remotely and partly be as a result of the botched amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates. The assertion of Ejim Onyebuchi validates this:

The root cause of this situation is colonisation which created states with boundaries that are incongruent with pre-existing ethnic boundaries. In some of these states, ethnic nationalities were lumped together under the colonial administration which uses a system of divide and rule to keep the people apart and unable to forge a common opposition against colonial rule (121).

The above position corroborates the argument that these ethnic groups, as stated earlier, were not consulted about the arrangement of lumping them together into an entity. It was hurriedly done to accommodate certain selfish interests in order to promote the economic and political gains of the colonial administrator, thereby leaving behind a feeling among the colonised that a particular ethnic group is the majority and the others, the minorities. This feeling has grown to a dimension where the more *populous* group feels it is their birth right to rule perpetually and equally dictate the pace of the socio-economic and political space. This is why throughout the Nigerian political journey, be it under military or democratic rule, the northerners

have ruled the most either, as a Prime Minister, Head of state and Presidents, either by design or by coincidence. In a way, this has infuriated other ethnic groups who equally have a stake and the mindset that their domains house the economic hub of the country that drives at least 75% of the country's foreign earnings. This feeling has not gone down well with Nigeria, as a country, as it plays out in the many crises witnessed in this nation with attendant losses of investments and lives. Thus, there is the thinking that urgent steps need to be taken to remedy this menace in order to avoid the reoccurrence of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970; or something even worse.

It is in the light of the above the two playwrights under study, Ahmed Ahmed and John Iwuh, graphically (in the dramatic sense of it) warn Nigerians against the calamity that may befall the country again as a fall out from unruly deprivation of people's rights by leaders and the attendant reckless consequential attacks by followers. This could be the cure to the ailing skeletal leftover of the very fabric upon which the Nigerian enforced marriage leans; because, as things stand, its fabrics have been deeply eaten rapaciously by caterpillars and cankerworms of ethnic, religious bigotry and the hiccup in the management of exploration and exploitation of the country's crude oil resources. Also, there is the question of the factors of production as it concerns the commensurate equitable disbursement of income from the sales of these resources among the various ethnic groups within the six geopolitical zones.

However, writing in the above vein, Maduabuchi Ogidi is of the opinion that,

the exploitation in the production and distribution of economic resources in society creates a consciousness among the exploited that the existing social relations of production has become fetters or chains that they can only be liberated through a revolution. As the exploited class struggles to liberate themselves, the privileged class also struggles to preserve the status quo. Thus society is constantly faced with conflict arising from struggle between the privileged or dominant class and the exploited or dominated class (34-35).

Ogidi's stance re-echoes the view that most of the crises witnessed in Nigeria are as a result of a fight back from the undemocratic process of electing leaders and the dislocated process of equitable distribution of resources to the overall benefit of society. There are ethnic groups who feel marginalised in the governance of Nigeria. In the Niger Delta, for instance, Adefolaju Adeseke and Modupe Olaniyan maintain that the problems are

...environmental and degradation caused by oil exploration and exploitation which has unavoidably led to squalor, extreme poverty, health hazards, high cost of living, youth restiveness, kidnapping and all sorts of vices ... the Federal government and oil multi-nationals

have been blamed and criminalised for these woes that betide the region (160).

Furthermore, the remark of Henry Seriaki Dickson, the Executive Governor of Bayelsa State, as quoted by Emmanuel Addeh, is instructive here:

I have told the world, that the country has been oppressing our people, you have done your worst, people are deprived, rendered almost to the level of only seeking surveillance contracts and are oppressed. They do not care whether we exist or not and I won't get tired of talking, in office or out of office (<https://www.thisdaylive.com>).

Yerima and Iwuh graphically capture this ordeal. In *Hard Ground*, the protagonist, Nimi, reports:

Nimi: He listens, mother, but even him has become disillusioned with our ways. He has, Mama. He did not create all those sufferings. No God created a fine life for us, Mama, but a few people say no, we must live a hard life. We are the natives, and they the well-to-dos. So we have to survive. The deadly swamp, the murky water, the heavy rain forests. The pockets of little villages separated by salty water. *The black oil under the ground....* (13). (My emphasis)

In *Birthright*, the conversation among the elders will suffice:

Nze: (*Taps the floor with his walking stick for order. Then moodily.*) Our people are not happy; Umuebe, Umuala, Umumili and all the areas our language is spoken. I am told that over twenty lorries full of our people arrived this morning.

Achumba: It is true; over 100 families were squeezed together like goats stacked for sale. No family returned complete. My brother was one of them; his wife and three children were beheaded by Ndi-Ugwu; civilians like us not soldiers.

Ichie: You're right; Obodonile wants to wipe us out. I wish I am as educated as Uredia!

Nwaka: Illiterate, what has education to do with war; must you mention that name again?

Ichie: Perhaps, I need some education to understand why it is so difficult to allow anyone who wishes to pull from Obodonile to do so.

Nze: *because Ndi-Ala feeds Obodonile from her oil.* That is the agreement with Ndi-ocha. Ndi-Ugwu and Ndi-Nda want it to remain so.

Ahumba: That is not all, Ndi-ugwu and Ndi-Nda have made it unsafe for our people to remain and keep their jobs in the city (19-20). (*My emphasis*)

The excerpts from the two texts above clearly re-enact the plights of Nigeria, where citizens are treated like foreigners; in some cases worse even in some states of residence or even in their own communities. Nigeria has variously witnessed ethno-religious crises where, at every slight provocation, Igbo people are violently attacked, maimed, killed and their shops burnt to ashes in some northern parts of Nigeria. In some instances, acts of reprisal attacks on Hausas and Fulanis have also been witnessed in the South-East, where they are equally killed and their cattle rustled.

Presently, there are repeated Fulani herdsmen and farmers' clashes. It is reported from some quarter that the Fulani herders feel it is their right to graze their cattle recklessly; and as if that is enough, they have equally pushed their recklessness to the extent of attempting to chase the original dwellers from their ancestral homes. The resistance from the farmers and the dwellers against the feeling (of Hausas and Fulanis) that they are meant to rule and that power belongs to them alone could be responsible for the unimaginable bloodbath witnessed in Plateau State, Kogi State, around the Benue Valley in the North-Central down to the Enugu axis of the South-East region. The entire scenario presents a gloomy and bleak future for the stability of Nigeria as long as the concern of ownership factors of equitable share of profit of production and others are not giving fair appropriation to at least benefit the immediate local communities, where these resources are explored and exploited.

As it were, Yerima and Iwuh poke at a social dialectical preoccupation, which this study deems imperative and which has continued to be a cog in the wheel of Nigeria's journey towards overall human growth and development and harnessing of its natural resources. It is the position of these playwrights that when once a people are deprived of their rights, socially, there is bound to be some level of resistance from the quarter of the oppressed. Hear how Yerima relays this phenomenon through Nimi again:

Nimi: The school you sent me to was made up of waste land and poverty. And even as a child you smell it and you quickly learn that nothing is free, unless you ask for it, and when they refuse to give you. You grab it, and that is what we are doing. Boys first growing up fighting for beans cake and puff-puff. Then gradually, we were forced to grow to become men overnight. Asking for our rights.

Baba: So, it is your right to kill?

Nimi: If we have to Baba. (*Mama bursts into tears*). Poverty stinks, and if another man holds the soap, and won't let have it, then nudge him slightly and collect it. For you need a good bath to become a decent perfumed human being like him...

Iningifaa: Nudge him to death if necessary?

Nimi: Yes, if necessary and often by any means we can lay our hands on (11).

In Birthright:

Narrator: Daybreak; a carcass of men (*Looks around scattered bodies*). These bodies from now on have ceased to be among the living. They'll now be manures for trees and grass for next planting season. Those were men, our fathers, brothers, and uncles. The army comprised of men, able-bodied men. It comprised of youths, the future of tomorrow. Ndi-ala engaged the best of them, but isn't the god of war a glutton? As he feeds we deplete and more men were sacrificed. The war continues (*Suppressed sound of machine guns continue*.) Village heads deliberate as if they are against different villages. But they are not compelled to contribute to that consuming fire, war, that voracious eater of the living. (*Taps his snuff case and inhales*.) Mmm... (14-15).

Nze: Ndi-Ala kwenu! Kwezuo nu! My son went even without asking my opinion. What opinion is there to give anyway? This is a tempting period. It is not easy to keep Obodo together, especially one with disgruntled people. But let us continue to be one even in the face of temptation... (15)

Nwaka: Sentiments, Sentiments! Ndi-ala wants government, not so? Government is death. Death is government. Each time you desire government then you desire death. Government is power; with it a twin can clutch on the mother breast while sucking the other. His twin will either fight or starve to death. What do we want? Freedom or power? Either way it is war. Unfortunately, war is death! (21)

Nigeria is a country, where there is so much concentration of power at the centre; and therefore, those at the helm of affairs try to allocate or distribute resources along tribal and ethnic lines. This woe has bedevilled every sphere of its economy so much so that people are disenchanted with this style of governance. This stance Kingsley Moghalu orchestrates when he asserts that,

the cries of marginalisation, restructuring and secessionist's tendencies are at the core, a cry for justice in our country. Some compatriots will go beyond their disagreement with secession rhetoric in the Southeast, Southwest and South-South today, to treat their fellow Nigerians with unjustified suspicion because of their belief about how Nigeria can be repaired or indeed if our country can be one country (<https://www.thecable.ng>).

If any ethnic group feels marginalised in the scheme of any democratic privilege and every constitutional allowance is implored to no avail and a peaceful protest is staged in Nigeria, such a protest is most often treated with disdain by those in authority. This is because of the wrong notion that such a protesting group comes from a minority ethnic background and hence do not have a say. Sometimes, they are unlawfully tear-gassed and even shot at and killed by the law enforcement agencies. Consequentially, with no other alternative, the aggrieved go all out to defend their rights, even if it meant carrying arms, equally dying for this cause, or even trying to secede. This explains why Ejim Onyebuchi observes thus:

Parties in Nigeria most times resort to the use of lethal violence to gain control over some dispute and perceived indivisible resource such as a piece of land or local political power. The groups are organised along a shared communal identity meaning that they are not formally organised rebel groups or militia but the confrontations take place along the line of group identities (128).

Additionally, one salient concern which is of importance to this study is the evaluation of the loss of lives and property as fallout from engaging violence in dispute resolution. It is no news that no reasonable strides of development can be attained by any nation when its human and natural resources are under perpetual siege of incessant attacks. This assertion is captured in *Hard Ground* and *Birthright*, respectively. In *Hard Ground*:

Baba: You said nothing. But twenty people died in the camp, butchered like sacrificial dogs... bodies littered everywhere. But you say you know nothing.

In *Birthright*:

Narrator: Daybreak; a carcass of men (looks around scattered bodies). These bodies from now on have ceased to be among the living. They'll now be manures for trees and grass for next planting season. Those were men, our fathers, brothers, and uncles. The army comprised of men, able-bodied men. It

comprised of youths, the future of tomorrow. Ndi-ala engaged the best of them, but isn't the god of war a glutton? As he feeds we deplete and more men were sacrificed... (14-15)

Achumba: ... The war attacked and sucked the blood of every one of us like a mosquito. The man who lost his wife is not different from the woman who lost her husband. As refugees, our houses fell before we came back. We are like children once again starting life afresh (56).

In a developing economy like Nigeria, loss of human or the labour force to a large extent spells doom to its developmental strides because it is the human resource that drives other factors of production. Several violent and sometime peaceful protests and agitations in this part of the globe are often met with attacks and reprisals leading to loss of lives and property on both sides. The Nigerian policy makers do not take to heart the economic and political implications of the loss of potential labour force. The neglect plaguing the health sector with the attendant medical tourism by these policy makers to other nations has had huge pecuniary repercussions on the country to the detriment of our overall development; and this needs to be averted. Thus, whenever an aggrieved group raises objection against unfavourable policies, instead of calling for dialogue, officers and men of the Nigerian army are quickly dispatched to create mayhem even under a democratic dispensation. This underscores the view of Wole Ayodele that,

all these ... clashes, which had claimed lives and properties as well as destruction to properties worth billions of naira have no small measure, led to disruption of social and economic lives and led to gross underdevelopment of the state (<https://www.thisdaylive.com>).

Instances of protests like the Islamic sect, the Shiites, followers of Al Zazaky, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitators, and followers of Sahara Reporters' Omoyele Sowore, and several clashes with security operatives, among others, amplify the above. These face-offs between the government and the agitators have left behind scores of deaths of able-bodied men and women and those caught by stray bullets that may not be part of the agitations. Such victims would have helped to engineer or harness developmental projects that would have placed Nigeria in the class of developed countries. No wonder Nigeria is presently a cynosure of global attention, only because it houses the highest number of poor people and the third most unsafe country in the whole world to live in, even when it is not at the Eastern pole of the globe.

Finally, we are in a dispensation that sees theatre transcending entertainment into the realm of seeking solutions to the myriad of human untold hardships. The playwrights who are herein studied unequivocally lend their voices to the need to

resolve whatever misunderstandings among ethnic groups amicably. To them, violence begets violence; and it should be the last option in conflict management. They, therefore, aver by inference that there is the need to come to terms with reality where issues are trashed out on the table of dialogue, a platform where each group is willing to give and take to the benefit of all in line with best global practices. This elixir to this headache is related by the playwrights through their personae.

In Hard Ground:

Nimi: I had said that I would not go, but when I was told that the occasion was to unveil the statue of the heroes of our land, who had given their lives for us, I went. We had been begging for Ken Saro-Wiwa day, and I thought the day had come. The occasion had started well. The President General of our movement had said all the great things about our heroes, the need for us all to come together, have one voice, and the best formula for resources control of the revenue generated from our oil. But the one that sent the governor twitching was when he said true federalism was needed to actualise long and lasting peace in Nigeria... (35).

Nimi: That was when we all chanted aloud the Kaiama Declaration. “Cease to recognise all undemocratic decrees that rob our people and communities of their right to ownership and control of our lives and resources which were enacted without our participation and consent. Agree to remain within Nigeria...” and that “the best way for Nigeria is a federation of ethnic nationalities” (36).

In Birthright:

Nze: Amalgamation was selfish. Obodonile for now is a collection of idlers, hounds and scavengers.

Owolawa: I share your sentiments.

Nze: Then it is easy to measure our love for one another.

Owolawa: How?

Nze: Let us remove the black gold from your psyches, it belongs to a region.

Owolawa: We have our different strengths.

Nze: Then let’s feed on these strengths if we must prevent future wars... support us! (30).

Nigeria is a country where 75-90 percent of its foreign earnings come from crude oil, the mainstay of the nation’s economy. Over the years, its procrastination on

diversification of the economy after the discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta is partly why the actualisation of its oneness remains a mirage. Nigeria did not have this challenge so much under the regional configuration. In fact, it was after the extermination of the First Republic that this issue became prominent because of the deep ethnic consciousness that attended that incident, being that oil is the major source of its revenue and which also affects what is accruable to all the federating states. Under the former arrangement, each region controlled the resources within her jurisdiction and paid royalties to the central government. Therefore, the case of economic and political marginalisation was minimal to an extent; that is why there were less unnecessary agitations and aggressions when it came to who occupied the central government, from which ethnic background, who got what, when and how. It was then an electoral exercise devoid of ethnic sentiments. It is thus the perception of the playwrights under study that if the country goes the way of the former, where recognition was given to people's right to own, control land and resources within their domain, it will reduce the concentration of too much power at the centre which, according to this study, has stood sturdily and defiantly against the achievement of Nigeria's harmony.

Conclusion

Nigeria today is still being plagued by a myriad of unnecessary threats militating against national unity among the various ethnic groups after many years of its togetherness. No time in history has it experienced so much turmoil and hardships like now, most especially, not because it is just the only country housing the largest number of poor persons around the globe, but that it is the most deadly place to live in on earth, behind Syria and Iran. Expectedly, the unity of this country is under interrogation here because its present state is one that is bedevilled by kidnapping, certificates forgery by key office holders who want to gain access to and remain in power, election rigging, banditry, herders and farmers' clashes, Boko Haram insurgents' attacks, and secession threats, among others, leaving behind trails of deep ethnic sentiments and suspicion. By an anthropological calculation, after a century, the union of these different ethnic groups occupying this territory should have evolved into a social unit that should have helped to narrow the sharp contrast of their multiplicity.

It is this nagging challenge that Ahmed Yerima and John Iwuh have attempted to proffer solution to through their creative endeavours in *Hard Ground* and *Birthright*, respectively. In the plays, the playwrights "have resolutely lent their disquiet... against unethical... justification. They have actually risen above the clouds of mundanity of mere aesthetic and entertainment proclivities into the celestial realms of conflicts and contradictory resolution" (Akowe 84). It is within the purview of drama to direct and redirect the dialectal relationships that transpire among people in a particular society and even beyond for the betterment of all.

In these two texts, issues on why Nigeria is where it is today are raised. One among others is the concern of cavernous ethnic chauvinism among citizens which

has eaten deep into the tissues of that cord of Nigerian oneness. This has led to the cry of marginalisation by people of the South-East and South-South, above others, from other geo-political extractions. For the people of these entities, it is time to re-negotiate this marriage of convenience, so that resources in their land would be used to also develop their communities and not the other way round. Until this happens, Dollard and others' theory of "Frustration and Aggression" will continue to play out, thereby perpetuating the wanton destruction of lives and property running to billions of naira with its attendant underdevelopment hiccups. In the opinion of Ogidi,

in situation where the legitimate expectations and desires of individuals are denied, a feeling of disappointment may follow and this may be expressed through against certain people or society in general. Where people are deprived of their rights and entitlements there is the tendency for them to react with violent behaviour to reclaim their rights (36).

Nigeria is on the threshold of rewriting her history for good if, in its policy making and implementation, a space is not given to readdress the plights of the many agitating and aggrieved ethnic (of course not the faceless) movements, through re-negotiating its present federal system of governance that is lopsided in terms of resource control and allocation. This country is one clime where leaders at the helm of affairs are indifferent to the demands of people from the other regional and religious extractions. This has led to much lethal violence, vandalisation of pipelines and government infrastructure, loss of lives and others. It is not the position of this paper that extreme aggression should be the elixir to solving the challenges bedeviling Nigeria; but that unjustifiable deprivation of people's rights and expectations will certainly lead to gratuitous disorder and carnage.

This Nigerian nation which is feted with so much encomium on how much it is blessed in human and natural resources is on the global watch, paradoxically, for peevish and incredible dialectical dispositions. To the say the least, it is on the precipice of falling into the abyss of eternal disorder and bloodbath. It cannot afford to sink any further. Therefore, it is the position of this paper that there is a dire need to re-negotiate the Nigerian ethnic concerns leading to less concentration of power at the centre, with specific reference to resource control for the overall growth and development of the citizenry. Consequently, the government of the day, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari, should have the political will to revisit the recommendations of the National Sovereign Conference convened by the immediate past president of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, in 2014, which was adjudged to have addressed most of the factors militating against the unity of the country. Secondly, the 1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as Amended)* needs to be reviewed since it was drafted under an undemocratic government. This is to ensure that it essentially and adequately captures our present social, cultural, economic and political realities.

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**THEATRE AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL
RESTRUCTURING: A STUDY OF OSOFISAN'S
YUNGBA-YUNGBA AND THE DANCE CONTEST**

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Abstract

The political system of Nigeria has been tagged unstructured and formless since the last two decades. This has brought about arguments among political scholars, citizens and politicians. Interestingly, the theatre which functions as an educative, entertaining and informative art also plays vital roles in the restructuring of Nigerian political system. This study therefore, examines Femi Osofisan's *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* in relation to its depiction of political restructuring and transformation in the society. This paper adopts the theory of liberalism as modified by Phillips Shively, which advocates for psychological, economic and political freedom for all, complemented with the analytical approach to data gathering. The study reveals that, while some people believe that the restructuring of a country is the only solution to the political problem of such country, others see economic restructuring as a long-term panacea. This study concludes that, the role of theatre in the propagation of cultural, economic or socio-political restructuring cannot be over-emphasised. Thus, it is recommended that, Nigerian dramatists should be involved in the National Political Restructuring Agenda as they possess the proficiency and skills needed in proffering solutions to the problem of political instability, and that, the arts of the theatre should be employed in the process of restructuring the political system of Nigeria and Africa at large.

Introduction

The Federal Republic of Nigeria became an amalgamated country in the year 1914 with federalism as her system of government. This implies that the "political units recognise the sovereignty of a central authority, while retaining certain residual powers of government" (Falola and Dauda 237). Thus, power is over-concentrated in one out of many ethnic groups of the country. Toyin Falola and Bola Dauda further describe Nigerian federalism by stating that the

Nigerian federalism had two structural features. The first is the number and size of the regional units. There were three regions: Northern, Western and Eastern. Each was very large... but one of the

three (the Northern Region) was as large in population and territorial areas as the other two combined (265).

The above soon became a problem as Akanmu Adebayo observes that, “in the Nigerian federal system, a number of operational issues arose: The first was the dreaded spectre of Northern domination. The second was the minority question...” (105). Thus, the Northern domination has become a burden in the minds of the people of other regions. As a matter of fact, the issue of restructuring in the Nigerian political system has caused and continued to cause agitation among the citizens who believe that power is over-concentrated in one out of many ethnic groups of the country. As a result, there arose a huge agitation by people of the same view that a call for political restructuring is inevitable. Michael Okpara cited in Toyin Falola expresses the minds of others in the South by complaining that national integration is being threatened because of regionalism. He says:

We hold the view that the two worst threats to Nigerian unity are the practice of Regionalism... and the fact that most important principle of federation, namely that there should not be any one state so much greater than the rest combined that it can bend the will of the Federal Government has been broken. Until these two threats are removed, they labour in vain who labour for Nigerian unity and solidarity (Falola 193).

Thus, the practice of regionalism in a federal country continued and it instilled fear into the minds of the minority group whose major fear is that the majority group “would misuse power to the detriment of the disenfranchised” (Falola 193). Hence, over the years and in recent times, calls for political restructuring in Nigerian polity have become the order of the day as it becomes a continuous song on the lips of its advocates. This is clearly recorded in *The Punch Newspaper* of 4th September, 2017, thus:

Nigeria has in the recent past been inundated with calls for political restructuring by interest groups across its geopolitical zones They maintained that restructuring would enable the country create fewer and more viable federating units for rapid economic growth and development, whilst those who are averse to it (restructuring) have commended the lawmakers for refusing to grant the agitators what they said was an immodest request (Ikemitang 2).

Interestingly, Nigerian dramatists are not left behind in the advocacy and search for equity: political, economic, and educational restructuring through the art of playwriting. For instance, while Wole Soyinka advocates for equity in governance in his *Kongi's Harvest*, Femi Osofisan advocates for political restructuring in *Yungba-*

Yungba and the Dance Contest. In the same vein, Ahmed Yerima advocates for equity in the distribution of natural resources in *Hard Ground*; while Esiaba Irobi advocates for equity in the distribution of government allocation in *Hangmen Also Die*. Furthermore, Alex Asigbo in *Once Upon a School* and Rasaki Ojo Bakare in *Once Upon a Tower* have joined the train by advocating for restructuring in the Nigerian educational system. The recurring themes in these plays remain evergreen because of the socio-political vices which they attack. Importantly as well, the above mentioned playwrights, along with few others in their generations, have attempted to re-order the disordered state of our nation with the conviction that art can be a viable tool for social and, indeed, socio-political reconstruction.

It is based on the foregoing that this paper examines the role of theatre in the advocacy for political restructuring. Using Femi Osofisan's *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* as our case study, it discusses the issues of political development, equity in the distribution of natural resources, good governance, and participation in the national budget, among others. This is done in relation to how these themes can be applied to the Nigerian political system for possible and plausible sustainable development in terms of political restructuring.

Conceptual Clarifications

Theatre: Theatre is an art of make-believe, which consists of acting out a once experienced event or an imagined story. Ayo Akinwale defines theatre as “an activity in which an actor takes a role other than himself and through mime, speech, song and dance movements convey or communicate a message to an audience” (45). Thus, it is the representation, imitation or presentation of real or imagined stories in terms of dramatic action, acted upon a stage by actors and actresses with the use of all the theatrical elements. Theatre mirrors the society and shows the exact picture of the original to the society. Theatre, as used in this context, is defined as a drama text or its performance.

Restructuring: Restructuring can be defined as organising or re-organising something or place – government, system, company or institution and so on, in a new, different and better way. This implies that a change or alteration will take place in the process of such organisation. Obiora Okonkwo defines restructuring as a process of changing an “existing status quo in order to make it functional” (cited in Nwafor-Orisu et al. 28).

Political Reconstruction: Political reconstruction is the reformation of the political system of a country. While defining political restructuring, Babatunde Ahmed states that it entails “both political re-configuration of the country and devolution of powers to the constituent units as it is practiced in other climes” (9). In the same vein, Abu Najakku posits that political restructuring is the “re-organisation and the re-arrangement of the resource control by the governments and regions to foster unity and development” (1).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the theory of liberalism as modified by Philips Shively as its theoretical framework. One of the major figures in liberal thought was John Stuart Mill (1806-1813), who was also a strong feminist and advocate of women suffrage. Shively reveals that Mill's "contribution to liberal thought was to reconcile individual freedom with the general mood of the society in a fairly tight logical system" (Shively 26). He further opines that the theory of liberalism is one of the greatest ideologies that developed in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries and it "flourished in Great Britain and its colonies, perhaps because Britain was the first country to industrialise" (Shively 27).

Liberalism as an ideology advocates for psychological, economic and political freedom for all. It hypothesises that a society will be better off if there is appropriate distribution of power, national resources and gender balancing in all political sectors. Shively observes that liberalism posits that,

the highest good of society to develop their individual capacities to the fullest extent. That is, in a good society, all individual should be able to develop their minds, musical talents, athletic abilities or any other gift as much as possible. This requires according to liberalism, that people be maximally responsible for their own actions, rather than having someone else do things for them or tell them what to do. It is only by acting and feeling the consequences of such action that we can develop our capacity to act (Shively 26).

In view of its thematic concerns as discussed in the quotation above by Shively, liberalism is thus, apposite for this study as it relates to the study's thematic engagements. The following features are the tenets of liberal ideology as listed by Shively:

- a) Democracy of some sort is the proper form of government;
- b) People should have full intellectual freedom, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press (They should have responsibility for their own values, so that they will develop the ability to judge values);
- c) Government should remain minimal and should regulate people's lives very little. (As few decisions as possible should be made for people, so that they learn to make decisions for themselves.);
- d) In particular, people should be free to regulate their own economic activity; and that
- e) Power of one person over another is a bad thing; hence, government should be organised to guard against abuses of power. (Again, one person should not make decisions for another) (Shively 26).

Thus, this researcher finds liberalism as an ideology and theory that is relevant to this study.

Literature Review

The role of theatre and drama goes beyond the provision of information, serving as an entertainment tool or educating its audience. It also functions as a tool for political restructuring among other important roles. Dramatists have, in the past proffered sustainable solutions to pressing national issues which have the tendency to collapse a nation. Femi Osofisan, a prolific writer in the African theatre terrain, who is categorised among the post-independence Nigerian authors of dramas, novels and poems, has written many plays which treat subjects ranging from corruption to freedom or liberation of the downtrodden, to political restructuring, women empowerment, and so on. Sam Ukala avers that the politics of aesthetics in Femi Osofisan's plays include

corruption and insensitive governance; flagrant display of a few of ill-gotten wealth or power to the shock and envy of the poor and powerless majority; the suffering of the masses in a capitalist and/or totalitarian system; violence as a means of protest, the roles of the individual and the community in bringing about a new and progressive socio-political order and the obstacles on the way (Ukala 32).

In the same manner, Tunde and Falola observe that, "one common trend in all of these aspects of Osofisan is his desire to fight for the marginalised masses and to create a better society for all to live in" (37).

Femi Osofisan's usual approach to writing is to raise important questions such as why? how? where? and when? will these issues be resolved in the society. However, sometimes, he allows his audience to find an answer by themselves or he proffers a workable solution to right the wrong of such a society. Martin Banham highlights that, "Osofisan's dramatic aim is to expose the conscience of his audience by making spectators reflect on the performance to respond to societal issues" (cited in Adeyemi 18).

In *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*, Osofisan makes profound political statements and responds to a nation's political situation. He is keenly susceptible to pulse of nation; to the tragic political, religious, economic and socio-political realities that exist in the country. Osofisan himself expresses his distaste and disaffections for the dominant ideology of the African postcolonial ruling classes and articulates his continuous alliance with the poor masses:

. . . Given the kind of writer that I am, I am always spontaneously drawn to social injustice and to its victims. The way I was born and raised, I find all my reflexes conditioned to react with instant hostility

to the dominant ideology of our postcolonial ruling classes, at the same time as my sympathies effortlessly flow to those confined to the margins of (official) history. Easily, I find myself in alliance with the struggling poor and helpless wretched of the earth. In a gerontocratic society, the suppressed women are my heroes (6-7).

Osofisan's major concern is to awaken the consciousness of his readers and viewers to prevailing injustice and to point them in the direction of the proper ethical conduct in a given society. Hence, building an ideal society is paramount to Femi Osofisan. For instance, one of his desires is equity in the distribution of political positions such as women participation in governance.

On this discourse of political restructuring, Femi Osofisan's *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* readily comes to mind as a play which treats the issues of power and powerlessness, agitation for both political and economic restructuring and equity in the distribution of national resources.

Synopsis of *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*

Femi Osofisan uses *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* to chronicle the political situation of a country like Nigeria where dictatorship, oppression, tyranny and social injustice are the order of the day and a continuous clamour for true democracy remains the song of the majority populace. The play takes a new dimension from other plays of Osofisan because it is characterised by female characters both young and old. *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* is set in a small village somewhere unnamed but obviously of Yoruba tribe with three families, namely, the 'Mayesoge group,' 'Aroorotan group' and 'Jeosuwon group.' These three families can be said to represent the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba).

Typical of Femi Osofisan, he employs the festival medium in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* through which he reflects the political predicaments of a village. The annual festival of Iyeneri, the Priestess is in progress with splendour and pageantry which includes cleansing of the land, dancing competition and selection of a new Iyeneri. For a decade, the three groups – the Mayesoge Girls with Osingin as the group leader, The Jeosunwon Girls with Rokeke as the group leader and The Arooroton Girls with Gbemisola as the group leader, have participated without any form of disruption. However, this year's festival will be disrupted by a newly formed group, called, Yungba-Yungba, which consists of three masked members, namely, Ayoka, Dunbarin and Laboopo. According to the Yungba-Yungba girls, who are led by Ayoka, there is a need for a re-structuring and re-adjustment of the annual festival. Their argument is hinged on the fact that their democratic rights are denied because Iyeneri, since her emergence as the Chief Priestess has removed the aspect of 'selection of new Chief Priestess from the annual festival.' Therefore, Ayoka insists that Iyeneri, who has served for the past ten years, should relinquish power. After Ayoka's continuous and incessant planning to stop Iyeneri from making the throne her birth right forever, she and her group members succeed.

The Theme of Political Restructuring in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*

In *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*, Osofisan presents a formidable dramatic representation of a country like Nigeria or a continent like Africa in which he satirises and pictures the political leadership in Africa as characterised by dictatorship, corruption, nepotism, despotism, tyranny and social injustice. Ayoka and other youths, having realised the extent of their ignorance and how the old women, especially Iyeneri have trampled on their rights become agitated and begin a campaign against corruption, power drunkenness, and the dictatorship of their ‘so-called leaders.’ This evil attitude is common with most African leaders who have turned the political seats to their fathers’ properties and have refused to leave at the end of their tenures. They rather will, hand over to their children and children’s children and they explore all evil means to remain in office including crafty, undemocratic and unconstitutional devices.

The political undertone in the play is quickly made manifest from the beginning of the play when the girls begin to fight over supremacy. Femi Osofisan uses the character of Ayoka to discuss the deception of dictator leaders such as Iyeneri and to call for political restructuring with the emergence of Ayoka who demands for their political rights which have been denied them for a decade. This is evident in the conversation below:

Ayoka: It is no fancy believe me! But as you can see, all that tradition has been changed! One person has usurped the post! For ten years non-stop! Ten years! Should we continue to accept this?

Voices: No-oo-ooo! Speak now, our mothers! Is this true? You must speak! You can’t keep silent any longer! (23)

Femi Osofisan explores the revolutionary approach through the Yungba-Yungba group to conscientise other group members and revolt against the tyranny and oppression of Iyeneri. Iyeneri tampers with the rules of the competition so as to encumber others from challenging her position. This can be likened to how some political leaders in Nigeria and other African countries have refused to relinquish power to others. While many of these leaders have spent well over two decades in office, some are replacing themselves with their children just like the case of King Adelu in *Kurunmi* who decides that his son Atiba who by tradition is supposed to die with his father – the king, becomes the next Alaafin of Oyo.

In the Nigerian political terrain of today, many political leaders are replacement of their aged or late parents. The constitution of the country therefore becomes like a toy in their hands as they tamper with it anyhow as Iyeneri has done in Osofisan’s *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. While they remain in office, enjoying the national cake, travelling out of the country to spend their loot from the national treasury, the citizens are suffering and dying of unspeakable diseases due to lack of social amenities such as good hospital, water, food shelter. Some others are

dying of avoidable road accidents because of the bad roads that have been abandoned by the government whose means of travelling is by air.

Just like Ayoka and her group members are in danger of kidnapping after declaring their intention of unseating Iyeneri from the throne of the Chief Priestess, the Nigerian society is bedevilled by the menace of insecurity as every corner is porous and people die daily because the political leaders have refused to provide sustainable security to the citizens. Armed robbers, Fulani herdsmen and terrorists have become the lords of Nigerian roads from the East to the West; South to the North, nowhere seems safe. It is thus, worrisome that the Nigerian government has not been able to find a lasting solution to this threat.

Interestingly, the dance contest in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* is a metaphor to replace the ballot election in Nigeria. Ayoka explains this in the quotation below:

Ayoka: That was how the dance contest came about. Our foremothers, skilful dancers and musicians themselves, saw at once how fun could be mixed with serious business. They knew the tremendous amount of training, and energy, and self-discipline it takes for anyone to win our championship, and they knew these were also the qualities needed for responsible leadership! So, in place of elections, they chose the dance! And every year therefore, whoever won the contest became at the same time our political head, leader of the younger women, and companion of Iyaloja (32).

Femi Osofisan uses a masked pressure group to challenge the appropriation of the shrine by Iyeneri and others who are involved in her plans. Osofisan's message is projected by the action of the Yungba-Yungba group. Uwemedimo Atakpo states this vividly when he avers that the Yungba-Yungba group

has come together for the onerous task of unseating Iyeneri. The playwright uses this to intimate the people about the situation in Nigeria where the three major tribes have refused to come together as they do not trust each other, to form a common front and move towards a democratic rule (Atakpo 132).

Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest is not only a play about power drunkenness or bad leadership; it is also about the conscientisation of a people to be awakened to the collective fight against injustice, corruption and authoritarianism. The youths in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* feel unrepresented in the village's political and economic affairs. They feel left behind and marginalised. Thus, Ayoka and her group members in the Yungba-Yungba group thoughtfully come up

with their own plan to end the injustice against the youths and the people generally by Iyeneri, the Chief Priestess. In one of her explanations with other youths, Ayoka says:

Ayoka: Just listen. I say, as our foremothers danced, so did they also remember the welfare of their community. As their songs, so did they keep in mind their responsibility to others and to themselves. They never forgot that they had to find two women to represent them every year, in the assembly of the Baale. Well, as you know, Iyaloja normally sits there, as a representative of the older women. But what of the youths? Shouldn't they have a voice too? If so, who should it be? Our foremothers were much enlightened than us! Two hands, they said are needed to lift a load! Just as you need the voice of the old, you must listen to the cries of the young, for it is only that way that harmony comes to the land.

The vision and message of Femi Osofisan is a call for political restructuring by preaching against oppression and tyranny of political leaders in Nigeria, Africa and the World at large with the play – *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. The play brought to the fore, the vices of leadership and the quest for good governance as well as proper political restructuring through the continuous struggle of Ayoka and her group members in their bid to fight for their rights no matter what. Consequently, with strong unity of purpose, they achieve their aim.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to discuss the issues of political restructuring in a country like Nigeria through the use of Femi Osofisan's *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. The paper concludes that Nigeria as a country needs serious restructuring in her political institution. Therefore, urgent attention should be given to the issue of restructuring so as to ensure a better country, efficient administration by the political leaders and to; guide against marginalisation in the different areas aforementioned. The study also concludes that the role of theatre in the propagation of cultural, economic or socio-political restructuring cannot be over-emphasised, thus, the Nigerian government is enjoined to adopt theatre as one of the tools of restructuring the political structure of the nation.

Findings and Recommendations

It was discovered in the process of our research that while some people believe that restructuring of a country is the only solution to the political problem of such country, others see economic restructuring as a long-term panacea. It is our belief however, that both political and economic restructuring are inevitable in a country like Nigeria and other African countries. It is on this premise that this study recommends the following:

- a) Political leaders are encouraged to formulate economic policies that will overhaul the economy of their countries, this will lead to diversification in the economic system of such a country;
- b) Political leaders are advised to allow true federalism in their governance by drafting a well written constitution which will bind all and sundry. The constitution should be reviewed from time to time while the state and local government should be allowed to engage in the process of drafting and reviewing to ensure equal participation;
- c) The government should organise symposia, seminars and conferences on constitution review while all the ethnic groups participate;
- d) The government should operate a political system that will encourage equality of power between all levels of government and allow each government to have its autonomy;
- e) The government should ensure the equality of ethno-religious representation;
- f) A government that is not gender sensitive, is heading towards failure, therefore, the government is advised to consider the female gender in their distribution of power and national responsibilities;
- g) That Nigerian dramatists should be involved in the national political restructuring agenda as they possess the proficiency and skills needed in proffering solutions to the problem of political instability;
- h) The arts of the theatre should be employed in the process of restructuring the political system of Nigeria and Africa at large.

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**ACHIEVING NATIONAL INTEGRATION THROUGH
DRAMA: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF OBAFEMI'S
SCAPEGOATS AND SACRED COWS AND
ABDUL AND MUSA'S *THE REVENGE MISSION***

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Abstract

Nigeria as a nation is a product of diverse formations that manifest in ethnicity, politics, economy, religion and culture. The diverse nature of the Nigerian society has predisposed the nation to conflicts of varying dimensions which threaten the common agenda for national integration. With this situation, state and non-state actors alike have continued to search for viable measures that can transform this diversity to conscientious national development agenda. Using Obafemi's *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows* and Abdul and Musa's *The Revenge Mission*, this paper examines the aesthetic potency of drama in managing ethno-cultural, socio-economic and political differences that threaten the achievement of national integration and development. It argues that drama is a viable medium through which social education, conscientisation and mobilisation can be achieved towards purposive national integration in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. The paper advocates for drama that upholds the importance of institutionalising a free democratic space where the people's attitudes, institutions and ideas are overhauled for the corporate interest of the Nigerian state. It submits that the restoration of equity, justice and end of class marginalisation remain supreme to any political cum social debate, if the much eluded national development is to be achieved. It recommends, among other things, that Nigeria can overcome the challenges to national integration if the positive hope about social change is not built on mere dreams or wishful thinking; but on current realities of individualised and collectivised struggle and resistance to forces of despotism.

Introduction

Nigeria is a product of diverse formations, noticeable in ethnicity, politics, economy, religion and culture. This diversity has predisposed the nation to challenges of varying dimensions; many of which threaten the common agenda for national unity.

With this plural composition and other factors, the nation adopted federalism as a means of achieving national unity. The adopted assumed federalism is to, among other things, reduce the hugely belligerent inter-ethnic rivalry and tensions and dispel the usually presumed fear of domination of minority ethnic groups. It is also aimed at bringing government nearer to the people and give the different ethnic groups equal opportunities.

However, amidst exigent ethnic diversities and rivalries, federalism and the associated crises have continued to raise serious concerns with severe consequences that climax in a strong force being mounted on the federation with predisposition to disintegrate the country. Perhaps, the domination of the minority groups since the beginning of the 1914 project could remain a challenge in managing the politics of inclusion regarding access to land, public appointments and the control of valued resources and wealth for the Nigerian State. Thomas Imobighe highlights the nature and extent to which parochial dissents have affected the Nigerian project when he avers:

This has resulted to the fragmentation of Nigerian nationalism along ethnic lines which has further fuelled identity struggles for recognition by the federating units. There have been threats of pulling out of the federal union or make federal core less significant by empowering the states and ethnic nationalities (18).

This underscores the paucity of a common national agenda that is championed, supported and pursued by all Nigerians in the federal project regardless of ethnic, socio-political or religious biases. It is these divergences that have made the nation vulnerable to disarrays, resulting to acts of chaos as individuals and groups continue to struggle to take a vantage position in the quest for survival or power hegemony. Chinua Achebe presents yet another dimension of the development challenge that inhibits national integration in Nigeria, as he contends that,

Nigeria is not a great country. It is one of the most disorderly nations of the world. It is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun. It is one of the most expensive countries and one of those that give the least value for money. It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar. In short, it is among the most unpleasant places on earth (11).

Achebe may have overstated the fact; but this paints a picture of high level of profligacy and disarray in social behaviour and corporate interaction in the country.

Indeed, many scholars have done clinical historical inquiries of Nigeria's early beginning; with a common trend running in the various accounts that the nation was a colonial contrivance. These accounts induce an overriding notion that the present ethnicities that make up modern Nigeria were individually disparate in terms

of ethnic relation, religion, cultural and linguistic configurations, governance orientation and indeed national aspirations. A marriage of these incompatible partners led to strange bedfellows who are different in every way except being merged together by mere nomenclature. However, it does not in any way imply that the nation is irredeemable, and that efforts have not been made for national integration; but it appears that those efforts are not strong enough to make an impact. As a result, state and non-state actors alike, men and women of goodwill have continued to search for viable measures that can transform this diversity into conscientious national development agenda. One such tool that offers itself for the resolution of social disputes is drama.

Drama has been appropriated in many societies and at different times to seek several truths and its function as an instrument of social criticism, conscientisation and mobilisation is well founded. Christine Ojemudia observes that:

from the very beginning of civilisation, the art of drama has helped individuals discover and understand themselves and their relationship with the society, with others and with God (or the gods); and as such, it is and always has been an affirming force in the world. Unlike any other art, the total, intense focus of drama is on the human person, his or her existence, and his or her relationship with life (35).

Ojemudia's view above underscores the functional role of drama as it helps people to form a view of themselves and their society; a true and extensive assessment of events; get a rational, reasoned orientation of the world around them; and make a true assessment of their own self. It artistically expresses man's emotional-intellectual world in his relationship to the environment. Whether in real or phenomena, dramatic representation brings the hidden values or questions in the society to people's awareness; thus, induces people to reflect on problems that bedevil them. It is against this backdrop that this paper interrogates the potential of literary drama in achieving national integration in Nigeria, using Obafemi's *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows* and Abdul and Musa's *The Revenge Mission*.

Conceptual and Theoretical Nexus

In order to have a background understanding of the subject matter, it is appropriate to clarify and situate the key concepts within the analytical scope of the paper. Scholars have been divided in their views on the concept of integration. The word, integration means bringing into unrestricted and equal association people of different racial or ethnic groups in a society or an organisation. According to Marcel Onyibor, national integration is "the development of an integrated and coherent national identity and consciousness in a multi-ethnic society in which all citizens is [*sic*] given a fair opportunity to achieve his/her maximum potential" (3). This position underscores a corporate existence in which members are given a sense of belonging regardless of ethnic affiliation. In a similar view, Henry Alapiki contends that,

national integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different languages we recognise the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation (51).

By the above view, national integration literally connotes the bringing together of the different ethnic, racial, religious, economic, social and political groups into unrestricted and equal association on national issues. It involves the existence of national consciousness, which is the feeling of individual or group identity within the nation state as the only political unit through which their collective interest can be realised. However, Emmanuel Ojo presents yet another perception of the term. He conceives national integration as,

a process by which members of a social system develop linkages so that the boundaries of the system persists (sic) over time and the boundaries of sub-systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process, members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community (51).

This relates to a situation where territorial demarcations within a political entity gradually yield ground to convivial interactions of its members owing to the established integrative mechanisms. It is in this line of thought that Enaruna Edosa views national integration as,

the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogeneous political community ... this is the increasing promotion or emergence of peace through the breaking down of cultural and regional divides in the process of evolving a united state. It has been argued that a society is integrated when (a) it has effective control over the use of the means of violence; (b) it has a centre of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards; and (c) it is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens (63).

Although Edosa's position above underscores the subordination of individual or parochial interest to that of a 'strong state,' such does not, however, consider the social vicissitudes of the subordinates and peaceful mechanisms of integration. The fact is that, such view does not consider whether the citizens identify and relate with the political system peacefully or by brute force. This may explain why the many

policies of national integration, particularly in Nigeria, have failed and continue to fail to drive a cohesive and all-embracing national agenda.

Going by the array of conceptualisations sampled above, it is obvious that there are many meanings and implications of the term even though some of them have some elements of similarity. Yet, within the analytical framework of this paper, national integration is a situation where the citizens of a state see themselves as one, treat one another fairly and work together supportively, and freely accept to and do resolve their differences peacefully in the overall interest of the nation. Citizen, on the other hand, is one who dwells in a particular city, town or state.

A proper definition of citizenship therefore will depend on the proper definition of who a citizen is. *The Longman Contemporary English Dictionary* defines a *citizen* as, “someone who lives in a particular town, country or state and has rights and responsibilities there.... Someone who belongs to a particular country, whether they are living there or not” (167). Arising from this foundation, Lean McLean posits that, “citizenship simply relates to the status of being a citizen, which is usually determined by law” (69). This position denotes the link between a person and a state or an association of states without necessarily considering ethnic connotations. The acquisition of citizenship is normally associated with the right to work and live in a country and to participate in political life which may be determined by parental affiliation, birth within a country, marriage to a citizen, and naturalisation.

In Nigeria, however, the practical implication of citizenship, whether at the federal or state level, manifests in two broad classifications; either as indigenes or non-indigenes. Emmanuel Iwuagwu explains this when he states that,

being an indigene of a particular ethnic nationality, state, local government area, town, clan, village or kindred, as the case may be, is stronger than being a Nigerian citizen because it offers more opportunities than being a Nigerian citizen (172).

The indigene citizen is locally called, ‘son of the soil;’ whereas the non-indigene citizen is one who registers, naturalises or settles in any part of Nigeria without ancestral lineage. Remarkably, indigene citizens who reside outside their states of indigene and in some cases within their states of origin but outside their local government areas of indigene may be treated as foreigners owing to weak state institutions. This underscores the multiplicity in the conceptualisation of citizenship such that a multiple system of citizenship rights classification engenders discrimination in jobs, land purchase/holding, admission to educational institutions, marriage, business transaction and distribution of social welfare services and politics to such extent that performance of citizenship responsibility to the nation cannot be guaranteed.

From the foregoing, a citizen can be said to be a natural, registered or legal member of a state by virtue of birth, marriage or naturalisation; and with rights and

responsibilities. It involves an individual's link or relationship with the state or country in which the person is entitled to legal, social and political rights and in turn owes duties and obligations to the state, duties such as obedience to the laws, payment of taxes, defence of the state and other social responsibilities.

Drama is a concept that defies precise definition. It is "the portrayal of fictional or non-fictional events through the performance of written dialogue (either prose or poetry)" (Longley, para. 1); an act in which performers transform themselves into imaginary human, animal or divine characters in make-believe activities, presented before spectators. This definition is not, however, limited to a staged or live performance, but also the script which serves as the blue print for dramatic performance. It is a form of expression which depends largely upon communication from a playwright to an audience through the medium of an actor. A good drama script will be able to give a clear picture of the author's thoughts through the dramatic elements in the resulting dialogue. Josephine Baba perceives dramatic element to mean, "the diction or expressions that can create conflict in a drama, such as dialogue that elicits feelings of anger, delight, amusement, and so on" (para. 5).

A good drama should have an element of suspense, tension and be able to arouse the curiosity of its reader or audience. Generally, drama is an art form that explores human conflict and tension; which takes the form of a story to present to an audience through dialogue and actions. The stories which are conveyed use the elements of theatre: stage, actors, costume, props, music, scenery and sound. Drama involves imitation, impersonation, and a deliberate interest in costume, modulation of voice, gesticulation and movement in rhythm with the idiosyncrasies of the character being imitated.

Theoretical Grounding

National integration in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria can be possible when individual groups within the nation see one another as family brothers and sisters and therefore do almost everything in common; structure and organise their lives to conform to the society's way of life; and cooperate to ensure the general progress of the nation. This position is supported by the theory of structural functionalism. According to Eddiefloyd Igbo,

functionalism draws its inspiration from the ideas of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim was concerned with the question of how societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. He sought to explain social stability through the concept of solidarity, and differentiated between the mechanical solidarity of primitive societies and the organic solidarity of complex modern societies (46).

Durkheim adopted the theory to describe society as an organism with a life of its own, above and beyond the sum of its parts. Society is viewed as a system made up of interrelated parts, all interacting on the basis of a common value system or

consensus about basic values and common goals. To Durkheim, pundits of this theory argue that every social custom and institution is seen as having a function in ensuring that society works efficiently. It focuses on consensus, social order, structure and function in society. Social functionalism sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. It states that social lives are guided by social structures which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour.

The theory implies how the relationships among the parts of society are created and how these parts are functional (having beneficial consequences to the individual and the society) and sometimes dysfunctional (having negative consequences). Structural functionalists, such as, Hebert Spencer, Robert Merton and Alfred Radcliff-Brown are particularly concerned about the basic questions of what holds society together and what keeps it steady; thus, paying considerable attention to the persistence of shared ideas in society. While the functional aspect in the structural-functionalist theory stresses the role played by each component part in the social system, the structural perspective suggests an image of society wherein individuals are constrained by social forces, social backgrounds and group memberships. Consequently, given the fact that the problem of national integration has long been seen as an ethnic, regional and bourgeois-proletariat tussle, the postulations of structural functionalism most suitably foreground the dialectical position of this paper.

Synopsis of *Scapegoats and Sacredcows*

Olu Obafemi's play, *Scapegoats and Sacredcows* depicts a huge prison of want and poverty in a land over-flowing with abundant human and natural resources. A cell in a state of pandemonium reveals different inmates in a conglomerate order of chaos, physical, emotional, psychological and even mental imbalance. The inmates are engrossed in pain and reactions of hopelessness, curses and anger as the security operatives who, as if bionically programmed, descend on the inmates; maiming, raping and brutalising them.

Routinely, new inmates are dragged into the cell amidst resistance. One of the inmates, Gafa, was detained on account of his human rights activism. He is persuaded by the men in uniform to renounce his claims and regain his freedom. However, aware that the just and righteous always win the battle against sacred cows, Gafa and his followers are aware that the just and righteous always win the battle against sacred cows. Strong in their determination to resist the dehumanisation by the powers that be (Sacred cows) against the masses, they consider that time is now ripe to dislodge all sacred cows who feed fat from the wealth produced by others.

Synopsis of *The Revenge Mission*

Amade Abdul and Salifu Musa's *The Revenge Mission* chronicles the circumstances that led to the taking of arms against one another by the farmers and herders

community. Due to global warming and environmental changes – dried pastures and water – a group of herders migrate in search of pasture for their cows. They find the land of Ofuloko full of pastures and seek local permission to settle temporarily on it. While the solicited period expires, they ask for more time and the traditional leadership is quick to grant them. With the passage of time, there is breach of settlement agreement as cattle are left to graze on the indigenes’ farm lands and crops. The farmers who are not compensated then attack the cattle or poison their crop with the intention to kill the cattle. When the cattle dies, the herders attack the host community, rape women, set houses ablaze and plunder the community using sophisticated weapons. The attacks and counter-attacks result to almost erasure of the herders’ community in the area. The trumpet of war is fully blown as the herders reinforce for revenge which results to unprecedented loss of lives and property.

Achieving National Integration in *Scapegoats and Sacredcows* and *The Revenge Mission*

The art of writing obliges the playwright to have a destination and carry that destination through his work in order to inform, educate and conscientise the audience with the view of changing society positively. The playwrights whose plays are analysed here address issues of current social concern – demanding urgent value reorientation for national development. *Scapegoats and Sacredcows* and *The Revenge Mission* portray the blatant display of mutual contempt among citizens, who have become prisoners in their land by a powerful few, at whose command the fate of the vast majority of the citizens lies. Rather than guaranteeing and safeguarding the rights of the average citizen, the society has witnessed an increased level of human rights abuses.

As represented in the play, Nigeria is a greatly divided country – the division is characterised by inherent suspicion, distrust, and antagonism among its diverse people. People continue to betray trust and sense of unity, thus living in fear. The fear of which 1st Village Elder retorts:

1st Village Elder: ...You have done well, Your Highness. But today is not like the olden days. We are living in a difficult time; a time where you take one as a friend and he stabs you like an enemy... (*The Revenge Mission* 20).

The preponderance of this fear by some Nigerians justifies the current level of intolerance among groups. This mutual suspicion lingers in a way that portend grave consequences against peace, orderly growth, development, stable democratic government, unity and survival of the nation. Because the institutions of power in the country fail to protect and guarantee citizens’ rights and equal opportunities, there is the quest for self-help and disregard for the rule of law, as could be inferred from the following:

222: (*Hears him.*) Well. Your sharply turned neck is creeping into my space, my landed property. That is a trespass, within the rule of law. This space, this half of the bench is my property. Your neck is violating my right.

222: (*In utter confusion.*) Whatever you mean, just give me liberty over my one-by-six. My fundamental human rights: freedom, you know, is the bedrock of existence... (*Scapegoats* 6-7).

This claim of freedom and right over rights, when not rationally handled, can breed crises that become difficult to resolve. Although, it could be said that where a person's rights ends, another person's rights begin; institutions and legal frameworks exist that mediate, settle and regulate human rights and freedom (thesis) for peaceful co-existence. However, when such institutions fail to live up (to) their mandates, jungle justice becomes the order of the day. In *The Revenge Mission*, the dramatists raise the issue of initial inertia, unwillingness to act appropriately by the constituted authorities:

2nd Policeman: You are right. This is one of the things we are likely to see as we fail to do the right thing at the right time.

1st Policeman: What does that mean?

2nd Policeman: The issue of disagreement between farmers and herdsmen has been brought to our station on many occasions, but what did our leaders do about it? Nothing! (*The Revenge*... 41).

The foregoing underscores inherent policy deficiencies and contradictions on land tenure, inadequate capacity of the local institutions in settling such conflicts, violent nature of the approach used to resolve and manage the conflicts – using police, corruption and politics of the belly – lack of coordination in settling the herdsmen and the farmers. With the above reality, there is loss of confidence in even the security operatives and society's leadership. Olu Obafemi captures the circumstances that lead to such distrust in the stage directions:

A cell in a state of pandemonium showing different inmates in a conglomerate order of chaotic display of physical, psychological, emotional and even mental imbalance.... Some identified 'khaki boys' as if bionically programmed, descend on the inmates. Maiming, raping and other forms of brutalisation are displayed with utmost impunity (Scapegoats...vii).

However, the conditions for communal existence have been established by the two disparate groups (of farmers and herders) in *The Revenge Mission* as follows:

Onu: I have heard your request.... I see no reason to forbid you from staying there with your cattle as you have requested. But remember, we shall not hurt you and your people and may your hands or any of your people's not hurt me and my people (*The Revenge... 7*).

While the terms of settlement have been observed by both the indigenes and nomads, there is the desire of the herders to extend their stay, as Adamu solicits: "According to our agreement, the time has come for me to leave your land.... Please, Your Highness, tell me the price I shall pay to settle in your land" (15). But the Chief responds on behalf of his people: "Concerning the price you shall pay, you must not hurt my people. That is the utmost price you have to pay. And I shall protect you as long as you are going to stay here" (*The Revenge... 15*). Such is evident for peaceful coexistence when there is absence of apprehensions among a people.

The wide class dichotomy also creates conditions that hinder integration. While there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor, the few rich rarely see anything wrong with this. The common perception is that once you have economic power, you have freedom, respect and would always be right in all actions, inactions and decisions. In Obafemi's *Scapegoats and Sacredcows*, ITS boasts of this when he resorts:

ITS: ...even if we were to walk among the people, nothing can happen. Have you seen the opinion polls lately? Length and breadth of this country, everybody is dying of unswerving love for us, their leader.... Sound economy is the root of all love (31).

This, he further defends thus:

ITS: The commander in a battle is never exposed to little dangers.... Diplomacy teaches us that the leader must be protected with the lives of the masses (*Scapegoats... 31-32*).

This creates sacred cows and scapegoats in the socio-political life of the people, as Gafa submits:

Gafa: ...In order that you and your bossing sacred cows maintain the system, millions have become scapegoats. Some perish from hunger. Young lasses, other people's daughters, turn to bed toys to satisfy your nightly orgies. Goats for your nocturnal parties; pepper soup to wash the liquor down your sacred throats... (*Scapegoats... 29*).

Indeed, when the masses suffer, the wealthy rich gets pleasure. The greater effect of this class dichotomy is what Gafa concludes:

Gafa: Sacred cows. The million dies, the minion hides. The pasture dries, the shepherd fattens. The barns are empty, the foreign purse swells (*Scapegoats...* 29).

With this situation, instead of freedom, peace and prosperity, the citizens in the society continue to find themselves subjected to arbitrary and authoritarian rule whose governance increases social imbalances and diminished human security.

Instead of constitutional and democratic processes, armed conflicts and brutal repression of dissidents by the entrenched rulers, who destroy the social foundation and lay to waste the much desired robust and thriving economy, reign supreme. In Abdul and Musa's *The Revenge Mission*, a bourgeois-proletariat dichotomy and contraption is established, where the pain of one provides the pleasure for the other. When the mutual trust granted to the strangers in the land was thrown to the wind, Adamu needs help to seal an obnoxious deal against the populace as he negotiates thus:

Adamu: Now, I need your help...you are His Highness's palace historian and you can make him to do what he may ordinarily not do.

Opele: Don't worry. I shall do all I can to make sure His Highness permits you to stay here.... But my reward.

Adamu: A young cow at the end of every farming... (*The Revenge...* 11-12).

From the above excerpt, it is evident that there is conspiracy by a few selfish leaders over the masses as justice is commercialised, where the highest bidder takes it all, suppressing truth. Osuma puts this in proverbial expression when he declares:

Osuma: ... For no tongue, they say, can speak about the ills of the fingers that has [*sic*] fed it (*The Revenge...* 29).

This is justified in what Opele later admits:

Opele: ...The way to one's house, they say, is one's belly. Nobody can drive you from this land as long as you continue to please His Highness (*The Revenge...* 31).

It is this conspiracy and breach of mutual relations that leads the marginalised groups to resort to revolt – leading to disintegration. Given such circumstances, the problem

of national identity and crisis of integration is put into focus not necessarily by ethnic diversity but by the contemporary problem of injustice, especially that of consistent marginalisation of some groups within the polity.

Indeed, rational respect for customs and constituted authority, reciprocated by justice and fairness remain the needed ingredients for communal or national integration, particularly in a diverse society like Nigeria. To achieve this, Obafemi, through the character of Gafa posits:

Gafa: ...I myself have thought out every action; every step that I have made has been guided by ten steps of thought in my mind. Every one of us must confront knowledge through exposure and experience. For more than thirty years, I have studied the way things go on.... I have come to the conviction that certain people from among those who have knowledge, and also the material means must clear the path of justice. Social justice! They must use active knowledge to expose breeders of envy. I have learnt from lives and examples of those before us who have bared their chests against injustice and oppression perpetrated by the makers of law.... Those who make the law so that they can break it: the law, which only protects them (*Scapegoats*...13).

This calls for proper orientation and reorientation of citizens to imbibe the values that hold society together; while identifying those that disintegrate, as experienced in other societies. It is the appreciation and exhibition of such passionate knowledge that Adamu in *The Revenge Mission* declares:

Adamu: ...Cattle are the reasons, day and night, my race move through jungle with nothing but bottles of water as food. (*Pauses.*) The same way, the reason for which a farmer labours in the farm is for the love of his crops. My herdsmen and I, we are not ignorant of this fact (19).

With this demonstration, there is established mutual trust as Azala avers:

Azala: Good stranger, our community is a home of hospitality. Our culture forbids us from hurting a stranger (2).

Indeed, where there is established mutual trust, the respect for custom and tradition and constituted authority is guaranteed. This is demonstrated in the lines below:

Azala: ... I am the owner of the plot of land on which you are living now. But I am at the same time a property of His Highness.

Whatever I have belongs to him; that is our tradition. I don't know if the tradition of your people is an enemy of ours.

Adamu: Not at all.... The commands of our Emirs are next only to Allah's (*The Revenge...* 19).

The foregoing justifies the fact that, in spite of ethnic diversities, no one tradition is diametrically opposed to the other(s). The implication of this position is that, though ethnicity and ethnocentrism with its attendant cultural differences could greatly affect the achievement of national integration, particularly in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, national integration enhances the chances of creating higher loyalties that surpass parochial loyalties to ethnic cleavages. Again, the change desired by the people is well cultivated in Obafemi's play. While it could be accepted that many, who seek leadership over the populace in the name of 'messiahship,' do so with sinister agenda which citizens must reject objectively, as can be seen from the following:

218: Do not bury your star. Do not stop us for once from giving praise to whom it is due. Those who rape the earth daily give themselves brand new titles and decorations due only to gods. Do not stop the people from naming their own god.

Gafa: ...They clothe our earth like an embroidered garment. All I do simply is to call for justice. I asked those who sow garments of thorns for the rest of us to show us how to wear them. Obey their own laws (*Scapegoats...*10)

Such feelings of injustice conspicuously perpetrated by one group against others breed protests, revolts and agitations and neglect of statutory and legal processes, which in turn impede national integration. Thus, in a multi-ethnic society, national integration is theoretically a process of building a new society and social order based on justice and fair play to all its members no matter the ethnic affiliation, language or religion.

Evidently, to describe Nigeria as a nation in a flux suggests the absence of a common national agenda and the presence of certain institutions which would have ensured a better life for the people if only they were operating properly. It is in the light of this that the analysis from the chosen dramatic texts showcases the symptoms of marriage of incompatible partners (in terms of economic, socio-political classes, ethnic dichotomies) and of bizarre bedfellows, who remain different in every way except being merged together by mere nomenclature and geographic configuration. In spite of all these, as demonstrated in the Obafemi's *Scapegoats and Sacredcows* and Abdul and Musa's *The Revenge Mission*, achieving national integration is contingent on taming the peril of ethnicity, complicity, narcissistic political leadership, weak institutions and other glitches that impede national cohesion and development.

Conclusion

This paper attempted an analysis of two plays – *Scapegoats and Sacredcows* and *The Revenge Mission* to justify how drama is used as a tool for achieving national integration. It has established the fact that playwrights use their creative imagination to capture the ills inherent in their society; giving voice to feelings and artistic shape to experiences, balances passion and rationality and exploring issues of morality and value. Drama for national integration must address the structural injustice and structural oppression that underlie people's misery and powerlessness, as well as the immediate manifestations of conflict in people's personal lives.

In their artistic creativity, dramatists should advance ideological stipulations in the materiality of their dramatic works. Such stipulations, no doubt, should teach individuals, communities and the entire society to perceive and transform the world aesthetically. Plays should portray the reality of life, mirror society and the lives of the citizens and address the problems of the society, which should be seen as an enterprise that has tremendous utility and a vehicle for change.

In these troubled times, citizens are in a feeling of disorientation and alienation from society caused by the perceived absence of a supporting social or moral framework and loss of moral bearings. Drama thus remains an indispensable tool to dispel the nation of centrifugal tensions, class struggle, resource control and self-determination, ethnocentrism and religious cleavages that have enveloped national consciousness to the detriment of national integration. Above all, what Nigerian leadership needs is to be fair to all citizens – whether (or not) the people are of different ethnicities and/or gender.

Given the hostile nature of the various components that make up Nigeria, drama must indoctrinate corporate values and the ideology that upholds unity in diversity. This could be achieved when the diverse ethnic cum socio-political groups that make up Nigeria reach a consensus on how they want to be governed, how resources need to be shared, what system of government needs to bind and guide constituent units, how power is shared and the redefinition of citizenship, settler and indigene status in the nation are well articulated.

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RESTRUCTURING NOLLYWOOD: SCREENWRITERS AS CATALYSTS

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Abstract

To restructure is to form anew and to be a catalyst is to be an inhibitor. Restructuring is about a far-reaching systemic change that anticipates efficiency, effectiveness and better yields. The film is an image maker and the Nigerian movie industry, known as Nollywood, is one vital platform that can promote and protect our identity as a nation. Over the years, the industry has grown from local stable to gain national and international attention. However, despite its rich entertaining values, the Nigerian movie largely lacks dramaturgical depth and engaging storylines that can globally project and sustain positive identity for Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this paper proposes scriptwriters as catalysts in restructuring the Nollywood. Using the applied and qualitative research methods, the paper evaluates the quality of Nollywood film stories and audience responses to them. The key finding of this research is that audience responds more actively to well-written film scripts and there are very few of them. The paper therefore believes that good scriptwriters and engaging storylines can best accelerate the desired change in the Nigerian movie. It is also suggested that the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should articulate quality control template to guide film creative output towards global positive identity, patriotism and national integration. It concludes that only well-crafted stories with enduring values that can positively affect a society, engage the citizenry on nation building and ultimately transform the society. To this effect, deliberate effort to build and continue to build a body of good scriptwriters must be crystalised.

Introduction

Every film is conceived and produced within a thematic context to convey a message and to project an image. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, a national image would take extra effort to create without offending the sensibilities of any corporate group that make up the nation. Nigeria has become a conglomerate of modernity and

orthodoxy with transformative indices of metamorphosing into a new nation. The film can play a great role in the agenda of creating a new nation. If the existing sources on Nollywood films are anything to go by, Nigerian films are on the entertainment menu of almost all climes of the Black Continent as well as in a portion of African Diasporas in Europe, North America and Caribbean countries.

Even though the exact statistics of the quantity of exportation of Nollywood films to foreign markets do not exist, many scholars and geo-politics pundits have discussed the trans-nationalisation of Nollywood and its impacts even on Hollywood. Oh estimates at 20 million, the volume of Nollywood following in Africa and in African Diaspora in Europe, America and Asia. He observes that these pockets of Nollywood consumers have been widening over the years, pushing Nigerian film makers to rethink the contents and aesthetics of their movies in order to appeal to a wider range of international audiences. As Eunkeu Oh captures it, the demand for Nollywood films – particularly among the African Diaspora – has powered “a surge in the export of Nigerian films. In practice, the legal and illegal markets grew to coexist as Nigerian film marketers began to adjust their storylines to appeal to wider audiences, incorporating more diverse plot formulas” (1).

The popularity of Nollywood films, particularly in Africa, has made many national cinemas to copy or replicate the Nigerian experience. Such popularity has equally inspired critics to describe Nollywood as a reflection of the African vision. There, however, exist pockets of nationalistic critics who view the growing presence of Nollywood films in their countries as a cultural aggression or “pollution.” Similarly, to the Hollywood film industry which is often accused of perpetrating Americanisation in non-American climes, Nollywood is often taxed with being an agent of *Nigerianisation* in many African countries (BBC). Its trans-nationalisation in the African continent has, in recent times, been associated with a Black form of cultural imperialism or cinematic colonisation in Africa. While one may assert that Nollywood as a cinema is well-known in all climes of the world, one thing remains evident: its films have progressively made their way across various parts of the globe.

Despite its spectacular global reach, the Nollywood film industry is most often cited among factors contributing to the Nigerian image crisis. In other words, many observers have described Nollywood films’ contents as a deformation of Nigeria and have numbered them among factors which inform the negative perception of Nigeria in foreign countries. This paper argues that weakness can be converted to strength through good scripting to cashing in on the global tentacles of Nollywood. The paper calls for a better and refined Nollywood, one that reflects high level of intellectual and creative capacities, breaking new grounds and selling a good image of Nigeria and not showcasing mediocrity, copy works and general weak content most of the time. The genesis of any exciting movie is the script; scriptwriters would therefore be the catalysts of the envisioned refined Nollywood

Nollywood: Context and Challenges

According to Jonathan Haynes, the term Nollywood was invented by a foreigner and first appeared in a 2002 article by Matt Steinglass in the *New York Times* (16). But like other countries and their film industries, for example, India (Bollywood) and U.S.A. (Hollywood), it could be said that Nigeria (Nollywood) is not out of place. The inception phase of Nollywood was in 1992 with Kenneth Nnebue's film, *Living in Bondage*. Earlier in the 1960s, film production processes had begun alongside with some theatrical activities. Central to this film making enterprise were Ola Balogun, Hubert Ogunde, Jab Adu, Moses Olaiya and Eddie Ugbomah. These film makers are considered the first generation of film makers in Nigeria.

Nollywood: Cinema of Nigeria

Kenneth Nnebue's film opened up a new vista for the Nigerian film industry which is called Nollywood today with quantum of films navigating diverse themes and cultural propagation. Nollywood derives its popularity first from the ingenuity of its production technology, the video, and thus championing a film making revolution seen in the video boom of Nigeria and Ghana and thus giving a new direction for African cinema. The video film is widely recognised as a triumph over the obstacles that had held back celluloid film production in Africa. With its "grassroots character" (Haynes, "Nollywood: What's in a Name?" 107), the video film medium has also succeeded in establishing new modes of distribution. However, the video film's "triumph does not necessarily imply the displacement of the celluloid film medium, but rather the transcendence of the limitations imposed by the conventions of celluloid film making" (Ukadike, "Images of the 'Reel' Thing..." 252).

As a result of the video technology which is available to both amateurs and professionals unprecedented level of film production has been achieved in Nigeria. Nollywood is today rated second in the world in terms of the number of productions (UIS "Nollywood Rivals Bollywood..."). "The revolutionary potential of the technology" (Buckingham, Pini, & Willett 188) combined with other factors, both economic and socio-cultural, has played a key role in facilitating the growth of the video film industry. To situate this development correctly and to understand the video film, Jonathan Haynes argues that the video films do not fit into established African film criticism (*Nigeria Video Films* 9). Along with Onookome Okome, he proposes instead the paradigm of African popular arts as a means of understanding the phenomenon (Haynes & Okome 66). John McCall, amongst others, supports this position by noting that, "Nollywood is a highly productive node of African popular culture" (96). McCall adds that the discourse which the video films give rise to is "truly pan-African because it engages the common villager as well as the socially privileged" (94).

Comparing the video-film with the celluloid productions, Frank Ukadike observes that the video film has led to "considerable shifts in the discourse of African cinema" ("Images of the 'Reel' Thing..." 256). He emphasises the video film's "ability to construct and transform meanings and practices that render it highly

economically viable in a period of severe economic breakdown and austerity” (249). Foluke Ogunleye connects the video film to the Yoruba travelling theatre and “situates it as a result of the socio-economic milieu of the country” (45). The video technology is one which has enabled piracy, and Brian Larkin figures out that it is on this setup of piracy that the video-film industry has been fostered. Media piracy “represents the potential of technologies of reproduction – the supple ability to store, reproduce, and retrieve data – when shorn from the legal frameworks that limit their application” (Larkin 291). The technology also determines the mode of consumption. Onokome Okome focuses on the new public sites of consumption of the video-films (street corners and video parlours) which are enabled by the low level of equipment required (“Nollywood...” 68). However, the availability of the technology to all is assessed by Patrick Ebewo as the basis of some of the deficiencies in the industry since it warrants amateurish productions. It is within this context that the challenges of the Nollywood can be discussed and understood. Some of these include but not limited to the following:

1. *Poor storyline*: This is one of the major challenges of Nollywood and huge reason why it does not sell as much as it should. Poor storylines give birth to bad scripts and a bad script does not sell or put forward a good visual image to the viewers. A bad script when produced, no matter its level of technical efficiency, would often fall flat in engaging and enduring value. This is often times the case with Nollywood movies, where content is too weak to sustain enduring memory.
2. *Copyright and Repetition* has been a serious challenge to Nollywood, because of the rate storylines are unimaginatively repeated and sometimes there is utter disregard for regulation guiding intellectual property.
3. *Low Quality Productions*: Good quality defines and validates any product. A good film will certainly be a box office buster. Nollywood suffers because of technical inefficiency because of unavailability of requisite equipment. Even though some efforts at correcting this deficiency is on-going but the majority of films produced in Nigeria still lack technical depth in terms of good picture, sound and cinematography.
4. *Unimaginative Adaptation of Foreign Movies*: It is okay to see a foreign movie and want to do an adaptation of it, but it is also expected that the right tools are deployed for such venture. Adaptation should be creative in recreation and not a wholesale duplication of the original that commands no respect and attention.
5. *Predictability*: Most Nollywood films are easily predictable which is also a product of bad scripting. One key element that makes a story viable is

suspense and unpredictability. It is the duty of a film maker to hold his audience captive until the narrative is concluded. This can easily be achieved when a story is original, well scripted with unique style and techniques, and produced with detailed attention paid to both the artistic and technical demands of the film.

6. *Badly Tied Plots*: This is another scripting related challenge. Every good narrative thrives on well-structured plot. The plot draws the reader into the character's lives and helps the reader understand the choices that the characters make. A plot's structure is the way in which the story elements are arranged. Writers vary structure depending on the needs of the story. Conflict is the wheel that propels a plot. Perhaps, in film, a plot could be said to be the sequence of (causally related) events that make up the narrative. The plot is what happens. The story in a movie, on the other hand, is why it happens, and how. This is the principle that should guide any movie. The error most scriptwriters in Nollywood often make is to just narrate a story as it exists without giving a deliberate stance to emphasise a message or concern. A distinction must be made between a story and a plot.

A story is a series of events recorded in their chronological order. A plot is a series of events deliberately arranged so as to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance. In other words, a plain story is like history – boring and time wasting and not intellectual; but a plot is someone's telling of the story giving it colours and hypes. When these are absent, badly knitted and tied plot is what you get – storylines that give no room for suspense; scenes are wrongly created and end up standing in the way of the main focus of the film, distracting and distorting the viewers' comprehension. This in general kills pace and destroys thrilling actions, just as humour is misplaced and dialogue is broken. A good storyline with badly tied plot can impede the success of any film.

7. *Misplaced Stories*: Inadequate research in developing a story also often affects the authenticity of the story of a film. Where the story concerns a people's belief or social system it could instigate misgivings and mistrust. A misplaced story ultimately gives birth to an uninformed script which in turn gives birth to a misinterpreted film. This happens to be a challenge in Nollywood.

Film as an Image Maker

Film is a potent tool for image making, cultural diplomacy and even propaganda. It thrives on well-written stories which are also products of imaginative creativity, real-life experiences and happenings. The power of film as a branding vector can be appreciated by the value nations and nations of the world attach to it as a vehicle to project and entrench their cultural heritage, belief system, the stories of their

existence and aspirations. These nations/countries of origins and thus reflect life in these countries. Apart from adding colour to the perception of foreign audience of what a country stands for, cinematic medium plays great role in positioning the image of a nation.

According to a number of myths and even empirical studies, the impact of Hollywood films go far beyond spreading American soft power as it (the impact of Hollywood films) includes instituting American cultural imperialism (Americanisation) and political supremacy in numerous “Third Worlds” and even in some First World countries like France (Steinglass 16; Endong and Essoh 12). Dominique Callimanopulos notes for instance that Third World audiences' heavy exposure to Hollywood films has tremendously heightened their empathy for Western – and mostly American – values; and there is increasing fear that Third World nations' progressive embrace of these exocentric values and ideas may reshape their political and cultural aspirations in favour of the American or western world view (66).

Hollywood films have, over the years, succeeded in luring large segments of Third World audiences into perceiving the West and particularly America as an Eldorado, a land of prosperity and justice and the legitimate gendarme of the world. It is in view of this international relation picture that some critical observers simply tag Hollywood as US' advertising department. Hollywood films play critical role in the US image setting, propaganda and foreign relations. This is very much evidenced in the fact that they (Hollywood films) serve to extol the virtues of the American vision of the world. They equally promote American products and construct or/and reinforce a favourable image for the country. They thus mould and reinforce foreign audiences' (largely positive) perception of the US. Hollywood films thus strongly project American values. Hollywood films are aimed at indoctrinating foreign audiences – particularly non-western ones – into believing that non-western under-developed nations will be better off if they allow the much wiser America serve as their model and tell them what to do in all aspects of life.

Cinema's potential to serve as soft power is for instance demonstrated in the tremendous impact high grossing films such as *Titanic* and *The Lord of Rings* have had on international tourists' perception of America and New Zealand, respectively. *The Lord of Rings* is estimated to have indirectly marketed New Zealand to global audiences, attracting thousands of international visitors to the various scenes where the film was shot. By so doing, the film has facilitated a huge tourist industry in New Zealand (Glen 25). Similarly, the *Titanic* is said to have pull millions of ‘fascinated’ international tourists across the world to America. The film is said to have attracted over 20 percent of the world population to America in 1998 (Fafiolu 25). It made millions of international moviegoers to recognise the power of the American culture.

Other emerging cinemas – which, to an extent, are thriving and are successful in the international market, are Bollywood and Nollywood, respectively, the first and second biggest film industries in the world, in terms of volume of production. As the most powerful cultural ambassador of India, the Bollywood industry has

phenomenally helped reversed the hitherto negative image international audiences had of India; thereby spreading the country's soft power in the world. The industry has, to a relatively great extent, contributed to efforts aimed at correcting the stereotypical images that used to present India as a land of poverty, 'snake culture,' caste atrocities, human right violations, communal riots and religious fundamentalism among others. As Madhu Kishwar puts it, "Bollywood has synthesised the emotional life of NRIs [Non Resident Indians] living in distant and diverse cultures and has made them feel "Indian" by making them feel connected to their cultural values" (31). In virtually all climes, "these films are the heartbeat of the Hindustani dil, both of the resident and the non-resident variety" (Kishwar 32).

Nollywood films have similarly gone global, integrating the mix of factors that inform international audiences' perceptions of the country. It is recognised among a host of Nigerian critics, diplomats and policy makers that the industry has, to an extent been projecting the rich cultural diversity of Nigeria, starting from language to dressing codes. However, despite the fact that they are avidly consumed in numerous international markets, Nollywood films are yet to unarguably be viewed as a serious marketing tool for the Nigerian nation. One actually wonders why, despite their popularity in Nigeria and abroad (especially in the Black African continent and in some Caribbean countries), audiences and erudite Afro-centric critics still have mixed feelings about them.

According to some acerbic criticisms, Nollywood films constitute one of the most recent and active vectors of the Nigerian image crisis as they have subtly contributed to factors that tarnish the country's image in the international scene. This belief has mostly been anchored on the observation that most Nollywood film producers tend to put (exaggerative) emphasis on controversial themes, such as, juju, voodooism, occultism, easy money generation, corruptions, ethno-religious conflicts, misguided religiosity and other salient aspects of the moral decadence eating deep into the Nigerian social fabric. Critics fear that such emphasis on negativity has adversely affected international audiences' perception of Nigeria as a brand. In line with this, a former Nigerian Minister of Information and Communication, the late Professor Dora Akunyili embarked on wooing Nollywood to be part of the government's constant – but poorly structured – efforts towards rebranding the country. She lamented Nollywood contribution to the Nigerian image crisis, enjoining stakeholders within the industry (particularly film producers) to rethink their portrayal of Nigeria. In her words,

negative perception about Nigeria is generated by Nigerians because we [Nigerians] don't believe in ourselves, even in the press [...] If nothing is done, the image we have as a country of 419-ers [corrupt people], where nothing works [and] failing leadership, [will] become a liability. The most systematic way [to reverse this situation] is to re-brand, to tell our story and prevent others from telling it the way they want to tell it (cited in Ajelurou para. 8).

It is from this premise that this paper believes that screenwriters have a lot to contribute in restructuring Nollywood to serve the needs of Nigeria, especially in laundering and soaring the image of Nigeria. It must be acknowledged however that the *New Nollywood* is committed to improving the production quality of Nigerian films and also promoting nationalism, patriotism and our national image with these movies. The foundation for the structuring this paper envisions is already in place.

From Nollywood to *New Nollywood*

Nollywood is a product of creative ingenuity and it continues to reinvent and improves itself. The industry has been under critical searchlight for improvement. To this end, a number of Nollywood directors have begun to create better quality films. It is crop of films that are sometimes referred to as *New Nollywood*, *New Nigerian Cinema*, *Nollywood Reinvented* or the *New Wave*. These films are of higher standard than the familiar Nollywood films. They are also accessible to non-African audiences. From budgetary point of view, the films have substantially increased the budgets, oscillating from \$250,000 (₦90million) to \$750,000 (₦270million). This is much bigger than the low-budget video format films. The production cycles are also much lengthier. New Nollywood film includes the works of directors, such as, Kunle Afolayan, Obi Emelonye, Jeta Amata, Stephanie Linus and Mahmood Ali-Balogun. Some of the top Nigerian scriptwriters are: Ishaya Bako, Dare Olaitan, Kemi Adesoye, Xavier Ighorodje, Dami Elebe, Biodun Stephen, Emil Garuba, Kenneth Gyang, Olu Yomi Ososanya, Victor Sanchez Aghahowa, Tunde Babalola, Chris Ihidero and Tai Emeka Obasi, among others.

With this new development, the fortune of Nollywood is turning around with a lot of positives. Nigerian films are now premiered with red carpet inviting huge audiences across the world; international film festivals feature Nollywood films cashing in on its huge popularity; special programmes with a Nollywood focus take place regularly in Paris, London and New York, among others; Nollywood can also be watched on Pay-TV networks and free-to-air broadcasters across the continent and beyond. South Africa's M-Net, which broadcasts across Africa, has channels dedicated to Nollywood. Intrepid distributors, mostly from the African Diaspora, have created video-on-demand platforms for Nollywood. One example is the huge iROKO TV. This has increased accessibility to African Diaspora audiences. Even, the prestigious Netflix has purchased the viewing rights of a number of Nigerian films, which portrays the platform's awareness of Nollywood's popularity and commercial potential across the world. Some of these films are discussed below to exemplify this new creative dimension in Nollywood and the benefits of good scripts to films.

Review of Select Nollywood Films

Dry: Written and produced by Stephanie Linus in 2015, the storyline is captivating, educating, informative and very much an eye opener. It stars Stephanie Linus, Liz

Benson Ameye. It is about an African girl child who is culturally trapped with forced marriage and suffers an illness that makes her an outcast in her community. It is inspired by a true-life story that depicts the life of two young girls living as child-brides in West Africa. They become victims of vesico vaginal fistula (VVF) – a female medical condition that causes involuntary urination and other medical complications. This is a prevalent medical condition among young girls forced into early marriage in some Nigerian communities. The film is therefore a conscious effort to create awareness on vesico vaginal fistula (VVF) to its viewers. The film travels between rural Wales and Nigeria, with a view at two parallel narratives: a young girl child and a woman dealing with similar childhood memories and horrors. The film, *Dry*, focuses on a child bride who left a heart-breaking wish, "I want to be a girl again." In 2016, *Dry* won Best Overall Movie at AMVCA; it also won Best Narrative Feature at the Pan African Film and Arts Festival (PAFF). It is a film with positive dimension for a better society and social cohesion.

King of Boys: This film tells the story of Alhaja Eniola Salami, a business woman and philanthropist with a chequered past and a promising political future is a pillar of society, loved by many, feared by most and truly known by a select few. As her political ambitions see her outgrowing the underworld connections responsible for her considerable wealth, she is drawn into a power struggle that threatens everything she holds dear. To come out of this on top, she needs every one of the cunning ruthlessness and strategy that took her to the top, as well as the loyalty of those closest to her. But who can she really trust? Amongst its cast are: Sola Sobowale, Adesuwa Etomi, Jide Kosoko, Paul Sambo, Sharon Ooja, Osas Ighodaro. Written and directed by Kemi Adetiba, the film is a three-hour visual experience that manages to dismantle many Nollywood tropes and presuppositions, while engaging the audience in a way that some 15 minute short films still struggle to do. (nollywoodreinvented.com). This is realised with its strong content, gripping and mind-blowing story line, coupled with great acting, intentional directing and good picture quality. The film cuts across as an original Nollywood pace setter with a striking image of distinctive relativity in its image.

On the surface, *King of Boys* comes across as a gangster film, a strong one but inwardly, it reveals truths and threats about national issues which are easily reflective of the Nigerian society. This image is best seen in the character of Alhaja Eniola Salami (the lead role). She is respected and acknowledged by the movers and shakers of the society because she is somewhat instrumental to the moving and shaking of things, even people in order to get them to the position of power they occupy. This earns her a place as the king of the world (King of Boys) because apparently nothing happens without her knowledge or approval, until of course she is met with a breaking challenge. Now, this is a relative course to national power and security.

Lionheart: Genevieve Nnaji's directorial debut, *Lionheart*, is another of Nollywood's finest that runs for about 94 minutes. It is the first Netflix original film from Nigeria.

Its cast includes Genevieve Nnaji, Onyeka Onwenu, Pete Edochie and Nkem Owoh. *Lionheart* is a Nigerian film about a woman trying to save her family's transport business (Luxurious Bus Company). It is in general a delightful comedy bordering on family, business and feminism. Ben Kenigsberg on *The New York Times*, takes *Lionheart* to be a "globally minded film" that offers alongside observations about the importance of preserving a family legacy; the need for comity among Nigeria's classes and ethnic groups; and the wisdom of older generations, even when change is necessary ([instagram.com/nytimes](https://www.instagram.com/nytimes)). The film, beyond its message, sells Nigeria to the world in a stunning manner; it showcases a rich Nigerian society through the proper and elevating presentation of its locations and properties with good cinematography.

Renee Schonfield, of Common Sense Media, describes the film as an "upbeat colourful look at a bustling Nigerian city with terrific performances and multiple messages about family, persevering, and females striving; it's a welcome viewing for worldwide audiences" (@commonsenseorg). Also, it gives a contrary view to the regular view of every African/Nigerian uncle wanting to take over assets of late brother's family, especially when left in the hands of a girl child. It shows us better, it shows team work, which is amazingly great. *Lionheart* is a triumph for Nollywood; it carries a great storyline portrayed by great actors of equal great capacity. Samson Toramade of *Pulse Nigeria* avers that, "*Lionheart's* ensemble cast itself is dipped in the wealth of experience that could have produced nothing but the exceptional result that is on display" ([instagram.com/pulsenigeria247](https://www.instagram.com/pulsenigeria247)).

God Calling: Written and directed by BB Sasore, *God Calling* stars Zainab Balogun, Karibi Fubara, Richard Mofe-Damijo, Onyeka Onwenu, Nkem Owoh, and Tina Mba. It tells the story of Sade, the central character, who suffers a personal tragedy and is taken on a journey of self-discovery and faith which transforms the lives of all those around her. The film shines a spotlight on modern day spirituality by imaginatively exploring what it might look like for Abraham or Prophet Elijah to be in Nigeria in 2018 and have to contend with disbelief as well as modern day realities such as smart phones and social media. The movie is an intriguing and captivating one, it is a distinguished faith based story with exceptional acting skills on display. It is good movie from Nollywood that hits a great image on the big screen.

Restructuring Nollywood with Scriptwriters as Catalysts

We are in the 21st century where we have a generation of global minded humans, with diversified emotions and fantasies in terms of reasoning, preference and acceptability. What worked in 90s does not exactly work now, technology has evolved, people are evolving and so must the film industry. It has become a normal and usual thing to often hear a Nigerian say: "I don't watch Nigerian movies." This is not without a cause, it is as a result of the low rated movies we have, our local content is poor in many areas.

We have poor stories and when you see an uplifting one, it suffers recycling in a terrible pattern. There are so many low quality productions. We need script that will tell a picture of something spectacular and intriguing, societal issues hitting the nation and its different sectors and how it can be curbed. It is not every day one finds a good Nollywood film; or a new story different from the usual norm which is why we need restructuring. Every time there is a new Nollywood movie, we want a new story, a different story, a better picture, we want unrepeated flaws, good cinematography, we want high-tech make up, complimenting costumes, appropriate properties befitting character status, we want to see lasting continuity, we want diverse stories and genres, we want a better Nollywood, a far more upgraded Nollywood.

No bad script can make cinema pop. We need something different, new ideas and story that has not been acted or even thought of. It is the duty of the script writer to birth out these ideas and develop the narrative for productions. If directors and producers, ensure that every script taken from the scriptwriter are good enough to create a better film; Nollywood's growth will be massive.

Good Scriptwriters

In film making, we cannot talk about production without a script to work with. The script is the story to be produced into a film; it is the whole essence of the production. Scriptwriters for film are also known as screenwriters and screen writing is the art and craft of writing scripts for mass media, feature films, television productions, dialogue programs, and so on. It is therefore important to know who a good scriptwriter is.

Qualities of a Good Scriptwriter

It is true that both the good and bad film scripts are written by scriptwriters. The contention of this paper is that good scripts can change the Nollywood film production narrative positively. Therefore, it is apposite to briefly highlight the qualities of a good scriptwriter and the desirable pattern of script writing that should be extolled, encouraged and developed to achieve sterling scriptwriting attributes.

In an article published in Film Academy Manipur on qualities of a good scriptwriter, S. K. Luwang Thounaojam says: "A good scriptwriter is a good story teller. He knows how to hook attention and arouse curiosity. He creates credible characters and situations and has a sense of humour/irony" (Thounaojam, web). Good knowledge of the audio and video media is an advantage, in other words, the scriptwriter should be a good visualiser, a good observer and a good writer also. He should be familiar with the other art forms like painting, poetry, and so on. He should be easily excitable to little things and be self-critical. There is a consensus among writers and critics that a good script should to a large extent embody the following features:

- Protagonist <> Antagonist

- Balance<>Disruption of Balance
- Struggle between good and evil
- Resolution of conflicts
- Restoration of Balance (Thounaojam, web).

The features serve as a checklist that guides writing creativity that is not driven by any ulterior motives but the commitment to produce good and compelling art. To excel therefore, a scriptwriter is expected to possess the qualities highlighted below:

Vision: To be good and distinguished, a scriptwriter should be able to see clearly where ordinary eyes grope. He should have an inner eye to visualise his/her story before scripting. Ken Miyamoto describes vision as, “the ability to see your stories through the mind’s eye before placing any word on paper” (Screen Craft, web). Too many writers simply write page to page, plotting out the movie, and make choices strictly to get from point A to point B and beyond. The great writers can SEE the movie already from the perspective of an audience. A close critical look at *Dry*, a movie written by Stephanie Linus, indicates that she knew from the beginning what she wanted story to stand for and that influenced her scripting by following up a real event of the story she wanted to share, so she had a picture in mind that fuelled up her scripting.

Solid Writing Skills: A good screenwriter must have great writing ability that is beyond understanding the foundations of writing that one learnt in school, such as grammar and sentence structure. “Good scriptwriters create intriguing characters, develop an interesting plot and understand how and when to create drama” (Chris Mikeson, web). Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys* is one of such good examples, presenting a very tight plot and subplots, navigating between the present and the past multiple times without losing sight of the main story in general. All of these qualities make *King of Boys* a fascinating piece of narrative.

Creativity: This quality is what gives each script writer his/her uniqueness. The story material may be the same, but how it is told is what makes a story engaging and interesting. A story may not be new to the audience but how it is dished out could be new; hence, the need to be creative. Chris Miksen says:

You probably won't find too many successful scriptwriters who lack creativity. Without creativity, your script likely won't grab the attention of anyone. It's true that just about every general story idea has been done before, so to succeed as a scriptwriter, you need to execute those ideas in a different manner, similar to a novelist (Miksen, web)

This is evident in the movie *God Calling* written by BB Sasore, the movie is a Christian faith based movie, of a truth, there have been many Christian faith based movies in Nollywood before now but none has been told as Sasore tells it in the movie *God Calling*. His creativity is deeply felt in his plot structure, strong and proper use of special effects.

Thick Skin: A good scriptwriter must be able to take criticism, good or bad. "The best scriptwriters embrace criticism because it enables them to learn and identify their weaknesses" (Miksen, web). Most of all, he/she must be self-critical. Genuine criticism helps you to get it right.

Collaborative Skills: A good scriptwriter must be able to handle collaborations effectively. Like the saying goes; two (good) heads are better than one. As experienced in Genevieve Nnaji's movie, *Lionheart*, it was written by a host of scriptwriters, such as, Ishayo Bako, Emil Garuba, CJ Obasi, Chinny Onwugbenu and Genevieve Nnaji. Sometimes, as a scriptwriter you might have a good story, but in scripting it for a production, you must consider other production factors to craft your script accordingly. This might involve having some other good writers assisting in the writing of the script, producer having a preference, and director dishing out what is obtainable, all these work better when as a scriptwriter you have great collaborative skills. According to Ken Miyamoto:

be someone they can work with and someone that they want to work with. Know that you're not always right and that others can improve your work. And even when you think what they want is not something you agree with, be able to roll with it anyway and make their notes work (Miyamoto, web).

Discipline and Passion: This quality differentiates you from just any other scriptwriter, it is reflected in how you handle and tell stories. When you have passion for script writing, you don't just put out any story, you invest more to achieve quality result admired by many.

All the outlined qualities above define a good scriptwriter; such quality writers will certainly change the Nollywood film production narrative for good. Scriptwriters are important and critical to good film. A good story provides the skeleton for other inputs required in film making. Therefore, it is paramount to invest reasonably in story creation and story creators because of the roles they could play as catalysts in restructuring Nollywood for a better and bigger entertainment and commercial gains. Good scriptwriters are not everywhere; they need to be found, trained and retrained.

Conclusion

In this paper we have been able to interrogate the challenges of Nollywood as a basis for restructuring the industry for greater efficiency in film production and as a popular culture. The paper recognises a good script as the mainstay of any film project. Restructuring Nollywood would ultimately yield a number of gains some of these include: Great film content; improved technologies, high income, great economic returns. With the foundation laid by the New Nollywood, we can only anticipate rapid growth of the new wave to become the norm of film production in Nigeria rather than just being a standard bearer.

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**POSTCOLONIAL ANXIETIES AND THE
POLITICS OF IDENTITIES IN NNAJI'S *LIONHEART*:
A CONTRAPUNTAL ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

This paper examines the flow and contra-flows of postcolonial anxieties in Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart*. It looks at the politics of national identity and re/presentations in the contemporary Nigerian nation-state amidst the fears of what has been termed, 'Fulanisation,' a form of *becoming* or racial re/construction. The paper argues against the frame that the plot story of Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart*, more than anything, is a cynosure of the hangovers of colonial continuities left unaddressed since independence. The researcher argues that the manner of relationships among the film's diverse characters reeks out the tropes of postcolonial anxieties; that is, anxieties stemming from the vicious battle for survival in the wild, in this case the Nigeria in Nnaji's *Lionheart*. The paper contends that the film reinforces the imperial and quintessential posturing of the Hausa-Fulani against the shifting traditional poise of the peoples of Eastern Nigeria. The study is fore-grounded on contrapuntal-postcolonial theory. It uses contrapuntal analysis as a theoretical moor to claim that Nnaji's *Lionheart* is an artistic construct that echoes the divergent contraptions in postcolonial Nigerian nation-state. The paper submits that Nigeria is in a serious need of restructuring since the basis for which Alhaji Maikano agrees to save the Igbo family is the ability of the *paterfamilias* of the Igbo to speak Hausa. The conclusion is that the expansionist tendencies of the Hausa-Fulani is accentuated in *Lionheart* since the only means of survival of the peoples of the Southeast is left to the hands as well as the will to act of the Hausa-Fulani.

Introduction

The term, 'postcolonial anxiety,' as used in this paper, denotes the apprehension of 'the other' in a postcolonised state; the contraptions arising from the interactions between and among postcolonised subjects and the colonial pressures within the large space of the postcolony. Achilles Mbembe describes the postcolony as the manifestation of power and subjectivity in Africa; a mode of analysis into looking at the display of power and to uncover the mask and form of colonialism (259). As a neologism, the term represents the desires of the postcolonised subjects, their identity re/construction, stillness, mobility, breach, gendering and philosophies expressed in different forms. A postcolonised state is one where the footprints of colonial continuities or legacies can be found. It is a state attended by im/mobility and the

struggle for space, expansion and resistance. Awam Amkpa describes this state as one filled state with “postcolonial desires” (xii).

For Amkpa, the notion of postcolonial desire is the act of imagining, living, and negotiating a social reality based on democracy, cultural pluralism, and social justice. The Nigerian nation-state is one of the states in Africa that is haunted by a postcolonial desire to remain as one entity. Currently, there are diverse agitations from the different ethnic groups seeking to secede from the postcolony. Groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-cultural group, amongst many other ethnic groups in the Middle Belt and Niger Delta regions of Nigeria have threatened to pull out of the Nigerian entity. Nevertheless, their agitations have been undulated by postcolonial desires of wanting to secede while at the same time desiring to remain with the unit due to the mass wealth the country possess. While these are extant at the national level, there are also such divisive or seceding tendencies at the micro level where diverse ethnics with the states are agitating for separate states due to either marginalisation or harsh policies targeting the marginal centres. Hence, Amkpa describes the Nigerian state as a “postcolonial contraption.” The Nigerian cinema is in fact best placed to interrogate the pluralistic modernity of Nigeria and postcolonial desire of its subjects (xiii).

Film has always been central to questions of social being. In contemporary society, it is one part of anti-colonial resistance; and in post-military Nigeria, it is one medium that has contributed to the questioning of the new postcolonial realities, with the cinema becoming the site of struggle for national restructuring. Films, such as, Jeta Amata’s *Black November*, Curtis Graham’s *Oloibiri*, Kunle Afolayan’s *October 1*, amongst others narrate aspects of the Nigerian live that saliently calls for restructuring.

Genevieve Nnaji can be said to have joined the roll-call of film directors that have directed films on the imperative of restructuring. Many film critics have analysed her film, *Lionheart* from the purview of gendering – gender mainstreaming and gender reconstruction (Onwutuebe 6; Gana 3; Ifatimehin 18). This study takes a detour from the gender perspectives or lens of seeing *Lionheart*. The paper reads Nnaji’s *Lionheart* from the lens of contrapuntality. It examines the colonial bequest and continuities in the postcolonial Nigerian state vis-à-vis the tropes of identity stereotyping, expansionist pressures, and humongous privileges of the upper class. The paper examines the plot and character functions in the film and likens them to what a section of the Nigerian media as well as Nigerians in the southern part of the country see as, ‘the Fulanisation Agenda’ of Nigeria.

Theorising Contrapuntal Exigencies and its Frame for Analysis

This study is rooted on contrapuntal analysis. Contrapuntal analysis has its roots in postcolonial theory. The term was coined by Edward Said to describe how texts of literature should be read in order to reveal their deep implication in imperialism and colonialism while providing a counterpoint, or counterpoints to the meaning of the

text hitherto hidden therein (59). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin note that:

by stressing the affiliations of the text, its origin in social and cultural reality rather than its filiative connections with literature and canonical criteria, the critic can uncover cultural and political implications that may seem only fleetingly addressed in the text itself (49).

Put simply, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin mean maintain that every text draws from a social and cultural context and as a result has deep implications on meaning (49). Going further, Olagoke Ifatimehin states that, “contrapuntal significations refer to notions hidden in the text which reveal the innumerable possibilities of meaning around the ‘peripherality’ in the unfolding of events” (114). Ifatimehin’s statement draws from assertion of Janell Reinelt and Joseph Roach that contrapuntal signification attests “to a whole tissue of signifiers, potentially endless, through which meaning moves and slips” (111).

Contrapuntal reading of text, Richard Terdiman notes, brings about counter-narrative or discourse (13). According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, “the concept of counter-discourse within post-colonialism raises the issue of the subversion of canonical texts and their inevitable re-inscription in this process of subversion” (50). This means that there are no fixities in reading a text or a film contrapuntally. That the film, *Lionheart* has been read and reread from the lens of gender and the family live of the Igbos of the upper class does not make it fixed. Contrapuntal analysis is governed by extant realities and happenings around the social, political, religious and economical as well as epistemological propensities conditioned by time. Thus, while a text may have been read from a given standpoint within the frame of time, the same text may assume another meaning when read against the frame of another era. Nevertheless, central in deploying contrapuntality in reading a film text or film texts is the essentiality of the story, its sequence, dialogue and the in/action of the film’s characters. These aspects offer a film critic a stencil to carve out subjects or areas to be read contrapuntally.

The idealisation of contrapuntality bears on understanding the mechanics of the text. For film criticism, it thrives on the displacement and de/centring of the central message of the film text. The fixity of the film director’s vision is displaced as the peripheral messages are aggregated and given currents which makes them court critical attention while also negotiating their space for readership within the text. Some scholars in film and cultural studies who have analysed Nigerian cinema drawing from the *episteme-side* of contrapuntality have also examined the significance of cultural studies in reading film contrapuntally (Omoera 51; Afolayan 3; Banjo 16). The nucleus of their respective seminal theses is the *apartness* or *distinctiveness* of cultural studies in appreciating film. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin refer to this distinctiveness or apartness as “Alterity” – a shift away from

the philosophic concerns with otherness – the ‘epistemic other’, the other that is only important to the extent to which it can be known – to the more concrete ‘moral other’ – the other who is actually located in a political, cultural, linguistic or religious context (9).

The shift, Ifatimehin insists, is nourished by “intercultural encounter stemming from the writers’ ability to understand the cultural parlance of film characters they create in context ‘apart’ from the creator’s persons and intentions” (120). This assertion gives currency to the idealisation of cultural *alterity*, especially within the framework of contrapuntal analysis (Slemon 9; Taussig xix). Within the spirit and politics of intercultural encounter lie postcolonial anxieties and identity re/construction. Nnaji’s *Lionheart* is soaked within the mix of the postcolonial contraption that is the Nigerian nation-state and as a result offers itself to be read deploying the framework of contrapuntality.

Beyond running or passing commentary about the family live of an Igbo family or about a young lady who successfully manages her father’s business empire, the film takes the reader into the depths of postcolonial Nigeria and the lingering ghosts of colonial legacies. Like most neo-Nollywood productions, *Lionheart* is a high budget movie. Netflix’s acquisition of *Lionheart* is a feat for Nollywood and has opened up a frontier of new possibilities for film makers in Nigeria. The film is hailed for the modest portrayal of the Nigerian woman as smart, hardworking, family-manager and builder, creative with committed focus and above all, a great thinker. Nnaji further portrays the resilience of the Nigerian woman in the face of masculine pressures and chauvinistic logic. For Gana, the film is a cynosure for the quintessential Nigerian woman, especially in her efforts to show leadership within the traditional African family setup (5). Going further, Onwutuebe avers that, “the film is a well-adapted screenplay that mirrors the African society in a way that the audiences find recognisable” (3). For Ucheoma Onwutuebe, the film is only recognisable insomuch as it captures the realities of African family live. However, the narrative of the film is deeper than the lens Onwutuebe views it from. Theoretically, *Lionheart* convey tropes of postcolonial discourse than the context of struggling Igbo family attempting to negotiate the survival of their business empire.

Synopsis of *Lionheart*

Lionheart tells the story of a struggling Igbo family business at the verge of liquidation due to reckless borrowing by its chief executive officer, Chief Ernest Obiagu (Pete Edochie). It is the story of Adaeze Obiagu (Genevieve Nnaji), Chief Ernest’s first child, who wants to take over from her father when he can no longer run his company due to his health condition. Chief Ernest, however, asks his brother, Godswill Obiagu (Nkem Owoh) to take his place, with the mandate to work with Adaeze to save the company from liquidation. Igwe Paschal (Kanayo O. Kanayo), an

Igbo businessman who has eye for the family business, frustrates all their efforts to save Lion Heart Transport Company from surviving. He connives with Samuel Akah (Kalu Ikeagwu), Director of Engineering Services at Lion Heart Company to buy off the company. Consequently, Samuel gets the support of members of the Board of Trustees to sell off Lion Heart to Igwe Paschal.

As the plot is being hatched, Alhaji Danladi Maikano (Sani Muazu), a business mogul in Kano who wants to expand his business interest to the South East Nigeria, meets Adaeze and Godswill through the agency of Hamza Maikano (Yakubu Mohammed), Alhaji Maikano's son who Godswill had earlier saved from Igbo conmen in Enugu. Adaeze presents a proposed business plan before Alhaji Maikano, convincing the business mogul that Lion Heart has the capacity to partner with Maikano Transport Services. She successfully convinces him; and he requests to see Chief Ernest before the business deal can be completed. Alhaji Maikano travels to Enugu; and one of the bases for which the partnership agreement is finally signed and completed is the ability of Chief Ernest to speak Hausa. Chief Ernest Obiagu appears at the BoT meeting, where Lion Heart is to be finally taken over by Igwe Paschal, and reveals the new partnership agreement with Alhaji Maikano. Lion Heart is saved as the duo of Igwe Paschal and Samuel Akah is embarrassed. Alhaji Maikano appears as the *deus machina* to the Igbo family; and the basis for which the family can be saved is their ability to speak the language of its postcolonised *deus machine*.

Postcolonial Anxieties and Contrapuntalities in the Identity Construction in *Lionheart*

Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart* is loaded with tropes of postcolonial anxieties as well as the recurring flashpoints of identity politics in a postcolony. From the opening scene to the closing scene, the film readers are reminded of the temperaments of postcolonised subjects and their dispositions to one another. The film opens by showing the brutish temper of disillusioned Nigerian youths who enter into the premises of Lion Heart Transport Service to cause mayhem. The mob is soon demobilised when Adaeze appears to the riotous scene and settles the rage of the youths. She says: "So, you say you're a Nigerian, act like a Nigerian" (*Lionheart* 00:02:40). The scene accompanied by her statement sets the tone for what the film readers are to expect.

The first postcolonial site in Nnaji's *Lionheart* is the native intelligence displayed by the lead characters demonstrated by the Obiagus throughout the film. Apart from the business acumen of the Obiagus, Mrs. Obiagu (Onyeka Onwenu) incarnates the persona of the pre/modern Igbo woman with all her native intelligence at managing the affairs of her family. Religiosity is one of the hotspots in the postcolony in *Lionheart*. This is evident in the morality of the Godswill. We are told in the film that they are a family that subscribes to the Christian faith and that Christianity guides their dealings; and Godswill conveys the spirituality of the family. He showcases this by introducing the "early morning devotion" to Lion Heart Transport Services (*Lionheart* 00:22:46). The only time he is seen to remove his hat

is during the worship session. This goes to show his deep reverence for the things of God. Nevertheless, his religiosity has serious implication on the belief systems in the postcolony. The same Godswill, who introduces prayer and worship session in the affair of Lion Heart, is seen attempting to bribe a bank manager, an action which landed him into trouble. In fact, he goes ahead to actually offer a bribe to a police officer to get himself and Adaeze, his niece, bailed from police custody. He does not see anything wrong in bribing an officer of the law even though he is a ‘Christian.’ Godswill says: “It is give and take; everything has a price. Name anything, I will give you” (*Lionheart* 00:34:22 – 00:34:50). Adaeze refutes his attempt to offer bribe because, according to her, it is against the ethics and practice of the family which is built on “courage and trust.” She says: “Uncle, you cannot go around bribing and punching people” (*Lionheart* 00:36:20).

Though Adaeze chided her uncle for bribing, her faithfulness or moral principle is tested with Arinze (Peter Okoye). Desperate to save her father’s company from liquidating, Adaeze goes to Arinze, her ex-lover for a loan. Arinze is a moneybag himself. He agrees to give her ₦500million in exchange for sex. She follows through but runs away from the scene on a second thought. Again, she feels exchanging sex for ₦500million misrepresents her, her family and its business interests. Nevertheless, her conviction is further tested when she is arrested and jailed. Adaeze, who initially resisted her Uncle’s attempt to offer bribe, later becomes the person offering to give a bribe herself.

Godswill: Come on, open this door.

Onyinye: Release my Madam, Officer.

Godswill: We are ready to pay for bail.

Adaeze: Oga listen, this is an emergency. We need to leave this place. So, whatever it takes... what do you want? Just name your price. We need to get out of here.

Godswill: Adanna, is that your voice? You? Bribe?

Adaeze: Uncle, this is different (*Lionheart* 00:38:39).

From the conversation above, it can be argued that religious beliefs and practices in the postcolony are transient. It suggests that there are hardly saints in the postcolony. The deep respect postcolonised subjects has for religion or its codes is momentary. The members of Obiagu family indeed have deep respect for God; but they are ready to sidestep the morality in their faith in ‘God’ to please their earthly pursuits. Two very important conversations at different moments of the film capture the moral essence of the Obiagus:

Godswill: It is give and take; everything has a price. Name anything, I will give you” (*Lionheart* 00:34:22 – 00:34:50).

Adaeze: Oga listen, this is an emergency. We need to leave this place. So, whatever it takes... what do you want? Just name your price. We need to get out of here (*Lionheart* 00:38:40).

Even though they are naturally good people on a good cause, they are ready to get things done by all means, not minding whether it is ‘godly’ or not.

The above brings to bear the politics of identity in the film. Two major Nigerian ethnic groups are represented in *Lionheart* – Igbo and Hausa; two ethnics known for their love-hate relationships. The two ethnics have long history of antagonism dating back to the amalgamation of Nigeria. The ethnic discord between the two reached its peak in 1967, as the country was forced into a brutal civil war due to ethnic pogroms in northern Nigeria, the killing of some leaders of northern extraction, sundry retaliations and the declaration of the state of Biafra. The film resonates with some certain arguable distinctiveness between the two ethnic groups and puts a mirror before them. While the Igbo people are portrayed by Nnaji as brutish, as established in the opening scene; or as “ruthless businessmen,” as Adaeze describes Igwe Paschal, the Hausas is portrayed as meek (or is it sheepish?). Hamza (Yakubu Mohammed), a Hausa from the north is taken into a cold, dark room by a group of Igbo conmen in the East. The Igbo conmen discuss in Igbo and perfect the stratagem to scam him. Luckily, another Igbo, Godswill Obiagu, comes in to eavesdrop and saves the Hausa. He says to his fellow Igbo:

Godswill: Look at how you are doing stupid business. You’re painting us black. Aren’t you ashamed? (*The conmen threaten to seize him.*) You’re Igbo, I am Igbo; you cannot do me anything (*Lionheart* 00:51:40).

His motive of coming to the rescue of Hamza is an action that should be queried. What could be his motive? Did he rescue Hamza with a purpose to re/construct the identity of the Igbo man who, within the politics of the postcolony, is said to be a con artist? Is his action driven by the moral premise of rescuing another fellow postcolonised ‘other’ from being duped by people from his own ethnic affinity? Perhaps, he is propelled by the postcolonial desire to take the place of the other. He talks about the Igbo “painting the Igbo black.” This is again instrumental. Could the film itself be about identity construction for the Igbo considering the ruthlessness of the Igbo personages in the film, as well as their business acumen?

What one gets from reading the film is the nimble-fingered ambivalence of the Igbo in the postcolony and the expansionist tendencies of the Hausa-Fulani. This is exhibited by two motifs in the film: Igwe Paschal attempting to expand his business, IG Motors to take over Lion Heart; and Maikano seeking to expand Maikano Motors to the Southeast. The desires of the two expansionist positions are symbolic. They point the film reader to diverse innuendoes of postcolonial

significance which in turn bring about anxiety in the postcolony. This position is manifested in the conversation thus:

Godswill: Maikano Motors. They have been looking for a way to enter the East. If we push for a merger with them, that is something.

Adaeze: Maikano Motors is a very big transport company; and I don't think they will go with the idea of a merger.

Godswill: Why not? This is one thing that they have been looking for a very long time – to enter the East (*Lionheart* 01:09:08 – 01:09:58).

Central in the plot of the film is the idea of expansion and occupation of spaces – something that is banal in the postcolony. It is within the quest to occupy the space of the other that the ruthlessness of Igwe Paschal can be understood. It is inherent among the postcolonised subjects to desire the space of the other. It is the fear of forcefully or subtly being outdone that breeds anxiety and the suspicion of the other. Chief Ernest Obiagu says:

Chief Obiagu: No no. Nobody will take my company away from me... No no.

Adaeze: Dad, it is a merger. Nobody is taking your company away from you.

Chief Obiagu: What is the difference between that and what Igwe Paschal proposed? Tell me!

Adaeze: Igwe Paschal wants to buy us out and we both know that that is the end of Lion Heart if he did. But with a merger with Maikano, we might still have sort of control over our destiny.

Godswill: Odogwu. listen to her. We have run out of options completely.... Now, it is either Maikano or Igwe Paschal.

Chief Obiagu: What if Maikano does not accept our terms? (*Lionheart* 01:10:59).

The gamut of emotional outrage effused by Chief Obiagu at the thought of being outdone in the name or manner of a merger is instrumental. He does not see any difference between a merger and being taken over completely. His suspicion is given credence against the position of Adaeze because he will remain deferential to Maikano since he is not the majority shareholder in the new venture.

Another key aspect of the politics in the postcolony that bears on power relations in the film is the portrayal of the metropolis, Enugu and Kano. At the opening scene, the vegetation of Enugu is portrayed as a centre where business as well as agriculture can thrive. The city is so green that Godswill even advised the comen to take into agriculture, farming instead of “painting the Igbo black” by

conning the other. The portrayal of Kano, on the other hand, as a metropolitan thriving city is also germane. Nevertheless, the city is portrayed as a congested city in need of space – an expansion. This informs the desire of Maikano Motors to expand to the Southeast; to exploit the greenness of Enugu. ‘Lion Heart’ and ‘Maikano Motors’ can be said to be symbols that signpost other ideals other than mere transport business across the region. Adaeze seems to suggest this when she says: “Lion Heart is the soul and heart of the Southeast” (*Lionheart* 01:17:07). This suggests that entering into the Southeast in the name of a merger is, arguably, synonymous with the Northern occupation of the Southeast; something that Igbos themselves are wearied about. The desire of Maikano Motors to extend its operations to Enugu in the film can be likened to what has been termed, the “Fulanisation Agenda.”

To reorder the story of the film, applying deconstruction or contrapuntal analysis, *Lionheart* can be reread as a filmic situation where an Igbo tries to muscle out a fellow Igbo man’s business (negative for the Igbo). A Hausa seeks to enter a deal with Igbos and an Igbo man saves him from the *crooks* (negative for the Igbo). Then the Igbo man runs to Kano to strike a deal with a Hausa man to save him from his fellow Igbo man. Hausa man accepts and goes to the falling Igbo mogul in his house and the major factor that strikes the deal is the Igbo man’s ability to speak Hausa.

Conclusion

Genevieve Nnaji’s *Lionheart* is laden with multiple texts. There are many angles within which the film can be read. While this study sees postcolonial anxieties and the politics of identity within the story of the film, other film scholars like Gana and Onwutuebe see differently. Gana notes:

The film is all about the celebration of humanity; it is about a call for the embrace of cross-cultural engagements and its inevitability. I see the Igbos for once actually committing to something and agreeing to move forward ... at the end of the day anyone can draw from other texts which are not even pretexts of the primary texts but of their own texts; an intertextual engagement which may lead to forcing new meaning (9).

Gana’s assertion is perspectival and can be faulted on the ground that there are no fixations in reading films. Secondly on the ground that no film exists outside of the socio-cultural politics of the film’s setting. Hence, the argument of forcing meaning to a text or giving a text new meaning should not hold water since meaning is subjective and environmentally determined. In fact, Ifatimehin explains it better:

Texts are an endless continuum of binaries given meaning by a polysemy of contexts. What a text denies is what it actually professes. Whatever meaning you derive is inherent in the text, illuminated by

the spectacles of your pretexts and contexts. I watched *Lionheart*, but I could not find it fascinating. This does not mean various meanings could not be tapped from it, or even forced upon it (23).

Ifatimehin's assertion aligns with the thinking of this paper. While the paper acknowledges that Nnaji's vision in *Lionheart* may be anything, the motif of identity politics in the postcolony is strong and cannot be ignored. Tropes of post-coloniality hold sway in the film-text as there are various sites of expansionist pulses likable to what has been described in the Nigerian media as the 'Fulanisation Agenda' perhaps exuding itself in different policy one of them being *Ruga* – the creation of Fulani settlement or grazing reserves across Nigeria. *Lionheart* portrays many of the subtle issues Nigeria is currently faced with and the central message Genevieve has put forward can only pass for front.

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HUMANISING THE DEHUMANISED: REPRESENTATION OF GENDER-BASED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN TWO NOLLYWOOD MOVIES

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Abstract

Gender-based violence against women is like a cankerworm, which is eating deep into the fabrics of the Nigeria society. It is a psycho-social, cultural and global issue that cuts across national boundaries. The African woman's world is often caught in chains of fear, suppression, aggression, resignation and abuse. In the light of this, the battering and dehumanising experiences of women, globally, often come with grave consequences. Overtime, this has led to several deaths, trauma and psychiatric cases. More than any other literary genre, the film medium is expected to be at the vanguard of projecting the image and plight of women in sub-Saharan Africa. Current trends in the representation of women in literary discourse have necessitated several scholarly works that are gender-based. This paper, therefore, set out to interrogate the portrayal of women in Nollywood movies by considering the variables of the nature of these women, their temperament and the psychological and socio-cultural factors that necessitate these challenges. The research raises some fundamental questions thus: Can Nollywood serve as an effective medium for showcasing the plight of women in a patriarchal society? Can film be a dependable channel for reaching out to a wider spectatorship with a view to draw attention to the plight of women in Nigeria? The movies, Stephanie Linus' *Dry* and Desmond Elliot's *Knocking on Heaven's Door* are examined, using frustration aggression theory as the framework. Findings reveal that in most cases, the victims of these abuses do not report formally and some of the few that report hardly receive the succour that they set out to get. The study concludes that gender-based violence in Nigeria is not receiving the desired attention in order to help curtail the menace. It is hoped that the result of this study will provide a guideline and fresh perspectives for Nollywood key players in the portrayal of domestic violence in films.

Introduction

Many movie makers in Nigeria can be said to be sitting on the fence concerning some of the realities of our time, especially as it concerns the issue of women representation in Nollywood movies. More often than not, critical commentaries on many Nollywood movies relating to roles assigned to women in their creative works portray these movie producers and directors as being chauvinistic in outlook, or as portraying the patriarchal elements of their society. More than anything else, many of

such assumptions are informed by popularly held opinions, suggesting that many Nigerian movie makers who are men, write under the influence of patriarchy to designate demeaning roles to suggest that women are only second to men in all aspects of societal life, a view that many male movie makers are refuting. Beyond such defences, this paper sets out to re-examine the major characters in Linus' *Dry* and Elliot's *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, in order to (re)articulate a contrary assumption that roles designated to female characters in these movies are implicit signifiers of the importance and incontestable relevance of women to the moral, spiritual, social and economic wellbeing of the society, both in the movies under study and in reality.

Theoretical Framework

Often times, it is argued by many that if one's expectations and desires are not being met, it oftentimes leads to frustration and ultimate aggression. But one can contend that frustration most times translate to aggression. As Johannes Breuer and Malte Elson aver, "frustration aggression theory, more commonly known as the frustration hypothesis, ranks among the most seminal and prolific theories in research on aggression" (1). The frustration aggression theory, propounded in 1939, is the brainchild theory of John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears. In the words of Leonard Berkowitz, "the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression" (1). The implication here is that the resultant effect of frustration is aggression and irritability, which may be physical, verbal or both. Added to this, Dollard et al. aver that, "frustration produces instigation to aggression but this is not the only type of instigation that it may produce" (339).

It is worth noting that frustration can lead to other forms of abuse, which include humiliation, emotional abuse and fault finding, among others. The frustrated aggressor most times look for a scapegoat that he will vent his anger on, abuse or deliberately blame for his failures. The theory further states that, "expression of aggression and aggressive impulses often creates cathartic relief once the aggression has been released by the frustrated person" (Berkowitz 334). Furthermore, to Berkowitz, "frustration will lead to aggression to the extent that it elicits negative emotion... and such negative emotions and thoughts lead automatically to the fight-or-flight response" (335).

An Overview of Women Representation in Nollywood Movies

One of the dominant trends in contemporary discourse in film is the gender issue. Over the ages, women have been a theme of great debate. The point cannot be overemphasised that, many playwrights and movie producers have relentlessly tried to prove that women are inferior, superior or equal to man; while some tend to view them as the weaker or less privileged beings, contending that the division of the sexes is a biological factor rather than an event in human history (Ezeugwu 24). Patriarchy

has been operational in the society from the earliest times. Thus, societal norms and traditions have been formulated by men to the detriment of women.

This paper essentially sets out to provide a comparative analysis of traditional and societal attitudes, norms, taboos and laws often associated with women in contemporary Nigerian movies. There is no gainsaying the fact that many cultures in Nigeria, and indeed Africa, are imbued with one form of prejudice or the other against women. This unfortunate trend does not only dehumanise and subjugate women to untold and unimaginable predicaments, but also institutionalises their plight in the various socio-cultural settings. This marks them out as both socially and culturally endangered species. Uche Nwaozuzu is of the view that gender, as a term, “is different from sex, but essentially a socio-cultural and role-based concept” (83). Barclays Ayakoroma goes further in situating gender roles and constructs thus:

Gender roles are culture-based in the sense that they are theoretical constructs involving a set of social and behavioural norms that within a specific culture are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. The perception of gender roles includes attitudes, actions and personality traits associated with a particular gender within a given culture (15).

He goes further to amplify the realities in Nigeria:

As a point offact, different cultures have different norms or maleness or femaleness; they have different expectations for the two sexes. In most part of Nigeria, for example, the woman has her place in the society distinct from the man. What obtains in most ethnic groups is that she cannot talk or act like a man at any point in time ... a woman is not supposed to grow beards; if she does, it means she is a witch and had to be buried in the evil forest whenever she dies (15).

Discrimination against women starts immediately from birth. The society tends to welcome the arrival of the girl-child with less glee and enthusiasm than that of a boy. At the age when she is old enough to be enrolled into a school, preference is often given to the boy on the lame excuse that the girl will soon be married off. Femi Shaka and Ola Uchendu point out that,

from infancy, the girl child becomes a victim of patriarchal brand of socialisation which conditions her mentally and physically as a willing slave of man, as a recreational facility to man, and as an ornament or a piece of art work to be viewed and admired (5).

In a similar vein, Cheryl Lang opines that,

from the very first breath, humans are taught to follow a strict code of behaviour that differs depending on their sex.... Males often lead a privileged life in which he is thought to be the standard for human experience and the female will lead a subjugated subservient life in which she is defined only in relation to males (1).

Also, Victoria Atsenuwa avers thus:

Discrimination against women is prevalent in all spheres and is made obvious by features left by culture, colonial legacy, religion, education, politics, and employment, among others. Aggression towards women is based on patriarchy where the role of men and women are socially constructed in such a way that women occupy inferior position in the scheme of things (17).

However, taking a cue from Nigeria's documented history, Nkechi Okadigwe observes that,

women in the traditional African society were constructed to take just the limited roles of child bearing, child nurturing, some minor crafts like weaving and home management. Yet the traditional Nigerian periods also produced such women as Moremi of Ile Ife, Emotan of Benin and Queen Amina of Zazzau who are notable legendary figures (201).

All of the above positions are quite instructive. As a point of fact, while the man from childhood is indoctrinated with a superiority complex, the woman is merely treated as inferior to the man. While the male child is taught to aspire for greater heights professionally, the female child is indoctrinated with the idea that she could never survive outside the kitchen. This appears to have informed the position of Agatha Ukata when she states that, "Nollywood videos depict women mostly in the traditional roles of housewives, mothers and cooks" (531). Nonetheless, it has also been noted that, "the continental value of Nollywood films rests on the fact that the films are about the archetypal principles of goodwill with which many African communities will readily identify with" (Ezeugwu 53).

Violence against women is an issue that many countries all over the world have been contending with for years. The British Council Report of 2012 states that, "one in three of all women and girls aged between 15 and 24 have been a victim of violence" (13). It is believed that the bid to reduce the menace against women brought about the emergence of the movement that has come to be known as, feminism. This much is confirmed by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, when she affirmed that, "its emergence is a response to oppressive and unjust laws and attitudes against

women in the 20th century though the agitation of women's right started long before then in the 18th century Europe" (201).

The portrayal of women in films has remained almost the same over the years. Dibia Emelobe submits that, "men are portrayed as victims of female selfishness, and are seen as the final decision makers and as heroes who save the community from the evil hands of the women's movement" (529). With the emergence of home video films, it was hoped that many of the biased misrepresentations about the image of women would be addressed and corrected; but on the contrary, these expectations are not captured as many of the movies being churned out by Nigerian producers, almost on daily basis, still portray women as evil, prostitutes, disrespectful, low lives, greedy, wicked, quarrelsome, mean-spirited, gossips, husband-snatchers, witches, and objects of ridicule, among others. To buttress the foregoing, M.A.Y. Lewu adds that, "women are portrayed in many films as prostitute, at best courtesans, wily lovers and witches. They are prone to unimaginable nudity. This negative portrayal cuts across from North to South though with different intensity" (531). Chukwuma Anyanwu also notes that, "even when they are portrayed as epitome of love and understanding, they still end up as victims of their men, who use them for rituals in order to make money" (13).

Many expect that the Nigerian film industry, popularly referred to as, Nollywood, will be alive to the realities of our time. Instead, after several years, it has rather become an avenue where burning socio-cultural issues in the likes of domestic violence, sexual violence, girl-child marriage, sexual harassment, rape, reproduction rights, and other gender issues, are showcased in manners that elevate the status of men over women. The industry has become a channel where laws are projected to favour men, especially concerning issues of rape and marriage.

Films are essentially meant to reflect people's culture and project them to the world in a most objective manner. The image of women in contemporary Nigerian as well as in the past as represented by Nollywood is often portrayed negatively. Stephanie Linus' *Dry* and Desmond Elliot's *Knocking on Heaven's Door* are chosen as fitting examples to illustrate the elements of negative portrayal of women in Nollywood movies. It is assumed that through the movies, film makers would be the human agencies expected to intervene by recreating the narratives about the image of women in their various films. The selected movies will be used to show that the directors and producers of these movies have continued with the theme of subjugation and aggression despite the age we are in. The study will use frustration aggression theory as a lens to examine what often propel men to dehumanise women. What are the causes of frustration? And what are the effects of aggression? It is hoped that this research will challenge film makers to begin to refocus their creativity and change the narratives in raising and championing the cause for favourable portrayal of the women in Nollywood movies. This is with a view to redeem the female gender from the harrowing shackles of unwarranted aggression, exploitation and abuse.

Recent studies have shown that the representation of women in Nollywood films has remained stereotypical and tends to cast their image in the mould of weaklings and very dependent species, who are often left at the mercy of men. The men take decisions for the home irrespective of the likely consequences of these decisions (most times unfavourable) to the home. Agatha Ukata argues that,

the representation of women in Nollywood video films fail to depict them in ways which evaluate the sordid reality of things in the real world. To achieve this false representation, the film makers have resorted to reversals in the roles of women and men in the society (6).

She further adds that, despite the fame of the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, both locally and internationally, some critics still see it,

as a poor imitation of the real thing. The films also have significant influences on the way others see us, hence on the way they relate with us. Nigerian films more or less do not seem to be aware of the shifting parodying in women's discourse. Consequently, some of the films are gender insensitive and many still abide by the traditional and conservative attitude towards women (531).

Adefolaju Adesoke shares a similar view, when he also submits that,

some Nigerian home videos' portrayal of our cultural ethos and of women are inappropriate, misleading and therefore unacceptable.... Some Nigerian home videos could be accused of projecting intentionally or ignorantly an image of women... that contains old myths, misconceptions and even distortions of true images (76).

In the light of the foregoing, the study examines two movies, *Dry* and *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, to find out different manifestations of subjugations and treatment of women and its portrayal in these movies.

Synopsis of *Dry*

Dry is a 2014 movie that was written, produced and directed by Stephanie Linus. The movie examines the themes of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, Vesico Virginal Fistula (VVF) among young women as a result of early and forced marriage. The story recounts the ordeal of thirteen year old Halima (played by Zubaida Ibrahim Fagge) whose uneducated parents forcefully married her off to a sixty year old Sani (Tijani Faraga). Sani is portrayed as always beating and raping Halima and, subsequently, she gets pregnant, gives birth to still birth, and suffers from VVF. Halima is abandoned by her father and husband, discriminated against by her co-wives and the society and abandoned in isolation.

The movie's sub-plot also captures the story of a successful international medical doctor, Zara (Stephanie Linus), who had a similar childhood experience with Halima. She lives with the recurrent bitter memory of child rape, forced prostitution, child marriage and VVF. Luck had smiled on her when a medical expert from Atlanta, who was on a medical mission in Africa, rescued and adopted her. Zara was trained by Mrs. Robbins (Gemma McAvoy) and she became a successful and accomplished medical doctor. Her bitter experience in Africa made her almost reluctant to step her foot on an African soil; but when she discovers through a document that she had a child in Nigeria and that there was need to stand in for her mother, who is down in health, she visits with the hope of finding her child.

She encounters a harrowing and almost unbelievable scenario in the hospital regarding people with VVF, which included non-availability of drugs, inadequate facilities, very few medical personnel, and so many women to attend to. All of what she did was with little or no remuneration. After searching frantically for her daughter, she discovers that Halima is her long lost child who is down with VVF. Zara's effort to save Halima fails and the devastating effect of her daughter's death emboldens her to start a campaign against child marriage. Eventually, her message reaches the Speaker of House of Assembly (Olu Jacobs), who allows her to make a presentation at the hallowed chamber of the House of Assembly. Upon her passionate delivery, the House agrees to support the VVF cause.

Textual Analysis of *Dry*

Dry whose major theme centres on child marriage and its concomitant implications mirrors the two main characters, Halima and Zara, as victims who, against their will, were forcefully given away as mere goods created for the highest bidders. While Halima's age mates are in school learning how to read and write, she is being brutalised almost on daily basis by a man old enough to be her grandfather. Through the village gossip, Dillaliya (Famaima Buyengum), we have an insight into the kind of person Halima's husband is and the background he comes from. He is an old man with three other quarrelsome wives and a domineering mother; with this kind of home, one can only wonder what the fate of a 13 year old vulnerable child will be in such a home.

UNICEF defines child marriage as, "a formal marriage or union before the age of 18" (23). Child marriage is viewed by many as a violation of human right as the girl is given away in marriage without her consent; and this is often to a man much more older than she is. In child marriage, the girl is often exposed to sexual exploitation, rape and torture. This can be seen from Halima's explanation to her parents when she ran home: "He is beating me and my whole body is painning me" (*Dry*, 58:09).

Victims of child marriage are often infected with all manner of diseases, one of which is VVF. The child marriage phenomenon is prevalent in the Northern part of Nigeria; and as Paul Adekola, M. A. Akanbi and Olawole-Isaac explain, in Nigeria, "child marriage is endemic in the North, especially in the North East and North West

geo political zone with over 45% of teenage marriages and the highest level of female illiteracy in the country” (8). Teenage marriages often hinder young girls from having a healthy childhood. Adekola, Akanbi and Olawole add that, “in all the endemic areas, rural girls and women are particularly affected as they continue to bear the health risk, social and economic cost of early and forced marriage, non-consensual sex and early pregnancies” (8).

Halima, like any other child, wants to live a normal life; but her dream is cut short by her greedy parents, who not only marry her off at thirteen but are also waiting to marry off Teni (Hauwa Maina), her younger sister. After several attempts to forcefully sleep with Halima, without success, Sani becomes frustrated which results in aggression and he is seen many times beating her. During the time that Halima contracts and battles with VVF, her husband, out of frustration, confines her to a room instead of rushing her to a hospital. The incidence is captured thus:

Sani: Hey, it’s enough. Halima we have to put you in a room where you will stay for a while before I decide on what to do. No going out and no cooking (*Dry* 01:04:08)

The despicable aggressive act of Sani confining Halima to her room clearly shows how he resents and abhors her presence as she is down with VVF. Instead of love and care, all she gets is aggression, hatred, abandonment, rejection and isolation.

Synopsis of *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*

The film, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, written by Emen Isong, produced by Ini Edo and Emen Isong, is directed by Desmond Elliot. It is a contemporary story that centres on abuse, frustration, aggression, domestic violence, oppression, jealousy, inferiority complex, betrayal and cheating. The movie tells the story of the marital relationship between Debbie (played by Adesua Etomi) and Moses (Blossom Chukwujekwu) and how a little secret past of Moses succeeds in jeopardising their seemingly flawless marriage. The story takes another turn when a music producer, Thomas Dacosta (Majid Michael) enters into the scene. The couple is captured as having a shaky relationship, while eking out a living through gospel music. The wife, Debbie, is more popular and makes more money than the husband. Consequently, the husband becomes jealous and makes sure he does not allow her career to blossom. At the same time, he lavishly spends all that his wife makes without contributing anything. The constant marital abuses and aggression meted on Debbie by Moses leads to her suffering four miscarriages. It gets worse with Debbie becoming more successful in her gospel music career. Paradoxically, she refuses to let people have any hint about the domestic abuses that she is going through so as to protect her husband, while waiting on God’s intervention, or a miracle.

The *Knocking on Heaven’s Door* x-rays the challenges and plights that domestic violence victims go through in our society and what they go through in the hands of their abusers. Debbie will not want to speak out or walk out of her marriage

because of what society would say; rather, she opts to sit back and hope for the best. Somehow, succour comes to her only when her husband is killed by his ex-girlfriend. With her liberation, Debbie is able to recover and pursue her music career. Thomas, who was locked up for six months on a false allegation of killing Moses, regains his freedom and settles down with Debbie.

Textual Analysis of *Knocking on Heaven's Door*

Debbie, who is married to Moses, harbours a frustrating secret which she tries most times to conceal from everyone, including her pastor's wife and her best friend, Wunmi (Lelee Byoma). Unknown to many, the seemingly blissful marital relationship between the lovely gospel singer and her not too popular gospel artist husband is marred by constant aggressive battering of the wife by the husband. Moses, who suffers from severe inferiority complex and incessant frustration, often turns aggressive towards his wife and often finds succour in accusing, beating, humiliating and transferring his aggression to her at every slightest provocation. The aggression gets so bad that Debbie had four painful miscarriages; and all she gets as consolation from her husband, who *punched* out the unborn babies is "there will be more babies" (*Knocking on... 02:06*). Moses often gets aggressive with Debbie over everything she does.

The movie opens with Moses dehumanising Debbie by pouring liquid milk all over her body because she mistakenly brushed him on her way out (*Knocking on... 01:11*). In another scene, Moses is seen whipping Debbie with a belt on the staircase and eventually pushing her down, which led to her fourth miscarriage (*Knocking on... 01: 09*). He becomes visibly and irrationally frustrated with his wife outshining him in the gospel music industry and receiving all the attention from fans. After a church service, people were rushing to buy Debbie's CD and getting her autographs, an action which terribly infuriated Moses. On their way home, he exploded thus:

Moses: ... I help make your decisions because you have a terribly dysfunctional instinct which pretty explains why you have a penchant for making wrong decisions.

Debbie: ... I am sorry (Moses *for no reason slaps her.*) (*Knocking on... 03: 07*).

Moses becomes aggressive each time he is frustrated with Debbie's rising success. In another instance, during their ride back from Debbie's media interview, Moses visibly frustrated with Debbie's fame and the attention she is getting from her fans, lashes out at her:

Moses: What is that about... my husband is my rock... my all... you are mocking me.

Debbie: I wasn't mocking you. I don't know what you are talking about...

Moses: (*Fuming.*) You were patronising me... everyone wants to be around you! It is all about Debbie, Debbie, Debbie! You make a lot of money; I don't make a lot of money.

Debbie: Everything I make I give you (*Almost crying.*)

Moses: Oh, you are pitying me; don't you? You think you are the bread winner and I am the loser...? I am the man! Shut up when I am talking... (*With that, Moses opens the car door and forces Debbie out of the car in the middle of nowhere and drives off.*) (*Knocking on... 54:06*)

From the above, it is apparent that, out of frustration, Moses accuses Debbie of patronising him. This was just because he wanted to publicly humiliate her out of envy for her rising profile and increasing fan base. In another instance, after making up with Moses, Debbie confides in him with regards to a new 20million naira record deal and an 8.00am appointment she had with the record label boss the next morning. Again, out of frustration and envy, Moses angrily soaked all her outing clothes in water to prevent her from honouring the appointment, which was expected to fetch a fortune and shoot her into a celebrity. Out of jealousy, Moses ruined the contract for Debbie; and that was the last straw that broke the camel's back. That incident propelled Debbie to move out to Tom Dacosta's house, where she remained until Brenda, the ex-girlfriend of Moses, killed him during a romantic night gone sour. Fortuitously, the death of Moses liberated Debbie from the shackles of aggression.

Manifestations of Domestic Violence in *Dry* and *Knocking on Heaven's Door*

The two films chosen for the research on domestic and gender-based violence in Nollywood movies approach the theme from different perspectives. In *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, the pivotal character, Debbie, is represented as a hardworking, loving, submissive, tolerant and obedient woman, who obeys every instruction from her husband, irrespective of how inconveniencing it appears to her. She is submissive to the extent that she discloses her twenty million naira deal to her husband despite knowing that he is highly jealous of her career advancement and success.

Debbie is portrayed as a religious, God-fearing woman who, despite the numerous beatings by her husband, refuses to tell people, including her pastor's wife and best friend (Lelee Byoma) what she is going through in her home. Despite her husband's aggression, temper and jealousy, she is still of the view that she is supposed to tell him everything about her career; and this blind trust causes her to miss a twenty million naira music endorsement. She is portrayed as docile, weak and easily swayed, in the sense that while Moses is beating, raping and abusing her, she never fights back. With four miscarriages, and still counting, she never deems it fit to confide in anyone in order not to escalate her problems. Moses manifests different faces of aggression towards Debbie which includes jealousy, anger, humiliation, abandonment, verbal and emotional abuse and emotional blackmail, among others.

In *Dry*, the victims of violence, Halima and Zarah, are portrayed differently. From the onset, Halima vehemently opposes her being married to Sani. She runs back home to report her ordeal even though she was forced into the marriage. Her father does not see anything wrong with her being beaten; rather, he tells her to go back to her husband. Halima is cast in the mould of a child who is proactive and knows what she wants. She does not allow Sani's wealth to sway her. In her tiny and vulnerable voice, she is able to cry against what she is going through in Sani's house. She opts not to disclose her ordeal in her husband's house to Dellilyia, the village gossip, knowing that it is not the best option, just the same way Debbie refuses to confide in her pastor's wife, knowing that it may be detrimental to their image. Like Moses, Sani vents his aggression towards Halima through rape, anger, frequent beatings, confinement, abandonment and isolation, among others.

Conclusion

The study examined the issues and challenges of domestic violence and its portrayal in two Nigerian movies, *Dry* and *Knocking on Heaven's Gate*. Nollywood industry has shown that a lot still needs to be done with a view to capture the true picture of what many Nigerian women go through in their marriages and relationships. Many of the producers and directors of these movies are yet to do justice in uplifting the battered and dehumanised image of women in our patriarchal society. From the past to recent times, history has shown that victims of domestic violence are often left in sordid and pitiable states with harrowing experiences of sardonic treatment from their oppressors.

The researcher is of the view that these victims are often battered, traumatised, and devalued, due largely to many factors like their inability to speak out, alert their relations, security operatives, friends or even their immediate families as a result of what people will say (as in the case of Debbie in *Knocking on Heaven's Door*). Also, there is hardly any significant support for some of the victims from their immediate environment, government, families (as in the case of Halima in *Dry*), or security agencies. The researcher is of the view that the world is changing; and so should people's sense of reasoning. Thus, the sympathy of any decent person in the society should go to the victims of these aggressive and atrocious acts.

The study, therefore, attempted to advance the challenges of domestic violence and its dehumanising effects on victims and recommends that Nollywood should use film as a weapon against domestic violence. This is with a view to humanise women who are often used as scapegoats captured in dehumanising situations, specifically, using various aggressive and abusive mechanics. The study implores on the Nollywood industry to pass the message that it is high time people, friends and neighbours among others, learnt to take proactive steps in protecting those experiencing domestic violence. They should not remain complacent, claiming that it is a family affair (as Halima's parents did in *Dry*), which they would not want to interfere.

Through their movies, Nigeria film makers should, as a matter of urgency, identify areas where abuse and domestic violence, in whatever shades, are prevalent and begin to wage arduous and relentless war against the perpetrators of such inhuman vices. The essence is to create more realistic awareness on the trends, dangers, problems and resultant implications arising from gender-based domestic violence in our society. This is also with a view to drawing attention to the implications of indulging in such heinous acts which may range from criminal prosecution, to lynching and torture. Through the movies, victims will also learn about their rights and the dangers associated with being exposed to situations that make them vulnerable to abuse.

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MASQUERADES AS STATE IDENTITY IN ABUJA NATIONAL CARNIVAL

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Abstract

Beyond lifestyles, languages, dress codes and cuisines, performances are emblematic signifiers and identifiers of natal cultures. In its fourteenth year of existence on Nigeria's performance space, the Abuja Carnival has put various performance cultures on parade: dances, durbars, boat regattas, drumming and acrobatic displays, and many other kinetic entertainment stunts. The translocation of masquerade in the carnival revealed it as a very popular indigenous performance following its veneration in African lore and mores. With as many as thirty six states, the Federal Capital Territory and many foreign contingents, this street theatre is a constellation of masquerade cultures across Nigeria and beyond. However, despite the blurred aesthetics, which is characteristic of this processional art, the nativity of each masquerade is visibly noticed. Every masquerade performance in the Carnival is traceable to a particular indigenous culture in Nigeria. It is against this background that this paper examines five masquerades, namely, *Ijele*, *Agbogho Mmuo*, *Ugomma* (Anambra State), *Ekpo* (Akwa Ibom) and *Ekpe* (Cross River), to show how each of the masquerades depicts the cultures of their origin in costumes and mask designs, performance dynamism and aesthetics. The choice of these masquerades was based on their popularity and consistent appearance at the Abuja Carnival. Performances were complemented with video recordings of the carnivals. Data were subjected to performance analysis because of the liveliness embodied in the masquerades. The study reveals that Abuja Carnival, though a performance site, has unknowingly restructured this space as a platform where distinct performance cultures are identified based on the masquerades' localities. This has ushered a sense of pride for each state's indigenous performance, cultural reengineering and identity multiplication, as observed in the masquerades that were studied.

Introduction

Cultures all over the world reveal the certainty of lives lived in their most mundaneness. Cultures are signifiers, emblems and codes of identity through which more are known of a particular group, nationality, and period of a people. These include cultures of feeding (food habit), marriage and initiation rites, child rearing procedures, dress codes and value systems. There is a common saying that, "a nation without culture is dead," as no nation can survive without its cultural ethos. Tunde

Babawale and Ogen Olukoya posit that, culture is “an index of growth and development ... of civilisation, traditions, customs, beliefs, morals and values of the society” (12). According to Ralph Linton, the culture of a society is the people’s way of life; it is “the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation” (Haralambos and Holborn viii).

John Storey articulates various definitions of culture put forward by Raymond Williams. Amongst these broad definitions, one is peculiar within the focus of this essay. It talks about cultural development of a people along certain trajectories as observed in festivals, performances and practices. The principal function of these concepts is to signify, to produce, or to be the occasion for the production of meaning. This position echoes what Structuralists and post-Structuralists termed, “signifying practices” (Storey 2).

To further this position on signifying practices, there is the central idea about cultural identity which borders on lifestyles and performance cultures all over the world. Talking about performance culture, the versatility and maturity of the audience play a role in cultural formation and understanding the possibility of culture mix, inter-culturality and cultural hybridity. Victor Turner avers that cultures are “most fully expressed through their rituals and theatrical performances....” This is because “cultures provide the material subjects and objects out of which performances are made and through the process of performance cultures become self-aware and present themselves as cultures” (cited in Okagbue 3, 12). Although each ethno-cum-cultural group makes effort at reawakening the consciousness of its identity in various ways, it is significant to note that shared cultural codes grant tangibility to performance dynamism and also add to the cultural awareness of the audience. The whole image or picturesque concept on display draws from the cultural repertoire of the performance culture of a particular group or across proximate cultures. Performance cultures of dance, music, drumming, masquerading, acrobatic displays, and many other kinetic aesthetics, are significant and obvious ways through which cultures are traced and identified along ethno-cultural geographies.

The mask, masking and masquerade traditions, for instance, are the most popular indigenous performing art forms in Africa. To clearly delineate these three concepts, mask is the cover or headgear worn by masqueraders, masking is the processes involved while masquerade or (masquerading) is the end product of these processes that have become performance and ready to be visually and aesthetically perceived by the audience. Masquerade is called differently by various ethnic nationalities as ethnographic literatures by scholars like Meki Nzewi, Nnabuenyi Ugonna, Robin Horton, Simon Ottenberg and Tom Miachi, among others have shown.

In Igbo land, for example, masquerade is variously called, *mmonwu*, *mmanwu*, *mmuo*, *maa*, *omabe*, or *ekpo*; in North-Central Nigeria, especially Kogi and Benue States, it is known as, *akwujena*, *alekwu*, or *egwu*; among the Yoruba of South-West zone, it is called, *egungun*, or *eegun-alare*; within the South-South States of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa, it is called by different

names, including *egwugwu*, *ekine ba*, *owu*, *ekpo* and *ekpe*. As much as these names point to one and the same thing, it is in its representation and manifestation of the spirit of the dead ancestors or incarnate beings that masquerade (its ideas and concepts) find meaning in African lore and mores. However, the shared beliefs about the masquerade in its most ritualistic underpinnings: spirit incarnation, possession and manifestation have been challenged by scholars. This is not preclusion that all masquerades have been de-ritualised in indigenous African societies.

John Picton researched on African indigenous masquerades and notes that it has undergone changes. From a prehistoric time of deep rituality, when masquerades were spirits coming to the living on invitations, to a period of spirit possession, where the spirits residing in the masks took over the wearers, and to a point where men are merely dressed in masks to entertain. Masquerade or masked spirit or *mmanwu*, as termed in Igbo society, has spiritual connotation and is significant to its appearance and performance among its Igbo audience. Beeds Reed notes that through the agency of the masker who wears the costume, the invincible spirit is made physically tangible. This is made possible because spirits are omnipresent and yet unseen. The spirits turned masquerades are activated and protected by supernaturally charged *medicine* substances made from sacred materials that are placed on the masks or the bodies of the maskers.

Consequently, this paper will highlight details on this aspect of the masquerade, as its focus is mainly on socio-entertainment masquerades seen in carnivals. A masquerade must necessarily perform. Its performativity is multifaceted and coalesced in what many have described as total theatre and ranges from dances, drumming, songs, chants, processional displays and elaborate costuming. All these depend on the region, the culture, the people, the society, the peculiarities of historicity, the needs and contemporaneity as every work of art belongs to its age and its nation. Masquerade's ubiquity and preponderance in Igbo socio-cultural life has witnessed robust scholarship. Scholars, including Joel Adedeji and Yemi Ogunbiyi, have studied these indigenous forms largely on its influence on the literary theatre in Africa, John Conteh-Morgan and Tejumola Olaniyan as well as Osita Okagbue have studied the indigenous performances from the perspective of their contemporary variants.

Simon Ottenberg has studied the anthropology of Afikpo people through their Okumkpo masquerade performance; Bakary Traore has also studied the traditional African theatre as a vehicle of thought that brings peoples together in celebration and mourning. Other scholars of masquerade art include Chukwuma Okoye, Gowon Ama Doki, Meki Nzewi, Nnabuenyi Ugonna, Onuora Nzekwu, Osita Okagbue, Ossie Enekwe, and Victor Ukaegbu. Even emergent contemporary theories have also been applied in the study of African theatre and performance forms especially using the postmodern indices in the study of the masquerade: Devi Sarinjeive, Lokangaka Losambe, Sunday Ododo, as well as, Canice Nwosu. It is against this background that Chukwuma Okoye opines:

The masquerade is undoubtedly the most popular form of art expression among the Igbo. It has many forms and represents a visual and dynamic expression of the entire experiences and aspirations of its parent community. It engages the active participation of the entire community either as actual performers or audience; and it also performs vital social, political, psychological, aesthetic, religious and economic functions (140).

A masquerade must perform to accentuate its nature and invariably affirm the fact that costume undoubtedly serves as carriers of act and cultural identity in the art of the masquerade. Osita Okagbue asserts that, “the close relationship between performance, society and culture is reflected in the fact that every work of art belongs to its age, its nation and its geographical contexts” (12). To this end, Abuja Carnival masquerades studied in this paper reveal significantly their ethno-cultural origins in their costumes, performances, audience-space relations, dynamics, as well as, aesthetics, in general.

Carnival and the Search for Authentic African Identity

The history of carnival has become like the debate championed by relativist and evolutionist scholars on whether African indigenous theatre and performances can be termed drama within the European dramatic prism and standards: Ossie Enekwe, Philip Ogundeji and Yemi Ogunbiyi. But in the carnival example, the argument has been on the widespread cultural complexities of Spanish and English colonial powers, French planters, African slaves, Indian indentured labourers, and the many other ethnic groups that settled in the brave New World who through the carnival celebration had to contend with varied cultures and identities either as slaves or as masters. Richard Schechner argues that,

the contemporary Carnival as we know today serves the cultural complexities of the island (*the new world*) through incorporating the cultural styles and customs *of these different peoples, as observed in their dances, drumming, music and masking* (20) (Italics mine).

Early carnival acts have been traced to French aristocrats, European overlords and also as a form of Catholic rite of passage ushering the Lenten period (Ash Wednesday, when meats were disallowed) in the Catholic calendar. This position, according to Esiaba Irobi, is like saying Africans never had celebrations and festivals akin to this European styled format of merrymaking. In his celebrated essay, “What They Came With: Carnival and the Persistence of African Performance Aesthetics in the Diaspora,” he argues thus:

To understand what the Africans who left the continent from 1441 to 1865 came with to the United States and other parts of the New

World, we first need to understand what phenomenology means... the engagement in lived experience between the individual consciousness and reality as sensory and mental phenomena (897).

The memory to him is a retrieval faculty of a lived experiences, where individuals (Africans) relied upon to come to terms with their past in matters of cultural identity and orientation. As an integral part of the African existence, culture and values express an ambiance for vital production and reproduction of an image of identity. To this end, the body through the memory is able to recall and perform all cultural experiences; dances, music, drumming, and songs that served as a relieving mechanism in the slave labour yards. The debilitating and excruciating effects of slavery on Africans in the Diaspora could not affect their memory as to lose their ethno cultural identities which was the only part of their humanity left. According to Esiaba Irobi,

it is important to note that even after most African peoples lost their languages because of seasoning in the New World, phrases and fragments of their dances remained and survived as choreographic and phenomenological vocabularies of their original identity and cultural history (899).

He concludes that:

The whole tradition of African festival and ritual theatre, we must bear in mind, with all its complex music, drum language, dance, architecture, songs, spectacle, spatial configurations, choreography, and masking, has always been transferred from generation to generation, before and after slavery phenomenologically, such as through the intelligence of the human body, not videos, films, or typographic literacy (897-98).

The human body no matter how old does not forget the acts it had mastered in the past. This resonates in the Igbo adage that says: *Agadi nwanyi adighi aka nka n'egwu omari-agba* (transl. an old woman never gets old in the dance steps she's used to). To connect these thoughts together, it will be necessary to re-echo the words of Esiaba Irobi: Because the body is the primary instrument for incubating, articulating, and expressing all ideas as well as transporting all art, be it music, drama, literature, theatre, festival or carnival, he asserts that it is through "phenomenology and kinaesthetic literacy (i.e., the use of the medium of the body as site of cultural signification) that crucial aspects of indigenous African festival theatre were trans-located to the New World" (899), where carnival established itself as an African cultural identity.

Abuja National Carnival

The establishment of what is now known and referred to as Nigeria National Carnival (NNC) which was formerly Abuja Carnival, started with a Presidential Executive Order signed by former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. According to Ahmed Yerima:

The strategic orientation of Abuja Carnival started at the Presidential Committee on Tourism (PCT) held in Calabar in 2005 and chaired by the then President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. It was at this session, that Nigeria initiated an international Carnival to be known as Abuja Carnival to be held in Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria and to be hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on behalf of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2).

The Abuja Carnival took off in 2005 with a mandate and objectives to not only serve as historical source material, but also an inspiration for the unity of Africa and a reconnection with the past. It was also commenced to showcase traditional Nigerian Carnival of music, dance and arts; to celebrate the individuality and unity of the State Governments and people of Nigeria; to educate and inform the world of the rich culture, identity and history of Nigeria; to serve as a vehicle to promote and market the rich cultural heritage and arts forms of Nigeria with the view of attracting international tourists to Nigeria (Yerima 3).

To actualise these objectives, the Presidential Committee appointed Ambassador Frank Nchita Ogbuewu, then Honourable Minister of Culture and Tourism and former Ambassador to Greece; where tourism and culture had been highlighted to a point of not only that of celebration, but as a revenue earner, to be Chairman of the maiden carnival and Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, the Honourable Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as Vice Chairman. In the same vein, an inter-ministerial committee on Abuja Carnival made up of thirteen (13) Ministries was constituted, to show the inter-relatedness of marketing Nigeria as a *tourism destination* and the concomitant action by the various ministries as impacting on attracting tourists to the country. Carnival Consultants were also appointed. The Road Show Company of London made up of a group of experienced individuals from the West Indies and England was duly appointed as consultants on the Carnival. The team of the consultants comprised:

1. Claire Holder – Managing Director
2. Chris Nortey – Finance and Development Specialist
3. Danny Holder – Route Design and Management Specialist
4. Martha Fevrier – Float and Costume Specialist
5. Avion Mookram – Float and Costume Specialist

The Consultants were to proffer technical assistance to the Carnival Management Committee in packaging and presenting Nigeria's rich and diverse cultural manifestations into a single product of international standard patronage (Yerima 5).

To reinforce his commitment to the pursuit of alternative income through the culture tourism sector, Mr. President inaugurated the Carnival Management Committee (CMC) in July 2005. Because of the organic nature of the Abuja Carnival, the objectives have continued to increase over the years. Against this background, the Abuja Carnival is distinguished from the known world renowned carnivals and designed to be a creative occasion showcasing Nigeria's unique heritage of art forms and cultural identity.

Masquerades in Abuja Carnivals

Masquerade performances in traditional society are seen as a means of social interaction and agent of social change. The various masquerades on parade are part of the splendour and razzmatazz of the Carnival Opening Ceremony while a dedicated day and venue is set aside for the Carnival Masquerade Performance event. It is instructive to note that only friendly, social, de-ritualised and parade-like entertaining masquerades perform at Abuja Carnival in deference to the phenomenological sensibilities of the viewing public made up of foreign and Nigerian nationals.

The ubiquity of masquerades in Abuja carnival is an exemplification of how highly this indigenous art is revered in every community in Nigeria. From the North-Central, South-South, South-East to South-West, masquerade is a major spectacle in Abuja Carnivals and include: the *Eyo* (adamu orisha) masquerade of Lagos state, the *Igede* masquerade of Benue, the *Ekpo* masquerade of Akwa Ibom State, the *Ekpe* masquerade of Cross River State, the *Enentigha* and *Okenma* masquerades of Ebonyi State, the *Ijele*, *Agbogo Mmuo*, *Adamma*, masquerades of Anambra and Enugu States, Leaf Masquerade of Plateau state, the angel and the devil masquerades of Abia State, the *Ugbekpe* wonderful masquerade of Edo State, the *Akwujena* wonderful masquerade of Kogi State, the Rolling masquerade of Nasarawa and Kaduna States, the masquerades of animal genus; *Enemma* (antelope), *Enyi* (elephant), *Odum* (lion) *Ugomma* (eagle) and *Enyimili* (hippopotamus) mostly of Igbo pedigree, the *Ashama* masquerade of Nasarawa State, the *danafojura* (fire defying) masquerade of Oyo State, the hydra dancing and tumbling masquerade of Edo State and many others.

However, the performance of each masquerade differs from one culture to the other depending on the concept and idea behind its composition. This paper therefore sets out to examine few of these masquerades as performed at Abuja Carnival. Masquerades selected for study include *Ijele*, *Agbogo mmuo*, *Ugomma*, as identity postcards of Anambra State; *Ekpe* and *Ekpo* representing Efik (Cross River State) and *Ibibio* (Akwa Ibom State), respectively.

Analysis of Masquerade Performances as State Identities in Abuja Carnival

The Ijele Masquerade in Abuja Carnival

Ijele masquerade is the most well-known masquerade among the South-East states of Anambra and Enugu. It has been variously described as the king of masquerades. *Ijele* masquerade is the most spectacular mask in the carnival as attested to by the organizers and the audience alike (Yerima, interview with Researcher). Chuks Okoye calls it, “the most expensive and fabulously monumental of all the Igbo masquerades” (111). According to him, *Ijele* is a symbolic representation of the community in the shape of an enormous superstructure supported by a cylindrical base (111). Beeds Reed, who had witnessed the Mmanwu festival of Enugu, where *Ijele* was presented, captures the description of *Ijele* masquerade:

The *Ijele* was framed by figures of policemen around the lower levels of the mask and figures of chiefs appeared throughout. A man on horseback, with an Ozo title, stood near the top, while an airplane surmounted the entire assemblage. Around the base of the mask a cloth python curled around itself. *Ijele* masquerades are made from cloth-covered armatures, and the cloth is shaped into an elaborate mound over an arc colorful canes. On this super-structure as many as forty stuffed cloth figures and animals are arranged. These figures—from pythons and policemen to women with children—reflect the vibrant life of a community (8).

Following this description, *Ijele* does not reduce in flamboyancy and opulence as Okagbue asserts that,

Ijele exhibits an almost irreverent postmodernist appropriation of alien materials and threats in a process of discursive containment. *Ijele* successfully absorbs the colonial experience and presence of late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, and of late has taken on board the jet bombers, fighters and military personalities of Nigeria’s three-year civil war of 1967-1970 (10).

On the other hand, Okoye describes *Ijele* as featuring very expensive and decorative vertical sections of cloths of various bright colours with abstract geometric applique designs, the headdress is a network of interlocking canes wrapped in brightly coloured wool which meet at the apex in a dome shaped around and within which are various roundly sculptured images drawn from the human, animal, ancestral and vegetative worlds (112).

Ijele’s performance in Abuja Carnival attracts large spectatorship as everybody wants to have a look at its awesome and aesthetic presence. Even other masquerades stopped their performances and were puzzled as such gigantic figure approached the Eagle Square, Central Area, Abuja. As the *Ijele* approached the

Square, it swayed gracefully from side to side, causing its panels to gently rise. Once it reached the reviewing area where Carnival adjudicators were seated, it began to perform more elaborately. Surrounded by its acolytes and musicians who directed its movement, the *Ijele* began to spin, slowly at first, then gained speed. The centrifugal force generated by the spinning mask was carefully controlled, and the *Ijele* slowed and stopped without wobbling or stumbling. Its dance steps were delectably royal. Okoye captures *Ijele* dance more elaborately:

From the moment the *Ijele* emerges into the performance area to the time it goes back into its enclosure there is an alternating air of fast and slow motion, suspense, tension and release. As the *Ijele* increases its pace, it is attended to by a throng of efficient escorts, the orchestra, and the aesthetic exclamations of the audience. Occasionally this enormous structure rhythmically spins round and round causing the various tassels and panels of cloth to fly and sway round in a very visually overwhelming rhythm. The regal gait of *Ijele*, its incredible agility, the artistic excellence of its beautiful openwork cloth and woollen superstructure delicately balanced on two barely visible legs, and the sheer economic expense of the *Ijele* costume make it indeed a wonder to behold (114).

Nonetheless, Alex Asigbo contends that beyond its size, for instance, it is the colour and variety of the *Ijele* masquerade that makes it the king of Igbo masquerade performances. Every old and middle aged adult in Nigeria can point to *Ijele* masquerade and recognise its origin if not precisely Anambra but a link of its ethno cultural origin to the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria. From its creation processes (masking) to its performance, the *Ijele* masquerade exhibits a unique culture of the Igbo: creativity and craftsmanship. One can relate to this fact with the age-long artistry of Igbo-Ukwu in Anambra State, which has been designated as a UNESCO Tourism Site.



Fig. 1. The *Ijele* masquerade in Abuja Carnival Masquerade event.

Source: *Abuja Carnival in Pictures*, (Eds.) Yerima, Ahmed and Lizi Ben-Iheanacho

Agbogo Mmuo Masquerade in Abuja Carnival

Agbogo Mmuo, *Adanmma*, *agbogo lugulu*, *Nganga-Ije* or *akparakpa* as Ottenberg would call the maiden spirit masquerade or what Okoye termed the *Agbogho Mmuo* genus of masks, is well known all over Nigeria as an Igbo masquerade from Anambra State, with its girlish disposition and characteristic brightly coloured and beautiful feminine masks. They are maiden spirits who are believed to represent images of ideal female gorgeousness and comportment. They are the daughters of the household

and comprise generally a family ensemble in which there is a father (*nna mmuo*), mother (*nne mmuo*), one or two grown up daughters, sometimes a little daughter... (Okagbue 31).

They are very beautiful in mask and costume, and they dance in pretty feminine styles. Its costume is a variant of shiny golden yellow blouse or mini-skirt over a marching top. The blouse can be embroidered with mazes of designs up to her breasts that are exaggerated unduly in size. Her mask design represents a young woman full of life, with a wig of full and well combed black hair (some hairs are golden). *Agbogho Mmuo* in Abuja Carnival is a flirt and does not hide it. In one of the pictures shown below she is in a deep hug with a foreign tourist. This act accentuates the entertainment underpinnings of the masquerade in recent times. Before now, it would have been a sacrilege for a masquerade to be in the arms of an uninitiated member of its cult group. But times have changed and are obviously reflective of the performance nuances of the masquerade as seen in masquerades performances in Abuja carnival. *Agbogho mmuo* masquerade reflects Igbo family identity as she is always seen in the midst of family members as an ensemble act in their performance. This ensemble is made up of father, mother and a rascally son who charges at the audience and provokes the father and mother's intervention. The *agbogho mmuo* – maiden spirit is always seen as to be calm and a reflective of what an ideal young woman should be. She is regarded as the pride of the family and she shows off these attributes in performance.

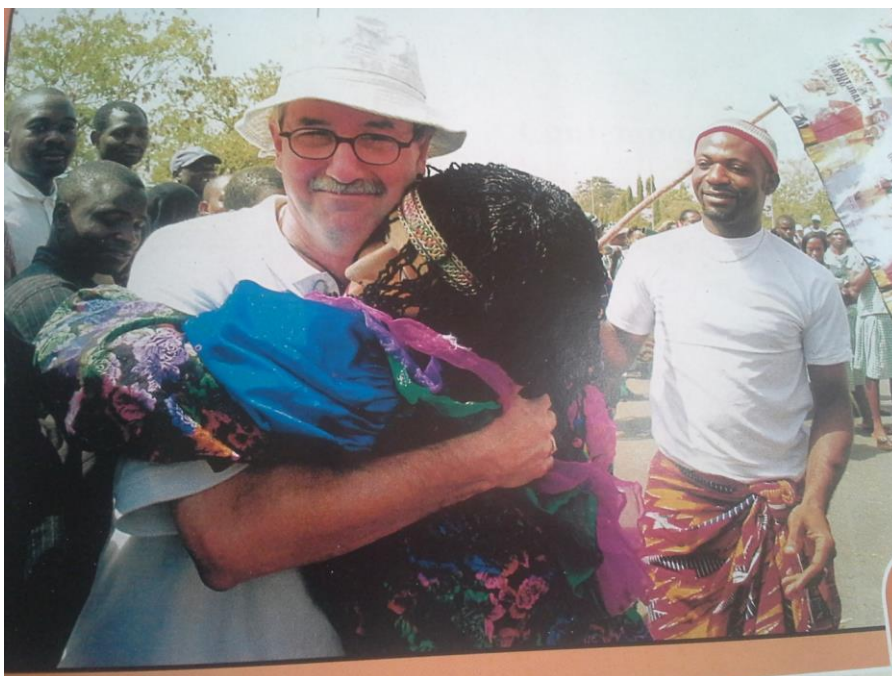


Fig. 2. *Abuja Carnival in Pictures*, (Eds.) Yerima, Ahmed and Lizi Ben-Iheanacho



Fig. 3. *Abuja Carnival in Pictures*, (Eds.) Yerima, Ahmed and Lizi Ben-Iheanacho

Ugomma Masquerade in Abuja Carnival

Ugo the eagle is king of birds (*Ugo bu eze nnunu*). As one of the animal masquerade typologies, it is one of the wonders of masking art of the Igbo and especially of Anambra State. In Abuja Carnival, Ugomma masquerade entertains with its delicate royal steps and ease of performance. It's akin to processional demands of the carnival and the carnivalesque. *Ugomma* masquerade is the epitome of artistry and splendour. The Anambra contingent in Abuja Carnival had *Ugomma* masquerade amongst other masquerades of animal genus which included the antelope (Enemna), elephant (atumma), and hippopotamus (enyimini). However, *Ugomma* masquerade was the cynosure of all eyes and the most anticipated. It was heralded into the Eagle Square by musicians and dancers to the accompanying flutes and drums all directed at its praises. According to Okoye, one can easily understand the enthusiasm, admiration and bewilderment with which the Igbo audience perceives the *Ugo* masquerade performance if one comprehends the Igbo cultural conception of the *Ugo* (eagle) bird itself. Reeds asserts that the eagle is an important symbol of beauty and social stature for Igbo people, its feathers are used to mark senior male title status, and it features prominently in proverbs that describe leadership, authority, and beauty. For example, the proverb, "the eagle kills seven times on its way to beauty, likens the eagle's renowned hunting skills to the accomplishments of honourable men" (78). Although,

the Abuja Carnival audience is a group of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and understanding, *Ugomma* masquerade performance is welcomed with ululation immediately it enters the performance square.



Fig. 4. *Abuja Carnival in Pictures*, (Eds.) Yerima, Ahmed and Lizi Ben-Iheanacho

However, most people generally think that every masquerade from the South-eastern Nigeria is from one location. But that is not the case. The five South-eastern States and even their communities have peculiar masquerades linked to their performance culture and identity. Among the masquerades identified in this study, scholars have been unanimous with their origins, tracing them to South-eastern States of Anambra (Miachi; Nwosu; Okafor; Okoye; Reed; Ukaegbu). A cursory look at some masquerades around South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria will suffice.

Along the north-eastern Igbo area of Nsukka in Enugu State is *Omabe*, *Odo* and *Ekwe* masquerades, *Okumkpo* masquerade is known with Akpoha-Afikpo and *Egbele Isi-Ji Edda* masquerade identifiable with Edda people, south of Ebonyi State; *Agbogho mmuo*, *Adanmma*, *Ijele*, *Agaba*, *Onuka Nma*, *Mgbadike*, *Ojionu*, *Ugomma* and many other animal genus of masquerades, which are known with the people of Anambra State. The *Okorosha* masquerade is traceable to the people of Ubomiri in Imo State; there is also the notorious and riotous masquerades from Arondizuogu in Imo State; *Inyi Agbaoku* and *Atuejeogu*, *Isimkpu*, *Oror* and *Utughugwu*, known for their deadliness. According to Reed, “because of the proximity, flexibility and

fluidity of performance and culture generally, Enugu people produce some of the masquerades traceable to Anambra State” (103).

Ekpo Masquerade in Abuja Carnival

Joseph Akpan avers that *Ekpo* masquerade from its background history is the most important and widely distributed of three secret societies still active in various Ibibio, Efik and Ngwa towns in South-South and South-Eastern States of Nigeria. As a secret society, membership is tied to initiation and the masquerade as its performance platform is revered and can only be performed during members’ initiation. However, in the Abuja Carnival, *Ekpo* masquerade is a major spectacle and an entertainer. With its acolytes made up of singers, drummers and a retinue of agile young men that help reduce its violent excesses, the Carnival is a readymade platform for *Ekpo* masquerade to deploy its darting moves and chases. Its performance is hampered by its feigned violent moves but the processional and entertainment appeal are its major attraction in the carnival. *Ekpo* and *Ekpe* Masquerades find reason to perform due largely because of their adaptations to the taste demands of the carnival audience and tourists alike.

The *Ekpo* genus of masquerade alone has more than ten typologies: *Ekpo Nyoho*, *Ekpo Ekong*, *Akpan Ekpo*, *Adiaha Ekpo*, *Udo Ekpo*, *Ukpaka Ekpo*, *Tinkoriko*, *Nkubia* and *Unak*. Akpan reveals that young men who died prematurely through accidents or killed by perceived enemies using juju, possess the masks of *ekpo* hence their vibrant and violent dispositions. Its performative dynamics include challenging each other to duels along paths in their natal performance cultures. Sharp cutlasses are their major props and they use it at will on non-initiates or women who dare cross their paths. *Ekpo* masquerade genus is a dreaded masquerade in all localities where they are performed. With its fearsome outlook the audience and tourists alike do not miss the scare and invariably the short displays along the carnival routes. Despite the openness and touristic appeal of the *Ekpo* Masquerade, it remains a deeply significant and revered symbol of one of the most important and respected institutions of the Ibibio clan in Akwa-Ibom and among Ngwa people of Southeast Nigeria. Below is the *Ekpo* masquerade in the Abuja Carnival.



Fig. 5. *Abuja Carnival in Pictures*, (Eds.) Yerima, Ahmed and Lizi Ben-Iheanacho

Ekpe Masquerade in Abuja Carnival

Ekpe is the name of a masquerade among the Efik of Calabar, the term is also the name of the leopard and of the traditional sacred institution that owns the masque. The *Ekpe* (sometimes called *Mgbe*) society is also called the ‘leopard’ society because the *Ekpe* masquerade is a visual cultural reference to a leopard – its costume, makeup and props define it as such, as observed by Jordan Fenton. The *Ekpe* Masquerade is one of the most iconic spectacles in Efik society, the subject of numerous Tourist Board photo campaigns and post-cards. The splash of red, black and yellow raffia and fabric of the *Ekpe* in full cry has come to represent in the minds of many non-indigenes, the characteristic face of Efik culture and its identity. In reality the *Ekpe* Masquerade represents significantly more than a mere Tourist spectacle, but in fact embodies the very socio-cultural and indigenous spiritual soul of the Efik people.

The *Ekpe* Masquerade is one of the symbols of the ancient *Ekpe* Society of the Cross River Basin. However, in Abuja Carnival, all the ritual and spiritual accoutrements are shed off and in its place, entertainment. The *Ekpe* Masquerade in Abuja Carnival represents Cross River State contingent and performs with the mind set of winning prizes for its state. *Ekpe*, is usually adorned accordingly with the *Ekpemgbe* society’s trademark of red, black and yellow raffia; with the *mgbe* fresh

leaves in hand, it glides and executes semi-circular turns with its graceful and free-flowing dance movements peculiar to the riverine performance culture of the *Efik* people of Cross River State.



Fig. 6. Source: *Abuja Carnival in Pictures*, (Eds.) Yerima, Ahmed and Lizi Ben-Iheanacho



Fig. 7. Sourced: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/253116441527301526/> on Mar. 2017

Mask, Costume and Makeup Designs as Indicators of Masquerade Identities in Abuja Carnival

Art as often said is a reflection of life; of a people and their precursors. In the African traditional context where art is credited with the embodiment of the whole life of a society and defined as a communal experience available to every member of the society rather than an elite phenomenon, a contemplation of given art style becomes a study of a particular communicative mode which the society finds most appropriate for the expression of itself. Chuks Okoye is of the view that, “the traditional artist suffers no estrangement from his society. He produces for, about, and from his immediate environment” (“Costume...” 8). In the traditional Igbo societies, the artist expresses and reflects this socio-cultural and ethnographic influence through his works which are informed by his society.

The *Ijele* masquerade in its grandeur, elegance, magnificence, aura and larger than life frame is a representation of the Igbo worldview of change, post-coloniality and vagaries of life; of the past, the present and the future experiences of the Igbo people. *Ijele* because of its ostentatious and financial demands is sponsored by the whole community or clan as an expression of pride, wealth and social prestige. The dome-shaped headdress of the *Ijele* mask comprises a myriad of human, animal and vegetative images drawn from the community’s environment. According to Okoye, these are “ornately decorated and, together with the base, present the ultimate in Igbo masking aesthetics” (“Costume...” 75).

The *agbogho mmuo* costume is usually very colourful cloth applique and embroidery with trappings of femininity such as mirrors, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, handbags loosely hung across the shoulder, cat-walk styled kinetics and general feminine dispositions. They are brilliantly coloured to reflect the Igbo concept of feminine poise, beauty and geniality. *Ekpo* costume is more of raffia and mask dominated; measuring almost three feet long, hideous, grotesque and associated with blackness as the body of the masker is usually covered with charcoal. Raffia palms are dominant in Cross River rainforest zones and Akwa Ibom area of South-South Nigeria, and significantly contribute in their masking culture. This is the reason while part of *Ekpo* and *Ekpe* costumes are made using its fibrous structures.

The mask, costume and makeup are the attention pull, attraction as well as the focal points in carnival events. These three components aside the performance of the masquerade make or mar its ‘showiness’ upon which the adjudicators base their assessment of each masquerade presented for competition. Against this background, appropriate and quality materials, colours of choice, expert and professional advice are sought before designing masks, costumes and the deployment of makeup. It is also important to note that each State contingent in the Abuja Carnival has the financial backing of their chief executives.

In Abuja Carnival, as each State’s motif meanders through the streets of the Federal Capital Territory, in the metaphor of a moving and stylised train, embellished by sights, sounds, costumes and dances peculiar to her, the Masquerades are also a reflection of each state’s emblem, trademark and cultural significations. Efforts are

channelled to design the mask, costume and makeup within what Economists term comparative advantage. The comparative advantage in masks production is evident in the materials used amongst masquerades on parade and presupposes that communities or states produce masquerades, masks and costumes based on the availability of raw materials within their localities. Esekong Andrew-Essien and Elizabeth Andrew-Essien have this to say in the deployment of cultural materials in designing for carnivals:

The tendency in craft production is for artists to explore their immediate environment and to use materials that are readily available. Any material can become valuable for craft production, depending on the dexterity and resourcefulness of the craftsman. Following the assumption that availability of materials within an environment encourages the production of arts and craft, one can easily relate certain crafts to specific locales in Nigeria. Wood carving, for instance, is predominant in the forest belt where the raw materials are available; cane work is common in the riverine areas; raffia and mat weaving are practiced in the palm belt. Calabash decoration, pottery, stone carving, dyeing and many other crafts are practiced in environments where the raw materials are available (277).

From the above submission, it does not mean that raw materials cannot be transported to locations where they are not commonly available. Drawing necessarily from the above statement, the masquerades in Abuja carnival events understudy exhibit an influentially conspicuous cultural artefacts that reflect their states of origin. The costumes are usually drawn from a wide variety of locally produced and foreign materials, the essence of which is to achieve the requisite aesthetic and spectacular blend in mask and costume designs. However, it is the creativity with which these materials are fashioned for these masquerades that sparks the interest and entertainment values derivable from their performance and invariably wins the heart of the adjudicators during the assessment periods.

The category of prize awards for the Masquerade Event in Abuja Carnival include: *Most Spectacular Masquerade*, *Best Masquerade Costume*, and *Best Masquerade Performance*. These are all tied to the expressionist trends of the 21st century and its demands for creativity. Some masking cultures in their design may revel in abstraction while others are suggestive of different physiognomies like feminine characters, western styled masks of European pointed nose, and at times suggestive of animal characters. However, because of the prize tag on best costumes and most spectacular masquerade sub-divisions in carnival, so much effort are expended to produce an award winning masquerades. Okagbue's elocution captures the thought of this researcher in full:

Most groups go to great lengths and efforts to make their masks colourful and beautiful so that their performance *can win the prize* and be long remembered for its artistic flamboyance and impact. This is where costuming can become very significant in what it can contribute to the overall visual effect of a performance. And the bigger the mask, the more the care that goes into the choice of costume and colours, not only in terms of the masks, but also in terms of the often large number of performers involved, from musicians, singers, attendants to the supporting dancers. The costume design for such an array of performers has to take into account colour and material coordination needed to achieve harmony, or contrast, and sometimes to establish levels of thematic significance and importance of roles (50).

Winning prizes and categories of such awards have raised the bar in mask, costume and makeup designs for all State contingents in Abuja Carnival masquerade events. It is against this background that States channel their creative energy in designing masquerade costumes that reflect the ethno-cultural identity of the producing localities in all their entries.

Conclusion

Cultures are basic life experiences a part of which is lived and expressed through performance. This much has been seen in the Abuja Carnival masquerade examples studied in this essay. From the expression of the Igbo worldview and temperament against the background of the ethno-cultural identity of the people of Anambra State, *Ijele*, *Agbogho Mmuo* and *Ugomma* have revealed in their mask, costume and performance dynamism a multiplicity of visual appeals which are characteristic identities in the performance and cultural aesthetics of this geographic enclave.

Ekpo and *Ekpe* masquerades of Ibibio and Efik of Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, respectively, have in likewise manner established themselves in the Abuja Carnival as art forms that can showcase the performance cultures of their people in spectacular designs and accoutrements, kinetic and aural dynamism. Designs of masks and costumes for each of the masquerades showed to a large extent creative deployment of indigenous art forms and locally sourced raw materials to complement current expressionist trends in modern performance aesthetics. The trans-location of the masquerades in Abuja Carnival, which fitted easily into the Carnival's processional design, also encouraged showcasing the peculiar masquerade cultures and identities of the various states. This accounts for the popularity and the attraction of the masquerades in this emergent street theatre.

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INTERROGATING THE IDENTITY QUESTION THROUGH IGBO MASQUERADE DESIGNS: THE *IJELE* MASK AS PARADIGM

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Abstract

Culture configures identity; however, the decline of interest in indigenous culture in contemporary society has contributed to issues of identity configurations. This study aims at using the masquerade theatre to interrogate the identity question. The objectives of the study include interpreting masquerade designs as cultural signs and symbols through which a people can be identified. It also examines the potentials of Igbo masquerades as identity carriers. Using qualitative research method, the study analyses the *Ijele* masquerade mask to ascertain its potentials as a carrier of cultural identity. The study reveals that masquerade designs are cultural signs and symbols that aid identity configurations. The researcher therefore recommends that the masquerade art should be sustained; and concludes that the masquerade as a great artistic institution in Africa is a carrier of culture which should be researched into and preserved as artefacts.

Introduction

The Igbo masquerade phenomenon has become a fascination to scholars across many fields of study. Although, it can be said to be most prominent among scholars in the arts and humanities as well as those in specialised areas of design and architecture, because of its combination of the spiritual/ethereal, sacred and the mundane elements. Thus, the masquerade art has been described as a composite art. Its composite nature is found in its amalgam of diverse forms ranging from design and architecture to costuming and craft making. A typical Igbo masquerade therefore embodies elements of the plastic and fine arts as well as the dramatic and other performance arts as is evident in its mask, costume and performances. This is why the masquerade is often seen as a representation of the people's cultural identity because it also exemplifies their belief system, especially as it concerns the concept of the now and the hereafter. It also explains why masquerades are regarded as manifestations of spirits.

According to Wale Ogunyemi, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, masquerades are regarded as, "departed spirits of their forbears" (95). In fact, they are often seen as the links between the living and the dead as the people regard masquerades as spirits of dead ancestors who have come to commune with the living. Chukwuma Okoye in his "Form and Process in Igbo Masquerade Art," asserts that among the Igbo:

Masquerades are perceived as incarnated ancestors who have been reverently dispatched to the general conflation of the ancestral spirit world. They manifest as guests to their living communities within which they must be treated with regulated awe, respect and other reverent attitudes. The general Igbo reverence for their ancestors as an essential and supernatural extension for the living human community ensures that this sanctified attitude carries over to the masquerades. Thus they are credited with supernatural powers and supernal insights. They descend to their erstwhile communities, at the ordinance of its members, to celebrate or mourn with them, or dispatch some social actions of consequence (74).

As spirit manifests, therefore, the Igbo revere the masquerade tradition so much that the practice is an exclusive preserve of the men folk. Women are not allowed to take part in masquerade activities; and where exceptions are made, like when a woman has reached the age of menopause and is metaphorically regarded as a man, or when a woman of means is chosen to be an *Nne Mmonwu* (mother of masquerade: this is a rare privilege given to some affluent female when a group such as an age grade wishes to make a formal outing with a stylised anthropomorphic masquerade), such females are not allowed into the secrets of the Igbo masquerade.

Onuora Nzekwu observes that, “in a few places however, very elderly women of means may become initiates but are not allowed into the masquerade house when preparations for display are going on” (132). Nonetheless, not every male is allowed to take part in masquerade activities in Igbo land. In fact, among the Igbo, every male child between the ages of nine (9) and fourteen (14) years is expected to undergo the initiation into the masquerade cult known as, *Ikpu-ani*. This literally means *a journey into the underworld* since masquerades are traditionally believed to emerge from the ground after the performance of some rituals. After the initiation, a male child becomes eligible to participate in the masquerade activities; while a non-initiate is regarded as an *Ogbodu*; or figuratively, a girl, since girls are not considered for membership into the masquerade cult. Thus, if he (*ogbodu*) does not get initiated, he becomes an object of ridicule and is denied some privileges like taking traditional chieftaincy titles.

Every Igbo community therefore performs the *Ikpu-ani* as a continuous process to sustain the masquerade tradition. This explains why every masquerade is conceived along the specific cultural beliefs of the community that owns it. This presupposes that while the Igbo as a people have the culture of masquerading, as a cultural performance genre, there are cultural specificities in the design and creation of masks and costumes through which every individual masquerade is identified. It is in these masks and headdresses that the cultural identity of a people is exemplified and displayed. While a particular type of masquerade in one Igbo community may have its equivalent in another community, the nature of its mask design and costume

bears some uniqueness that stands it out; thus, making an individual masquerade distinct from another.

Broad Categories of Igbo Masquerades

Beyond the individual specificities of masquerades, there are two broad categories of Igbo masquerades. This categorisation further defines the nature and identity of the masquerades and subsequently influences its mode of performance. There are therefore the day and night masquerades. It is pertinent to expatiate on these two categories.

Day Masquerades: The day masquerades are those masquerades that perform during the day. These are characterised by beautifully designed masks and costumes. They are often accompanied by an orchestra; and in most instances, they thrill the spectators to adroit dance steps. Examples of day masquerades are the likes of *Agboghommuo*, *Ulaga*, *Oji-Onu*, *Ayolugbe* and *Ijele*.

There are, however, certain day masquerades that are not so beautifully designed although their costumes are colourful. This group of day masquerades includes the *Agaba*, *Okwomma* and *Udo*. In spite of the differences in the nature of the designs and performance mode of these day masquerades, the underlining factor is that they perform in the day time and can be watched by everybody: male and female alike.

Night Masquerades: The second category of Igbo masquerades are the night masquerades. These are the masquerades that perform at night. These masquerades are specifically designed to perform under the cover of darkness because they are believed to possess some diabolic powers; thus, their performances are designed to be watched only by male initiates. These night masquerades are reputed to perform without masks or any form of disguise. Chukwuma Okoye observes that, “speaking, chanting and singing in a disguised *ududo* (spider) voice, under the mask of the darkness is more than enough disguise since only the initiated come out to watch and follow the *Ayaka*” (“Form and Process in Igbo Masquerade Art” 95-96).

Sunday Ododo calls the phenomenon of a masquerade without mask, ‘*facekuerade*.’ According to him, facekuerade “refers to a performance masquerade character without mask. Even though his audience encounters him face to face, the spiritual essence of the masquerade character is not devalued” (4). However, some of these night masquerades, like the *Onyekulie*, *Ogbazuluobodo* and *Ayaka*, perform some salient social functions beyond mere entertainment. They are used as social critics and they enforce punishment on defaulting citizens; hence, their relevance in spite of their seeming diabolism.

Therefore, every masquerade, whether day or night, as the case may be, is relevant according to the purpose for which it is created. These masquerades, the time of day of their respective performances notwithstanding, carry modes of identification which are evident in their mask designs. These designs bear cultural

symbols through which these masquerades are known and identified as cultural artefacts belonging to particular communities.

Igbo Masquerades as Identity Carriers

Every Igbo masquerade is identified by its mask and costume and, in addition to that, for the dancing species, by the rhythm of the music that accompanies the dance style. That is why there is literally no distinction between the masquerade and its mask and costume, which the Igbo call *Awolo*. *Awolo* means, “foreskin;” so, it is believed that the masquerade costume and its appurtenances form the foreskin of the ancestral spirits which they represent. Chukwuma Okoye in his discourse on *mmonwu* costume observes that, “the Igbo do not categorise the component of *mmonwu* into costume, mask and the ‘actor’ as units that can exist individually. In fact, the ‘actor’ does not exist” (“Costume in Traditional ...” 39). It follows therefore that the identity of every masquerade follows the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the people that produce or create it.

It is in the above context that Kenneth Pickering posits that, “masks have very specific textures, forms, size and colour and they function as symbols projecting a meaning through a number of associations that take us beneath the surface appearance to another set of meaning” (100). Among these ‘associations’ is the identity of the people where identity is taken to mean those specialised signs and symbols by which a person, thing or people is known. Hence, an *Agboghommuo*, a maiden Igbo mask, is known by its feminine features as against an *Adamma*, which is a different species of maiden masquerades whose masks and costumes, though feline, carry different designs on its mask and costumes. Beyond the recognition of specific masquerade genres, the mask design and costume as well as the dance style of respective masquerade types are signifiers of the cultural origin of every individual masquerade.



Fig. 1: Adamma Mask



Fig. 2: Agboghommuo headdress

Similarly, there are different species of *Agaba* masquerade; but from the configurations of the mask designs, the texture of the costumes and the sound of the music that accompany the dance of the masquerade, every individual *Agaba* masquerade can be tied to a specific community or group that owns it. Hence, there is an *Okwomma* and an *Agaba* both of which are variants of ferocious day masquerades but have specific mask designs by which they are known. The mask designs and costumes are created to be systems of cultural identities to the extent that similar masquerades from two different Igbo communities can easily be differentiated based on the design of their masks and costumes.

The above is evident in Figs. '3' and '4' below. Fig. 3 is a picture of an *Agaba* mask; while fig. 4 shows that of *Okwomma*. A casual observer can easily take the two to be the same, as both have horns and large sets of teeth with bulging eyes; and they are painted in black and red colours. However, whereas the *Agaba* mask has more defined eyes lined with red paint, the jaw line appears more realistic than that of the *Okwomma* which in itself is highly stylised to delineate its ferocity as a zoomorphic representation of the abstract concept of restlessness. The *Agaba* on its part is more anthropomorphic depicting a being with lesser destructive tendencies as the *Okwomma*.



Fig. 3: Agaba Mask



Fig. 4: Okwomma Mask

Correspondingly, on a general note, masquerades from different climes are identified by the designs of their masks and costumes. As a result, an Igbo masquerade can easily be differentiated from an Ijaw or Efik masquerade. Even in communities where there are little similarities, as could be found in the *Ekpe* masquerade tradition where the Bende and Efik communities of Abia and Cross River States, respectively, perform the masquerades, there are ethnic and cultural configurations in the mask and costume designs through which the *Ekpe* masquerade of one state is identified from that of the other.

In the same vein, some masquerades of the Igala people of Kogi State that bear resemblances with some masquerades of the Igbo of Anambra and Enugu States, as in *Udo* and *Aji Buusu* (cane wielding day masquerades), bear specific cultural

identifiers that situate each respective masquerade to a particular state or ethnic origin. In the *Udo* and *Aji Buusu* masquerades of the Igbo, the masquerade is built without a mask. It is a figure made of rope, intricately woven as a coverall from the head to the foot. The Igala version of the said masquerade is usually characterised by a large facial mask made of wood often painted black.

Beyond the similarities that may be found in some masquerades across ethnic and cultural divides, every culture has specific names and designs for its masquerades. For instance, among the Yoruba, masquerades are known as *Egungun*. A typical example of a masquerade of Yoruba origin is the *Eyo* masquerade. This masquerade is popular amongst the *Eko* (Lagos) people. They usually move in a group like an ensemble and every masquerade in the group wields the traditional iconic staff, known as, *Opambata*. The Efik, Ibibio and Annang people of Cross River and Akwa Ibom States call theirs *Ekpo*. The design of the *Ekpo* masquerade is usually an ugly black face mask and a body costume made from raffia which is usually dependent on the character of the individual masquerades. The Efik has the *Ekpe* masquerade, which is usually associated with the Leopard Society, a secret cult used in pre-colonial times as a system of administration. Among the Esan people of Edo State, there is the *Egbabonelimwin*. This is a performing masquerade that specialises in acrobatic displays designed to entertain spectators at festivals.



Fig. 5: *Eyo*



Fig. 6: *Ekpo*



Fig. 7: Ekpe



Fig. 8: Egbabonelimwin

The masquerade art can therefore be said to be obtainable among most cultures of Nigeria, each with its unique design of costumes and masks as well as performance genres which characterise it and the culture or people that produce it is known by it.

As deduced, every Igbo masquerade bears on its mask and costume specific cultural symbols through which it is associated to a clan, group or community. On a global scale, the Igbo masquerade is known to be of Igbo origin through its mask and costume design as well as through the spiritual essence associated with the masquerade phenomenon in Igbo land. Victor Ukaegbu observes that the concept for Igbo masks “combines the past, present and future within a mystic atmosphere which testifies to the society’s constant tussle with the surrounding world of spirits and nature forces” (8). Similarly, Osita Okagbue posits thus:

The Igbo universe, though it has the living at its centre, is spirit centred. But while a clear distinction is made between spirit and matter, there is an acceptance of the interconnectedness and movement between them. Transference from one planet to another can easily be achieved through specific rites of transition. Igbo masking is one such socio-religious rite of transference... (18).

It can therefore be averred that with the reverence accorded masquerades among the Igbo and its attendant ‘socio-religious’ rites, the phenomenon is one of the most eloquent symbols of identity of the Igbo.

The *Ijele* Masquerade as a Carrier of Igbo Cultural Identity

The *Ijele* masquerade is reputed to be the most magnificent of Igbo masquerades because of its enormous size and the splendour of its accoutrements. An average *Ijele* masquerade stands at approximately 15ft (4.7m) above the ground. According to Cole and Aniakor the *Ijele* is “... probably the largest masquerade of tropical Africa, about

five and a half metres high when dancing and two and a half metres wide...” (139). Tochukwu Okeke therefore notes that, “it is the most grandiose of Igbo masquerades because on its headdress is found motifs of other masquerades” (89).

In his analysis, Chike Aniakor observes that, “... it is by far the most monumental of all Igbo masks, dominating them in the same way that the elephant physically dominates the animal world” (42). The masquerade embodies on its headdress the worldview of the Igbo because its design is a complex combination of dexterous sculpture and costume design. The creation or building of an Ijele masquerade therefore requires skills in sculpture and costume design as well as skills in architecture and furniture making. Ossie Enekwe describes the *Ijele* as “... a mobile art gallery” (102), because it carries on its headdress “symbolic expressions of the Igbo worldview as well as her encounter(s) with other cultures” (Okeke, “Design Concepts and Motifs...” 62).

The Ijele masquerade is a cone-shaped sub-structure made from the midrib of raffia palm. Reporting on the process of building of the Ijele masquerade Tochukwu Okeke notes:

Technically, the structure of the Ijele is built with the midrib of the raffia palm (*ofolo ngwo*) and is lined with the stalk of the cane tree (*Arundo Donax*) also known as Giant cane or Giant reed. These materials are used because they are light and do not rot easily. In other words, wood pests do not destroy them easily (79).

The combination of the *ofolo ngwo* and *arundo donax* forms the skeletal framework upon which the costume and other appurtenances of the Ijele masquerade are built on. The artists that create the ‘skeleton’ are often skilled master craftsmen and carvers. When their job is completed, the costume designers begin the adornment of the headdress with the costume materials. The costume is made of velvet-like fabrics with woollen textures and soft drapes that do not fold. This material, called, *ododo*, comes in a variety of colours: green, red, yellow, blue, indigo, and so on. It is on this costume that motifs that characterise the *Ijele* masquerade are embedded. These motifs come in different colours, sizes and shapes.

However, irrespective of the nature of its shape, size or colour, they bear expressions of the Igbo concept of *Chi* (personal god), natural creations like *Anyanwu* (Sun god), *Onwa* (Moon), and *Kpakpando* (Stars). These motifs are often repeated in very pleasing compositions and are placed aside each other to create the impression of variety and rhythm. A good number of these motifs are the *Nsibidi* scripts and *Uli* design motifs. *Nsibidi* is an ancient means of written communication among the Igbo, which comprises symbols of the Igbo concept of the universe. Chinyere Ndubuisi and Emmanuel Irokanulo write about it thus:

The *Nsibidi* which is an aesthetic philosophy where sign system are used to convey ideas was traditionally engraved or imprinted on

calabashes, textiles, brass, wood sculpture, masks among other objects by the ancient people of South Eastern Nigeria. Traditionally, it was a sign mostly used by the secret societies (283).

On the other hand, *Uli* is a unique art form of the Igbo used in body decoration for women and in pottery and other wood carvings. Uche Okeke states that, “*Uli* design elements inform the Igbo art corpus” (23). These motifs, as are found on the *Ijele* costume, buttress the fact that the Igbo masquerade is a veritable source of cultural identity among the Igbo of Anambra extraction.

Similarly, on the headdress of the *Ijele* are symbols and motifs of the Igbo concept of God and some other abstract concepts of the Igbo understanding of the universe and her encounters with other cultures. Some of these encounters of the Igbo with other cultures as are found as motifs on *Ijele* headdress include: policemen, airplanes, cars, effigies of White men/women, motorbikes, bicycles amongst others. This underpins the assertion that the

mask of the *Ijele* represents both past and present experiences of the Igbo. It goes further to show how much influence certain cultures as well as other African cultures that the Igbo has come in contact with have affected the mythopoeic tendencies of the Igbo (Okeke, “Cultural Syncretism in Igbo Masks...” 126).

Thus, images of airplane, police, soldier, cars, ship, house, nurses, and couples in their wedding attires, among other images can be found on the *Ijele*. According to Mark Getlein in *Gilbert’s Living with Arts*, “amidst the tassels, mirrors and flowers on *Ijele*’s ‘branches’ are numerous sculptured figures of human, animal and other masks – a virtual catalogue of the Igbo and their world” (441). There are also carved images of other masquerades placed strategically on the *Ijele* headdress to drive home the idea that the *Ijele* is the king of masquerades. Chukwuma Ozochi observes that, the *Ijele* headpiece is “structured like a small community of masked spirits consisting of one principal masquerade – the *Ijele* and other minor spirits of both sexes” (46). This, according to Okeke, exemplifies the fact that, “on the *Ijele* headdress are artistic representations and symbols that depict the everyday life of the Igbo ...” (“Design Concepts and Motifs...” 98). Furthermore, Enekwe maintains that, “what the *Ijele* dramatises ... is the concept of state, in which the king leads and the rest of the people follows” (103). Chike Aniakor’s position presupposes that the *Ijele* is a microcosm of the Igbo worldview including her concept of leadership. He observes that the *Ijele* is

a grand artistic display of the economic fruits of the soil and as the highest manifestation of the achievement and social distinction of an Igbo community, the mask unites the people in their sense of historical continuity with the ancestors (42).

The composition of the motifs and symbols on the *Ijele* masquerade are eloquent cultural identifiers that stand out the *Ijele* as a typical Igbo masquerade. It bears both abstract and concrete concepts that depict Igbo cultural heritage as well as her intercultural relationships. Thus, Ozochi observes that the motifs on the *Ijele* are “metaphorical because they show or reveal the life of the Igbo people in all its complexities” (43). It can therefore be said that the appearance of an *Ijele* masquerade is a mobile statement on the identity of the Igbo.



Fig: 9. *Ijele*

Conclusion

A people are known by their art and the masquerade art has been acknowledged as an eloquent means of identification of the Igbo. Judging from the fascination that the masquerade phenomenon of the Igbo has become to scholars in the humanities there is no gainsaying the fact that the Igbo is always often associated with masquerading. In fact, among the traditional festivals associated with the Igbo, the masquerade festival is the most prolific. In every Igbo community, every male child is a potential masker and the masquerade art has become one of the highest cultural exports of the people.

The *Ijele* masquerade, as the largest of Igbo masquerades, has thus become an artistic representation of the people’s concept of what has been, what is and what will be because the Igbo concept of the universe is articulated in the concept and design of the masquerade. As a consequence, the Igbo can ideally be identified by their masquerade and the masquerade has become an acceptable agency for Igbo cultural identity.

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