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Theatre Practice and Social Adjustment in Nigeria

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Abstract

Current global stress has pushed both individual and social systems to limits. A plethora of schema has been tried for effective adjustment, particularly in Nigeria. Most times the structures of adjustments are either untried processes or failed praxis from the western mileaux. Therefore, there is the renewed interest in exploring local institutions, resources and managers as contribution to the process of development based on local resources and cost saving production based on the aspirations of the people. The methodology employed is heuristic in providing a framework for utilizing local alternatives in the pursuit of national development. The modest recommendation is that local processes are rational and possess the right capabilities to sustain improvement in quality life in Nigeria.

Key words: Theatre, Practice, Social, Adjustment

Introduction

Transiting societies always go through adjustable processes that sometimes create situations of loathing, leaping and poor channels of changes. The postcolonial experience in Nigeria benefited from this process. The conversion processes into the colonial and subsequently into the postcolonial was faulty in the abandonment of the traditional institutions and local managerial skills.

Several reasons can be given for the recent call for all-inclusive processes of adjustments in favour of local processes to drive social and economic development.

There is also the increasing awareness that local people and local institutions are rational processes of social adjustments and possess the right capabilities to sustain indigenous based strategies or complimentary institutions. Achebe (1983, p.11) affirmed that: "A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers..." (p. 11).

The essence of this paper is not the blame game theory but to break new intellectual grounds in the search for adjustment options in the present Nigeria that is seating on the crest of a precipice. Dele et al (1991) accepted that:

recent appraisals of the achievements in respect of human development, defined as the process of analysing people's choices and of providing access to the resources required for a decent living show a disappointing African record in general and that of Nigeria in particular (p. 2).

Goods, services and institutional frameworks are generated from the social relationships derived from the mode of production. The mode of production has not incorporated the local processes rather only the local resources are transported without the local managers. Thus, there is a lacuna in the production and processes of the local materials which would have provided dependable social relations and basis for adequate adjustment. You do not "try new tricks at the top of the Iroko because the ground will witness your undesired arrival" says the local adage.

The high rate of unemployment and massive city-drifts are consequences of untenable adjustment processes that abandoned the traditional processes and induced adjustments on western relations or systems.

Development or adjustment in the views of Dele et al (1991) is that:

...process by which the members of a community develop themselves and their institutions in ways that enhance their ability to mobilize and manage resources to produce, sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations (p. 2).

In the genuine search for adjustment, call it national development, we must not resort to palliatives but search for critical indices that will encourage the production of the raw materials, based on the indigenous technology and indigenous managerial skills. The traditional content can be secularized; the danger is in the loathing of the native content. The abundant natural institutions, indigenous technology and natural resources are still at the primary levels and yet people oriented programmes are churned out yearly. The questions are who are the end users of these lopsided people oriented programmes? Why were there urban drifts? Why won't there be mass unemployment?

Theatre practice stimulates environmental awareness as well as provides a conditioned response to the shared aspirations of the people. Theatre practice goes beyond aesthetics and entertainment because it provides a framework for conscientization as well as socialization. The theatre at all times has provided directions out of difficulties. It serves as a sociological looking glass that reflects the drives, difficulties and the perceptions of a nation. A cursory look at the Roman, Greek and Elizabethan periods shows the role of the theatre in providing moments of reflections as national rebirths. The American Revolution had antecedence in the influence of theatre practice. Most development agencies and non-government agencies now advocate the use of theatre

practice to achieve sustainability and end use of programmes. Finally, most environmentalists advocate the use of theatre practice to provide a moral tribunal for the trial of the selves. Theatre practice provides social, cultural and material history that set the agenda for response to national crisis. Theatre practice showcases the people's aspirations, perceptions and production imagery. Theatre practice is a veritable tool of social mobilization and adjustment. The failure of governance in Nigeria can be redirected through theatre practices.

Social Adjustment Processes

Social and cultural changes induce adjustments of individuals, institutions as well as processes. All adjustments are predicted on the prevailing culture, for which Schaefer (2001) defined culture as: "The totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge material objects and behaviour...it includes the ideas, values, customs and artefacts (p. 65).

Societies have always experienced changes and adjustment problems as a result of changes in cultural processes. This is the very thrust of the paper that nations or societies feel a loss of identity outside cultures or processes. The inability to conform to prevailing conditions as a result of variations in material production would always create adjustment problems. The material production and the constrains should be properly understood which firm the bases of adjustment. The culture transmitted and the process of transmission would always present the challenges. People learn what the social environment is from the materials produced which form the processes of social stimuli and social interaction. Hogan (2006, p. 100) explained that:

Adaptive culture would include methods of agriculture, manufacturing technical knowledge, norms, regulating economic organizations... those culture traits and complexes that represent an adjustment of the non-material culture particularly the values and norms regulating social and institutional life to the material culture.

Social adjustment programmes in Nigeria have been based on foreign cultures which alienate the people and further create misery. A recall of all the adjustment programmes which include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) War Against Indiscipline (WAI) Mass Mobilization for Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and the current change driven by the present Buhari led government have been faulty processes that ultimately produce faulty products or ends. Anya (1982) examined the cause of the stasis in the growth and development of Nigeria and opines that:

Self-sustaining growth in the Nigerian socio-economic system as presently conceived is possible when a positive feedback relationship develops between capital investment (derivable from national resources) and the returns from investment to heavy industry, service industry and agriculture (derived from human resources) (p. 7).

Implicit in the views of Anya in the above is the faulty processes of formulation and implementation of policies that obviously result in faulty products. The foreground of the policies which are the carriers of the adjustment programmes does not reflect the traditional social relationships which form the human resources and the traditional or

domestic economy that evolve capital investment. The 1970s agrarian policies of the Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation, did not exploit the abundant natural resources that would have limited urban-drift reduced the dislocation of the rural areas and evolved composite industries.

The operation feed the nation as an adjustment programme during the oil boom era would have provided a turnaround revolution in the sophistication of the domestic economy. The agricultural policy was not rural dwellers friendly. A point to make is that 90% percent of the food consumed in the urban centres is produced from the rural areas. Therefore, the programme would have ensured rural rich and urban poor. Today the food producers are poor and the food consumers are rich. This invariably produces a condition for loathing of the producer and the production processes. This is where we have growth without development. How will growth and development be sustained when the drive and the drivers of the process do not invest in the abundance human resources? How can the people adjust to strange social and economic norms? The norms and values of adjustment are anti-people as well as anti-environment. The social and economic environment in Nigeria presently is very unfriendly. A situation where we consume what we do not produce cannot create possible channels of socio-economic adjustments. Are we adjusting to poverty and misery? Since the social policies are not based on the economic realities such policies as structural adjustments become palliatives. The huge sums of money generated from crude oil and large sums obtained from loans, if plied into the production of goods and service that benefit the cultural imagery, and then the adjustment will be worth it. The mass mobilization for economic recovery died on arrival because the pivot of operation was on a rotten fulcrum. The economic recovery was based on consumption and not production of goods. The only thing that is not imported in Nigeria is air. The rural dwellers depended on imported food; the urban dwellers depend on imported foods which are products of another culture. There is a relationship between culture science and technology.

The discussions so far have provided a historical presentation of the forces that shaped the post colonial's adjustment programmes in Nigeria and the corresponding social relationships that evolved from such praxis. The attempt here as earlier noted is not to trade blames but to provide a framework for the analysis of the situation and the leap that have orchestrated the social disorganization. It is in this assumption that Nbeta and Ikiroma-Owuye (2015, p. 31) explained that:

Self-reform is a crucial missing link in successive transformation programmes in and it is our contention that it is imperative to address the issue of self-reform with utmost urgency and commitment in order to attain good governance and far reaching transformation. Premium has been inappropriately placed on infrastructural transformation without a corresponding commitment to a broad-spectrum transformation agenda that focuses on individual selves, whose wills and actions will drive the processes of structural, institutional and national transformation.

The cultural image should be the bases of industrial production and social policies. This will deepen the cultural fabrics and the adjustment processes.

Theatre Practice and Social Adjustment

Theatre practice has strongly shaped the landscape and major development in Nigeria from colonial to post-colonial periods. Christine Skantz informed that theatre practice “is a collaborative form of fine art that uses live performances such as music, dance, drama, folklore and could write an anecdote of history of invention...advances and are by definition reproducible and multipliable adfinitum...Being part of technological practices”.

Implicit in the above is the role of theatre practice on providing history as a programme guide in development and as an agenda for social action. History to theatre practice is not mere presentation of stories and events but inbuilt dynamics to raise consciousness and provide a platform for rebirth. Shantz views also present the processes of theatre practice as anecdotes of history of inventions the theatre practice as anecdotes of history of inventions. The theatre presents material history and material culture production. The artifacts, props, costumes, songs, dances and various stage effects are products of the culture and the evidence of the material culture or science and technology of the people. Festivals and other forms of theatre practices draw attention to the cumulative way of life of the people evolved overtime in a particular environment. In all human history theatre practice has provided evolution of actions and sophistication of production processes. The early man drew inspirations from ritual dances, game, hunting and the improvement of hunting tools. Ogunbiyi (cited in Krama 2013, p. 6) noted that:

In the course of history, man learned to make nature work according to his needs the need to meet the requirements of all motivated efficiency, a certain degree of planning, a strategy and a methodology. Thus, man played at fighting in preparation for victory in real battle over anticipated adversaries. Similarly meant devices were initiated to imitate the movement and pacing of the games intended.

The early man’s civilization was influenced by theatre practice both in the sophistication of inventions, perceptions and material production processes. The Greek games and the Romans gladiator fights did not only provide agencies of pleasures but were serious sources of data for the production processes that have been carriers of human civilizations. Krama, (2013:33) adds that festivals are preserves of total theatre as they show case the historic mind, traditional technology, occupation and other creative expressions of the people. The festival is the forerunner of modern day theatre practice which still retains its axiological role and carrier of social action. Theatre practice either in festival form or play production expresses the historic thoughts, technology, theories, products and philosophy evolved in attempts to meet the challenges of the environment. The essence of this aspect of the review is to establish the link between cultural production, consumption and adjustments. The needs created as a response to the challenges of the environment stimulated production. If the products that were produced as response to the environment are not consumed then there is a big problem. Conversely, if what is consumed is not produced from the environment, two things will occur; either the environment dies or the people will die because the environment will be very hostile. This is the situation we find ourselves in Nigeria today.

Ofonagoro (1995) explained the role of tourism and culture to national development and noted that: “The thrust of the policy objective is to generate foreign exchange from non-oil proceeds, encourage even development and promote tourism-based rural based enterprise” (p. 2). Any revolution or adjustment in Nigeria that does not stem from the production and consumption of indigenous culture will mesmerize the people as well as create hostile environment. In similar position Ossie (1987) observed that: “There is a vibrant, dynamic and functioning theatre all over Africa though critics have generally either failed to recognize it because it does not fit the theoretical model on which they hold their opinion” (p. 14).

The failure of critics to accept all cultural processes as theatre has weakened the recognition of the role of theatre practice in social and economic adjustments. Theatre practice is an embodiment of adjustment processes in that it provides the contact for adjustment and the content. The present change as an adjustment in Nigeria can only be effective when the policy is rural production based. Every culture or society has its rituals, call it sophisticated or primitive. It is the degree of use or consumption that improves the quality of a product. What is the basis of classification of a product if not consumed? For whatever model, we use to classify it still involves the consumption or the taste. The festivals contain the ingredients of indigenous technology and science. Every festival show cases the traditional industry and products. The consumption of these products will not only place the festival on world records but promote the indigenous products.

The Analysis of Igwe Festivals of Benin and the Play: *The Trial of the Masses*

The analysis of the festival and the plays is vital in the definition of theatre practice. This is necessary so that we do not see theatre practice as play production alone and to demonstrate the effect of the role of theatre practice in socio/economic adjustment.

The play by Onyema (2014) is set in Asakurube town of the Niger Delta Region. The synopsis of the play explains about the effect of modernity and oil exploration on the serenity of the community. The villagers are farmers, fishermen, traders, palm wine tapers and palm oil producers. There is unity, love and social security based on traditional processes, some days of the week are held sacred. They also have community leaders and who also dispensed justice. The youths are industrious and the watchdogs of the community through age grade activities. However, the introduction of oil exploration and exploitation prompted things to fall apart. The oil production activities created loathing of traditional occupations, land and water pollution, discretion of sacred lands and days. Moreso, there was emergence of Chiefs, opinion leaders, youth leaders and total breakdown of constituted authorities. Evident in the new social order is poverty, suffering, unemployment, agitations and even violence. The play reveals the characters as victims of circumstance beyond their content.

The disarticulation of the natural economy and the destruction of the traditional production orchestrated poverty, unemployment as well as social disharmony. The cultural fabric which propels the production and consumption has been shattered. The play which explains the trial of the masses actually holds the reason for the present social adjustment. Either return to the culture of the people and their ways of life or create structures that appropriate the life processes of the people for meaningful, social engagement or adjustments. Agriculture sustains the life of the people and so the oil

proceeds can be redirected to agricultural processes which propel the culture of the people. The culture of industry is generated from the agricultural processes of the people. Today, the Nigerian policy is geared towards importation of what was earlier produced as explained in the play, the trial of the masses. The play though contrived, provides a response to social stimuli and a drive for social action. The alternate reactions of the characters of the play are a definition based on present social stimuli that can only be addressed when the basis of the latter has been adequately exercised from the lives of the people.

Osemwegie (2003, p. 37) explained that the Igue festival is an annual event which is celebrated to mark end of the Benin year and ushers in a new one with a renewed hope for peace and prosperity. During the festival, the Benin turn out in their best dresses and hospitality. The ostentatious display of the chiefs in their traditional dresses shows the power and glory of the Benin Empire. The festival offers the opportunity for the people to exhibit their rich cultural heritage in dancing, arts, crafts and other skills. Finally, the Igue festivals apart from providing a spectacle for tourists' attraction, provides historians and ethnographers a deep insight into the Benin culture as well as life processes of the people. The synopsis of the Igue corroborates the position. *The Trial of the Masses* on the process of the socio-economic adjustment in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In transiting societies, institutions and people adjust as well as drop most of the traditional culture. The culture of the people does not transit with the people and therefore maladjustment sets in with attendant chaos. Implicit in the assumptions of this paper is the argument that because the rural cultural has not been introduced into the process of adjustment, the product is of necessity faulty. Therefore, the ship of state of the Nigerian state can only be corrected if the cultural products are introduced into the processes of social and economic adjustment which drive employment as well as productions. More so, theatre practice provides mutual benefits in the streaming of cultural imagery into the decision-making process.

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