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THEATRE AND THE CHALLENGES OF OUR CHANGING WORLD: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

The global recognition of the import and impact of the performative arts in the affairs of man underpins the eternal relationship of the creative arts, science, technology and society. This glaring symbiotic relationship and partnership of the creative arts and man is continually refreshing, innovative and dynamic as man contends with the vicissitudes, tribulations and successes of life. Therefore, the performing arts are intended primarily to sensitize, educate and bring global attention to the vital role of theatre in the affairs of man, socially and politically.

Brett Bailey's World Theatre Day 2014 message draws ample attention to the irresistible spirit of theatre especially in the deconstruction, reconstruction, amelioration and sustenance of the developmental needs and challenges of man in a world plagued by poverty, injustice and inhumanity of man to man. Our topic, "Theatre and the Challenges of our changing World: The implications for Africa in the 21st century", derives inspiration from the indestructible spirit of theatre as educator, builder and molder of society, especially the African continent, where our world is plagued by poor governance, endemic corruption, poor management and allocation of natural and national resources. These factors have led to unexplainable injustice, inequality, youth restiveness, religious conflicts and wars in Africa.

In Nigeria, apart from the intractable religious and social insurgency in the far north, the middle belt is bedeviled by senseless killings spearheaded by ethnic jingoists and rampaging Fulani herdsmen. In the Niger Delta region, the post militia revolts and the Amnesty resettlement programme have gulped billions of naira, and it is questionable if we have resolved the crisis. Amidst all these, the government is yet to give account of the stupendous money spent on the centenary fanfare in Abuja and the gains to the poor man; yet we are marching and wobbling on towards the 2015 elections to be supervised by a dazed and confused INEC whose predicament we cannot fathom or explain. As if we are not suffocated by the myriad socio-political challenges facing us, about 492 eminent Nigerians apparently handpicked by the powers that be, gathered in Abuja to fashion a constitution that will take us to the 22nd century. Indeed, against the backdrop of the prevailing national mood, one is forced to ask the question whither Nigeria? What is the role of theatre in an environment of uncertainties, social dislocation and cultural dysfunctionality? As thespians of various callings and shades, we must all be encouraged and emboldened by the words of Irina Bokova (2011), that:

> Theatre has the power to move, inspire, transform and educate in ways that no other art form can. Theatre reflects both the extraordinary diversity of cultures and our shared human condition, in all its vulnerability and strength.

Historical Reminiscences

A common ground for global appreciation and understanding of the concept of Theatre or Drama is the universal theory of 'magico-religious rites of remote antiquity' propounded by European scholars. This persuasive theory also holds strong ground among early scholars and researchers in African oral and theatrical activities. According to Peter Arnott (1981):

> Some anthropologists have traced the roots of all drama to seasonal celebrations marking the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, the triumph of spring over winter… This protodrama, then would have been a ritual combat between two figures, one representing the old year, one the New, culminating in the mimic death - perhaps, originally, the actual death - of the former.

The difference between the magico-religious origins of world drama and theatre and the Africanist perspectives on theatre are more in the areas of growth process, content, performative styles, cultural aesthetics and spectacle. What is germane to us is to perceive and appreciate theatre as an artistic phenomenon that encompasses all art forms that are performed on stage and explores modern forms of Radio, Television and Film for the edification of man.

Theatre has grown from its traditional role of enabling man to communicate with the gods, dominate, domesticate and control the environment, to a more rewarding role of deploying the stage, modern technology of radio, television and film as means of communicating with people in an attempt to address socio-political issues of health, poverty and development. The key question therefore is, whether Theatre has successfully performed these roles in Africa? The question will also lead us to a critical reappraisal of African Theatre. A critical perspective on African theatre is a broad subject, but the beauty

of it is that it gives one a broad platform or canvass for a random journey around the subject, especially in the appreciation and criticism of African theatre. More importantly, it affords one the opportunity to reflect on the true nature, trends and future of African theatre as the continent searches for an enabling environment for peace and development. Hopefully, at the end of the discourse, we'll end up with a structured way forward for theatre practice in Africa.

A recurrent issue on African theatre over the years especially after colonialism has been the failure of its practitioners including writers and performers to evolve the kind of theatre potent enough to communicate and address social issues. In this regard, a good point of take-off would be some reflections on Ngugi wa Thiongo's seminal essay, 'The Language of African Theatre', now published as a chapter in Decolonising the Mind, published in 1986 by Heineman Books. I am attracted to the essay for the following reasons:
The essay is a succinct summation of the journey, if you like the story of African theatre from pre-colonial period to the present. In a very clever and ideological manner, he provides insights into the festival and ritual origins and content of indigenous forms of African celebrative and performative arts. The anger and dialectical slant with wish Ngugi discusses the fate of Kenya's indigenous forms of theatre and indeed culture in the hands of the colonial powers echoes similar experiences in the continent. It is a clarion call to all students, scholars and researchers in African performative and creative arts to go back to roots for inspiration and influences. Perhaps, the urge to capture and define the true nature, influences and evolve a truly relevant theatrical tradition relevant to the time and people of Africa explains the heated scholarly debates of the post-colonial era, spearheaded mainly by university lecturers,

critics and writers in the early 1960s and '70s.

This mood and critical commitment is well reflected in the arguments, critical assumptions and positions documented by M. J. Echeruo and Ossie Enekwe. Indeed, I would recommend that Yemi Ogunbiyi's edited book, Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A critical Source Book should be a must read book for all of you. Equally recommended are, J.P. Clark-Bekeredemo's. The Example of Shakespeare: Aspects of African Theatre and Abiola Irele and Oyin Ogunba's, Drama and Theatre in Africa. Second, Ngugi's essay brings to the fore the dilemma facing the African dramatist and theatre practitioner working in a second language situation. This colonial legacy over the years has continued to be a topical and challenging subject in conversations and workshops on modern African theatre. Even when writers like Ngugi and others have adopted indigenous languages as medium for their plays issues of spread of readership, audience composition and pluralism still dominate debates and discourses.

The situation is even more compounded in countries like Nigeria, where ethnic nationalities with varied mother tongues and dialects are in abundance. The late Ola Rotimi tried to resolve this by experimenting with the Pidgin English in some of his plays. The admixture of English and the local language appear to be a good compromise, but what are the effect of this approach on meaning and the general psyche of the people, especially in performance? How successful Ola Rotimi was in his experimentation with the pidgin language is a matter of conjecture. As long as the plays are not communicated in the original indigenous language of the people, it is obvious the characters are basically aliens in borrowed robes. Closely tied to the issue of language is the commitment to explore the content of indigenous forms embedded in Orature to mirror

social and political realities.

The late Efua Sutherland's experimentation with Anansegoro, the Akan story-telling tradition of Ghana, which inspired plays like, *The Marriage of Anansewa,* J.P Clark-Bekederemo's *Ozidi*, Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* and Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame, The Gods Are to Not Blame,* an adaptation of Sophocle's, *Oedipus Rex,* are good examples of attempts by African playwrights to come to terms with the challenges of acculturatisation and syncretism in post-independent Africa. This trend in African theatre raised the status, richness and uniqueness of African drama and performative arts, nationally and internationally-even when they also raise issues of ideological and social commitment.

Third, the issue of a National Theatre as symbol of national cultural institution and cultural identity raised in Ngugi's essay pertaining to the Kenyan experience is applicable to most independent countries in Africa. In spite of the much publicised cultural gains and renaissance derived from the 2nd World Black Arts Festival, tagged Festac'77 in Lagos, 1977, most African countries cannot boast of a befitting national theatre after 36 years of cultural fanfare, celebration and debates. Presently, the gigantic and glamorous edifice that hosted FESTAC'77 in Lagos is threatened by physical decay, neglect and abandonment. Apart from its sorry state, the place is not even open to those that are supposed to use it. Actors and performers are forced to work and rehearse under trees and shades. There is this constant threat of privatisation and commercialisation by government of the day. The state of the national theatre in Nigeria is a reflection of the state of the arts in the country, albeit the African continent. Just as in Kenya, there is urgent need for a relevant and committed theatre that would address current issues of political and social

development in the country.

The post war radical theatre of the 1970s and early 1980s has fizzled out without much impact on the people. Apart from the excessive utopian and ideological message reflected in the works of dramatists like Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso et cetera, these plays are mainly performed for university based audiences, civil servants and middle class persons in the big cities and towns in urban centres of the country. There is a palpable disconnect with the rural and urban poor and marginalised communities of the country. It is in this context that the Kamiriithu Community Theatre project is relevant and applicable to the development needs and social aspirations of the African people in the 21st century and beyond. As a theatre model it draws inspiration from cultural ethos and relies heavily on indigenous forms of theatre for its impact. This includes the story telling mode, music, song and dance. In practice and overall objective the kamiriithu is not different from other forms of popular theatres like the Chikwakwa in Zambia, popular theatre campaigns in Malawi, Zimbabwe in the early 1970s and the Samaru community theatre for integrated development projects in Zaria, Nigeria in the mid-1970s.

The Nigeria Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA), Nigeria's chapter of the International Popular Theatre Alliance was to later popularise the practice through its development projects and programmes in various parts of the country. Other groups that adopted the popular theatre method include the University of Benin popular theatre initiatives in the 1990s, Chuk Mike PEC theatre, in Lagos and the late Bode Osanyin community work in the western region of Nigeria. Without any fear of contradiction, the popular theatre movement in Africa, with its various phases of development had some influences from

Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal's Adult literacy campaigns in Latin America. Augusto Boal's thesis in Theatre of the Oppressed and Poetics of the Oppressed, articulates the seven point approach to the practice of Community Theatre for Integrated Development or Theatre for Integrated Development (TFD). The relevance and popularity of TFD is anchored on the premise that it is cheap to produce, it is participatory, it is development oriented, and draws immensely from the cultural repertoire as it seeks to mobilise, conscientise and initiate development through its processes. In the end of a TFD performance, the play does not end, but the beginning of the realisation of an Action Plan put together by the people themselves for the development of the community from their own perspective understanding and experience of social reality. Like the Ngugi's Kamiriithu community theatre experience, this is the kind of theatre that we should adopt for the 21st century and beyond.

The Niger Delta Popular Theatre Experience (1998-2007)
At various academic fora and in scholarly publications, I have had opportunities to share my experiences with audiences and colleagues on the outcome of my relationship and collaboration with SPDC (Shell Petroleum Development Company), 1998 to 2007, using theatre for development (TFD) as a tool for cultural communication and development in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria1. It is suffice to say that the Niger Delta State Initiative gave me the opportunity to experience at first hand the poverty, exploitation, dehumanization and decay prevalent in the area. It also reaffirmed and concretised my belief that through theatre, one can manage and navigate the politics of survival, initiate a well-structured and effective enlightenment, conscientisation and development process in

communities that are hitherto depressed, marginalized and neglected. The semblance of peace in the Niger Delta region today could be adduced partly to the enlightenment campaigns and level of awareness of the people to their rights and developmental needs. Various non-governmental organizations now ply their trade in the area using theatre and culture as entry points. Ironically, this development has equally exposed the inadequacies of government and the multi-national companies exploring and exploiting the natural resources of the region. It is a mark of success that indigenous Nigerian investors are now partnering with foreign investors for the exploration of oil and gas. Theatre, through Community Based Organizations (CBOs) can act as watch dogs to ensure sincerity of purpose on the part of the developers, as well as the sustenance of peace and security in the region.

As we reflect on the role of theatre in a changing world, where peace and security have become elusive and challenging, it is imperative that we embolden and restructure the practice of theatre to reflect and suit the demands of the time. In Africa, developmental needs and challenges of post colonialism compounded by international and local monopolies can be redressed through cultural rebirth and regeneration. For this to be a reality in Africa, the following recommendations contained in my inaugural lecture (2012), *Beyond The Rhetorics of Theatre: Enhancing The Platform For National Development* are reiterated here for implementation by government:
✐ Implement the strategic plan for culture which has constitutional backing.
✐ Promote Nigeria's rich music, dance, arts and crafts as embodiment of our
✐ culture.

✍ Provide adequate funding via constitutional provisions for the proper development and sustenance of the culture sector.

✍ Set-up endowment fund for the Arts to sustain and promote Arts and Welfare of Artists.

✍ Promote arts and culture as veritable economic business with revenue earning objectives; encourage and promote partnerships and traditional networking interface.

✍ Promote festival and masquerade performances as key national celebrations, entertainment, business and tourism.

✍ Emphasis should be placed on culture studies and practices in the educational programmes for schools, colleges and universities from cradle to grave approach.

✍ Adequate fund, restructure and reinvigorate national and State Council for Arts and Culture.

✍ Encourage on a large and frequent scale performing arts competition and festival celebrations.

✍ Artists, writers, poets, musicians, comedians should be encouraged through patronage, grants and sponsorship to workshops, seminars and conferences.

✍ Their works and performances should be extolled and celebrated.

✍ Mentorship in all facets of life including leadership, creativity and inventions: encourage role modeling and celebrate culture heroes and achievers.

✍ Deploy culture as Foreign Policy instrument for image laundering, business, entertainment and tourism.

✍ Encourage community theatre for integrated development as national tool for mobilization, sensitization, social change, conflict and peace building mechanism.

✍ Cut down and minimize red-tapism, bureaucracy in arts promotion and administration.

✍ Encourage and institutionalize annual national colloquium to gauge, discuss and assess the state of arts and culture in the life of the nation.

✍ Encourage 'culture rebranding' as a national philosophy and project with strong grassroots input, not elitist and intellectual jamboree; driven by season and ideologically committed culture experts and workers.

✍ Tax exemption for some cultural products which are to promote fledging talents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, theatre is a global artistic phenomenon which over the ages has become institutionalized in the minds of mankind. Equally, theatre whether in Africa, Europe, Asia or the far East has continued to function as a tool for education, enlightenment and development. Because of the oral nature of most African societies, theatre was embedded in the festival and cultural celebrations of the communities. This cultural reality still subsists and has remained a vibrant cultural reservouir for most modern African creative and performative works. However, from all indications it is apt to say that modern African theatre is new, despite over fifty years of its existence. The trends which we find over the years, are inevitable phases of growth, renewal and development.

Therefore, with globalisation as a universal philosophy of development and societal engagement, Africa must look inwards and maximise its cultural potentials and resources as it seeks to evolve a society where poverty, illiteracy, marginalisation, poor health and the environment are key issues to be addressed. African theatre, through TFD practice can provide the platform for dialoguing these issues from the perspective and involvement of the people.

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STAGE AND SCREEN EXPERIENCE: THE ACTOR'S CHALLENGE

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Abstract
Oftentimes, one encounters a silent argument between the stage actor and stars produced as a result of having played either lead or supporting roles in the movies. This has in most cases raised questions as to who is a celebrity between the two. Of more importance is the fact that most celebrities who are screen actors are not trained theatre artists, thereby querying the essence of studying theatre arts when they can actually become headliners without going to an acting school. Consequently therefore, trained actors who derive artistic fulfillment in showing their prowess on stage have become unsung heroes while the society has always celebrated the screen personalities. The reasons are not far- fetched; this is as a result of ignorance both on the side of the society and the actors on both media in the sense that they have failed to realize the challenges that actors are confronted with. This paper shall therefore bring to the fore, principal challenges that confront the actor on both sides and the need to appreciate stage actors as well as those on screen.

Introduction
If you walk into an acting class in the theatre and try to find out exactly why the students have chosen to be trained as actors, not a few will quickly tell you that they look forward to becoming film stars. Try to find out who their mentors are and you will hear names like Genevieve Nnaji, Mercy Johnson, Patience