THE THEATRE DIRECTOR AND THE USE OF DANCE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF "TRAPPED IN THE WEB"

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Abstract

This paper examines dance as an interpretative theatrical element in the process of directing "Trapped in the Web", an unpublished drama written and directed by this researcher. The paper evaluates the performance in relation to how dance, choreographed by Funmilola Owolabi was employed to achieve holistic performance appeal and aesthetics. Adopting the participant-observation research method, the study reveals that dance plays significant roles in play interpretation. One of the findings of this study is that the fusion of dance into a play production requires an understanding of different types of dances, their backgrounds and socio-cultural functions. This helps in avoiding a misrepresentation or mis-presentation of the socio-cultural setting of the play. Hence, this paper concludes that African/Nigerian theatre audiences appreciate and prefer theatre performances that are well garnished and embellished with dance(s); thus, dance should be considered by play directors as part of directing elements in order to enhance the dramatic actions, rhythm, mood and tempo of the performance.

Keywords: Theatre Director, Application, Dance, Performance.

INTRODUCTION

There is no gainsaying the fact that most Nigerian play directors infuse dance(s) to plays in the process of directing. This is because dance is an important element in African theatre. It is thus worthy of mention that African audiences love dance, and that, many Africans cannot live without dance because it is an essential part of their lives either in the traditional or modern setting and it plays a

pivotal role in cultural propagation and sustenance. This is evident in the submission of Lliane Loots as quoted by Castelyn (5) where he points out the significant roles dance plays in African setting. He avers that "we dance when we protest; we dance when we bury the dead, and we dance to celebrate new life". As a matter of fact, the every day-to-day activities of Africans are usually embellished with dances, intended or unintended, choreographed or not.

Interestingly, in the traditional Nigerian setting and in other African countries, people express themselves in dance while relating with their gods or during festivals. For instance, mourners in their age groups perform burial/mourning dance at burial ceremonies in some Nigerian communities and they do this so ensure safe passage of the dead to the great beyond. Dance also plays the same roles in other events like wedding ceremonies, traditional title taking ceremonies, house warming parties, naming ceremonies, graduation parties, church services, age group parties, political rallies, students' gathering and so on. This is why Yerima (2) avows that

in Africa, dance... to us, is indeed, the symbol of living, the dead, and even the unborn...The African dances about everything. He uses dance to transmit emotion, In this case, dance is a symbol of gesture which allows man to express feelings or argument against his common or immediate environment...

The above explains how dance is used in Africa for different events according to the people's feeling, thinking, and dynamics in relation to the beliefs, norms, attitude and values of the society. In a similar manner, Obongko and Onwuka (93) avow that dance "interprets, reproduces and expresses the lives of the people in the society; therefore it can be said to constitute the integral part of human existence that performs vital functions in the society." Similarly, Apeh (50-51) confirms that dance as an art

has been used as a pleasurable aid to work, especially in rhythmic team work. Dance has become an adjunct to fighting, hunting, loving and much else. In dancing or movement thinking, man comes

into awareness of a certain order in his higher aspirations towards spiritual life. In religious dances, man represented those super human powers which as he discovered, directed the happenings of nature and determined his personal and tribal fate. In such persons personification of efforts man learnt the reconciling trend of events and pictured the power behind it all.

This is why Abbe (156) attests to dance as an art that "serves as a vehicle for solidarity and cultural continuity" while Ugolo (232) opines that dance is "part and parcel of most cultures in the world. It has been regarded as the oldest of the art forms." Hence, these important revelations on the import of dance explain why many play performances in Africa are replete with dance(s). Little wonder why Amankulor as quoted by Abbe (156) states that "dance maintains a primary level in traditional theatrical presentations." As a matter of fact, some creative theatre directors replace few lines in the play with rhythm and dance movements in order to add dance into their performances. Playwrights are also not left behind in ensuring the infusion of dance in the performances of their plays by suggesting to theatre directors to infuse dances in some scenes. While some of them concisely build dances into stage instructions, some embed them into the lines of the characters. Bakare in an interview session with Musa (117) explains that

> dances advance the plot structure of a play, though there are principles that you follow if you are choreographing dance in dramatic productions. The first is to study the script and understand the role

that the playwright wants dance to play in the script. You have dances in dramatic productions that are meant to serve as commentaries on the happenings in the play What you first of all do is to ask from what the playwright has written, what role is dance going to play in his drama?

The sentient exertion of dance from the play to the production has underlined the importance and aesthetic value of the art of dance in theatrical productions, be it dance theatre, operatic/musical performance or drama production. Consequently, this paper is focused on the exploration of the art of dance in the process of interpreting the play "Trapped in the Web". This is done by analysing the different dance types and forms embedded in the performance; therefore, a general performance review is attempted.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Theatre Director

The theatre director is a manager, interpreter, designer, supervisor and above all, a creative artist; he is many things rolled into one. The theatre director has been conceptualised by Mcdonald (4) as an artist who creatively and interpretatively "oversees and orchestrates the mounting of a theatre production... by unifying various endeavours and aspects of production." The director analyses the play script in order to understand the characterisation, lines, messages, and dramatic elements of the play. As an interpretative artist, he pays total attention to the minutest part of play directing, from choosing the script to staging the play.

Dance

Dance has been popularly defined as the rhythmic movement of the body to the accompaniment of drumming and singing. Obongko and Onwuka (95) define dance as "the rhythmic movement of the body in time and space to communicate or express an idea, emotion or feeling." Dance occupies a central place in Nigerian theatre performances.

Performance

Performance can be defined as the end product of all theatrical activities. It is the totality of the theatrical activities, which consist of the actors' performance, director's direction, costumier's designs, lighting designer's work, sound, make-up artist's work, and chorographer's work amongst others. It is the output of all the designers and dramatists' work. Adeoye (32) defines performance as the "last phase of artistic communication to the audience...which can only become a reality through the creative endeavour of the theatre director in the complex art of play directing." A performance is said to be acceptable, pleasing and commendable if all the elements of the theatre are well harnessed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dance scholars such as Abbey (2017), Suru (2017), Hawkins (1988) among others have described dance as a means of communication. Hawkins (3) for instance, defines dance as "one of man's oldest and most basic means of expression" while Suru (1) defines it as an art that is "concerned with the use of body gesture, body movements and other dance elements for expression." The two dance definitions here confirm dance as a communicative art. In Nigerian theatre, dance in play performances serves as a means of communication and expression. In a similar manner, Yerima (127) avers that "dance is a mode of expression by man to understand the mystery and the magic of the reality of his environment. This is also buttressed by Abbe (156) in her assertions that dance is a "most significant medium of communication."

Communication according to Imo (100) is defined as a "process where an individual or a group of people with some common tie exchange ideas that are useful to a particular cause using similar codes to encode and decode messages". Communication is divided into two broad categories, namely verbal and non-verbal communication. While verbal communication includes the oral form

of speaking, shouting and making sound through the mouth, non-verbal form of communication includes sign languages and body movement. Dance as a non verbal art of the theatre falls within the category of non-verbal communication as discussed above. Metheny (49) opines that

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

The above is corroborated by Suru (309) when he describes dance as an art which "deals with the expressive movement in non verbal communication media." Little wonder why Nigerian theatre directors explore dance as a non-verbal communicative art to communicate to the audience either in a pantomimic dramatisation or in a choreographed cultural, maiden, celebration or any other form of dance in his production. This is because theatre itself is an art of communication.

This explains why Ugolo (286) explains that "the artistic expression that becomes very obvious to the onlooker is the dance art which manifests in movement, mimesis, songs, music, and the plastic arts." Aside from its function as a non-verbal form of communicative medium, the art of dance can also be used to enhance the telling of a story by a theatre director. Acholonu (51) states that dance is used to "express an emotion or idea, to narrate a story or simply to take delight in the movement itself. Dance is communicative; it can tell a story sometimes better and more effective and powerful than words." Therefore, the director may

decide to use dance to create a symbolic message into his performance. For instance, if two lovers are supposed to be in a romantic mood, the director may ask the choreographer to create a romantic dance in order to interpret the scenario.

Scholars such as Abbey (2017), Ufford (2005), Tobrise (1991) among others have extensively justified the exploration of dance in Nigerian play performances. In her opinion, Abbe (296) avows that

dance functions in dramatic play to serve religious, social, cultural, political, complimentary, creative, interpretative, and entertainment purposes amongst several other numerous roles. These functions determine the form it takes and how it is packaged to suit the play either in its integrative and, or incorporative form.

The use of dance in Nigerian play performances has continued to make theatre appealing to the audience both local and foreign. Hence, the infusion of dance and other elements of the theatre into play performances distinguishes them such that they are tagged 'African performances'. Dance has always been a great tool in Nigerian theatre performances, especially during the popular theatre traditions. Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo to mention a few used dance as opening and closing glees which are popularly referred to as ijuba. Ijuba literally means 'paying tribute' or 'paying obeisance' or 'paying salute', it is when "the performers acknowledges professional and/social seniors; peers or performer" Ajayi-Soyinka (93). This also extends to the literary theatre tradition where directors such as Femi Osofisan, Ayobami Akinwale, Tunde Awosanmi and a host of others are known for their generous application of dance in the process of directing dramatic plays. Consequently, dance has become a strong force that drives most theatre performances to the desired artistic and aesthetic expectations. Ugolo (286) asserts that

the dance art in Nigerian traditions and cultures harmonises and domesticates the other art forms in its expression. It is at once utilitarian in its expression and combines the other artistic traditions . . . to communicate. Due to the multifarious nature of its expression, it combines and aggregates, thereby making its language highly symbolic and abstract.

This therefore, explains why most Nigerian theatre directors explore this unique art in their productions. Hence, dance is useful as spectacle because it helps to provide some relief from the overwhelming plot of the drama. It entertains and enhances the aesthetic value of drama production. Ufford (266-267) avows that

dance, being a sensuous art, found its way into theatre as a means of creating spectacle and evoking empathy in the audience. Directors and actors use dance to enhance their techniques and concepts . . . dance can also be used as a vehicle for transition. An actor, through the manipulation of his body movements within a peculiar rhythm and musical pattern, can flow into another realm and existence in a play production . . . Most times, directors use dance to improvise war scenes and general conflict points.

Interestingly, dance performances, whether hunters' dance, elders', masquerades', celebration/ceremonial dance, war dance, property, occupational, maiden's cult dance, religious and so on, play a major role in adding beauty and ecstasy to drama and theatre performances and it always keeps the audience glued to their seats.

SYNOPSIS OF/ ISSUES IN THE PLAY "TRAPPED IN THE WEB"

"Trapped in the Web" examines the political situation of Nigeria in the last two decades. It reflects the ills of the country where there are lingering fuel scarcity, insecurity, bad road, inadequate health facilities, lack of power supply, exploitation, poor leadership, corruption among other menaces. The play further, satirically bemoans the plight of the poor masses and the unfeeling attitude of their political leaders, thus, the citizens are subjected to chronic hardship and poverty. Two political parties are established in the play, 'Corruption Free Party'-(CFP), this party stands for good governance while the second party known as 'Chop Make 1 Chop'-(CMC) stands for corruption and bad governance.

During the campaign exercise for the presidential election, the two political parties present their candidates who both assure the masses of good governance and transparency in their manifestoes. However, Chief Adeleke, a corrupt wealthy CMC Party's presidential candidate deceives the masses while his opponent Professor Adebayo of the CFP has a sincere intention and desires to be an agent of positive change. Unfortunately, the evil triumphs over the good as Chief Adeleke rigs his way to victory and becomes the new president. Thus, he appoints his ardent supporters as ministers and special advisers. These are corrupt and desperate people whose mission is to loot the country's treasury.

President Adeleke squanders and empties the treasury alongside his corrupt cabinet members. He lavishly spends the national treasury on his daughter's wedding. The members of his cabinet generously donate huge sums of money each as their contributions to the wedding. The rest of the money is generously spent on personal international travels, shopping, and foreign health care services. The masses are therefore, denied social amenities. One of the citizens, a

pastor visits the President and warns him about the consequences of his actions. However, he turns deaf ears to all warnings.

It is evident in the play that the monopoly of resources and power by the CMC political leaders make them oppress the poor masses. Thus, their egoistic avariciousness, insatiable lust, greed, lack of commitment to the cause of their portfolios and disloyalty to the country become a great concern for the poor citizens. This leads to aggressive protests by the masses against the government and they are afterwards arrested and charged to court. The presiding ludge, rules that the political leaders have breached the fundamental principles of transparency and accountability. He therefore, condemns the administration of the CMC President for being indifferent and insensitive towards the needs of the country and her citizens. Each and every one of them was prosecuted and made to account for all the loots. At the end of the play, power changes hand, Professor Adebayo is announced the winner of the presidential election by the Chief Justice while Chief Adeleke and his cabinet members are sentenced to thirty years of imprisonment.

EXAMINING THE DANCES IN THE PERFORMANCE OF "TRAPPED IN THE WEB"

The performance of 'Trapped in the Web' was commissioned by the Local Organising Committee of an International Conference on Religions and Democratic Change which was held at the Department of Religions, College of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, Kwara State University, Nigeria in 2015. This researcher wrote and directed the play. In the performance, dance was a great tool of communication as the director explored different types of dances to enhance the telling of her story. Funmilola Owolabi, a dance expert choreographed the play.

There were scenes where the director just simply allowed dance to communicate rather than the use of voice and lines. The interesting thing about the play is the fact that it is not situated in one particular tribe, it is simply set in contemporary Nigeria. This gave the play director and the choreographer the opportunity to explore many Nigerian dances. Dances such as bata, apepe, atilogwu, and koroso characterized the production while the celebration dance took the form of the Nigerian contemporary and postmodern dances. The dances in this category were free movement. rather than choreographed or stylized

Funmilola Owolabi displayed her choreographic skills by infusing about five different ethnic groups' dances into the play. The first was the bata dance which was done by four young ladies and two young men at the celebration scene. Itsewah (151) defines bata dance as "one of the most popular dances among the Yoruba speaking people of the Western regions of Nigeria, which was derived from the set of drums used for the dance." The bata ensemble contains five instruments which include omele-ako. omele-abo, kudi, single omele-ako, iyaalu-bata. The Omele-ako, omele-abo and Kudi are tied together while the remaining two stand on their own. All the five instruments play different rhythmic patterns assigned to them. The bata dance added colour and beauty to the play. The audience seemed to understand the language of the dance as they moved to the rhythm of the drums on their seats. The choreographer blended the dances well with the scenes. The dance was used alongside some performative elements to enhance the beauty of the performance. Ojo as quoted in Abbey (156) asserts that dance "celebrates the life of any culture and incorporates other art forms like costume, songs, music, masquerade, properties, etc" Thus, other elements of theatre that accompanied the bata dance included but are not limited to costumes, props, songs, chants, music, drumming and so on. For instance, the dancers were beautifully and elegantly costumed in colourful Adire fabrics sown in line with Yoruba tradition dress culture - oleku iro and buba for the female which is a Yoruba traditional attire for young women or maidens, while the male

dancers wore agbada dansiki and sokoto which is the Yoruba traditional attire for both young and old men. They also wore beaded accessories on their heads, necks and wrists to match their costumes.

The second dance was the apepe dance, this also took place at the presidential party, and it was immediately performed after the bata dance. Apepe dance like the bata dance is also an energetic dance, which is usually danced alongside a fast tempo of rhythmic drumming and singing. It originated from the Egba people of the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. Apepe is known for the simultaneous raising of hands and legs. It can be danced by both male and female. In the play, "Trapped in the Web", the dancers entertained the president and his council members with apepe dance, the audience were equally entertained.

The choreographer also used a protest dance in scene five to communicate the disaffection of the CFP party members to the corrupt leaders of CMC party. They used the dance to seek for justice which they eventually got. Atilogwu dance was performed at the manifesto scene by youths in CMC party. The dance was used to herald Chief Adeleke to the stage when he was about to give his manifesto. Atilogwu dance is a traditional energetic Ibo vouth dance that dwells on repeated jumping; swinging of the hands; shaking of the waist; tapping of the feet on the floor in a calculated manner and vigorous movement of the body. At a point in the dance, one would think the dancers were drunk as they were lost in the dance; however, they were all stable. The young men in this group also did a beautiful choreographed acrobatic display. The ladies wore colourful short skirts, tops and accessorized hairdo, each of them holding hand fan. The leader of the group held a black long horse whisk while the young men wore white singlet and short wrappers.

Koroso dance was also featured in the play as a celebration dance. However, the dancers in this category did not wear Hausa or Fulani costumes because the dance was performed when Chief Danladi, a Hausa politician sang a Hausa song, the dancers willingly and cheerfully danced to the song while the drummers increased the pace and volume of their drums. The traditional flutist and trumpeters also performed brilliantly well. The dancers repeated lifted and raised their legs in unison. Other dances in the performance ranged from Benin dance to Calabar dance among others. These dances greeted the Professor from CFP party who later became the new president. The director used the dances to communicate the victory of the CFP party to the audience; all the dancers joined hands to express the essentiality of unity as an effective tool in fighting a cause. The performance of "Trapped in the Web" was rich in different Nigerian dances.

The art and beauty of the talking drum was displayed in the scene where Pastor had gone to share her vision with President Adeleke. While he refused to listen to her and decided to lock her up, the talking drummer used his drum to warn the president of an impending doom. Find below, the message of the talking drum:

Ijo eleya re n bo	Your dance of shame approaches
Ijo eleya re π bo	You will soon dance the dance of shame
A wi fun o, o nranju Kankan	We warned you, but you frowned in defiance
ljoeleya re n boo o	Your dance of shame approaches
Awi wi wi, e le o ni gbo,	We warned you but you turned a deaf hear
A fo fo fo e le o nigba	We cautioned but you are rebellious
Afai mo ki'ya mo je o o, afaimo	Doom awaits you, you might
	not escape

Awi wi wi, e le o ni gbo,

A fo fo fo e le o nigba

We warned you but you did not listen

We warned but you are defiant

Also when they won the election, the talking drum changes to:
We shall crown the Elephant

A o m'erin joba Eweku ewele Eweku ewele A o m'erin joba Eweku ewele Eweku ewele

We shall crown the Elephant

At this stage, the drummer ascended the stage and began to dance to the rhythm of his drum; this was also used to bridge the gap between the scene and the next.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been able to examine dance as an interpretative and communicative art of the theatre. The paper also concerned itself with the production review of "Trapped in the Web" in relation to how Nigerian theatre directors explore dance in the process of play directing. The dances embedded in the performance which range from Bata dance to Apepe to Koroso to Atilogwu, Benin and to Calabar dances were examined and critically discussed. In the performance under examination, dance was used as an effective vehicle through which democratic change as the thematic preoccupation of the play was driven to the public. The study revealed that dance enhanced the aesthetic value of the performance in focus; it served as a bridge between scenes and also entertained the audience. It therefore, will not be out of context to conclude that the arts of play directing and dance performance are integral in African play productions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that play directors should not jettison the art of dance in the process of directing. This is because dance plays

significant roles in African stage play performances; it enhances the aesthetic value of performances and also entertains the audience. Thus, the study recommends that African theatre directors should explore dances in their productions because:

- total theater performance (which includes dance) attracts audience' attention than pure dialogue performance, therefore, African theatre directors should explore dance in the process of play directing if the play can accommodate dance without distorting the storyline;
- ii. theatre directors can also use dance to depict the culture/setting of the play;
- iii. instead of having a blackout, dance can be used to bridge scenes. This also must be worked into the story;
- iv. dance can also be used as a non verbal vehicle for passing a symbolic message across or to entertain dignitaries and other people in a celebration scene;
- v. the theatre director can also use dance to interpret special characters' roles especially if they are gods or professionals, examples are Ogun (war dance), Sango (bata dance), Oya (ijo Olomo wewe), fishermen (fisherman's dance), occupational dances and so on;
- vi. dance can also be used in a festival or ritual setting to appease or summon the gods. Some of the dances in these kinds of scenes are: cleansing dance, ritual dance, among others.

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