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Staging Resilience: Selected Performances as Response to Insecurity and Migration in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Staging resilience examines how the Nigerian theatre practitioners address the challenges of insecurity and migration as well as how the performances reflect resilience and coping mechanisms of individuals and communities affected. Art as a vehicle of expression provide a platform for voices and stories to be heard, critique societal and political issues that contribute to poor leadership and its consequent human tempers. This paper applies Postcolonial Performance Theory to examine how selected Nigerian performances respond to the challenges of insecurity and migration. Through the analysis of selected Nigerian theatre performances, the researcher applies a descriptive qualitative methodology to reveal the impact of performance as a resilient tool against the traumatic impacts of insecurity and migration. More so, the paper argues that these performances do not only reflect the experiences of displacement and violence, but also, subvert dominant narratives and identity. Through the postcolonial lens, this research highlights the ways in which Nigerian theatre performances challenge dominant discourses, foster community resilience and provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard; by exploring the intersection of performance, insecurity, migration and identity, the study contributes to ongoing conversations on the role of art in responding to socio-political challenges in Nigeria.

Keywords: Resilience, Insecurity, Migration, Performances and Postcolonial Theory.

Introduction

Live theatre/ stage performances have always been a powerful tool in which theatre practitioners apply to elucidate issues while often times pointing towards solutions to these trends. This work seeks to explore one of the major functions of theatre- as a resilient tool

that fosters unity in the midst of chaos. As such, insecurity and migration in Nigeria are the up-to-the-minute trending issues that require urgent attention.

Insecurity is a scenario where significant threat confronts the stability and development of a nation. It means lack of protection or the state of being insecure. Insecurity as a concept simply means absence of security. Nigeria at present is confronted with multiple cases of security concern that span from banditry to insurgency, kidnapping, robbery, herdsman-farmer's clashes, and terrorism. Also, the movements of the Biafra agitation in the Southeast, the Yoruba nation agitation in the Southwest, the scourge of Boko Haram terrorism in the Northern parts of Nigeria, and, the cases of kidnapping for ransom amongst others are examples of threat to Nigeria's security landscape, while migration on the other hand is an activity that involves vacating a certain settlement to resettle in another. Migration is a normal activity; it is common for an individual to migrate from one settlement to another, especially in search for greener pastures.

Thus, the content of this paper interrogates the measures Nigerian theatre practitioners appropriate the experiences of displacement, migration and insecurity in their environment, and how it shapes the individual as well as reflect on national identity. Hence, the analyses of selected performances on migration and insecurity will suffice; tackling the thematic pre-occupation of the performances and examining ways in which theatre provide ways of coping with the complexities of insecurity and migration in Nigeria.

Hence, staging resilience as response to insecurity and migration in Nigeria will be anchored on Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* and Toni Duruaku's *A Mirage for a Dream* as demonstrations of social commitment, absence of security, bad governance and failure in the system that has promoted migration and insecurity.

Theoretical Background

This article centers on how performances reflect the experiences of people and its immediate environment. Here, the use of Post-colonial Performance Theory avails the researchers the opportunity to highlight dominant discourses, foster community resilience and provide a platform for marginalized voices. Therefore, the post-colonial performance theory is a framework that examines the intersection of theatrical performances, colonial impact and post-colonial thrusts. Also, it deals with how performance practices reflect, resist, and subvert the legacies of colonialism.

Again, post-colonial literature/theatre deals with the question of the 'subaltern' finding his voice; being one who is in a subordinate position and the term refers to anyone who fights the process and results of colonialism. Thus, Helen Gilbert and Tompkins' arrival at a four-point definition of post-colonial "performance" which involves: the response of imperialism, whether direct or indirect; the continuation and/or regeneration of colonized communities: the recognition that the history of a post-colonial state does not begin with the arrival of the colonizer and insistence on the importance of a pre-contract communities... (Ann Wilson, para.2). However, we note that:

"The four defining elements which inform post-colonial performance suggest that the study assumes the binary of the colonizer and the colonized, valenced as the culture of the colonizers being coherent and "hegemonic" while that of the colonized is complex and variant, marked by difference which is celebrated in contemporary theory that is engaged politically."(para.4).

More often, the conflict between the colonized and the colonizer rest on the intent, hence, questions will suffice on (1.) Identity (2.)Cultural Supremacy (3.)Cultural Diversity (4.)The voices of the oppressed. This research re-examines the language of the oppressed in performance, their resilience, the angst and reactions of the people as well as the challenges and barriers that obstruct the attainment of set goals.

More so, for students of theatre, Post-colonial drama is important because it insists that plays are part of the culture of postcolonial countries and critics discussing them have important contributions to make... (Ann Wilson, para. 9). Remarkably, the relationship between the colonized and the colonizers squarely rests on economic relation which translates to exploitation. It is on this annotation we have embarked on the exploration of selecting Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* and Toni Duruaku's *A Mirage for a Dream*. The study therefore examines selected performances to buttress the point.

Performance Synopsis and Analysis.

The aesthetics of stage performances cannot be disputed; it's one of the most powerful instruments of passing meaningful information and creating a social change in the society. Stage performances goes beyond the entertainment level, it's satirical, didactic, educative and also a medium of instruction and communication. As an unmitigated weapon of social reconstruction, drama addresses insecurity issues such as armed robbery, ethnic and religious violence, ritual killings, cybercrimes, kidnapping, banditry, and the host of others. Drama is the literature that talks and walks before our very eyes. The menace of armed robbery in the 1970s during the treacherous regimes of Dr. IsholaOyenusi, MufuOloshaOko, BabatundeIsholaFolorunsho who were the kingpin of armed robbery in Nigeria is the subject of *Once Upon Four Robbers*. This play was performed by the department of Performing arts, Music and Film Studies at Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo state. The issue of migration in Nigeria is the subject of *A Mirage for a Dream*. It was performed by the department of Theatre Arts, Alvanluku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State. Stage performance is viewed as a medium of instruction and the performing artists created a unique performance where they seek to rouse their audience into critical awareness of the social decadence and thus move them into taking appropriate action. They were able to achieve this by providing a critical insight into the basic causes of societal melancholy and also proffering suggestions on as to how society malady can be overcome.

Once Upon Four Robbers

In the performance, the military men executed the leader of an armed robbery gang publicly at the bar beach; this is synonymous to how the 1970s armed robbers were being executed while subjected to the bullets emanating from the guns of the firing squad. The four robbers; **Alhaja** (who happens to be the gang leader's wife), **Hassan**, **Major** and **Angola**. **Alhaja** cries endlessly, singing an elegy to her dead husband. **Angola** and **Hassan** plans on how they'll avenge the death of their leader while **Major** wants a different life.

Alfa, a character whom the audience assumes to be a pious Muslim reveals his true identity by taking off his clothes to reveal the Juju clothes he was putting on. He brings out a charm and hands over some objects to the armed robbers while teaching them how to use the magic formula. He warned them that the magic could only be

used thrice. He also gave them three conditions: To rob only in public places, not to rob from the poor and not to kill.



The robbers decided to use the magic formula in the market place where the market women sold their goods and starts singing. The market women dances off under the influence of the Robbers spell while leaving their goods and money behind which the robbers took. The market was however locked for seven days creating a dilemma for the robbers as they were unable to sell the stolen goods.

The market women had gone to seek the protection of the military men but this time, the robbers decided to use the magic formula, singing like they did the first time. Again, the market women and the military dances off. Greed overtakes **Major** and he tries to take the money all to himself; this spoils their magic. The military men who were under spell regained consciousness and shot **Major** in an attempt to arrest the robbers but others escaped. Greed also clouds the reasoning of the military men and they shared the retrieved properties amongst themselves without returning a dime to the market women.



After a while, **Alhaja** tries to release **Major** by enticing the soldiers with corn and promising them sexual pleasures but all her efforts were unsuccessful. While the soldiers were about to eliminate **Major**, the robbers used the last magic to create a stalemate. Everyone on the stage freezes while the robbers sang. At the point, the audience were given a role and asked questions. What will be the outcome of the play? Will the soldiers execute **Major** and capture the remaining soldiers? Will the robbers successfully free **Major** and escape? But let everyone be reminded that if the robbers win, lawlessness and anarchy reign and if the soldiers win, there will be an undying darkness and evil military rule.



In *Once upon four Robbers*, Osofisan expresses his concern for man to reclaim his lost humanity in an unjust world. His belief is that dehumanization, though a concrete historical fact is not destiny; it is created by man. To Osofisan, the ultimate consequence of dehumanization is violence. Jude Agho (1999) corroborates this position when he argues that because “dehumanization is a condition of not being fully human, sooner or later, being less human leads to the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so.” Violence manifests in form of Armed Robbery in *Once upon four robbers*. In the second scene of the performance, the leader of a group of an armed robbery squad has just been violently executed by the firing squad. This act leads the other members of the group to reflect on their future and their gangster activities generally, especially now that they are left without a leader to coordinate their notorious and nefarious activities. The audience of this play performance view these armed robbers as the product of an unjust society. The performing artists during the performance attribute the violence of armed robbery to the following social structure.

Take a look at our salary structures, at our sprawling slums and ghettos, our congested hospitals and crowded schools, our impossible Markets... then take another look at the fast proliferations of motorcars, insurance agencies, supermarkets, chemist shops, boutiques, etc. the callous contradictions of our oil doomed fantasies of rapid modernization. (*Once upon four robbers, Scene 5*)

This implies that the bisection of society and its implications have produced the likes of **Alhaja, Angola, Major and Hassan**- the armed robbers of today. In other words, when there is joblessness, poverty, hunger, armed robbery will become inevitable.



A Mirage for a Dream.

The performance of *AMirage for a Dream*, performed by the Department of Theatre arts, AlvanIkoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State is an epitome of the Nigerian space.

The play explores the issue of migration and its widespread antecedents in the 21st century in Nigeria. It exposes the causes of migration within the Nigerian space which ranges from the search for greener pastures, political instability, ethnic/tribal wars, and market economy. The play questions the absence of employment opportunities, crave for exposure and environmental factors amongst others. This created an avenue for the continuous vacation of one state to another, or even eloping to countries outside Nigeria. This is seen in the performance of **Chimdi, Obinali, Ginger** and **Charlie** who represents most Nigerian Youths who's always have deem it fit to elope from their states and country through all means. Some persons even elope to European countries through deadly routes and the outcome of the sojourn turns out to be unpalatable.

A Mirage for a Dream elucidates an ambitious man; **Chimdi**, who, impatient of the slow progress to wealth and comfort is bitten by the bug of migration to Europe where well-paid manual labour and a convertible currency beckons. His family tried advising him against his journey but all words fell on deaf ears, he's determined to travel to Europe because **Charlie** and **Ginger** did same and turns out to be successful. Unable to secure the necessary documents on his sojourn for greener pastures, he joins others in travelling through the Sahara deserts and is killed alongside another man during a brawl with the organ harvesters. The evil man harvested their organs afterwards. This is seen in transition H of the performance.

These youth decides to migrate in the course of searching for a greener pastures, believing that the government of Nigeria has failed them in all ramifications. This is seen in the performance where **Chimdi** who was a brilliant boy during his primary school days couldn't further his education for financial reasons. His financially handicapped mother couldn't foot the bills either and the government provided no avenue for free education to enable him achieve this. This is why he couldn't comprehend nor fill the form that's handed over to him by Barrister Mike's confidential secretary; **Ginger** the day he came to look for the barrister. This was revealed in Scene three of the performance where **Charlie, Ginger** and **Agnes** was seen discussing.

AGNES: P.A dey talk about that funny man. Abi, Oga P.A, No be that man wey hold cap for hand like say the thing go miss?

CHARLIE: Why are you people guessing and guessing? Look at the visitor's form, where is it? Didn't he fill a form? Oga is about to go home.

AGNES: The man no fill form o. E no fit write anything. Wey the man, kwanu? Make I check outside. (Leaves)

CHARLIE: He couldn't write?

GINGER: (chewing gum and typing) Ah! Agnes gave him a form to fill. He stared at it for a while and left it on the table. He couldn't read it I'm sure. The way he looked at it. (*A Mirage for a Dream Stage Scene 3*)

However after meeting with **Barrister Mike**, he was enrolled in an adult education class and leased a taxi to pay up to fifty percent but he wasn't getting the funds he desired from his driving business. The unpleasant nature of the society in the performance aggravated **Chimdi's** intention of wanting to leave the country. He therefore deceived **Barrister Mike** and **Egondu** through **Berna** of wanting to open a business for his wife **Berna**, while navigating the money to his travelling proceedings.



The performance ended with **Chimdi's** post burial activities with traditional dirge wafting in the background with strains of Christian burial songs while the **Umuada** taunts **Berna** over the death of **Chimdi**, accusing her of being responsible for **Chimdi's** death due to her constant nagging which prompted **Chimdi** to elope to Europe through illegal means and got killed in the process.



Just like **Chimdi**, most Nigerians who travel overseas ends up to be victims of these organs harvesters, some languishing in jail in these European countries after being arrested for perpetrating in certain crimes, some die in the Saharan desert as a result of exhaustion and fatigue while ending up as meals to wild animals, some die while crossing the Mediterranean sea and some die even after getting to Europe, while most are departed on daily bases after losing their possessions and properties to government of those countries because they believe most illegal immigrants in their country make their money through illegal means such as drug trafficking, prostitution, Cyber Crime, Armed robbery, and other malevolent activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it's deduced that the rate of migration in the 21st century in Nigeria is alarming and thus, threatening the peace, tranquility and development of the country. From all indications, the major causes of migration in the Nigerian system includes the search for greener pastures, security, suffering, poverty, sickness, hunger amongst other which is caused by unemployment due to high level of corruption. Amongst the youth, migration seems to be a more professional job that requires no schooling as more percentage *Japa* and families encourage their youth to travel out. Also, Using Femi Osofisan's *Once upon four Robbers* stage performances as a case study of Response to insecurity has provided an alternative engagement paradigm to assessing and ending insecurity in Nigeria, The performances exploration of followership regarding security matters in the country suggests that we all participate collectively in the security affairs of our society, it's not the sole responsibility of the leaders. For any literary work or performance to be successful, such work must be composed of certain aesthetics qualities. (Ambanasom, 2007). Hence, playwrights such as Osofisan and Duruaku are not only mindful of this in their work but lean on cosmological and philosophical aesthetics in other to buttress their points.

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