



The Praxis of Theatre for Development in Curbing Social Menace in Urban Slum in Lagos State

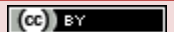
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Abstract

Theatre for Development (TfD) is a special kind of Theatre practice that creates a platform for members of a specific community to respond to, and actively participate in issues relating to their social development through an engaging process of play and acting. The sole essence of this form of theatre is to sensitize, radicalize and conscientize the people towards the improvement of their social conditions; it offers the people of the community the opportunity to actively reflect together by using the stage as a meeting point to “explore new ways of living and to express new visions of the future”. Through Homestead and Observation- Participatory research methodologies, this paper explores how TfD can be employed to curb social problem in Odiolowo, a Lagos suburb. The aim and objectives of the paper are to analyze the people’s problems and through collective action with the people, find solutions to them. The paper argues that the youth of the community are disenchanted because of government neglect in terms of providing social amenities. In conclusion, it is clear that TfD helps the people to collectively engage in pragmatic steps towards solving their problems.

Keywords: Drama, Development, Hooliganism, Gangsterism, Social development, Street trading, Theatre for development urbanslum.



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1. Introduction: Theatre and Social Development

“I believe that all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that people themselves may utilize them. The theatre is a weapon and it is the people who should wield it.” (Boal, 1979).

The above epigraph leads us into the discussion of the essence of social development in human history. The totality of the history of humanity is characterized by social development which is a signpost to the rejection of social redundancy and stagnation and a lift to a higher height. In the case of Nigeria, a country said to be richly endowed with both human and natural resources, yet ranked among the poorest nations of the world because of her monumental social challenges, since most of the several economic and social reforms instituted by the government have failed to work. The government is lacking in its effort and ability to sensitize its people on the initiatives that could bring about social developmental changes in almost all spheres of life.

Scholars conceive social development from multi-dimensional perspectives, in relation to positive changes that affect a group of people within a geographical space. Affirms that social development is the enforcement of people’s thinking ability which “presumably enhances their capacity and will to diagnose their needs, assert their own rights and demand greater control over the decision that affects them”. While advancing further, Ibagere (2007) defines social development as “the change of the people constituting a social system toward patterns of that system that allow better realization of human values which allows that system greater power and control over itself, its environment and its political destiny”. Conceived development from three major points of view: the individual, the social group and the state. The individual level implies increased skill, capacity and material well being. The social group level suggests the capacity of a social group to regulate its development both in terms of internal and external relationship while development at the state level suffices both the quantitative and qualitative growth in socio-economic and political aspects of the group.

However, a critical study of Rodney’s conceptualization of development reflects a tilt towards social development because all of these are confined to humans within a geographical environment. The opinion of this paper is that one major hindrance to the realization of social development in most cases is that people have always been alienated and marginalized from participating actively in the developmental process. It is thus the realization that social development is participatory and human driven. Tanko (2013) argues that development should focus on those people who are striving to escape from hunger, mystery, endemic diseases and ignorance [and] “those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfillment”. Social relationship and development entail every aspect of human interaction, including theatre, which concerns us in this paper. Any functional theatre, must, necessarily be relevant to its immediate environment. At least, within the scope of human relationship, theatre functions beyond the provision of entertainment, to embrace aspects such as creating political awareness, promotion and dissemination of desirable knowledge that human society benefits from in many ways.

Going by the above explications, it is germane to emphasize that there is a connection and/or relationship between theatre and social development as each according to Mohammed “reinforces, projects and distills the other”. This connection is fundamental since theatre, as a discipline, has not only been used as an instrument of entertainment and preservation of culture but also functions effectively to instruct and educate. As a human device, theatre serves as a tool of investigating the imperfections in the society with a view to encouraging and reinforcing change for the better. The implication of this is that the roles it plays are germane to social development, which is in line with Worthen (2004) assertion that theatre provides “the ability to represent and challenge social, philosophical and aesthetic attitudes of the society”. Against this background, it is clear that theatre as an art form is life, communicating and as such it gives the sense that what is being conveyed to the society through the stage is reality in itself or at any rate has something of the quality of life. This assertion is further buttressed by Arnold (1997) when he affirms that theatre not only conveys life but “reveals something about life”. The understanding one draws from Worthen and Arnold focuses attention on the notion of a symbiotic relationship between theatre and society. According to Bamidele (2002), theatre forms have “become not just mere criticism, but they reveal a lot about the various social institutions, the society and its people”. The form of theatre that seems more relevant to social development in this case is Theatre for Development (TfD).

Theatre for Development (TfD) also referred to by some scholars as Community Theatre, Participatory Theatre, Forum Theatre, Theatre of Conscientisation, Popular Community Theatre (Etherton, 1982; Obafemi, 1999; Hagher, 2000; Kerr, 2002) is an “alternative theatre” which differs from the conventional theatre (literary theatre) that uses theatre building structure for play production. It is a type of theatre practice that focuses on sourcing for ways of articulating and analyzing issues peculiar and of concern to a particular community. Obafemi submits that TfD is a theatre of “grassroots, popular awareness, mobilization and conscientization; a theatre of mass sector of the society, peasants, human and urban “proletariat” and marginalized peoples, for the purpose of challenging and confronting their political, economic and social deprivations, using residual contemporary cultural form of expression and collective improvisation to analyze these conditions” (1). It is a theatre with a technique of scenario building and performance that rests on the interaction with community members, with the aim of creating social consciousness, empowerment and pedagogy geared towards addressing the people’s peculiar social, political, economic and religious challenges.

2. Evolution of Theatre for Development

The evolution and the emergence of Theatre for Development are premised on Freire (1988) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he articulates the theory of education in relation to the fundamentals of theatre, and its roles in effecting social change; Brecht’s theatrical concept of social realism, and Boal (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, in which he explores the creation of theatrical techniques that transform theatre into a public arena where performers and audience are able to engage issues that affect them in such a way that theatre can have impacts and generate awareness on how to find solutions to their peculiar challenges. Freire introduced a radical distinction that has since

become an enduring feature of progressive education thought. He established the distinction between “banking system of education” and “problem-posing system of education” and proposes that the banking system of education is hegemonic in nature, a situation whereby the teacher deposits knowledge in the students without allowing the student to think deeply about what is being thought. Using this method, the student is at disadvantage because s/he will just be a passive receiver of knowledge; while in contrast to the banking system of education, a problem-posing system of education encourages the student to participate actively in the learning process by asking critical questions that are germane to the topic being discussed. Problem-posing system of education relies on dialogue and critical consciousness which aid the student’s critical analysis of the topic through a dialogic process with the teacher who, with the student, “equally evaluate problems as well as seek solutions to the same at the same level of commitment”.

In clarifying the two concepts, Freire observes that Banking education “attempts, to mythicise reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way men exist in the world”. Banking education does not give room for dialogue while problem-posing education “regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality”. He uses these two concepts as model of what he called *conscientizacao* (conscientization), a process from which “poor and exploited people learn to conduct their own analysis of their social political and economic reality, to enter the historical process as responsible subjects and to take action against their oppressors”. The concept he developed in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is a radical effort at revolutionizing the education of the less privileged masses from which they eventually become informed people. Influenced by this, Boal adapted Freire’s idea of student-teacher relationship to a theatrical context of spect-actor “one who actively contributes to the dialogue on stage”, as a way of democratizing the theatre.. It then becomes what Olaniyan (2004) refers to as “the promethean with the fiery searchlight of knowledge to root out inequities and injustices wherever they exist”. Through this technique the dichotomy created between the performers and the audience in the traditional western theatre is ruptured. This method has since been adopted for the practice of Theatre for Development and has been realized in communities all over the world as a positive agent of change and development within rural and urban communities.

Theatre for Development is participatory in nature, and its end result is providing alternative means of communication for the purpose of change and development for the communities involved. It helps the communities in sharpening their critical perspective and to become more responsive to issues that concern them. Komolafe (2010) observes that what the practice does is to “discuss” with the people their woes, expectations and lives generally using the people’s art forms to channel their problems to the appropriate quarters.

The main thrust of this paper therefore centres on the exploration of Theatre for Development and its strategy of dissecting and curbing hooliganism and urban slum in Lagos Metropolis. Odiolowo/ Ojuwoye Local Council Development Area (henceforth Odiolowo) is a local council area carved out from the old Mushin Local Government in Lagos State. It is bounded in the north by Mushin Local Government and in the west by Yaba Local Government. Odiolowo is a community that has been in existence since the 17th century and according to history was regarded as an extension of Isale-Eko. Another historical source claimed that the first settler at Odiolowo was Madam EfunroyeTinubu, who came and used the place as a farm land. Later on settlers from Ijebu, Egba and Benin came in but today Odiolowo has developed into a metropolitan community harboring different ethnic groups, speaking diverse languages.

With urbanization and migration, there have been numerous assimilations by the diverse ethnic groups that make up the present Odiolowo community, though they still maintain their ethnic awareness. Politically, Odiolowo constituency is represented by Honorable DaudaKako Are at the Lagos State House of Assembly. The Odiolowo Theatre for Development workshop was carried out from 6th to 16th August, 2014 and researched into by the writer and a group of theatre practitioners who volunteered to be part of the workshop.

3. Research Methodology

Theatre for Development practitioners/facilitators need to adopt the methodology or approach that is different from that of conventional theatre. The approach postulated by scholars like Kidd (1981), Hagher (2000), Akinwale (2001) and Komolafe (2010) involves: information/ data collection, data analysis, scenario building and creation through improvisation, play rehearsal, play performance, evaluation and interaction with audience and follow-up. This approach can be modified into three phases, the Preliminary phase, the Workshop phase and the Post-Workshop phase.

However, this particular TfD research was carried out through the adoption of Homestead Approach and Participation-observatory research methodology. The Homestead approach indicates that the research participants and facilitators reside in the community (Odiolowo/Ojuwoye LCDA) throughout the workshop period, so as to be able to carry out the research survey effectively rather than the Migrant approach which stipulates that the researchers resume to the community in the morning and return to their base at a stipulated time. The Participatory-Observatory method employed methods like interview, observation, interaction and dialogue as instruments of data collection. Through this means, the researchers are able to observe and carry out the survey by joining in, and sharing in the communal activities of the community. In this process, the researchers/ TfD facilitators incorporated the people’s view point in order to contribute to the social transformation system which eliminates some of the challenges the community faces. With these two approaches, the TfD researchers started with the identification of the problems, which were later analyzed and developed into different drama skits and scenarios for presentation to the community. They also served as catalysts for the people to face the reality of their problems and critically work out the methods of resolving them, as Komolafe advances that “this is certainly an empowering process; a process of reinvigation through which the people can find meaning to their lives and a justification for their existence”. These methodologies were of great importance to this research because they served as potential tools for the diffusion of innovative ideas among the people towards solving their own peculiar challenges.

4. Aims and Objectives

The Odiolowo / Ojuwoye workshop was organized to achieve the following:

1. To assess the level of government interventions in the community, so as to interrogate the state of social development in the area.
2. To analyze the people's problem and work with them collectively to deliberate on ways of finding solution.

5. Data Gathering and Analysis

Data gathering is at the core of the research in TFD, without which there will be no basis to draw any reasonable conclusions. To facilitate effective data gathering process, the researcher and the facilitators adopted qualitative data gathering methods, which involved field collection, participatory- observation, descriptive and experimental methods. A good understanding and practice of all of these gave the researcher and the facilitators the insights into the historical, social, political and economic contexts in which the people lived and worked in the community.

At the initial stage, the research group was divided into seven units, each given specific places to visit and topics to research into. This was done to allow for diverse opinion from the community members and accurate data gathering by the facilitators. The process lasted for four days after which a proper scrutiny of each unit's findings was carried out. In the end the following data were gathered:

1. The youth of the community are disenchanted because of government's neglect in terms of the provision of social amenities.
- ii. The youth could not go to school because of poverty, hence hooliganism is rampant.
- iii. High rate of unemployment.
- iv. Early marriage by young females in the community.
- v. Street hawking is rampant among children and young adults.
- vi. Over-population and congestion as a result of lack of social amenities.

The data highlighted above are later pruned down to three major areas for the purpose of scenario building and because it was discovered that these three areas are the most paramount through which the community is highly challenged:

1. Street Hawking
2. Urban Slum lifestyle/ Hooliganism
3. Unemployment/ Poverty

6. Analysis of Data

The data gathered are thoroughly analyzed by the research team to provide the means for convincing role play by the performers on the one hand, and to give the audience the opportunity to feel the impact of the play as it directly affects their community.

6.1. Street Hawking

Street Hawking is the art of selling of products along the streets, major roads and/or from place to place. The incidence of street hawking in Odiolowo involves both male and female, and virtually all age groups. From the research, it was discovered that many of the street hawkers are children of school age, but are out on the street daily while their mates are in school. Others are able bodied young men and women. They are forced into the street by circumstances beyond their control; they sell all kinds of wares ranging from snacks, foodstuffs and drink to household equipments in order to earn money for themselves and their family members. Some, especially the young ones, wriggle through slow moving traffic and oftentimes chase moving vehicles in traffic on highways to sell their wares. Others, both young boys and girls, parade through the motor parks and around mechanic workshops.

From the data gathered, it was obvious that the reason for street hawking at Odiolowo community is economic hardship due to unemployment. Poverty has therefore been identified as a major cause of street hawking. Many hawk on the street to earn income, while children hawk to support their parents or guidance and sometimes for their education. The data also revealed that many of the street hawkers, especially the children combine street hawking with schooling.

The effects of street hawking, as the researchers gathered, are as follows:

1. Road traffic accidents which may lead to injuries or death.
2. Child street hawker especially female children become victims of rape or sexual abuse which may lead to child pregnancy, abortion and school drop-out.
3. Street hawkers are exposed to violence and crime as they come into contact with miscreants in the streets.
4. The child street hawker can face many social ills in the street; s/he can be exposed to deviant attitude that may result into juvenile delinquency.

6.2. Urban Slum Lifestyle/ Hooliganism

The second major challenge in Odiolowo community is urban slum lifestyle and hooliganism. Slum can be described as a geographical space in an urban area characterized by lack of basic amenities such as regular supply of electricity, potable water, over-crowding and basic health facilities. In most cases, the inhabitants are always socially neglected by the government. The conditions that prevail in Odiolowo like most urban slums in Nigeria, is in line with Obionu's assertion that they are characterized by "poor access to clean water, proper sanitation, refuse disposal and drainage system... slum dwellers oftentimes help to deface and further degrade the environment" (11). The major cause of urban slum especially in Lagos can be attributed to rural to urban migration.

Migrants from all over Nigeria and neighboring countries move to Lagos on daily basis in search of employment. As the population increases, the slums and their associated problems increase making the areas become overcrowded as the migrants settle in already congested living places with bad infrastructures in terms of good roads, pipe-borne water, and basic sanitation. In the end, the inaccessibility to good living conditions results in "slum lifestyle, modeled by several characteristics and of course with serious health implication on the people" (12). Thus, Odiolowo

community is not left out of this experience and from the research conducted; social ills, crimes and other nefarious activities associated with high liquor consumption and drug abuse are common among the youths. All of these results in hooliganism. Such a situation often shows the social imbalance in the society, and provides insight into condition, which promotes the outbreak of social disorder that manifests in the picture of riots and fight resulting in murder.

Hooliganism manifested in this area because of laziness, and refusal of some residents to work and earn a living. Rodwell refers to this situation as the youthful exuberance to “challenge the system by openly denying work and opting to make quick money through crime and violence” (168). From another point of view, hooliganism in the area is as a result of subcultures of violence created by the marginalized youth to assert a claim in the social economic system and register their anger against the social class that have excluded them. This has become a major challenge that needs urgent solution.

6.3. Unemployment and Poverty

Another major challenge affecting Odiolowo community is unemployment and poverty which pose serious problems in the area, especially from the perspective of security of lives and properties. For instance, this has contributed to the incidence of youth unrest in the area. The inability to get paid employment and the quest for survival prompt many of the youth to engage in criminal acts. Many of the unemployed youth at Odiolowo community as at the time of this research, idled around street corners taking alcohol or smoking Indian hemp, while some go into touting popularly known as “Agbero,” a phenomenon that, according to Akwara has encouraged “the development of street youths and urban urchins (area boys) that grow up in culture that encourages criminal behavior”. The psychological effects of unemployment on the people cannot be swept under the carpet as they include trauma, low self esteem and anger while the social effects manifest in poverty, street fighting, rivalry between groups which at times could lead to bloodshed and killing. The aftermath of unemployment is poverty, another social problem, whose effects on the people have become what Akwara aptly describe as a “situation that somewhat dehumanizes the individual because of the various disabilities it causes to the sufferer”.

The dominant forms of poverty affecting the people are absolute poverty and relative poverty. These forms indicate the inability of the people to provide material needs like three square meals, basic health, basic education and other needs to guarantee their subsistence. The indicator is that majority of the people find it hard to maintain a minimum standard of living due to economic imbalance.

7. Scenario Building, Performance and Interactive Session

After a careful analysis of the data, the research group was divided into two units to package two different drama sketches that centre on the data collected. Each unit was to come up with two plays incorporating all the techniques of Theatre for Development. The units were also to incorporate other issues they found useful during the process of data gathering and analysis. The team members were given twenty four hours to package the plays. In the end the two units came up with plays that anchored on the data collected and after a close study of the plays, the entire group agreed on merging the plays to produce one drama sketch that will incorporate all that have been gathered during the field work. This method was adopted as a way of creating a performance that would engage the audience, without losing its dramatic quality.

However, in the course of rehearsal and building of the final performance, the following techniques were adopted:

1. The review of the play storyline to ascertain that it is in line with the subject matter, the locale of the performance and the socio cultural and security context of the community.
2. The determination of the maximum number of scenes and the development of scenario, character, and setting.
3. Casting was done in relation to performer’s skill
4. The language of the play is a mixture of Yoruba language and pidgin. The reason is to ensure that most, if not everybody can understand and appreciate the performance, in line with its objective.
5. The performance must appeal to people’s emotions
6. The performance must include captivating features like songs, music, dance and music.
7. The performance must allow for audience contribution and participation.

The rehearsal session lasted for three days from which the group was able to come up with the play title that was influenced by the issues raised. It was an open ended performance entitled; “Who is to blame?” that creates a window for audience response and participation. It is important to state here that one major challenge the Tfd group faced during this study was the identification of suitable location for the performance. Three major sites were earmarked for the performance, these are:

- a. The Local Council Secretariat conference room
- b. The popular Ojuwoye market
- c. The Local Primary School

After series of deliberations, the group decided to use Ojuwoye market. The reasons for the choice of the market were based on the following:

1. Access to the venue was not restricted
2. The market was large enough to accommodate a large audience
3. There was a steady flow of people at the market, hence there was less publicity.

The production started with the introduction of music and dance by the performers. This was done to draw the attention of the people to the scene. Another reason was to encourage the audience to participate in the interactive session of the performance as they would be called upon later to discuss on the play. The dramatic structure and the role play of the performance focused on the political and social life of the people. On the political scene, issues like political gangsterism among the youths, ignorance and deception by politicians were raised while on social scene, urban migration, illiteracy, urban slum, street trading and hawking were explored.

As the performance continued, the narrator came in at interval to engage the audience in their opinions about the performance. This allowed them to react to the actions on stage. They had the opportunity to interrogate the performance: what should they have done in a situation like this? Who is responsible for the youth's engagement in political hooliganism? What should be done to reduce street trading and hawking? What are the measures to be taken to alleviate poverty at Odiolowo? Who are to blame when violence and gangsterism are the order of the day? These and many other questions were responded to by the audience.

8. Discussion, Evaluation and Follow-Up

The response, participation and enthusiasm exhibited by the audience during the interactive session showed that the people's consciousness was raised by the performance. The people were allowed to suggest and proffer solutions to those problems highlighted in the course of the performance. A summation of the suggested solutions to counter the people's challenges is listed below;

1. Effective Child Right Law should not only be enacted by the government to tackle street trading and hawking, but properly enforced. The existing Child Right Law has not done much in reducing street hawking hence, Law enforcement agencies should be up to the task in proper enforcement of the law. Public sensitization should be employed by the government to create awareness among the people so that they would understand the gravity of the offence.
2. Government should provide jobs by creating conducive environment for investors, small, medium and large who can provide job opportunities for the teeming urban youth population.
3. Poverty Alleviation Programmes should be created by both private organizations and the government to tackle poverty and improve socio-economic status of the people.
4. Public awareness and education programmes should be organized for the youths on the consequence of political violence and hooliganism. Parents should endeavor to be more vigilant about the behavior of their children and proper counseling should be adopted.
5. Skill Acquisition Centres should be created to cater for young women and men who are unskilled. Lack of skill and limited education make employment difficult and this gives room for idleness and youth restiveness.

Both private organizations and government should provide opportunities for economic upliftment of the rural areas. Provision of schools and other welfare services will help discourage migration to urban areas.

9. Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it is clear that the Theatre for Development experiment at Odiolowo community has shown that Tfd is a developmental practice hinged on performance and its participatory tool towards helping individuals and groups within a geographical space share their experiences with the intent of social transformation. Tfd interrogates the process through which a community creates transformation by critically examine their problems through the process of role-play and a manner that allows them to deliberate towards finding solutions to their challenges.

Through the performance, the people of Odiolowo were able to put into visual discourse the problems of social menace like youth restiveness and street hawking by children and thereby articulate new directions and deploy new ways to overcoming them. With this approach Theatre for Development could be seen as a social learning studio or workshop for both the performers and the spectators (audience).

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