

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE GLOBAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Theatre and Performance as well as other activities that have theatrical nomenclature are capable of showcasing the socio-economic conditions of the people in a given society, besides all other intents. It is, therefore, pertinent in this context to consider how theatre and performance can be utilized as a concept in addressing and redressing the socio-economic situation of the people in a deliberate attempt to make a better society. This work incorporated the efficacy of *Theatre for Development* (TfD) in awakening the consciousness of the society and its citizens, and recommends their usage for socio-economic development. The work serves as an inspiration to theatre practitioners and performing artists to channel their creative activities towards the socio-economic challenges that the people face in a given society in an effort to contribute their quota to societal development. The significance of this work is that it aims at exploring the advantages of theatre and performance in the context of *Theatre for Development*, which is also known as *Community Theatre*, in proffering solutions to some socio-economic problems bothering the society, mostly African countries. In conclusion, this work has proved that theatre and performance should not be viewed from the perspective of fantasy but on the viability of exposing and developing the socio-economic aspect of nationhood.

Introduction

Performance as a phenomenon has been and is associated with man right from the beginning of existence. Its manifestation and contributions in different periods and societies have been universal as well as commendable. However, 'Theatre', whether ancient or modern, has always emerged from the society's historical, traditional, political, religious and socio-economic realities. Therefore, *theatre*, in this context, refers to the work of writing, producing and acting in plays—plays considered as entertainment.

Performance in the context of arts is 'Performing Arts' which is synonymous with 'Theatre Arts'. This implies the act of performing a play, concert or some other forms of entertainment. Performing arts, therefore, is "a conscious and deliberate activity, organized by and for an audience... a community and designed to serve certain or specific communal aspirations and goals" (Osofisan, 18).

Theatre or performance becomes functional when a dramatic action occurs, involving the actors and audience, not excluding the playwright. Theatre and performance is an enactment of action with many motives, including teaching, entertaining or both, at the same time, in a given place, before an audience. It follows, therefore, that theatre and

performance could be used for a particular purpose or purposes since it mirrors both societal and global developments.

Based on the above perspectives, it is imperative to establish the fact that theatre and performance, through all its forms and genres, is largely and globally socio-functional in focus, relating the controversial notion of “Art for Art’s sake” in favour of “Art for life’s sake”. This, of course, supports Ernst Fischer’s assertion that: “Art is necessary in order that man should be able to recognize and change the world. But art is also necessary by virtue of the magic inherent in it” (14).

The assertion above explains why a global issue like socio-economic development, as a matter of concern, should be explicitly considered and discussed through this creative and unique artistic medium. Theatre and performance is unshakably committed and obliged, consciously or unconsciously to the welfare of the people in the society and the world at large, who by all ramifications are the ones affected by the socio-economic development and situation, whether negative or positive.

The impact of watching a theatrical production always presents and directs the consciousness of the audience which is, invariably, the society. The entertainment and educational values of theatre and performance need not to be overemphasized because it portrays the fundamental, social, political and economic relationships affecting the people and the environment. Practically, and with relevance to global socio-economic development, is the purpose of theatre and performance, be it traditional, modern or post-modern. Theatre and performance must reflect the developments of the society to the people – as an instrument available to the greater number of people in their socio-economic condition. This introduces the concept of *Theatre for Development*.

Theatre and performance should look beyond the realm of entertainment. Ossie Enekwe is of the view that “plays were not written for entertainment only” (21). Thus, the dramatic representation of man’s existence in his society, showing his striving in public and private, present and past, transient and enduring, is for him to gain knowledge and wisdom, and fashion out a better living condition for himself and the society. Theatre for Development becomes functional and people-oriented in addressing global socio-economic development when it is capable of prompting the masses to ask pertinent questions about themselves and what the leadership or government means for their living condition and welfare. Whatever the response(s) will be, the dramatic representation shall foster the re-examination of the current situation and try to effect positive reactions, changes and thoughts in the people. In his inaugural lecture entitled: “Beyond Entertainment: A Reflection on Drama and Theatre,” Adedeji opines that:

Beginning from the creation aspects of culture—the literary, the visual and the performing arts which when materialized express the essence of cultures... this is the basis of progressive living. Theatre is the philosophical aspect of culture which embraces the realm of ideas, beliefs, concepts and values of a people which come into full view either

for reflection or provocation or both ... it exists when the theatre is used for social and political action, when it is used as a weapon of change (Enekwe, 17).

Theatre for Development or Community Theatre should constantly be engaged in the act of extolling, hinting, warning and teaching the people through creatively acting out their socio-economic condition and development. This is possible because a theatre and performing artist in this contemporary period should carefully observe and create imaginatively, leading to the predictive analysis of the socio-economic system. In portraying societal affairs, one could say that Theatre for Development is simply mirroring the socio-economic aspect of the society in all ramifications. This paper examines the effectiveness of theatre and performance in a wider spectrum while basing on the framework of Theatre for Development. The global socio-economic development in terms of human exploitation and oppression can be exposed and addressed through the creative and purposeful utilization of Theatre for Development, otherwise called *Theatre for the Oppressed*.

THE DRAMATIST AND THEMATIC THRUST ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

All over the ages, the problems of man, in relation to himself and his environment, both physical and spiritual as well as in socio-economic development, have been the concerns of literature. Therefore, suffice to say here that dramatic writings are, more often than not, conditioned by the nature and prevalent situation of the society that produced them. The notable ancient Greek classical dramatists like Aristophanes, Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus wrote their plays to reflect the true essence of the goings-on in their different periods in the society they found themselves. In their different plays, they focused on the situation of human beings even though different aspects of the concerns of man have been emphasized.

Few examples can be seen in the pretence of men and women in the Elizabethan society of Europe as captured by William Congreve in *The Way of the World*; the conflict between high principles and expediency in *Antigone* by Sophocles; the religious hypocrisy and pretence in the society as depicted in Moliere's Creative work, *Tartuffe*; the reflection of socio-economic situation in the then apartheid regime in South Africa as artistically demonstrated in Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*; as well as other thematic thrusts in the works of other dramatists. All forms of creative writing embrace myth, legend, folktales and other human experiences. In considering themes and plots development, dramatists often strive for the sublime and global human concerns. The thematic thrust of any dramatic writing has, at once, an infinite variety and an abiding constancy. It can be taken from myth, history or any contemporary and global situation, or it may be constructed from the constant materials of real experience no matter how fantastic or rural the invention. The dramatist's thematic thrust is then the human being. The obligation, responsibility or task before the dramatist is to decide what aspect of people and their concerns he should write about. Contemporary dramatists could, therefore, be regarded as socio-economic visioners and critics because they foresee what evil is about to befall the

society and criticize the authority while educating and sensitizing the people for the possible way out and at the same time proffering possible solutions to them in their imaginable, tasking and creative play-scripting.

To this regard, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *I Will Marry When I Want* dramatizes the imposition and development of religion by imperialists, and the subjection of Black Africans to abject socio-economic conditions. It is the task of the dramatist, therefore, as in the case of Ngugi here, to promote the socio-economic consciousness of the people, making them to become aware of their situation, and in the situation, stir them up to move toward positive change in order to better their living condition. It is important to note, here, that the African dramatist cannot afford the luxury of "Arts for Art's sake". This is because he is looked upon to undertake some socio-economic roles which his counterparts in other parts of the world may not be called upon to perform. It, therefore, bears upon the African dramatist to identify with the socio-economic issues of his time as peculiar to the need of his society.

The topical issue, here, is the selection of theme by the dramatist in his creative writing toward promoting socio-economic consciousness. This will enable him to adequately lead the struggle against oppression, recession, exploitation, poverty, inflation, wrong economic policy and the plight of the common man in the society. In the apartheid South Africa, dramatic writings were created to check, fight and promote socio-economic consciousness. Dramatic writings by dramatists are considered as useful tools; and they emphasize the instructional over the pleasurable aspect of production. The dramatist, through his dramatic writings, can offer solutions to the banes of both social and economic development in the present global situation. His creative works can check and direct the government and, at the same time, stir the people to choose to revolt against bad policies, injustices, corruption and other evil tendencies bedeviling the society. The dramatists through their thematic thrust preoccupation will always be useful and relevant in addressing the socio-economic development of the society. By extension, theatre and performance, if well channeled through works of the dramatists with relevant themes, could be powerful and effective tools for the achievement of global socio-economic stability and progress.

THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SENSITIZATION

The call for socio-economic sensitization through Theatre for Development is basically a call for the adoption of a sustainable development through theatre and performance. Performance admonishes the people to think about the present situation and state of things in addition to make provision to cope with it. As an ideology, sustainable development is "normative, embracing social, ecological and economic dimensions of conservation and change" (Hediger in Akinwale, 72). Theatre for Development has the efficacy of advocating a sustainable development in the society when there is a response to stimuli by the adoption of a new approach based on the profound nature of information made possible through theatre and performance. However, Theatre for Development as the name implies involves a group of methodologies that employ performance (song, dance,

drama, etc.) as a mode of sensitizing the public to engender socio-economic development. Socio-economic sensitization, thus, is simply the rousing or creation of awareness in the minds of the people towards developmental patterns in the society that border on welfare and sustenance. The people are made to be sensitive to the challenges and problems confronting their struggles, politics, economics, tradition and various manifestations of their society.

Theatre and performance, through creative weaving of plays around social and economic situations in the society, is an established vehicle and a veritable tool for socio-economic agitation and protest. The use of Theatre for Development as a tool for socio-economic sensitization has been the primary responsibility and concern of theatre and performing artists, considering the peculiar situation besetting a society. Theatre for Development seeks to explicate specific socio-economic issues affecting the people with the aim of bringing about positive change for better livelihood in the society. Therefore, a creatively-crafted or improvised play in the process, as an essentially didactic form, interpreted in theatre and performance, at its best, seeks to offer a sense of socio-economic sensitization in the form of song, dance, drama and other theatrical genres with a great deal of humour.

It is through Theatre for Development that the plight of the populace and the indifference of the government are nakedly exposed because, through it lies the picture and presentation of the real situation in an artistic style in order that the socio-economic consciousness of the people can be evoked to reject, challenge or protest against the indifference of the ruling political class and wrong formation of economic and social welfare policies. In the process of this sensitization, the people become aware of the devastating effects of the situation on them if allowed to remain unchecked and are able to envision what the future may look like if the status quo remains unchanged. Theatre and performance must be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the global situation and fight for the people's liberation, alleviation and a better society.

From the dramatist's perspective, the dramatist has a duty and responsibility to inspire in the people a sense of patriotism, belonging and justifiable loyalty to the society. In terms of socio-economic sensitization, the theatre and performing artist is looked upon and expected to chart a new beginning for the people by promoting a sense of struggle against economic oppression and the negation of fundamental human rights in his society. The people, in turn, want the theatre and performing artist to share in their burdens, appraise their problems, understand their predicaments and be able to chart a way forward out of their socio-economic problems through various artistic avenues available.

Socio-economic sensitization as a vehicle for liberation can be effectively promoted through theatre and performance by using relevant thematic scripts or improvised plays to expose the weak economic will and adoption of wrong socio-economic policies by leaders and rulers that are not favourable to their subjects. For example, the doyen of Nigerian theatre, Hubert Ogunde, championed the course for cultural and economic renaissance through his dramatic writing and performances like: *Strike and Hunger*; *Toward and Bullet*; *Worse than Liberty*; *Worse than Crime*; *Half and Half*, and others.

These plays were all relevant to socio-economic as well as political sensitization. However, similar effort and couragement is expected from the present theatre and performing artists, through Theatre for Development (TfD), to address the socio-economic challenges facing the people in various levels of the society.

Discussion

The increasing utilization of creativity as a tool for global socio-economic development demands greater academic concern to the potentiality and efficacy of theatre and performance. Theatre and performance serves a variety of functions, depending on the interest of the audience and the social means. This means that the main functions of theatre and development depend on the interest of the audience or society. These functions are: entertaining, informing, educating, enlightening, sensitizing and persuading. Therefore, looking at theatre and performance from a global perspective, it can be rightly observed that it is not always a blameless benefactor in gearing towards improving the lives of the masses with relevance to socio-economic development. Theatre and performance is supposed to serve the people with awakened consciousness and cannot be referred to as *useless*. Given this understanding, therefore, it is obvious that what is being demanded of theatre and performance in the global socio-economic arena is to return and refine the plays to challenge the citizens for a positive change. This, however, can be done through a systematic ideology in the plot, creating remorse and sensitizing the audience, as has been applicable in the concept of Theatre for Development.

Thus, the revolutionary disposition and approach in theatre and performance has the efficacy of changing the volatile nature of global socio-economic systems. Looking at theatre and performance in the global perspective, it can be observed that it is capable of shaping and molding individual or group behaviours and attitudes towards a particular idea. This highlights the aspect of revolutionary aesthetics embedded in Theatre for Development which cannot be succinctly discussed in this paper because of its vast nature. Theatre and performance in the Ideology of Theatre for Development can become potent weapons in the hands of the people, if wielded rightly, through good comradeships and direction by revolutionary or democratic practitioners. It can identify and enhance a sense of direction which might lead to purposeful change individually and collectively. The effect of Theatre for Development in the present-day democratic environments like Nigeria's, for instance, is revolutionary. For aesthetic reason, it can effectively change and reorder individual personality and humanity generally, probing and mirroring the socio-economic situation in the society for a positive change.

The role of theatre and performance in revolutionizing and sustaining global socio-economic development is enormous. It goes beyond mere entertainment experience to meet up with the intensity of socio-economic challenges it has to grapple with and recreate in the process. According to Bertolt Brecht, "drama was to be nothing if not social, and in an era like our own, it has to do nothing if not contribute to social and revolutionary change" (Bently 121). In approaching the subject of theatre and performance in the society, Eric Bently sees theatre and performance (drama) as propaganda because, to him, it is through propaganda that drama most simply can cope with the society (Bently 124).

However, the phrase “propaganda drama” suggests different things to different people. To most people, perhaps, it suggests a drama that fathers socio-economic change and revolution. But, after all, the other side has its propaganda, too; and plays can be written in the interest of the status quo. Shakespeare’s histories are a case in point (Bentley 124). The efficacy of theatre and performance in the contemporary society has actually reinforced the sensibility of any right-thinking human and questioned the government and authorities concerned on sensitive governmental issues like economic recession and other prevalent adverse situations. This is made possible through the application of Theatre for Development’s concept. One major problem in the world today is ignorance: the inability to decipher the right mode of entertainment for education and distinguish right from wrong. With this problem sowed or reduced, theatre and performance can become a potent tool in the hands of the people.

Finally, theatre and performance in the global scenario, besides reinforcing the concept of entertainment, can generate socio-economic changes. It can be submitted here that theatre and performance practitioners need to understand their role as socio-economic ambassadors and thrive to contribute their own quota toward global socio-economic development.

Summary and Conclusion

Theatre and performance from the framework of Theatre for Development is very important in the exposition of the goings-on in the society and in the sensitization of the people on global socio-economic issues. In this regard, theatre and performing artists and relevant practitioners should weave their plays and performances based on, and around the prevalent situation in the society and on other vital developments that have to do with the socio-economic condition of the people. This paper establishes the fact that theatre and performance goes beyond the mold of entertaining the people to conscientizing them on societal issues that are crucial to their wellbeing. It further proves and recommends that Theatre for Development, if properly harnessed, can effectively challenge the present adverse socio-economic development, revealing and protesting (without violence) against the wrong governmental policies and indifferent disposition to the plight of the populace by the leaders. It can also serve as an avenue to seriously engage the people (audience), appeal to their consciences, arouse their interest and generate a proactive and new consciousness that could create positive socio-economic change within the society.

Theatre for Development sensitizes the public while also stimulating a process of solution to their problems. It creates a forum for discussing issues provoked by performance. The idea of ‘synergisms’ is paramount as Theatre for Development can lead to multi-dimensional approaches to solving socio-economic problems and challenges. It is against the backdrop of the sensitization impact of theatre and performance in all ramifications, that this paper interrogates and highlights its efficacy in global socio-economic mobilization and development. As reliable partners in socio-economic development, all theatre and performing artists, not excluding dramatists, must not focus on mere entertainment in their creative pieces and performances but must in all dedication lead in sensitizing the people on socio-economic development and properly guide them toward achieving an egalitarian society through their creative works and improvised plays.

This paper is of the view that theatre and performing artists should embrace the ethical framework of Theatre for Development in their socio-economic responsibilities in order to contribute their own quota that will positively engage the people through sensitization for global socio-economic change. It is my submission that theatre and performance, within the framework of Theatre for Development, should be encouraged by the government in order to convey the relevant messages even to the rural people in remote areas. This will equally help to massively mobilize the people and give them adequate socio-economic information. With proper utilization of theatre and performance from the perspective of Theatre for Development in socio-economic development, the desired global positive change can be attained and achieved.

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