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'When Drama becomes too much': Postdrama as Agency and Praxis in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

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Abstract

Stand-up comedy has evolved to become staple escapism in Nigeria today, avidly patronized by millions; with the form vivaciously enacted to induce laughter, yet retaining a substantial clout of critical social commentary on its immediate society. While this may have been possible because archetypal stand-up comedy depends on live performance of satiric mimicry; its socially conscious undertone couched in the subversive pursuit of mirth happens to be located within a far-reaching performance convenience warranted by conventional Drama's logistic and epistemological requirements, and grounded in a tactic that facilitates the circumvention of such encumbrances. Stand-up comedy's character is decisive: staged showing, single performer, unscripted act, a tactical reduction to superfluity of the habitual encumbrances of costume, set, props and the likes, a required slash of audience participation, recent employment of multimedia technology. And by these features, it implicates a re-negotiation of what constitutes 'proper drama': script, cast, the fourth wall, scenic detail, full character delineation and plot of a certain magnitude.

The present study interrogates the socio-cultural reality, performative rationale, and theoretical implications of such a form that thrives, mostly by re-processing dramatic convention. 'Postdrama' is here used to critique how stand-up's demotic strategies reconfigure material from the performance canon, and is proposed as the agency and praxis that can be woven to account for the especial performance condition of Nigerian stand-up comedy. The critique will be inhabited under these especial discourses: the political economy of dramaturgy in Nigeria, the reality of multimedia interface, and the conceptual implication of the 'post' in postdrama.

Introduction

The present study is an attempt to understand the especial performance strategies of Nigerian stand-up comedy using premises drawn from

dramaturgy such as scenic accompaniments, performer-audience interaction, costume and make-up, the enacted material and delineation of character and role. It construes Nigerian stand-up comedy as performance conditioned by the necessity to circumvent the traditional requirements of drama and theatre, and how such a necessity birthed performative innovations that embody and foreground the incorporation of an array of techniques and tactics alien to 'standard' drama. The focus of the study is to critique the performance style of stand-up comedy routines as social documents, whose communicative agency are rooted in a praxis that protest the limitations of dramatic convention, and evinces itself in its reactive pattern, as the latest development in the contemporary evolution of Nigerian drama. 'Postdrama' is here prefigured as the critical progressive descendant of drama's performative limitations, and as the agency and praxis that accounts for how Nigerian stand-up comedy inevitably has to re-work standard elements of performance to remain relevant in the dramatic polity.

Nigerian Theatre and the Agency of Stand-Up Comedy: Peak, Decline and Renaissance.

Hubert Ogunde's arrival in Ebute Metta, Lagos, as the organist and composer for The Church of the Lord, determined the course of Yoruba and most implicatively, Nigerian travelling theatre for over three decades from the mid-1940s onwards. This church was less fundamentalist in approach, and this reduced strictness aided Ogunde's innovativeness to re-work the "Native Air Opera" with a sprinkling of Yoruba music and dances. His first two productions in 1944 in aid of the church building fund, *The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God*, and then *Worse than Crime*, (a story on the slave trade) were warmly received. Buoyed by the success of the productions, and sensing the commercial viability, Ogunde would resign from the Police after eight years in service, and with £9 in savings, turn professional and inaugurate The African Music Research Party in March 1946, marking the advent of modern professional theatre in Nigeria. His theatre company made its week-long debut tour in the South-West in August 1946, joining the only travelling theatre at the time –the masked performers of the Alarinjo traditional theatre. Ogunde's tour meant he was the first modern professional counterpart of the Alarinjo; and his tours, were borne more out of the necessity to meet

public demand, or more out of the suggestion of the supporting public, than his own proposition (Clark, 1981, pp. 295-8; Ogunbiyi, 1981, pp. 22-3). Public patronage of theatre performances at the time was this vibrant and encouraging.

The 1960s to '80s witnessed the establishment of Theatre Arts Departments in many Nigerian Universities, with University Performing Companies instituted at the Universities of Ibadan, Calabar, Ilorin, Ife and Benin; as well as Arts Councils in many states of the country. This facilitated great heights for theatre in Nigeria (Ayakoroma 2013). But theatre in Nigeria, like its modern African counterparts that began and developed as live theatre, would begin to suffer a serious decline, especially from the early 1970s (Ebo, 2012, pp. 168-71). This decline either coincided with, or was precipitated by the aftermaths of Ogunde's active era, the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), and the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) hosted by Nigeria in 1977 (Ogunbiyi, 1981, pp. 22, 32; Olusola, 1981, p. 379). This decline was caused by the paucity of modern theatre studios, the cost of stage productions, the proliferation of mass media technology and poor government funding. The economic recession in the country in the early 1980s, in the aftermath of the Oil Boom – arguably crystallized by the introduction of the 1986 Structural Adjustment Programme by the Ibrahim Babangida government – was particularly inimical to the theatre industry. Prior to this economic hardship, the country's Oil Boom had encouraged a whole theatrical industry as the Yoruba travelling troupes, to flourish, along with its professional organization, fixed tour circuits, audience networks, and financial mechanisms. Theatre-going that had become a feature of daily life especially in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Oshogbo, began to experience a sorry decline, and still evident even today. Although many performers and directors have indeed migrated from theatre to the flourishing Home-video industry, communities of theatre practitioners continue to stage live 'neotraditional' performances. Today, they are persisting in the theatre, practicing in universities, regional cultural centers, and foreign cultural institutes. This category of practitioners are managing to survive and retain public interest in the theatre, under ever more precarious circumstances, apparently affecting both the quality of the productions and the morale of those staging them (Müller, 2005, pp. 176-77, 192).

Today, it begs to be asked: how feasible is it to produce drama in the standard theatrical form of stage acting, in a way that is commercially viable and economically sustainable? What is the guarantee that theatre today, produced as stage drama, made possible by a cast and full logistic accompaniments like sets, props, costume, make-up, lighting, and the likes, can bring in fiscal return worth the effort and investment? Is present-day Nigeria a fertile ground for staged dramatic endeavour; especially in the way it demands a budget, hired cast, rehearsals, and the hardware encumbrances of costume, make-up, sets, props, lighting, a script, a performance arena (probably rented), pre-event publicity, etc?

Drama and theatre in today's Nigeria, in reaction to these realities, appear to have been conditioned by factors that crystallize its predicament. First, is the impracticability of staged performances to be commercially viable in the present economic dispensation; and secondly, the dissolution of the period of vibrant travelling theatres and University theatre troupes. Third, is the change in audience tastes: a younger and more upwardly mobile audience is fast replacing the older generation, and the implication this has on drama is evidenced in a shift away from ideology-laden scripted drama designed for curriculum, to drama that prioritizes entertainment for the masses and may only harbour ideological activism underneath. Vaudeville-style shows have become hugely popular as a result. Fourth is the advent of electronic technology, and how its proliferation exploded access to television, radio, and the internet; with the implication that performance could be widely disseminated and consumed through these media, and most notably with a virtual audience not needing to be bodily present at the performance arena. This socio-cultural turn meant that postmodern forces of Industry and Capital ramped up formerly unruffled cultural mores into pecuniary schemes (Barber, 2007, pp. 219-24). It also meant that the democracy and mass participation of popular culture crumpled "the old upper-class monopoly of culture", as the "cultural demands of the newly awakened masses" became commoditized by electronic technology (MacDonald, 1957, p. 59).

As appalling as the decline of the theatre profession was, especially as exacerbated by the aforementioned factors, it would find in stand-up comedy a refreshing circumvention of these impediments. Over a hundred Ogunde-inspired travelling theatre troupes had endeared

themselves to the populace by performances of mass-culture repertoires in local language and operatic modes blending speech and music (Jeyifo 1984). Theatre, a potent form of social critique, vibrant medium of cultural exhibition, and vehicle for individual re-orientation (Sofola, 1994, pp. 2-5), was fast losing its stimulating quality in Nigeria. This was until the budding stand-up 'theatre' hugely compensated for its decline, auditioning for its role of social annotation, and like theatre, applying histrionics, music and dance as adjunct arts (Onyerionwu 2010). This theatrical incarnation would defy the odds to emerge as a hugely popular form of entertainment in Nigeria (Ayakoroma 2013).

Stand-up comedy is "the presentation of an intentionally comedic performance by a lone performer on a stage in front of an audience" (Rao, 2011, p. 3). However, the form is tough to comprehensively define, because it absorbs many elements from other performance genres – solo, small-groups, verbal, musical, or physical clowning, direct joke telling and social commentary (Říčný, 2014, p. 12). Stand-up comedy shares close performance ties with acting, oratory and even music. It is distinct because of its performance venue, conversational nature, and the intent of the comic which is primarily to induce laughter, while challenging an audience's social beliefs and ideas, without necessarily being preachy. The comic's speech may include lots of anecdotal deviations, and the routine is always performed with an eye to gauge the reaction of the audience to the content (Manwell, 2008, pp. 14, 18-19, 23).

According to Double (2014), "other than being funny", stand-up comedy must satisfy three statutory conditions to be so described (19). Double mentions "personality", where a certain persona is assumed and maintained in performance; "direct communication", in the sense of a lively interactional rapport of between performer and audience; and "present tense", where the performance is situated in the "in the here and now" and in the course of it, the comic may "incorporate events in the venue into the act" (19). The comic generates material from social observation, which are regurgitated as jokes and externalized as routines; and to highlight the art as a site for the excretion of psychosomatic heat, the comic is usually isolated on stage (Lee 2012, Limon 2012). In the search for resources, comics are "more open to experiences" than the average population, and the stand-up art thrives by demonstrating "a fresh and innovative look at things around us and staying in tune with

popular culture events that interest their audience" (Greengross and Miller, 2009, p. 82). The humour in stand-up comedy is sourced from social observation, "presented as the thoughts, experiences, attitudes, and unique perspectives of the comedian" – and this renders the form, a performance of the "comically-biographied-self" (Naessens, 2018, p. 61).

Stand-up comedy typically involves a bodily present performer performing routines of jokes in front of an equally bodily present audience, where the comic adopts the standing position when performing. Stand-up comedy in the country evolved and maintained its popularity because its performance strategies permitted the participation of a large swathe of demotic creative energies founded on the undemanding prerequisites for inclusion. Comics unaccompanied, could enact 'dramas' that told a story, without having to involve a cast for the roles in the story, without having to employ costumes and make-up to delineate those roles; without having to involve verisimilar props to aid action; without needing scenic details of scenery and sets as backdrop; and without even upholding the 'fourth wall' and the illusion of drama as separate from the real world. Stand-up comedy in the mould, would then appear to be performance, be drama, even employ music and dance, without the weight of the very logistic factors that forced Nigerian theatre's decline, and even usurping to its advantage, new realities like changing audience tastes in theatre and the advent of electronic technology. The very non-feasibility of staging profitable productions because of the encumbrances of cast and theatre's hardware materiality became the very springboard for stand-up comedy to evolve in Nigerian theatre history.

The wide reception of the stand-up art since the turn of the new millennium, and following the steady decline of conventional theatre, precludes a potential misrecognition of West Africa's budding theatre culture, and averts the erasure of a crucial field of quotidian creativity in the region. The ensuing merit is that majority of Nigerian audiences whose interest in 'drama' or 'theatre' are not informed by classist leaning or scholarly pursuit, but simply by the fulfilment of the demotic crave for spectacle, are not silenced. Nigerian stand-up comedy not only responded robustly by turning decline to invention, but it represents a heroic stick-out and renaissance for other forms of dramatic orientations that had been in the margins in the heydays of conventional theatre in the

country – forms that did not satisfy the 'standard' requirements of what the Alarinjo, Ogunde (and professional troupes he inspired), University Performing Companies and states' Arts Councils, impressed upon the freshly postcolonial Nigerian audience as 'drama'.

As stand-up comedy became a national preoccupation in Nigeria, the havens of theatre arts began to shift from the dour orthodox, to hippy highbrow sites, alluring upwardly mobile and assorted audiences to venues like Federal Palace Hotel, Eko le Meridien and MUSON Centre, Lagos; This Day Dome, Sheraton Hotel, Transcorp Hilton, International Conference Centre, Abuja; and Polo Ground, Port-Harcourt. The audiences converged not for Ola Rotimi,Wole Soyinka or Femi Osofisan, but the total theatre promised in Bright Okpocha's *Basket Mouth Uncensored* and *Lord of the Ribs*, Ayo Makun's *AY Live*, Julius Agwu's *Crack Ya Ribs*, and Opa Williams' *Nite of a Thousand Laughs*. Aderibigbe's article, "Lucrative Nature of Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria" (2014) reveals that tickets for *AY Live* 2014 show for instance ranged from 6,000 naira for Regular, 25,000 naira for VIP, 500,000 naira, to a million naira for a front-row table of eight to ten.

Shows like these have been avidly acknowledged by public and social analysts alike (Ayakoroma 2013b), with trickles of their aesthetics managing to infiltrate established theatre, albeit watered-down (Rutter, 1997, pp. 99-102). The individual art of stand-up would begin its ascent over the cast-form collective of conventional Theatre, and this was possible because of the relative logistical ease and better investment-to-box office return ratio, which the stand-up comedy industry offered. But even audiences of such a theatre, certain of its artistic integrity, often lack the critical apparatus to articulate an acuity of the form in a wholly positive delineation, hence there is the penchant to see stand-up in hierarchical terms, as though engaging, but unworthy of the cultural duty inherent in 'proper' drama. Stand-up seems to be defining itself against the notion of proper drama.

In effect, the present study aims at critiquing stand-up 'drama' in a way that would certify it as a worthy comic genre of its own. There appears to be a steady drift of city entertainment lovers to the visual and performance arenas in Nigeria – a drift to live performance and entertainment once catered for by conventional theatre. This drift now gives primacy to variety shows over theatrical productions of canonical

plays, signifying that the mode of live entertainment and its consumption is changing, and entertainment producers are tuning their art to meet those changes. The obligation for this study thus, in the face of this, is to locate within Nigerian stand-up comedy the potential for theatrical development and socio-cultural appraisal, especially in the way it recalibrates for dramatic performance a new dimension, and prefigures for the business of theatre as a capitalist venture, a future hinged to the interstices of populist vitality.

Stand-Up Comedy Performance and the Dimension of 'Postdrama'

It would be interesting to see how stand-up comedy's re-processing of Drama's protocols – full character delineation, dialogue, action woven around a theme and providing spectacle, and plot of a certain magnitude – aggregate to define stand-up comedy as a genre either of drama or of performance. The concept of 'post-drama' is useful in organizing stand-up in these terms.

It is necessary to introduce the phenomenon that informs the concept of Postdrama, which is Drama. Drama is action rendered in text; for it was originally conceived as "poetry written in verse to be performed by actors in a space designed primarily for viewing" (Berton, 2010, p. 12). Drama occurs "when the text is materialized in an acting space and becomes a play in front of an audience" (Berton, 2010, p. 12). Drama, in conventional terms, is predicated on cosmetic performance as sequel to Text. Unlike comedy as pure drama, stand-up comedy is relatively non-theatrical, devoid of details of sizeable length, surprise, incongruity, conflict, sudden reversals, comprehensively delineated characters, and the encumbrance of logistics – costume, props, sets, lighting (Gilbert, 2004, pp. 56, 190; Ayakoroma 2013b). Stand-up's priority is laughter shared by a participatory audience (Limon, 2000, pp. 12-3), and presented as a purposive verbal and non-verbal cosmetic action (Mahadev, 1983, pp. 188-92), with audience interaction as a unique ethnographic tactic to affirm satire (Borns, 1987, p. 29).

The mid-20th century has witnessed the emergence and then dominance of electronic technology; the growing deficiency of drama to depict present-day social tensions; a capitalist economy that cannot find in theatre, viable commercial potential (Bicknell, 2011, pp. 4-6); and an industrial order that has converted tangible cultural information to the

insubstantiality of disc and bytes (p. 9). This dominant new media began to affect the typical text-to-stage transfer that defined dramatic theatre. The consequence has been a studied departure from Drama's habitual norms, noticeable as a challenge between admitting or resisting the modern media and the competition it brings, and as propositions that Theatre shed its "static form in the wake of contemporary media" for more radical mimetic designs (Bicknell, 2011, p. 9). Bertolt Brecht's Epic theatre mirrors this anti-Aristotelian form: transcending fictionality for the conveyance of socio-historically exacting instances; interrogating drama's interior processes for social change (Bicknell, 2011, pp. 21-2); and isolating the elements of performance to posit that theatrical message is stronger if its elements are not unified but alienated to independently imply their own message (Brockett and Ball, 2004, pp. 186-87). His grouse with 20th century dramatic theatre was its incapacity "to develop a critical spectator" immune to cathartic capitulation (Berton, 2010, p. 16). Hence, Brecht's technique reminded the spectator that the play was at most, a symbol of reality. By stressing Theatre's artifice, Brecht (2001 [1964]) averred that the audience's reality was also illusory and thus mutable (p. 122). This kind of theatre that replaced drama as the model theatrical form in the postmodern era whets consumerist tastes of media-fed image-saturation; relegates drama to a "residual element" in the panorama of a total theatre devoid of "hierarchical distribution" of its elements (Berton, 2010, p. 46); and scorns the fetishism of Text for the performance underneath (Artaud, 1958, p. 78), was called "postdramatic" by German theatre researcher, Hans-Thies Lehmann.

Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006 [1999]) explicated this avant-garde form as that which is "no longer dramatic" (p. 17); a "Theatre without drama" (p. 30), where the mesh of character, plot, setting and fictionality is ruptured, even relinquished (p. 30-1), to produce a performance collage of text, image, sound and movement; its evocative fragments echoing numerous situations, feelings and states. Karen Jürs-Munby's Introduction to Lehmann's book, gives a clear explanation of postdramatic theatre:

> […] the 'post' in postdramatic is prone to similar misunderstandings as the 'post' in postmodernism […] 'post' here is to be understood neither as an epochal

> category, nor simply as a chronological 'after' drama, a 'forgetting' of the dramatic 'past', but rather as a rupture and a beyond that continue to entertain relationships with drama and are in many ways an analysis and 'anamnesis' of drama. To call theatre 'postdramatic' involves subjecting the traditional relationship of theatre to drama to deconstruction and takes account of the numerous ways in which this relationship has been refigured in contemporary practice […] (p. 2).

Lehmann continues the discourse of the postdramatic, carving a definition of the term, from the implication of its prefix:

> The adjective 'postdramatic' denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time 'after' the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre. What it does not mean is an abstract negation and mere looking away from the tradition of drama. 'After' drama means that it lives on as a structure – however weakened and exhausted – of the 'normal' theatre […] Even in the term 'postmodern', wherever it is used in more than a token sense, the prefix 'post' indicates that a culture or artistic practice has stepped out of the previously unquestioned horizon of modernity but still exists with some kind of reference to it. This may be a relation of negation, declaration of war, liberation, or perhaps only a deviation and playful exploration of what is possible beyond this horizon. […] Postdramatic theatre thus includes the presence or resumption or continued working of older aesthetics, including those that took leave of the dramatic idea in earlier times, be it on the level of text or theatre (p. 27).

Jürs-Munby and Lehmann have made clear in these expositions that postdramatic theatre does not imply a breakaway from drama. Rather, it is a critique of the limitations of drama, and thus a deconstruction of the innards of the form (p. 44). Postdrama associates with drama by expressing itself, beyond the traditional restrictions of set, scenery, props,

acoustics, lighting, plot and verisimilitude. The concept of postdrama also takes into cognizance the intentional usage of technical aid in play productions, and how present-day technology determines cosmetic portrayals of reality, and their dissemination to the larger society. Lehmann does well to play on the elaborateness that has come to be associated with 'multimedia':

> The impact of media on performance manifests itself not only in the use of high-tech 'multimedia' onstage, however, but sometimes also in its very opposite: theatre on a bare stage with minimalist, pared down aesthetics, which nevertheless can only be understood by being related to life in a 'mediatized' society (p. 10) […] Such postdramatic theatre has thus not given up on relating to the world but crucially no longer *represents* the world as a surveyable whole: 'Here, "world" does not mean the walled-off (by a fourth wall) fictional totality, but a world open to its audience, an essentially possible world, pregnant with potentiality.' Another example of such open theatre which turns the audience into an active participant […] (p. 12; original emphasis).

Postdrama, like drama, employs technical support in its productions; unlike drama however, postdrama de-emphasizes the support. This is postdramatic theatre's own way of using media to accentuate performance, before an audience that is used to seeing typical elaborate drama aided by multimedia. In other words, whether the multimedia supporting the performance is elaborate or "pared down", postdrama, like drama, engages 'media', but the fact that this media is not always 'multi', means that postdramatic theatre cannot holistically portray reality. This capacity belongs to the realm of the dramatic. However, postdrama compensates for it by encouraging the very society it cannot fully portray to partake in the "pared down" performance, probably to complete what is lacking in the portrayal, themselves.

The postdramatic stance is tenable when Text and Performance are seen as autonomous; negating the automatic unity of stage and text for their separation and free combination (p. 59), with visual dramaturge, hyped over the textual (p. 93). When Lehmann avers that postdramatic

theatre seeks to equate reality with fictionality in a self-reflective thematization, he follows it up, that the postdramatic idea of performance occurs as a three-fold structural split between presence and its representation; mimesis and its performativity; and represented reality versus the process of this representation (p. 103).

The stand-up comic mirrors this in his act by evincing a disparity between his person and the persona adopted in mimicry. When mimicking, he elucidates in speech, the object of mimicry and the very mimicking act itself, then returns to mimicking, and then back to his person, where he rounds off with a laughter-provoking punch-line. Such dispersal of subjectivity, aided by the new media, upsets in the performer the illusion of self-hood, only making identity decipherable for the audience, not by what the performer's body is, but what it does (Lepage, 2008, pp. 138-40, 142).

This joke performed by Ayo Makun alias AY at a *Nite of a Thousand Laughs* show which held in Abuja in 2008 elucidates postdrama's discourse of "pared down aesthetics", of on-and-off switching to person and persona, and of the performer's identity made recognizable not by what the body is but what it does:

TRANSCRIPTION (PIDGIN)	TRANSLATION (ENGLISH)
In those days musicians don sing for Nigeria […] but those people no make money like the people wey dey sing now […] But the things wey dis people dey sing now na rubbish. What is the meaning of 'O fọ ka si bẹ'? What is the meaning of 'eh!' 'eh!' 'eh!'? Full album don ready with 'eh!'? In those days musicians dey sing […] they get message. Some of dem go sing – they get their own dance wey they dey take follow their song. E.g. somebody like Ras Kimono	Back in the days musicians sang in Nigeria […] but those people did not make money like the people singing now […] But the things these people sing now are rubbish. What is the meaning of 'O fọ ka si bẹ'? What is the meaning of 'eh!' 'eh!' 'eh!'? An entire album becomes ready with 'eh!'? Back in the days musicians actually sing […] they have a message. Some of them will sing – they have their own dance with which they follow their song. E.g. somebody like Ras Kimono back in the days – how

in those days – how many of una remember? You go see something like this. Him go just come out.

many of you remember? You will see something like this. He would just come out

[Music plays. AY Dances in mimicry of Ras Kimono.]

Alright, cut am. […] Una remember? In those days na who sing love song reach Chris Okotie? […] Only say God know wetin wan happen for future na im e quickly call am […] Chris Okotie go come out […] you go see something like this […]

Alright, cut. […] You people remember? Back in the days, was there a better singer of love songs than Chris Okotie? […] Only that God knew what was about to happen in the future, hence He quickly called him […] Chris Okotie will come out […] you would see something like this […]

[Music plays. AY dances in mimicry of Chris Okotie, trying to exude the facial and bodily agony of the lyrics of the love song, as well as lip-synching to the song.]

Cut am! You go just see one guy just wake up in the morning. He no gree do any work for house […] come meet Nigerians with im music. All of us rush go dey buy. E complain give us; we go dey buy. E just come out in the morning, see wetin e do.

Cut! You will see a guy just awoken in the morning. He refuses to do any domestic chores […] comes to Nigerians with his music. We all rushed to buy. He complained to us; we patronized. He just came out in the morning, see what he did.

[Sits on a loudspeaker; his right cheek buried in his right palm. Puts on a mien that portrays him as being in full thinking or self-pity mode. The instrumental sound to J. Martins' song, "Good or Bad" plays. AY cries melodramatically.]

[Sings the lyrics:] Ew! Ew! Oh-weh! Eh-eh! Oh-weh! Eh-eh! Which kind life be dis eh-eh-eh-eh-eh-eh! Chai! *[Then queries:]* We be fowl? We be fowl? Then Timaya, Timaya; we feel say na dat one go help us solve the matter. E just come from nowhere too. *[Sings again:]* Na me be your toyon toyon *[interjects the lyrics with deliberate blabber, after which he continues:]* toyon toyon. Abuja, what is toyon toyon?! What is toyon toyon?!

[Sings the lyrics:] Ew! Ew! Oh-weh! Eh-eh! Oh-weh! Eh-eh! What kind of a life is this eh-eh-eh-eh-eh-eh! Chai! *[Then queries:]* Are we fowls? Are we fowls? Then Timaya, Timaya; we felt, here comes the one that will help us solve the matter. He just appears from nowhere too. *[Sings again:]* I am your toyon toyon *[interjects the lyrics with deliberate blabber, after which he continues:]* toyon toyon. Abuja, what is toyon toyon?! What is toyon toyon?!

How is this stand-up routine postdramatic? Firstly: AY mimics Ras Kimono, a reggae artist; Chris Okotie, a hip-hop artiste of yonder years; and another artiste of the present generation without needing to switch costumes into the subject of mimicry. He remains in the same attire as he performs jokes prior to the rendition of the routine above, imitating other subjects; and yet begins this joke to imitate subject after subject without needing a costume change. When he gets to the part where he wants to do a burlesque of J. Martins' song, he identifies a readily available prop, a loudspeaker, and immediately converts it to seat. The de-emphasis of costume and props to become Ras Kimono, Chris Okotie, J. Martins or Timaya, represents postdrama's "pared down aesthetics" and minimalist stage accompaniments

Secondly: it can be observed that to aid his mimicry of different artistes, AY has the disc jockey on cue to play out the song or sound of the particular artiste he is about to mimic, and after doing so and getting the audience to appreciate his effort, he gives the order to "cut". The comic gives background information to the performance, then he points out a reference or an example, mimics that subject, gives the cue to be aided in this mimicry by multimedia, stops the mimicry and relays his critique to the audience, then points to another reference to re-start the

cycle. Conventional drama might imitate reality, but it does so by trying so well to resemble reality and keep the audience in a whirl of an outside world unfolding before them, as they witness it from the figurative fallen fourth wall. But AY mimics, lets the audience know he wants to mimic, goes back and forth mimicry and direct address, intermittently dropping punch-lines to punctuate and divide his routine. While drama absorbs Character, Spectacle and Song as part of it, as Aristotle prescribes; AY keeps Ras Kimono, Chris Okotie, J. Martins and Timaya as personas exterior to his person, highlights the disparity between the spectacle of their acts and his person, and makes sure the audience knows his person is distinct from the songs performed or danced to. This intentional exposure of the cosmetic innards of drama, this performativity of Performance itself, this problematization of self-hood, this dispersal of subjectivity aided by the new media, is postdrama.

Thirdly: the switching on and off of multiple personalities, where the real self of the performer is still made to appear in-between, creates a new rule for how to regard the comic's being on stage. As the illusion of self-hood is undone, AY's identity and his being becomes decipherable for the audience, not by who he is (which is AY), but what he does (at which point he becomes Ras Kimono, Chris Okotie, J. Martins or Timaya). Drama makes an actor keep acting till the performance is up, or at least, till the stage lights go out. Postdrama frees the actor to act, switch back to self, explain the acted, act again, choose to act another reality, and then back to self to critique the totality of the acted.

Fourthly: traditionally, drama as it has come to be known, especially in the academic circles, has to have a script, a written entity that is either the rallying point of the stage action, or the point of reference to work out the action. But this joke by AY could not have come with an *a priori* script. If it did, we have not been made privy to it. We only saw the performance, and had to create a script from what was performed. AY's routine seemed to exist in spontaneity and planned cues, rather than an alphabetic blueprint. Stand-up is postdramatic in the way it blurs boundaries of personhood and experience in playful self-reflexivity; dismisses psychological constancy and steadiness for fragmented and restless identities; and dethrones *Text* as the corpora of cultural data, for the density of demotic life.

The compensatory function of drama is to supplement the chaos of reality with structural order. Postdrama embraces and valorizes this chaos, and this is evident in the way it de-emphasizes structural order. The study thus considers stand-up's minimalist mimicry and confederated climaxes (Limon, 2000, p. 9), as well as its discursive rhetoric and especial mandate of cathartic evocation, as significant tools, with which to interrogate the form's peculiar dramatic norms, critique its re-configuration of material from the canon, and to gauge the import of its re-negotiation of drama's habitual norms. 'Postdrama' aims at capturing stand-up comedy's needlessness of traditional dramatic magnitude and the compulsory achievement of collective audience reaction, if not participation, by laughter. Rutter's (1997) critique of stand-up comedy's minimalism, as a trope for an avant-garde order is valuable for the postdrama concept:

> […] the setup of stand-up performance areas is much more static than that of the theatre. It does not change from performance to performance instead each performer brings their act onto the same stage rather than recreating the staging space to meet their own needs. There are no changes of scenery, backdrops, or opening and closing of proscenium arch curtains. This means also that there is no pre-performance spectacle to observe before stand-up comedy as an audience waiting for a gig to start is not faced with anything more or different than the usual open stage (pp. 73-4). […] stand-up utilises a sameness from venue to venue, from performance to performance […] this works towards creating a non-confrontational atmosphere, a situation which does not seek to challenge, de-centre or disturb its audience but put it at ease and encourage social interaction (p. 81).

Postdramatic theatre, despite being unconventional is theatre nonetheless (Silva, 2013, p. 42). The term conveys and legitimizes stand-up's demotic strategies and performance status, needless of, and existing before scripting. Postdrama, as regards the stand-up art, does not denote avant-gardism or a conscious anti-tradition. Such an appendage will make stand-up appear as a grandiose intellectual manifesto to re-define

dramaturgy. Instead, Postdrama's 'post' arises from the need to christen a form that pays little respect to drama's norms. The postdramatic condition arose out of the comic's instant need to make people laugh as promptly and as often as possible; thus drama's etiquettes needed to be shed for a fluency of the act. Yet, despite the shedding, postdramatic stand-up retains a regard for drama's provisos: imitation, the larger-than-life factor, catharsis, performance space, speech and action, an audience, and their sacrifice of believability to extents where the comic's imagery intersect with their anxieties. Postdrama, then is not a negation of drama, but a re-constitution of its basics to inhabit the reality of, and need for uninhibited cultural expressiveness. It conceptualizes how we recognize drama in its most current form, and opens a vista to absorb stand-up's turbulence, improvisation, and complex affair of text and performance. The 'post' in Postdrama does not imply chronology or phenomenological aftermath. The absence of a separating hyphen is a deliberate oversight to foil such overtone. The 'post' in Postdrama here, calibrates the place of drama within the ambit of stand-up comedy's unconventionality, and its employment of the same technology that has altered the mode of the generation and processing of cultural information.

Conclusion

Postdrama locates for drama's conventions, an agency to foreground the basis on which stand-up comedy can entrench itself as a credible performance subgenre that attempts to account for how the contemporariness of the form cannot be captured by the traditional qualification of 'drama'. It negotiates how stand-up comedy, in spite of its minimalism, multimedia application and irregular cathartic evocation, is also 'drama'. The study has critiqued Nigerian stand-up comedy as a sub-genre of drama, by seeking out performance strategies that the popular art form has been adopting to entrench itself as a dramatic art and praxis. Also, it is hoped the study has identified stand-up comedy as the latest mutation in the evolution of 21st century Nigerian dramatic performance by taking into account the postdramatic developments of the mediatized society which are obviously still hard to categorize, and giving them their long-overdue cultural and intellectual legitimacy.

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