

# PSYCHOANALYSIS AND STAND-UP COMEDY IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL SURVEY OF THE WORKS OF GANDOKI

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## **Abstract**

*The study attempts a psycho-analytical appraisal of the comic art of Gandoki, one of Nigeria's top flight stand-up comics. Using Gandoki's jokes as paradigm, the study asserts that such social deviations among Nigerians as street fights, indecent dress codes, drug abuse, uncontrollable temperament, vituperative and cantankerous verbal exchange, indiscipline, immoral dispositions and other awkward social behaviours are manifestations of mental stress, anxieties and despair occasioned by harsh economic realities. The study is literary in methodology and qualitative in approach. The data analysed have been drawn from the life performances of Gandoki in selected comedy concerts as recorded in Video Compact Discs (VCDs) and Digital Video Discs (DVDs). The major finding of the study is that consistent economic depression is largely responsible for the various manifestations of psychological trauma amongst Nigerians. The study also deduces that stand-up comedy goes beyond making people laugh, to also ridicule the social anomalies in human society with the aim of occasioning social change. It is for the foregoing that the study, amongst others, advocates the inclusion and integration of stand-up comedy into mainstream tertiary education in Nigeria not just as a course but as an area of specialization. The need for the formation of a formidable comedians' guild in Nigeria is also canvassed.*

**Keywords:** *Stand-up Comedy, Psychoanalysis, Depression and Insensitive Leadership*

## **Introduction**

The emergence of stand-up comedy as popular culture serves as the springboard for the renaissance of the live theatre culture in Nigeria. History has it that the live theatre tradition which reached its zenith in patronage during the experiments of Hubert Ogunde and the Yoruba travelling theatre groups in the middle eighteenth century down to the early nineteenth century witnessed a decline towards the end of the twentieth century following the rise of the video film industry. Today the live theatre industry in Nigeria is experiencing a major reawakening in the form of stand-up comedy. At the moment, stand-up comedy features prominently in most social events in Nigeria including religious programmes such as crusades, revivals, retreats and camp meetings. This overwhelming patronage has, in turn, spurred the stand-up comics into creating comedy variety concerts and brands for themselves.

At the level of form and content, Nigerian stand-up comics differ markedly based on their creative inspiration and areas of artistic strength. For instance, Klint D'Drunk characterizes a drunk who goes about fabricating words and vocabularies that negate the rules of morphology in English; I Go Dye uses a brand of pidgin known as 'Warri Pidgin' to portray the various survival strategies adopted by Nigerians in their daily struggle for livelihood; Ali Baba satirizes the leadership class in Nigeria for failing in their responsibilities to deliver effective welfare services to the masses; Julius Agwu uses automatism and 'musicomedy' to ridicule the pretentious social life style that has characterized Nigerian youths in their clamour to carve out a social class for themselves; Aboki 4 Christ and MC Acapella use biblical passages and allusions to

create jokes targeted at Christians in their preparation for salvation.

The emergence of stand-up comedy into mainstream popular entertainment in Nigeria has occasioned a major boost for theatrical activities in Nigeria. Far beyond delivering jokes, some creative and imaginative Nigerian comedians have inserted dramatic sketches into their comic performances in order to spice up their art as well as improve on the cumulative spectacle of the comedy concert. For instance, Ayo Makun (AY), one of Nigerians most entrepreneurial comedians, infuses dramatic sketches and skits into his *AY Live Comedy Concert* so as to create some form of comic aesthetics and collagism. Similarly, Julius Agwu infuses incongruous and mechanical dance steps into his performance in order to drive home the comic tempo of his *Crack Ya Ribs* comedy concert. The point to note here is that stand-up comedy is a form of paradigm shift in theatre practice.

However, our reference to psycho-analysis in this paper stems from the fact that a reasonable number of Nigerians live in penury as a result of incessant economic depression. Characteristic of most developing nations, Nigeria's economy flounders between the dark and the deep as a result of lack of a clear-cut and effective economic policies and corruption within the leadership class. Thus, the masses are launched into one form of untold hardship or the other and in a bid therefore, to cope with the stress of living in harsh economic conditions, most Nigerians exhibit mannerisms and behavioural dispositions suggestive of psychological trauma. Often times, the psychological trauma manifests by way of daydreaming, fantasy, hysteria, melancholy, dementia, amnesia, non sequitur dialogue, vituperation, uncontrollable temperament and emotions and so on. It is for the foregoing that the paper takes a cursory examination of the psychoanalytical import of

Gandoki's comic craft in order to underscore the position that stand-up comedy, like any other theatrical mode, performs the tripartite functions of entertainment, enlightenment and education.

### **The Comic Spirit: A Conceptual Overview**

Scholarly opinions across the ages reveal that the comic spirit is primarily concerned with man as a social being rather than as an isolated individual and that the fundamental purpose of comedy is to correct man's social excesses. The comic spirit flourishes largely on the premise that man, as a social being, is surrounded with series of contradictions in his attempts to conform to the canons dictated by society. The richest comedy manifests therefore when man threads the ridiculous, ludicrous and incongruous paths. Such theatre historians as Pickering and Brockett affirm that the primitive revels out of which comedy arose is in tandem with man's full acknowledgement of his animalistic dispositions as characterized by disharmony and incongruity. Wright notes that the very heart of comedy lies in man's recognition of how far his fellow man has fallen from the ideal. For Wright, comedy is often measured by the sharpness of our perception in recognizing those differences between what man is and what he pretends to be. "Comedy is the sworn enemy of hypocrisy and pretense...it is God's gift to disaffect the world of pomposity" (Wright, 49). He summarizes the basic characteristics of comedy to include, thus:

Treats its subjects in a lighter vein even though the subject may be a serious one; Provokes what can be defined as "thoughtful laughter "; Is both possible and probable; Grows out of character rather than situation; Is honest in its portrayal of life. (55)

For Sigmund Freud and his followers, comedy allows us to release tension and deal with the dangers and stresses in the

world. Esslin amplifies Freud's thesis on laughter in his book *An Anatomy of Drama* when he notes that:

Freud, another important writer on the nature of laughter, thought that laughter was caused by the relief of anxiety: what shakes us when we laugh is the nervous energy release when we realize that the misfortune we saw coming does not directly affect , that we are free from it's consequences. (72)

Freud's submission above is quite interesting and apt as it buttresses the thrust of the paper which is the use of stand-up comedy as a medium of entertainment to a generous number of Nigerians who toil on daily basis to guarantee livelihood.

For Seyler and Haggard, comedy is simply a point of view. It is a comment on life from outside, an observation on human nature. In their analogy, comedy:

...demands the co-operation of another mind on which this observation is to be made-the audience, and is in essence the same as recounting a good story over the dinning table-table. It must have direct contact with the person to whom it is addressed, be it one's friend over the port or one's friends in the stalls and pit (Seyler and Haggard, 9).

Establishing a direct contact with an audience in Seyler and Haggard's opinion refers to some kind of subtle psychological bond i.e. the subconscious acknowledgement that the intention of one's job as comedian is to point out some thing to an audience, and that the audience's reaction to this makes up an integral part of the comedian's job. Similarly, Altshuler

and Janaro view incongruity as the essence of the comic. For them, the basic function of all good comedies is to give us a fresh perspective by making us, at least saner, for the time being. Their position must have been informed by Bergson's analogy in his masterpiece, *Laughter* where he states that we always laugh at either the incongruous or the irrational. (Qtd. in Altshuler and Janaro, 2006). However, Altshuler and Janaro note that the laughter must not have to be a guffaw and that the value of the comic is to be measured not only by the volume of the laugh but by the extent to which the incongruity offered is believable (206).

Fundamentally, as one of the two basic dramatic genres, comedy translates in multiple genres which are often determined by the source of humour, the method of delivery and the context in which it is delivered. It is along this classification that stand-up comedy stands out not as a comic genre but as a comic mode of performance that accommodates the sub-genres of comedy.

### **Psycho-Analysis: A Theoretical Survey**

Within intellectual circles, there has been great concern to investigate into the true nature of man. This concern has occasioned series of arguments about the major components of self i.e the inner man that no one sees and the outer man that the world sees and knows. Such thinkers as Plato, August Strindberg, Andre Breton, Luigi Pirandello, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung have presented a variety of models of man's inner nature while some have assumed a supernatural element called a "spirit" or a "soul"; others have accepted that nothing is given beyond a biological and genetic heredity. For Morrish:

...models of man's self, or personality, amount ultimately to no more than current descriptions of

man's activity and function, the role he plays and the modification of his attitudes and behavior through socialization and education (179)

Morrish's position above clearly locates man as a social and political animal who is under consistent influence by the goings on in his society. Morrish's analogy also deviates largely from the philosophical or neurological or psycho-analytical problems of body-mind relationships as propagated by Sigmund Freud and his contemporaries. It is stating the obvious that Freud's theory of self was written from the point of view of the psycho-analyst that he was. However, his description of the nature of the self has clear social implications. In an attempt to organize the personality, Freud recognized three major elements namely; the Id, the Ego and the Super-Ego. The Id is concerned with pleasure as the sum-total of crude and unmodified instinctual needs while the Ego is controlled by the reality principle as the executive of the personality. The Ego is the product of an interaction with the external world, or the environment. Freud held that the general development of the Ego was also controlled by heredity and the process of maturation (Qtd. in Morrish, 186) In Freud's analogy the Super-Ego is:

...the moral element in the personality since it is concerned with the ideal. It represents the individual's moral code which is largely the internalization of parental authority, and then gradually of the other traditional and external values and ideals of his society...(Qtd. in Morrish,186)

It is pertinent to note that the Id, Ego and Super-Ego work together harmoniously in an individual who is adjudged mentally healthy but when there is an iota of imbalance in these elements, then an individual becomes ill. In his book titled

*Introduction to Psychology of Adjustment*, Kinee attempts a review of Freud's Psycho-Analytic Theory emphasizing that the libido is the fundamental drive that motivates the personality throughout life and that the Id is animalistic, irrational and amoral and that the content of the Id are almost entirely unconscious. (146) He adds that the Ego controls the impulses of the Id as well as respects the environmental demands of the Super-Ego while the Super-Ego restricts or judges conscious activity even as it acts unconsciously (146). In a bid to buttress the complimentary relationship that exists between the elements of personality, Kinee states that:

...each time the ego loses its struggle to reconcile the demands of the id, the Superego, and reality, a person experiences a state of psychic distress called anxiety. In order to reduce anxiety, the ego adopts a mental strategy called defense mechanism to handle the situation...(147)

Whereas Kinee's analytical point of view of Freud's Theory of Personality offers some ray of defence mechanism, it does not claim to have found lasting or sure remedy for the body-mind problem that preoccupy the Psycho-Analytical Theory. Uzoeshi and Iwundu draw from Burns' critique of Freud's theory and argue, thus:

...all motivation springs from unconscious sources...all behavior is psychically determined, not simply fortuitous, for despite defence mechanisms and ego Control we are completely unaware of our real motives or the motives behind Our actual behavior...all behavior is goal directed: even neurotic symptoms, compulsions, and slips of the tongue are purposive (85)

In a recent study of Freud, Eagleton has posited that psychoanalysis is not only a theory of the human mind, but a

practice for curing those who are considered mentally ill or disturbed.(138) Eagleton adds that such cures, for Freud, are not achieved just by explaining to the patient what is wrong with him, revealing to him his unconscious motivations but through what he refers to as “transference”-a concept sometimes confused with what Freud calls “ projection” or the ascribing to others of feelings and wishes which are actually our own.(Eagleton, 138). The work of psychoanalysis can perhaps best be summarized in one of Freud’s own slogans: ‘Where id was, there shall ego be’ (Qtd. in Eagleton, 139). The deduction here is that where men and women were in the paralyzing grip of forces which they could not comprehend, there reason and self-mastery shall reign. Eagleton reveals further that Freud’s compassion for the ego is a compassion for the human race, labouring under the almost intolerable demands placed upon it by a civilization built upon the repression of desire and the derferment of gratification (140) In a more current study, Freud had argued that:

...if a society has not developed beyond a point at which the satisfaction of one group of its members depends upon the suppression of another, it is understandable that those suppressed should develop an intense hostility towards a culture whose existence their labour has made possible, but in whose riches they have too small a share...a civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence (Qtd. in Eagleton, 140)

It is pertinent to note at this juncture that psychoanalytical literary criticism can be broadly divided into four kinds, depending on what it takes as its object of intention namely; the author of the work, the work’s content, the work’s formal construction and the reader’s perception. Our major

interest in this study is on the content of the work i.e. commenting on the unconscious motivations of characters, or on the psychoanalytical significance of objects or events in the text. Freud draws a comparison between art and neurosis arguing that like the neurotic, the artist is oppressed by unusual powerful instinctual needs which lead him to turn away from reality to fantasy but that unlike other fantasists, the artist knows how to work over, shape and soften his own day-dreams in ways which make them acceptable to others (Qtd in Eagleton, 156). Shaka and Ihentuge inform that Freud's psychoanalytical discoveries grew out of a collaborative relationship with Joseph Breuer, a Viennese physician. According to them:

...Freud made a number of trenchant discoveries relating not only to the understanding of neurotic symptoms but also to the functioning (psychodynamics) of the human mind. Much of human behavior, he believes, are irrational, rooted in basic biological drives and such as sex and aggression, and governed by unconscious motives. He further argues that many forbidden childhood impulses are submerged(repressed) but remain in the unconscious only to resurface in dreams, neurotic symptoms, slips of the tongue and nervous mechanism... (179)

They also emphasize dream interpretation as one of the major contributions of Freud's psychoanalysis stating that he believes that feelings and instincts repressed by the individual during his conscious state return to him in form of dreams in his sleep when he no longer has control over his consciousness (180) However, Shaka and Ihentuge inform that in spite of the tremendous impact which Freud's psychoanalysis has made on contemporary psychology, it has never been fully accepted by many scholars even when its concepts and ideas have gained

popularity in literary/film theory and criticism. According to them, the reasons for this skeptical perception include the fact:

...some aspects of the theory are vague and difficult to test empirically...also Freudian psychoanalysis does not consist of a logically interrelated set of concepts and assumptions from which specific consequences can be predicted. For the same reason, it is difficult to make an overall evaluation of it. Freud himself has been criticized for his negative perceptions of the female folk as shown in the much cited case of one of Freud's patients, Dora.(180)

They go further to present Jacques Lacan as one of Freud's contemporaries that was influenced by Freud's psychoanalysis. They note, however, that Lacan's brand of psychoanalysis appears to be more ambiguous, abstract and vague than Freud's psychology.(181) Whereas Lacan like Freud agrees that the unconscious is the most important aspect of the person as well as the nucleus of our being, he opines that the unconscious should be interpreted through language. However, Drawing from Lacan's analogy, Shaka and Ihentuge note that:

Language here should not be thought of as a lexicon with each word pointing to a familiar object like a dictionary or a picture book. Rather, language (the signifier) points to something (a signified) that is not present-exactly what happens in real life when one feels an absence-a lack, a desire. The meaning of language is not derived from the interaction between words and things but between words and words, which goes to suggest that the meaning of a word is always deferred to the next word in a chain of association (182)

Our review so far has harped on the basic tenets of psychoanalysis which include; the elements of id, ego and

superego, libido, the conscious, preconscious, unconscious, anxiety, defence mechanism (transference/projection) and so on. It is against these elements that we would examine the jokes of Gandaki.

### **Stand-up Comedy: A Historical Overview**

History has it that stand-up comedy, as an art form, gained prominence as an enterprise since its practical manifestations in the minstrel shows of Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice during the 1800s in America. History also has it that the minstrel shows of the 1800s reflected America’s social history as it ridiculed and caricatured African- Americans thereby portraying the racism of the time (Bromley, 1). The institutionalization of stand- up comedy into the nucleus of popular entertainment culture in the United States, Europe and consequently, Nigeria, is credited to the proliferation of the vaudeville, stand-up comedy clubs, English Music Hall, minstrel shows, humourist monologues, comedy concerts, radio and television comedy programmes (*Saturday Night Live, The Tonight Show, Time Out With Tee A* and so on) and comedy variety shows organized by either foresighted entrepreneurs, corporate organizations or the comedians themselves.

In Nigeria, to be precise, standup comedy became a professional art with the legendary Moses Olaiya in his solo performances and multiplicity of farcical characterization. In his article titled “Stand-up Comedy as Popular Art and Theatrical Entertainment in Nigeria”, Fosudo informs that the comic theatrical wealth of Moses Olaiya(Baba Sala) in the late 1950s gave rise to the multiplicity of drama groups in Nigeria (7) Bamidele corroborates Fosudo’s account when he notes that:

Olaiya’s...movement from reality to fantasy is a ready source of comedy even in ordinary life which a comedian like him makes

use of. As usual with all comic dramatists, he arranges a situation in which the two views, reality and fantasy, clash and amuse by abruptness of the contrast. Baba Sala is the characteristic paradox of the comic fool, the cheat and the rogue. He sometimes appears as the stupid wiseman, the self conceited coward who challenges the thunder and docks at the next minute, the assertive husband who is flawed by his wife, he is the charlatan who wants to outwit his opponent and finally he is outwitted. (55-56)

Olaiya's professional disposition towards solo comic performance would give rise to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century standup comedy which is largely entrepreneurial and commercialized.

Interestingly, the latest sensation of standup comedy came into prominence as popular culture in Nigeria in 1995 through the box office explosion of Opa William's *Nite of a Thousand Laughs*. Opa Williams recounts his pioneering experience thus:

When we started *Nite of a Thousand Laughs* in 1995, we were the only comedy show, we were real, and Nigerians witnessed something fresh and unique. Jokes were original and audience actually laughed a 'thousand' times. Consequently, the show produced superstar comedians who got their first break on the stage of *Nite of A Thousand Laughs*. These comedians went ahead to start their own shows. These shows became clones of *Nite of a Thousand Laughs*. (Nollywoodgossip..net)

In present times, Nigerian stand-up comedy shows have transcended the stage and auditoriums and flourished on Video

CDs, television and radio. Taking their cue largely from *Night of a Thousand Laughs*, most of the stand-up comedians have hosted comedy variety shows at different times all in a bid to maximize profit as well as guarantee audience satisfaction. Such shows include Julius Agwu's *Crack Ya Ribs*, Basorge Tariah's *Unleash de Comedy*, Holy Mallam's *Holy Laughter*, Basket Mouth's *Basket Mouth*

*Reloaded* and *BasketMouth's Uncensored Okey Bakassi's Laughter Fiesta*, Ayo Makun's *AY Live*, Gordon's *Comedy Klinik*, Dan D' Humorous' *One Man Show* and *The King and I* etc.

### **Gandoki: Bio-data Statement**

Gandoki is one of Nigeria's outstanding stand-up comic whose fame spans from the glorious beginning of stand-up comedy as an enterprise in Nigeria. He was born into an Ijaw family in Bayelsa State of Nigeria and had his early childhood and youth upbringing in Warri, Delta State where his unique comic language (Warri Pidgin) was developed. Gandoki's penchant for stand-up comedy dates back to his days of teenage experiments as the manager of a road side barbing salon with steady patronage because of his ability to engage his customers with jokes that crack their ribs. His breakthrough into mainstream stand-up comedy in Nigeria is credited to the Opa William's *Night of a Thousand Laughs* comedy variety show of the early 1990s.

Today Gandoki's fame transcends the Nigerian entertainment circles as he travels overseas especially to the United Kingdom and the United States of America on regular basis to either anchor a social event or feature as a special guest artist. He is still a regular face in the Opa William's *Nite of a Thousand Laughs*. Gandoki has performed in the big stage in and outside the shores of Nigeria alongside household names like Ali Baba, Okey Bakassi, Julius Agwu, Gbenga Adeyinka, Basket

Mouth, A.Y., Gordons, Klint D'Drunk and so on. He also hosts a comedy variety show known as *Gandoki Live* and also stars as an actor in television comic skits, series and serials shown on both local and international channels.

### **Performance Dynamics of Gandoki**

Gandoki remains one of Nigeria's greatest stand-up comics in terms of originality in performance dynamics. His sense of characterization and language distinguish him from his contemporaries. Typical of most Warri comics, he adopts a special brand of pidgin English language known as 'Warri Pidgin' in the delivery of his jokes. This brand of pidgin English gives room for wrong pronunciation of words. For instance, Gandoki pronounces the word 'church' as 'shursh' as a result of the linguistic interference of his Urhobo mother tongue. He also adopts the vocabulary of the pidgin English by alternating common words in English language with uncommon expressions akin to "Warri Pidgin". For example, rather than report that 'he bought a car' he says 'motor don show'. Gandoki's language style is one of his comic assets and has made him a brand in the stand-up comedy industry in Nigeria. Little wonder, a generous number of Nigerian stand-up comics now adopt the 'Warri Pidgin' in their performances even when they don't have any bearing with the Warri environment.

In terms of characterization, Gandoki is dexterous at mimetic action. He reinforces his jokes with re-enactment of the actions of the persona in his jokes. Often times, he exaggerates the actions by distorting his face in a manner that suggests caricature. In one of his jokes, he tries to describe the depth of a girl's facial ugliness, in the process, he gropes for words and then he resorts to demonstrating the girl's facial structure by squeezing his face in a way that looks like a cartoon, thus throwing the audience into a round of boisterous laughter

(*Night of a Thousand Laughs*, Vol.1). In a bid to give his jokes some theatrical aliveness, he assumes the roles of the personae in his jokes, thus:

I get to understand say we the Nigerian youths, we are trying to survive, not like me, I don already arrive. Hehehe...A young man wey fit get where him dey sleep, no dey enter bus, e don try (laughs)...because when we start this comedy, our father, my father dey provoke. (*assumes the role of his father in his provocative tonality*) For what? I don't like this kind of thing! (*returns to his real self*)...But when him see say motor don show (laughs)...

Na him dey even call me...(mimicks his father again but this time in a soft tone)

My pikin come, e get one joke wey I see (laughs)  
(*Comedy in Excess*, Vol.1)

The joke above establishes Gandoki as a performing stand-up comic who embellishes his jokes with mimetic actions and also as a dynamic artist who lives in the part of many characters. His ability to switch from his original role as Gandoki, a comedian on stage to Gandoki's father in an imaginary scenario is what gives Gandoki's comic some professional prominence.

Gandoki also adopts some elements of Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' in the delivery of his jokes. Often times, he gets hostile with his audience especially when he perceives catcalls from the audience in the character of traditional African audience. Rather than massage the ego of his audience, he greets them with vituperative response aimed at reminding them that he has the power of the microphone. In one of his jokes, he tries to recount his experience in one of his trips to

London and in course of the delivery of the joke, the audience makes some catcalls suggestive of their doubt for his ability to afford the luxury of going to London. Gandoki leaves the drift of the joke and responds, thus:

...(with irritating tonality) Hold on, wait, una be poor people or what? Wetin be London? I go do show there na. Which one be I dey lie again? Okay, because una no see am for paper?...(*Comedy in Excess*, Vol.1)

Gandoki's response above betrays his mastery of the psychology of most Nigerian audiences which is characterized by impatience and verbal antagonism. The deduction here is that most Nigerian stand-up comics are not conscious of the audience factor in course of delivering their craft.

In terms of physical appearance, Gandoki is not given to elegant costume. He wears everyday dress of shirt tucked into jeans trousers with either snickers canvass or corporate shoes to match. He is also consistent with skin cut hair style and clean shave without any attempt at make-up.

### **The Psycho-analytical Import of Gandoki's Comedy**

The psychoanalytical concern of Gandoki's jokes lies in our deduction that he is primarily concerned about the mental health of an average Nigerian. His jokes portray Nigerians as undergoing one form of mental stress or the other as a result of harsh economic conditions occasioned by ineffective leadership. Against this backdrop, most of the lead personae in his jokes are mad men, psychopaths, patients of schizophrenia or outlaws who have breached communication with humanity and therefore resort to fantasy. In one of his jokes, he declares, thus:

You know say we dey about one hundred and twenty million (120) million People in did country and em...eighty five percent(85%) of us get mental stress and na mental stress dey

lead to full madness. If you go to Lagos you will know wetin I mean...Every five five seconds...you go see guys dey do (*Mimicks a fighter in a Yoruba mannerism*) 'Ah kiloshele, ah, ah eba...! (*Jumps around as he feigns a fight*) (*Laughs as he gets out of the fight frenzy*) (*Comedy in Excess, Vol. 1*)

The joke above presents residents of Lagos and by extension, Nigerian masses as being under pressure for survival and therefore, unconsciously exhibit all kinds of anti-social behavior including being violent. The psychological import here also includes the fact that crude and animalistic form of social interaction amongst Nigerians, have become a norm in most urban centres in Nigeria with Lagos as the lead due to the overwhelming population and commercial activities. Having declared that most Nigerians undergo mental stress which drives them to the point of madness, he extends the joke to the point of classifying madness in the Nigerian sense, thus:

.....we get different kinds of madness; we get inbuilt madness. That one, you no go dey know say you dey crase except dem provoke you. You never see where person dey say (*Mimicks an imaginary angry persona in provoked tone*) O boy look me I dey crase o! Ask of me, I dey crase o! I dey mad o!...Then we get spiritual madness. That one dey with girls, like those girls wey get heartbreak. You never excuse girl once/ You just say hello (*Mimicks an imaginary girl that is angry with men*) Hey, just behave yourself, fool!

(walks away) (*Comedy in Excess, Vol.1*)

Gandoki's classification of madness amongst Nigerians aptly captures his obsession with the psychological built and mental health of the average Nigerian. He is more interested in the inner self of the Nigerian rather than the outer self that the world sees and recognizes. The joke presented above speaks volumes about the remote causes of most animalistic and

irrational behavioural dispositions of most Nigerians. The two brands of madness identified amongst Nigerians by Gandoki are traceable to the disharmony in the three elements of personality which Freud identifies as id, ego and superego. This disharmony is occasioned by accumulated frustration, despair and depression as a result of the lingering harsh economic conditions that the citizenry have been thrust. As Eagleton puts it:

The motive of human society is in the last resort an economic one. It was Freud, not Karl Marx, who made this statement, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. What has dominated human history to date is the need to labour; and for Freud that harsh necessity means that we must repress some of our tendencies to pleasure and gratification. If we are not called upon to work in order to survive, we might simply lie around all day doing nothing. Every human being has to undergo this repression of what Freud named the 'pleasure principle' by the 'reality principle', but for some of us, and arguably for whole societies, the repression may become excessive and make us ill...(131)

Again, Gandoki crafts another joke which portrays Nigerians in a comic situation as a result of taking advantage of sophisticated public toilets in eateries in the city. In the joke, he depicts yet another survival strategy adopted by most residents of Lagos who do not have access to decent toilet facilities in their compound and so resort to patronizing conveniences of eateries in the pretence of posing as customers to such eateries. He delivers the joke, thus:

You see if you go down to Lagos...em...all these Mr Biggs, Tantalizers and the rest of them, all these fast food joints. Dem dey help Lagosians wey no get toilet well well. If you see person wey shit dey catch enter Mr Biggs...the

face na him you go take know say oboy e be like say  
This guy wan do something. As him just enter (*mimicks a persona that forcefully opens an imaginary door*) Please where is your rest room? I want to... (*laughs*) (*Nite of a Thousand Laughs, Vol.No.22*)

Whereas the joke above is highly comic due to the comic situation in which the persona has been put and the farcical form in which Gandoki delivered it, it raises serious issues bothering on the deplorable living conditions of most Nigerians whereby they cannot afford a convenience but rely on the rest room of eateries. In another joke with a similar trail of thought, Gandoki had ridiculed the crops of idle and unemployed Nigerian youths you are engaged in the daily routine of clustering around newspapers vendors to read headlines of all the dailies without patronizing the vendors. That this set of Nigerians engage in protracted arguments by the road side and once they get exhausted, they go in search of banks with good working air conditioners in the neighbourhood so they can rest their nerves. He subtly drops a conjecture that being able to identify banks with effective air conditioners in one's neighbourhood is a mark of joblessness and frustration (*Nite of a Thousand Laughs, Vol. No. 22*)

Gandoki's jokes set out to lampoon the decay and moral degeneracy in all spheres of the Nigerian society including the law enforcement agencies such as the police force. In one of his jokes, he crafts a scenario where a madman in the street rejects an offer to enroll in the Nigerian Police Force. With an air of disgust, the madman declares, thus, '...I dey crase wey I go join police?...' (*Comedy in Excess, Vol. No.1*) He takes the Nigerian Police Force to the cleaners further by declaring that '*...we are lawless...once you have money, you can slap any police man and go away...*'(*Comedy in Excess, Vol. No.1*) He goes further to re-enact the joke by thrusting a five hundred naira note in his

hands and mimes slapping a police officer with the naira. At first, the imaginary police officer makes to react violently but when he discovers that the slap is accompanied with a five hundred naira note, he switches his mood quickly to that of excitement and appreciation as he screams, thus, '*well done sir!...*' The joke above satirizes the height of bribery and corruption that have engulfed the Nigerian Police Force such that they compromise their integrity for a ransom. In course of delivering the joke, he realizes that he could be arrested for ridiculing the Nigerian Police Force but rather than feel remorse, he tries to justify his satirical swipe by resigning to fate, thus '*...me I don tire, make dem arrest me sef...*' (*Comedy in Excess*, Vol.No.1) Gandoki's rebellious attitude of ridiculing the police without recourse to the punishment attached to it aptly demonstrates the depth of disillusionment and disappointment that he has for the ruling class. His sense of hostility is as a result of the dissatisfaction which he expresses towards the leaders in all strata of the country. Freud asserts that:

....if a society has not developed beyond a point at which the satisfaction of one group of its members depends upon the suppression of another, it is understandable that those suppressed should develop an intense hostility towards a culture whose existence their labour has made possible, but in whose riches they have too small a share...(Qtd. in Eagleton, 140)

Drawing from Freud's thesis above, it becomes imperative to state that various manifestations of anti-social behaviour and crude violence amongst the common Nigerian masses portend some kind of protest and hostility targeted at the ruling class for their inability to deliver effective welfare services to the people. Upon a cursory examination of Gandoki's jokes, one observes that a reasonable number of Nigerians are mentally sick as a result of accumulated depression that arises

from the constant anxiety to survive in a society where the socio-economic and socio-political structures suffer protracted limbo. This accumulated depression finds expression in various absurd forms including; fantasy, dreams, melancholy, aggression, megalomania, neurosis and other socially- awkward behavioural attitudes like drug abuse, chronic alcoholic patronage, uncontrollable libido, masturbation, fashion abuse etc.

### **Conclusion**

The age long appellation given to the artist as the ‘watch dog’ and ‘mirror’ of the society remains evergreen even as society transits from one system of government to another. Today, through the medium of stand-up comedy, the artist has encapsulated the harsh realities of the Nigerian society and the different coping mechanisms adopted by the citizenry in a bid to survive. Using the psychoanalytical model, the study has brought to the fore Gandoki’s vivid portrayal of Nigerians as suffering from one form of mental illness or the other as a result of their exposure to brutal survival processes. It has been established in this study that the jokes under study harp mainly on the idiosyncratic responses of struggling Nigerians amidst socio-economic malaise and functional malapropism. The paper establishes Gandoki as a satirist who is brutally frank in his portrayal of the decay and degeneracy in all spheres of the Nigeria country. His jokes also reveal his sense of pessimism towards the actualization of the Nigerian dream. For Gandoki, Nigeria is, at its best, a mental asylum playing host to a generous number of mentally sick citizens. This pessimistic view has been lavishly expressed by prolific Nigerian playwrights such as Wole Soyinka in *Madmen and The Specialist*, Ola Rotimi in *Holding Talks* and Benjamin Ejiofor in *Who Then is Sane?*

Fundamentally, the paper makes a strong case for the inculcation of stand-up comedy into the curricula of secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria for purposes of accentuating the genre both in theory and practice. The inculcation should be deep enough to accommodate it as an area of specialization especially at the tertiary level. Similarly, a formidable guild of stand-up comics and practitioners is canvassed so as to guarantee appropriate regulation of its practice as well as foresee the welfare of her members. This would give the genre some level of professional prominence as well as weed out the gatecrashers in the industry. The presence of a formidable guild would also bring about intermittent workshops, symposia, talk shows, conferences, retreats and other forms of trainee and self-awareness programmes aimed at occasioning human capacity building amongst members.

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